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Community-Based Research in Higher Education: Research Partnerships for the Common Good

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Introduction

Community-based research (CBR) refers to an approach to research where university researchers partner with those most affected by multi-faceted problems in communities to enable them to collaboratively identify and address these problems. Through development of participants' ability in dialogue, negotiation, questioning and critical thinking, CBR is a means to promote positive social change for sustainable community well-being, as we discuss in more detail later in this chapter. CBR first emerged in the 1970s, in support of the 'ciencia popular' (popular

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science) movement in South America (Bonilla et al., 1972) and other movements in Tanzania (Swantz, 1982). It gradually spread to the United States and parts of England in the 1990s and continues to spread today as the participatory paradigm that underscores CBR gains ground inside and outside higher education institutions.

Scholars of those early times, arguably the most famous being Orlando Fals Borda in Colombia and Paulo Freire in Brazil, sought to develop an approach to research that would awaken the conscience of people about causes and consequences of human disempowerment. Exceptionally, this approach would attract those suffering under oppressive sociopolitical structures as participants in rather than 'subjects' of research, to emancipate their thinking, develop their ability to create sociopolitically conscious knowledge and therefore enable them to take action to improve their own circumstances and those of others similarly disadvantaged or disempowered. Experiments with participatory forms of research combined rigorous empirical research with activism, a paradigm not much appreciated in the traditional academy (Fals Borda, 2013), which has predominantly created knowledge to fortify the status quo. As Lomeli and Rappaport (2018) noted, the participatory forms of research that these pioneering scholars have developed are now appearing in universities and international agencies such as the World Bank, but these are watered-down versions, "alienated from their radical roots" (p. 598).

Nevertheless, the history of participatory research testifies to its sociopolitical intent to enable the emancipation and empowerment of marginalized and vulnerable communities. This is why the participatory research paradigm is central in CBR. Despite opposition from within the academy, the participatory research movement has gradually gained support, causing a steady paradigm shift towards recognizing that knowledge is socially constructed, and therefore has to be developed within specific contexts. This calls for methodologies that are participatory, involving the people most affected by the phenomenon under investigation (Hall, 2005). Today, a plethora of participatory research genres falls under the umbrella term of CBR. These include critical participatory action research (CPAR) (see Fine & Torre, 2019; Kemmis et al., 2014); participatory and appreciative action and reflection (PAAR) (see Ghaye et al., 2008); participatory reflection and action/participatory rural appraisal (PRA) (see

Chambers, 2012); community-based participatory research (CBPR) (see Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003); and participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) (see Wood, 2020a; Zuber-Skerritt, 2011). There are many more variations, where the process may be slightly different depending on the participants and context. Yet, they are all grounded in the same participatory paradigm and foundational principles, with the ultimate aim of enabling collective action for positive social change (Wood, 2020b).

Currently, in universities where CBR is undertaken, it is positioned mostly as a leg of community engagement. It calls for partnership between university-based academics and community partners for conducting research guided by the lived and experiential knowledge of the community. The process also promotes capacity building, to enable communities to take a leadership role within the larger society (Guta & Roche, 2014). In theory, the CBR process should involve collaboration between and among these stakeholders, from identifying what is to be researched to disseminating the knowledge generated (Hall & Tandon, 2017). As this approach to research challenges the traditional view of the academic as the all-knowing expert, the sole holder of valid knowledge, it is not surprising that CBR has not been embraced by academic researchers as a mainstream methodology. However, as the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) crisis has shown, traditional, *normal* ways of functioning in higher education can and must change to respond effectively to social problems and crises.

The aim of this book is to provide an ethical, inclusive and sustainable framework to guide university-based researchers to work *with* vulnerable populations. Vulnerability does not denote helplessness or fragility. It refers to the susceptibility of specific groups to the negative impact of economic, political, social, health, climate-change and related problems, due to lack of access to basic life support such as a stable income, quality educational opportunities and adequate housing. Such deprivations also curtail people's freedom to make choices that they believe will add value to their lives (Sen, 1999). As Sen (2008) advocated, the action to reduce social inequalities and injustices needs to be guided by the values and priorities of those whose lives are diminished, so that the change pursued and achieved is meaningful to their lives. As Wood (2020c) explained,

