We're experts too!

CHECKLIST

to support community-led research

INTERNATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECT

In this Checklist, you will find a summary of the main strategies and recommendations that are described in the *Community Action Guide on Community-led Research. A Survey Template for Community-Led Research* is available with this Checklist for you to use and adapt to your own community.

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What is COMMUNITY-LED RESEARCH?

When you hear the word "research", what do you think of? Do you feel like research is something done far away by others? Is it something out of reach, only conducted by professors in universities?

Research doesn't have to be any of those things. We believe that research should be a collective effort, a process where communities feel empowered to define, lead, and carry out research on a topic of their choosing, and where everyone who participates feels free to contribute, exchange, and reproduce the knowledge collected.

The Mekong Community Institute defines community-led research as *"the search for knowledge based on local expertise by community members, for the benefit of the community."* Other types of research tend to start with questions asked by people outside communities.

> With **community-led research**, community members define their own topics, questions, and process, allowing them to create, analyze, and explain their own experiences and expertise. With community-led research, the community builds on its local knowledge, customs, and traditions, and owns the knowledge that is being produced. Communities should no longer be only the focus or object of research. It's not just researchers or academics - **communities are experts too!**

In fact, when community members do their own research, they may uncover findings that others would not. Communities possess knowledge about their surroundings and environment that decision-makers and planners may not know. Often, the research process itself helps communities better understand the problems they face, build confidence in their knowledge and ideas, strengthen solidarity and accountability amongst community members, and learn necessary skills for community organizing. Together, the skills and findings gained from the research process can be useful for mounting community-led campaigns.

The results of community-led research show that alternatives are possible, and that the entire development process can be transformed so that **communities claim their power.** When communities put themselves and their visions at the center of the development process, community-led research can become a powerful tool!

Based on existing methods of community-led research, we have developed this *Checklist* with our partners as a tool for communities, community organizers, and local civil society groups who are interested in community-led research.

This Checklist outlines the basic steps on how a community can use community-led research to determine their development priorities.

Included are the key steps to **Prepare**, **Research** and **Advocate** for community-led research.

1	Prepare	1. Identify the Research Topic 2. Build a Research Team 3. Identify Allies and Influencers 4. Address Security Risks 5. Design the Research Tool
2	Research	6. Engage the Community Throughout 7. Collect the Data 8. Draft the Research and Recommendations 9. Share Draft Versions for Feedback
3	Advocate	10. Share the Final Research and Recommendations 11. Together, Take Action! 12. Reflect

IAP would like to acknowledge the Asia Pacific Forum on Women Law and Development and the Mekong Community Institute for sharing their thoughtful comments.

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Prepare

1. IDENTIFY THE RESEARCH TOPIC

Organize a **community meeting,** or several group conversations, with as many people as possible to identify the most important questions to research. Make sure to include women, young people, people with disabilities, and other members of the community who may be underrepresented and excluded from similar conversations.

When planning the meeting, first **consider whether it is safe to organize a meeting that will publicly discuss problems in your community.** It might be necessary to choose your location strategically to avoid attracting unnecessary attention from authorities, such as during a traditional ceremony in a temple, or at a regular community event. Identify and consult trusted community leaders. If it is too risky to hold a big meeting, you can start by having small informal discussions with different groups of people in your community.

Once you meet, **determine the research topic** and what you would like to learn. Decide together on how to carry out the research, what roles and tools are needed, and a realistic timeframe to complete your research.

The topic you identify may be viewed differently by development banks, project developers, or the government. Their claims can be informed and challenged, especially if they are incorrect or incomplete. For example, communities researching existing and potential human and environmental impacts of a project can share information that is missing, excluded, or incorrect in 'official documents'.

RESOURCE BOX

Defining and Analyzing a Problem: A toolkit from the Community Tool Box that provides resources and advice on taking action, teaching, and training others in organizing for community development

→ *bit.ly/ComAnalyze*

Village Book: In the Village Book process developed by ActionAid, people analyse and document their general situation to gain an understanding of the causes of their village's problems

→ *bit.ly/VillageBookActionAid*

2. BUILD A RESEARCH TEAM

Reach out to members of the community to form a research team. Team members exchange information with the wider community, ask questions, and compile the information collected. The team should represent the many types of people in the community, especially those who may be underrepresented and excluded. The number of team members will depend on the scope of the research, but usually at least 10 people will be needed.

Training your team is very important. Together with your team, understand why your community has chosen to do this research, what the goals of the research are, and the roles each member will have. Team members should be comfortable communicating and interviewing participants one-on-one or in small groups. Remember, the research process is actually an exchange of information, and participants will likely have questions. Each research team member should understand the research topic and any community-led development plans.

RESOURCE BOX

A Training Manual for Community-Based Researchers: A training manual with activities and exercises for community researchers, including introducing the concept of research and research tools such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups

→ *bit.ly/CBPRManual*

3. IDENTIFY ALLIES AND INFLUENCERS

In addition to your research team, other allies can contribute to the research process. Members of your community may be busy with work or may not have the time to contribute to all stages of the research process. In such cases, reaching out to allies such as university students and local civil society groups can be very helpful. For instance, a university student you trust can offer technical support to design the research tool, or create a system to organize data. Seek the advice and support of other communities affected by the same project, company, or bank, or who have already carried out a similar research process.

Local, national, and international civil society organizations may provide additional research information and, when the research is complete, amplify the message to reach target audiences and access decision-makers. Academics and members of the government you trust could help analyze the research results, and identify key findings and broader trends. Depending on your objectives, additional allies could help organize the research results into a graph, a written report, or a video.