> many of the people researchers in developing countries work with possess various skills or functionings (they are able to 'do'), but endemic poverty has eroded their capability to use these skills to improve their lives as they would like to. People who have received inferior education and who lack the social capital associated with a higher socio-economic status face additional adversity in attaining a sense of wellbeing in this competitive world. They first have to develop their 'capabilities' before they can increase their agency to direct their own life in a way that they consider worthwhile and valuable. And once people experience a sense of dignity and agency, they are able to have hope for the future and a sense of purpose in life. (p. 2)

The life experiences of vulnerable populations are far removed from those who work in the academy, yet it is these privileged 'experts' who are tasked to conduct research *on* the social problems that beset marginalized sectors of society, harvesting *from* people their lived experiences and local knowledge to create recommendations and craft policies to improve their lives. Not unsurprisingly, such recommendations and policies often prove to be difficult to implement since they do not take into consideration the contextual barriers facing specific communities that impinge on the usefulness and/or sustainability of these so-called solutions. One recent example we have learned about is the South African government's move to pay unemployed youth in township settings to distribute personal protective equipment in their communities. Applicants had to apply for these positions online and provide scanned copies of their birth certificates, a curriculum vitae and proof of residential address. The circumstances of such youth were not taken into account—most had neither the skills nor the equipment to prepare an online application, and could not access or construct the required documents, let alone scan and upload them. The government had not pursued the necessary research, such as asking youth in targeted communities what they would need to enable them to apply, what help should be provided for intending applicants and how the system could be simplified to enable such applicants' full participation.

Although poverty is endemic, particularly in the global South and in certain populations in the global North, it takes a crisis like COVID-19 to headline the stark inequalities in society along race, gender and class

lines. The economic and health decline because of COVID-19 has particularly affected vulnerable populations; that this epidemic has also threatened the lifestyles and income of people accustomed to a comfortable and secure life, may be why actions to minimize its impact have been made a global priority. However, adversity also breeds resilience (Ungar, 2019), and responses to fight the COVID-19 pandemic have shown that normally slow-working bureaucracies can work fast to generate creative ways to continue providing services. With their survival under real threat, higher education and other sectors have sprung into action, making decisions and changing their practices within short time frames.

Just as online teaching almost overnight became the new norm, the time is now ripe for new approaches to and paradigms governing research. The serious threat to life and livelihoods has also highlighted the resilience of community members who manage to survive in the face of extreme diversity. In response to the pandemic, a global spotlight has been turned on social inequalities and injustices prevalent in so many countries, sparking discussion around the need to strengthen efforts to attain the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, n.d.). These circumstances raise the question of how we can sustain the creative and useful responses prompted by the COVID-19 crisis—especially, perhaps, the thinking and principles behind such responses—to address social injustices through research partnerships. Of course, such complex social problems can be addressed or ameliorated only through long-term social restructuring that entails a fundamental shift in dominant values and world views within societies. However, we contend that research that involves the people most affected by such problems in identifying and working to resolve such problems can be a successful approach to attaining sustainable improvements in the well-being of communities. This is the key argument underpinning the research discussed in this book. If we continue to exclude people from involvement in research about issues that concern them most, we also exclude them from the educational, emancipatory and activist outcomes of CBR, as we discuss later in this chapter.

The academy can no longer run the risk of supporting research that may be valid and viable in theory but does little to improve the actual situation on the ground. Here we are not implying that all research should

be participatory. Some research questions do require a positivist paradigm and experimental approach, for instance in the natural sciences and other disciplines that require objective inquiries. However, many social, health and educational problems are addressed more effectively through collaboration of academic researchers with those who have first-hand experience of these problems. CBR affords universities and their research staff the opportunity to partner with communities to pursue social change for social justice (Strand et al., 2003). This approach is very much needed in South Africa, and in other countries where populations are rendered vulnerable by high levels of poverty and the inequalities that prevail in education, health and wealth distribution. Thus, CBR seeks to democratize knowledge creation to make it more socially relevant to the society it serves. There is ample rhetoric within higher education policy in South Africa (and other countries) on the need for research to be community-based (Luescher-Mamashela et al., 2015), but current practices of institutions mitigate against conduct of this type of research as a truly participatory and transformative project.

It can thus be argued that CBR in its current form is no less colonizing than traditional approaches to research. CBR should "throw off the intellectual, social and material shackles of colonialism" (Glassman & Erdem, 2014, p. 217). Even so, knowledge gleaned from a previous five-year research project of the South African National Research Foundation indicated real constraints to conducting research that meets the outcomes listed earlier (see Kearney et al., 2013; Wood, 2017a, 2017b; Wood & Louw, 2018; Wood & Zuber-Skerritt, 2013; Zuber-Skerritt et al., 2015). The findings of the previous project, confirmed by international literature (Tandon et al., 2016), highlighted three distinct but overlapping areas that need to be further researched. These are discussed in the following section.

Aim of This Book

This book seeks to add to existing CBR theory and practice in a seminal way by providing responses to three unanswered questions raised in CBR literature. These questions are:

1. How do we develop *ethical* processes especially suited to CBR that, while upholding universal ethical principles, also allow for the principles of recognition, participation and joint decision-making to be implemented throughout the research?

   The ethical procedures and rules that generally govern research are designed for university-driven 'expert interventions'. It does not necessarily befit research that, as full partners in the research process, involves members of the community being researched, who have their own perspectives on what is ethical at each stage and are therefore encouraged to contribute to collective decision-making about ethics throughout the research process. University researchers continue to 'train' community participants in specific areas, rather than helping to release the potential in people to find and enact their own solutions through action learning. Self-directed action learning has proven to be a powerful way to restore dignity and self-determination to economically and socially marginalized people (see, e.g., Kearney et al., 2015; Zuber-Skerritt & Teare, 2013). This is a more ethical approach and efficacious outcome than the benefits possibly afforded by a short-term 'training' programme. It could be argued that universities, as public institutions, have a moral imperative to develop a broader-based approach to enable the learning and development of community members. The very nature of interaction in both community learning and development and government enablement of this approach is an ethical issue not yet explored from the viewpoint of the community. What community partners view as ethical interaction and outcomes still need to be investigated.
2. How can we build the *capacity* of academics to conduct CBR?

   Current ethical standards rightly require academics to provide evidence of their expertise in whatever methodology they use. Yet, very few academics have received any form of training in CBR and therefore run the risk of being judged as unethical in their engagement with the community. Tandon et al. (2016) pointed to the lack of structured opportunities for academics to learn how to do CBR, specifically those that require academics to move outside the confines of the lecture room. Both academics and community partners clearly need to be capacitated in the principles of CBR, so that *sustainable* structures for

application can be developed—a need now evident on an international scale. Needs differ according to local contexts, so goals, processes and evaluation methods to implement CBR have to be tailor-made for specific projects, while keeping to the basic principles of CBR.

3. How do we ensure that the learning and development of community partners are recognized and *sustained*?

   Academics demonstrate their knowledge at conferences and author articles on the learning of research participants, but the participants' contribution to the creation of that knowledge is seldom acknowledged at public forums or in publications. Motivation will be increased if public recognition and certification (not accreditation) are built in as an integral part of the research partnership. Public recognition can be in the form of a ceremony at a university with certification of their learning and competence in a particular area. This can be a stimulus to other community members to also pursue similar learning. Research participants will be able to experience something uplifting and affirming that hitherto was unattainable for them even though no credits are allocated such as in accredited courses that allow people to build up credits towards a degree. Public recognition and institutional endorsement of the learning and development of community partners should be mandatory, without participants having to enrol in a formal education programme with cost implications and access requirements. CBR can thus enhance the *inclusion* of the community in knowledge creation as valid partners.

These key overlapping questions guide the research presented in this book to inform the development of an ethical, inclusive and sustainable framework for CBR in higher education. Chapter authors are researchers passionate about community engagement, who work with community partners, sharing their knowledge, experiences and skills, collaboratively create useful, relevant and effective knowledge for better-quality community life. While much has been written about CBR in health settings, literature in the social sciences and education is less extensive. This book steps into this space by providing a comprehensive exposé of CBR with

actual case studies, creating a seminal text particularly for social science researchers, but also useful for community members and agency workers keen to learn about ways to develop and sustain community well-being in partnership with experienced CBR researchers. In the next sections we turn to explain some of the key concepts discussed in this book. We begin with a detailed explanation of the book's central concept—CBR—as an ethical, inclusive and sustainable approach to addressing social issues.

Community-Based Research

CBR is conceptualized in this book as an umbrella term for research partnerships between university and community representatives, be they individual citizens, non-profit organizations, government departments or business interests. The main aim of CBR is to democratize the creation and dissemination of knowledge to make it suited to and therefore constructive for the society it serves. This approach to creating and disseminating knowledge builds the capacity of community partners to initiate and sustain positive change with, in and for the community, thus reinforcing key connotations of the original Latin term for community—*communis*—notably fellowship and solidarity.

However, especially for university-based researchers, community learning and development is often neglected in their pursuit of research outcomes. This lack of engagement with community members diminishes both the likelihood that change will be what most community members want and their capacity to sustain the change themselves when the university partners withdraw. Despite global recognition that CBR should be conducted primarily by non-academics (Hall, 2005; Munck, 2014), community input, knowledge and learning mostly go unrecognized, which raises questions of ethical concern. In addition, people who have been rendered vulnerable by deep-rooted structural inequalities are often not confident to contest epistemic colonization by the academy. Without cultivation of critical analytical skills, particularly through higher education, these people may be unable to identify or explain this epistemic colonization, even though, or perhaps largely because, they live on the

coalface of historical and contemporary colonization. The depth of their colonial experience may have made them unaware of the value of their local knowledge and experiences for addressing problems that directly affect them (Wood, 2020a). Raising both critical consciousness of the value of local knowledge and the potential of local people to apply it, are therefore a moral imperative of CBR.

The more the world grapples with complex issues arising from the way members of the human race treat one another and the planet, the more urgent the global need for research approaches grounded in ethical practices that foster inclusion of new knowledge creators and the valuable understandings and knowledges that they bring to problem-solving tasks. Only with this first-hand life experience and consequent knowledge can sustainable and knowledge-driven change be achieved for better community life locally and globally. Budd Hall and Rajesh Tandon,S co-holders of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Chair for Community-based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, raised questions about the word 'knowledge' in a publication in *Research for All* (2017). They called this approach to knowledge generation "Knowledge for Change" (K4C), and explained:

> The critical challenges facing humanity today require new understandings and solutions. Achieving [United Nations] Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will require new insights and connections locally and globally. New understandings and innovative solutions have been shown to be catalyzed through co-construction of knowledge carried out in respectful partnerships with local communities. (UNESCO Chair, 2020)

We refer the reader to their website (http://unescochair-cbrsr.org/) for more information and literature on the need for increased adoption of CBR in Higher Education, which we cannot address in this short introductory chapter. We now present a short overview of the philosophical underpinnings of CBR.

The Paradigm and Basic Principles of CBR

CBR is not a methodology in itself, but an overarching term for a distinctive participatory research design that includes those in the community who are central to the research purpose and process as research participants. Within the scope of this chapter, we cannot explain all the processes entailed, so we refer readers to Wood (2020b) for a concise and comprehensive overview of CBR. Here we highlight the important foundational values and principles of CBR, which are grounded within a transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2016) in pursuit of social justice. All paradigms are informed by specific assumptions in four fields: epistemology (how knowledge is created, valued and used), ontology (how people perceive themselves in the world in relation to others), methodology (how research is conducted) and axiology (what values underpin choices and actions). A transformative paradigm is characterized by the following understandings.

Epistemological Assumptions

One of the ground-breaking theories about learning and knowledge creation was Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycles that explain how people can gain knowledge (1) on the basis of their concrete experience, (2) by observing and critically reflecting on this experience, then (3) conceptualizing and theorizing about the outcomes and processes, and (4) actively experimenting in new situations, thus gaining new concrete experiences and repeating the cycles again or several times until they are satisfied with the results. Critical subjectivity underlies the cocreation of knowledge by all involved. Both local, experiential knowledge (knowledge embedded in community) and scientific knowledge (knowledge produced in academia) are valued, generated through critical dialogue. The purpose of knowledge creation is to enable the most effective action to bring about positive change. Sources of knowledge and ways of representing it are many. De Sousa Santos (2009) alerted us to "epistemological diversity" (p. 104) in the world and the need to recognize the value of drawing from an "ecology of knowledge" (p. 116) to challenge the view

that only scientific knowledge is valid. Since each form of knowledge represents only a small part of this ecology, researchers need to be open to embracing multiple ways of knowing as valid and valuable.

Ontological Assumptions

Through the development of trusting, respectful relationships, stakeholders in the research process work together to identify the best ways to arrive at answers to the research questions on which they have mutually agreed. A relational ontology is based on the understanding that reality is participative, meaning that we can develop understanding of the world through thoughtfully analysing experiences of people in relationship to one another. This view recognizes reality as multiple, fluid and ever-changing; and understandings are developed through critical reflection and dialogue with self and others. This systemic view of reality sees people as part of—rather than in control of—a larger whole and thus values the experiences of all for understanding an issue under investigation. Building trusting relationships with and handling the expectations of vulnerable populations should be the main focus, especially during the early stages of the partnership. Early attention to these aspects is crucial to setting up participatory processes that provide engagement and affirmation to all participants.

Methodological Assumptions

The research design chosen must allow for participation of all stakeholders in a collaborative enquiry, to not only come to a better understanding of the problem, but also to act to effect change. As such, most CBR designs are a genre of participatory action research, incorporating action learning and experiential learning, a research approach that follows iterative cycles of reflection and action until the participants are satisfied with the outcomes. A relational and participatory methodology is therefore more varied, comprehensive and complex than traditional research methodology in the social sciences. In CBR there are no fixed rules on

methods and methodology. All participants need to be open to new approaches and critically consider and evaluate alternative, innovative and creative strategies that best serve the mutually agreed aims, objectives, ethical requirements and desired outcomes of the project. Issues facing vulnerable populations are complex and are not easily resolved due to their multiple and interacting causes and effects. Action research designs enable participants to engage in action learning through cycles of trial and error where they develop capacity for self- and critical reflection to help them reach acceptable outcomes through the project.

Axiological Assumptions

According to Mertens (2016, p. 7), "for researchers … philosophically situated in the transformative paradigm, the ethical responsibility extends to seeking ways to design research that directly addresses issues of human rights and social justice and supports a pathway to action to address the problems". This is where the notion of the common good, as reflected in the title of this chapter, comes in. We agree with UNESCO (2015) that the common good is informed by life-enhancing values such as respect for life and human dignity, social justice, cultural diversity and compassion, which we all have a shared responsibility to embody in our interactions. However, since we are shaped by our social histories, we also have a responsibility to explore how our own and others' histories impact on our understanding and reactions to racism, sexism, privilege, oppression and other sensitive constructs to learn how to negotiate meaning and accommodate for different views. Since the embodiment of these values is so important for establishing a trusting relationship between the university researcher and community participants, we discuss the ethical considerations of CBR in more depth in Chap. 2. Here we merely highlight the ethical assumptions.

CBR is underpinned by an ethics of care, explained as "a distinctive approach to moral theory that emphasizes the importance of responsibility, concern, and relationship over consequences (utilitarianism) or rules (deontologism)" (Nair, 2020, p. 1). Since relationship is at the heart of CBR partnerships, ethical behaviour cannot be determined by the

academic researcher before the research begins, as per normal practice. Relationships and contexts are fluid and dynamic, so expectations change during the relational process. This means that ethical conduct should be continually (re)negotiated by the partners involved in the research. Since the aim of CBR is not only to attain effective practical outcomes but also to educate and emancipate those involved, the balance of power within the relationship should gradually shift towards the community partners as they begin to realize their potential, find their voice and develop agency. Thus, they may wish to review the roles, responsibilities and outcomes initially agreed upon. Noddings (1999) referred to this as *relational ethics*, where decisions are made based on the best interests of the parties involved, rather than adherence to hard and fast rules for interaction between university and community partners. The skill of guiding such complex ethical processes needs to be included in any capacity-development initiative for researchers embarking on CBR. We also suggest that unless university-based researchers are motivated by a genuine desire to improve society at large and the lives of others, they should refrain from doing CBR since their lack of authenticity will soon become apparent and they may do more harm than good. This brings us to the intended outcomes of CBR.

The Transformative Outcomes of CBR

The process of CBR has beneficial outcomes over and above both the scholarly intent to add to the body of knowledge, and the practical intent to bring about positive change. Because community members participate fully in the research, from design to dissemination, they also learn and develop personally and professionally. The process is educative, emancipatory and activist.

Educative Intent

Since the aim of CBR is, through stakeholders' participation, to develop knowledge for improving community life, research designs chosen are

normally variants of participatory action research. Critical reflection is therefore a key component of the process. Continual reflection on the process by all participants is required to ensure the project is proceeding as planned, or to identify where the research plan needs to be changed and whether ethical agreements are still being adhered to or need to be altered. However, it is vital that each participant also learns to self-reflect, to identify their own learning and learning needs and to become aware of how their behaviour is affecting or influencing the group process. This is especially true for academic members of the project team. It is a way to ensure they do not default to dominating the process, but rather are opening up opportunities for the community participants to learn and develop leadership and collaboration skills collectively. Most academic researchers have not learnt to develop an acute sense of self-awareness as part of traditional research approaches with their understanding of objective inquiry; hence, the need to develop the academics' capacity to conduct CBR, which is one of the aims of this book (see especially Chap. 3).

Participating in collaborative group discussions fosters the development of important life skills such as problem-solving, communication, organization, presentation, conflict management and goal setting. Participants may also be required to learn specific technical skills, such as data generation and analysis methods, report writing, operating computer programmes and creating digital representations of their findings. Thus, we can call CBR a form of community education, although it is not widely recognized as such. Participants are not given formal recognition for the learning they acquire while working in partnership with the university, a problem addressed later in the book (see Chaps. 12 and 13).

Emancipatory Intent

CBR aims to encourage the reappropriation of knowledge for people, by people (Gaventa, 1993). The process is emancipatory as it challenges all participants to question their existing assumptions and beliefs and to critique existing social structures to devise new, more socially just ways of "being, doing and knowing", the three main characteristics of a sustainable learning community as conceptualized by Kearney and

Zuber-Skerritt (2012, p. 403). Traditional research approaches lead to mental colonization, in that the universal 'truths' produced within and projected from the academy, backed up by the findings of purportedly objective, scientific enquiry, are generally accepted blindly as applicable to all contexts and all people. CBR is based on the premise that people can think for themselves; that those affected by a specific social issue are best placed to know how to address it; that responses need to be uniquely crafted for different settings; that knowledge generated through involvement of all stakeholders is more likely to lead to sustainable change; and that lay people can, and should be recognized as knowledge creators, not just consumers. Once people begin to think in a way that is outside mainstream knowledge, once they can critique the creation and purposes of mainstream knowledge and appreciate the value of the knowledge they already have, their sense of agency and self-worth tends to increase.

Activist Intent

Academic researchers have long concentrated on explaining social problems through theoretical lenses and using these interpretations to recommend change on behalf of a target community. Naturally, this approach has not contributed to real or lasting change in the lives of those affected by the problem, since (a) these people do not usually read academic publications, which are in any case inaccessible to them; (b) even if they were aware of the recommendations made by academic researchers, these people may not be able to implement the recommendations for various reasons and (c) policymakers do not always consult this type of research. Alternatively, an activist researcher has been described as one who *collaborates* with those subjected to the condition(s) being investigated, to *better understand* the problem and context and to *bring about change for the better* (Hale, 2001) on many levels, for example, personal, professional, organizational, social and policy. Some academics contend that activism through research hampers and is hampered by the expectations of the academy (Smeltzer & Cantillon, 2015). However, from a CBR perspective, it is unethical for outsiders to conduct research *on* people and make decisions or come to conclusions *on their behalf*, as it denies the principle

of democratic participation and collaboration. CBR requires an authentic partnership between the university and the community, with each bringing their specific expertise to contribute to the process of change. Although the constraints and responsibilities of working in a bureaucratic system may hamper academic researchers in being overtly activist (Couture, 2017), these researchers can stand in solidarity with their partners, helping as they can, for instance, by providing theoretical and research expertise, material resources, assisting in funding applications, using social capital to leverage contacts in industry and government. Where vulnerable populations are involved, the role of the academic normally starts as facilitator of the collaborative learning process and slowly shifts to a supportive function as community participants grow into leadership roles (Wood, 2020a). Such a facilitation role is complex. It strengthens the argument that university researchers need to both recognize unequal power relations in a research project and have the skills to negotiate and minimize this inequality. We now turn to some of the other important concepts discussed throughout this book.

Core Concepts of the Book

The main concepts discussed in this book and intrinsic to CBR include knowledge democracy, social justice, power relations and vulnerable populations. We explain these constructs in the following sections.

Knowledge Democracy

In this book, participatory approaches to knowledge creation in the form of CBR are offered as alternatives to the "monolithic knowledge enterprise based on the domination of the Global North and the marginalization and subordination of other knowledges" (Knowledge Democracy, n.d.). Hall and Tandon (2017) explained that democratizing knowledge entails the acknowledgement of plural ways of knowing, which have value in different contexts. This includes the appreciation of indigenous and cultural knowledge sources (oral, arts-based), and the multiple ways

of disseminating knowledge outside of academic publications. The movement for democratizing knowledge is in reaction to "intellectual colonialism" (Fals-Borda & Mora-Osejo, 2003, p. 35) and the "epistemicide" that results from it (De Sousa Santos, 2007, p. 15). Responding to this epistemic wake-up, community-based researchers must embrace multiple knowledges, multiple sources of knowledge and multiple means of representing knowledge and must commit to using such knowledges to create a more socially just world (Hall & Tandon, 2017).

Social Justice

Social justice can be said to exist when people have the capabilities to make choices that afford them a sense of dignity and agency and that inspire hope for the future (Sen, 1995). Two main paradigms are related to social justice. One is a distributional view (Miller, 1999), which is concerned with the allocation and accessibility of resources within society. However, while governments almost always claim that their policies aim to attain distributional justice, so often it appears that they have responded to other influences, usually not publicly identified, which makes achieving stated policy goals unlikely or impossible. Marginalization of so many people along race, gender, class and health lines in many societies further complicates government capacity to achieve stated policy goals in practice (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). The recognition approach to social justice (Fraser, 1997) is concerned with enhancing social structures that enable people to feel they are a valued part of society. Yet again, the enactment of social justice depends on the freedom of individuals to recognize and make choices that improve their subjective well-being (Nussbaum, 2003). Specific groupings in society are thus rendered vulnerable and marginalized since societal structures and attitudes tend to disadvantage those who most need help. CBR enables people to take action based on the values of individuals and communities to bring about positive change where it is actually needed (Sen, 2008); in this way challenging existing social norms and structures. Academics, as privileged members of society, have a moral imperative to assist vulnerable populations who may not have the social capital of those with higher status, and

thus face additional barriers to developing a sense of dignity, agency and hope. This lens makes clear that community-based researchers need to develop a critical understanding of power relations within their research project and well beyond.

Power Relations

Researchers in academia generally have symbolic power by virtue of their academic qualifications and position. They also have educative power through teaching and through knowledge creation in their research. If they seek to help address social injustice, they can use this power to promote the learning and development of community partners. CBR enables them to employ critical, humanizing pedagogies (Freire, 1976), with educative intent, to help empower people of disadvantaged communities through participating in the creation of knowledge about their community circumstances. Through adopting methods to democratize knowledge and increase the agency of participants, this approach to research can also help to flatten power differentials in society. Lister (2007) said that this is attainable only if academic researchers can be humble, open to all points of view, tolerate tension, be comfortable being uncomfortable, be self-critical and honestly seek to find compromise. The academic researcher is also a research participant, whose initial facilitative role in the research diminishes as the community partners learn and develop as researchers and leaders within their own context.

Vulnerable Populations

The *Cambridge Dictionary's* (2021) definition of *vulnerable* is "able to be easily hurt, influenced, or attacked". The use of the term in this book refers to social groupings of people who face two ongoing difficulties due to their status, including but not limited to gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, income, health, race, age and geographic location. One is the struggle to access and/or benefit from public protective resources such as quality health and welfare services (distributive view of social

justice, as discussed earlier). The other is that they are marginalized and excluded from mainstream society due to hegemonic (dominant) attitudes and norms (recognition paradigm). As Phillips and Fordham (2010, p. 11) explained, vulnerability does not result from deficit on the part of individuals, but from "the ways in which social systems are constructed, [and] choices are made", resulting in a susceptibility to adverse economic, social, emotional, educational and health outcomes.

An intersectional understanding (Reygan & Steyn, 2017) recognizes that vulnerability does not emanate from a single source, but that injustice and inequality result from a complex coming together of factors that create systems of oppression through disparities in power and privilege. To illustrate, someone who grows up in poverty in a South African township will most likely be black, and thus have less access to quality educational opportunities, good health care or even basic necessities such as adequate housing, electricity and a healthy sanitation system. If they are female, gay or lesbian, they are in increased danger of being abused (see, e.g., Gillum, 2019; Heise et al., 2019; Müller, 2016; Taylor, 2018). People are thus rendered vulnerable on multiple levels, robbed of a sense of dignity, agency and hope. The participatory paradigm of CBR requires that people experiencing such disempowerment are included in research seeking to bring about change in the societal, political and economic structures and attitudes that contribute to oppression of themselves and others. The educational, emancipatory and other activist intentions of CBR aim to reduce vulnerability of specific populations through raising awareness and understanding of oppressive systems, developing the ability to address injustices and supporting action to help overcome this systemic oppression, informed by empirical research.

Having clarified the core concepts discussed in this book, we now turn to an outline of the structure and content of the rest of the book.

Structure and Content of the Book

This chapter has argued that in a global setting where poverty and marginalization are increasing, there is an urgent need for methodologies and methods that support and enable engaged scholars to work with

disadvantaged communities on the pressing social issues of our time. This book discusses the context in which such action research may be conducted through CBR and the theoretical foundations of this approach. It also provides case examples from a variety of settings, mainly in a South African context, with some examples pertaining to research with marginalized populations in developed countries.

The book has three parts (see Fig. 1.1). Part I has three chapters, which respectively provide the rationale for the book (Chap. 1), address the construction of ethical guidelines for CBR (Chap. 2) and discuss the development of research capacity for researchers conducting CBR (Chap. 3). Part II presents case studies that offer varied methodological and theoretical perspectives on how university-based researchers can partner with vulnerable populations to make the university more socially responsive through engaging community partners in the co-construction of knowledge for change (Chaps. 4–11). Part III offers insight into the development of a framework for CBR, considering models of collaboration that

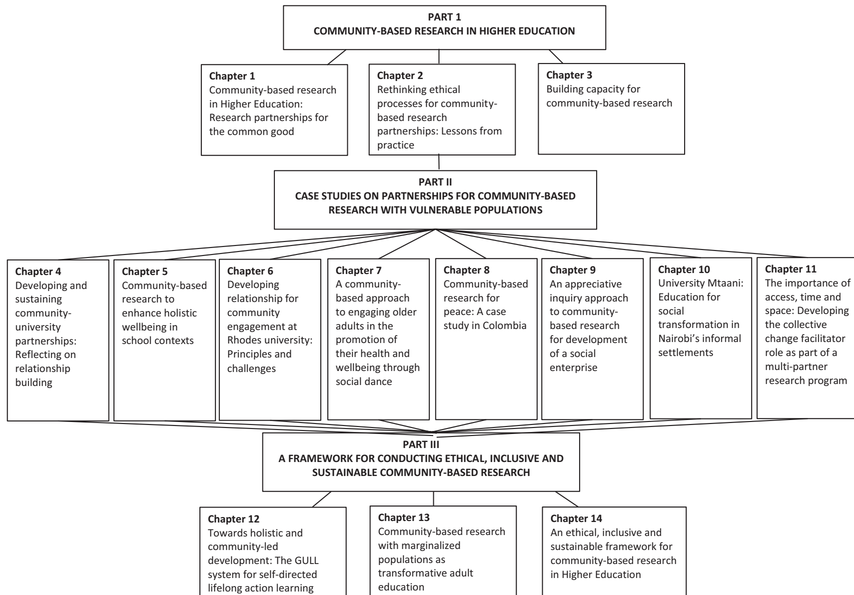

Fig. 1.1 Structure of book

recognize the capacity of community for learning and development (Chaps. 12 and 13). Chapter 14 concludes the book by drawing together insights from the various authors and their chapters to suggest responses to the three questions that prompted the research on which the book is based. These responses will help to move forward in understanding how to conduct authentic CBR with vulnerable populations. From this knowledge, an ethical, inclusive and sustainable framework emerges to guide CBR partnerships.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced and provided the rationale for the overarching research question that the following chapters will address from various angles and perspectives: How can universities improve their practice of CBR to make it a truly participatory, democratic, decolonized and decolonizing process?

The authors' aim is to help develop a conceptual framework that will address the three concerns the literature highlights, namely (1) the need to develop ethical processes, especially suited to CBR, that while upholding universal ethical principles also allow for implementing the principles of recognition, participation and joint decision-making; (2) the need to build the capacity of academics to conduct CBR and (3) the need to find a way to ensure that the learning of the community is recognized and sustained. Generating knowledge in response to the book's guiding question is a collaborative effort between community-based researchers from five continents who share their learning from their respective community projects, to inform the framework presented in the last chapter. This framework will be useful to universities around the world that want to contribute to social justice and engage in CBR in partnership with vulnerable communities for positive change and the common good.

Questions to Provoke Discussion

1. What benefits do you think CBR could bring to communities you work with or may work with in future?
2. What paradigm shift would you need to make to conduct authentic CBR?
3. What changes do you think need to be made in academia to enable authentic CBR?

Further Reading

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