If it is safe for the community and does not jeopardize the research or campaign, consider contacting key decision-makers who may have influence over parts of your research topic. Explore what influences them and decide in advance if and how you would like to engage with them. For example, you could visually map the relationships among allies and decision-makers to help improve your strategies and achieve your campaign objectives. Again, if it is safe and beneficial to the campaign, schedule a meeting or phone call to inform them about the research. If you have a good relationship with them, find out what questions they would like answered by the community-led research.

Before reaching out to allies and decision-makers, make sure you have analyzed the security risks and collectively decided on clear, simple messages. Carefully document and organize these communications and where possible, maintain written records of meetings and conversations.

RESOURCE BOX

How to Deal with Projects that Involve Forced Evictions and Displacement
The activities in this workbook prepared by the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing ask questions to help you identify the different actors related to your research topic and potential allies

→ *bit.ly/UNForcedEviction*

Chapatti Diagram: A tool from ActionAid that helps you examine different power dynamics within and between groups and organisations

→ *bit.ly/ChapattiDiagram*

Gate Keeper Tool: A tool from ActionAid to identify people who can help you access decision-makers relevant to your advocacy or campaigning work

→ *http://bit.ly/gatekeepertool*

4. ADDRESS SECURITY RISKS

Protect the safety of your research team and your community in all steps of the research process. Sometimes, people receive threats or are harmed for discussing a development project, a company, or their government. Even having information about a development project can put people at risk.

Based on these risks, everyone interested in joining the community-led research should be able to make fully informed decisions decisions on if and how they wish to participate. From the very beginning of your research process and throughout the campaign, your team should continually assess all potential risks (including those posed by allies and influencers), and have a plan to minimize them for everyone.

First discuss the risks with each member of the research team and every research participant, and then ask if they still wish to participate. By sharing their stories and insights, participants put their trust in you. Protect their identities and contributions at all times. Describe how photos, video, and quotes may be used and ask permission before using them.

RESOURCE BOX

To understand risks and create a security plan, consult the **Workbook on Security** from FrontLine Defenders, which is available in 11 languages

→ *bit.ly/HRDWorkbook*

Learn how to protect information on your phone or computer by reading **Security in-a-Box** from Tactical Tech

→ *securityinabox.org/en/tactics/*

5. DESIGN THE RESEARCH TOOL

There are many research tools available, such as community mapping, community monitoring, surveys, and questionnaires. One example we will discuss is the *Community-led Survey Template*. A community-led survey, unlike a conventional survey, is not only about collecting information - it also allows for information and insights to be exchanged between the community and the research team. Consider what contextual information should be shared by the research team so participants are fully informed about the research subject. For example, if you seek information on the community's experience with a proposed development project, perhaps prepare information about how development is designed, funded, and implemented in your country.

If your team decides to carry out a *Community-led Survey*, make sure the questions are focused, easy to understand, and designed in a collaborative manner. You may decide some questions have a "Yes" or "No" response, a choice of possible answers, or a space for open comments. Responses can be based on personal experiences or aspirational about what development the community wants, if any. Survey questions for the community-led research, can cover a wide variety of topics, depending on the objectives.

For example, imagine a community may lose homes to make way for a highway project. Consider questions like:

"How will your children be affected, if you must move?"

"How will your job or livelihood be affected, if you must move?"

"What common resources or sites (like schools, temples, or rivers) will you lose, if you must move?"

Go through the draft survey with your research team to ensure questions are clear, organized and easy to understand. Encourage the team to practice and build confidence by interviewing each other. Estimate the time it would take to complete the research process and plan the community meetings or outreach visits accordingly.

If you are looking for past examples, activists from 8 countries who are part of IAP's Global Advocacy Team created a *Survey Template* for their community-led research. Use or adapt the *Survey Template for Community-Led Research*, or create and test a new one for your community!

Once you have decided on the tool you will use, set up a system for organizing the research collected. Organizing the research will help the research team, allies, and community members understand the results before it becomes part of a campaign. Some software analyzes survey data automatically, but may require an internet connection and may not be available in the local language of the community. Some may also charge a fee.

RESOURCE BOX

Resources like **Campaign Research Toolkits** from DataCenter can help build tools

→ *bit.ly/CampaignResearchToolkit*

For surveys, programs like:
Survey Monkey (*www.surveymonkey.com*),
Google Forms (*https://www.google.com/forms/about/*)
and **KoBo Toolbox** (*http://www.kobotoolbox.org/*)
can help organize and analyze research results

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Research

6. ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY THROUGHOUT

It is very important for the Research Team to **update and involve the broader community** regularly and throughout the community-led research process. Early on, set up a process to communicate the activities and times when the community should gather for review and input.

At the start, collectively verify information with the broader community about the research team's plans and goals. When the research process is ready, share information about how the research will be carried out. Review the initial findings with the wider community before finalizing or sharing the results as part of your campaign. Ask the community to verify and analyze the findings, and to prioritize what information is most important for their campaign.

RESOURCE BOX

Communication and Power: A toolkit from CIRAC that provides a variety of methods and examples on how to communicate within communities

→ *bit.ly/CommunicationPowerEng*

7. COLLECT THE DATA

Carry out your research at a time and place that will be safe, convenient, and accessible for participants. Prepare to share information and answer questions so participants are fully informed about the research topic. Explain the purpose and process of the research to each participant.

Plan how to share and gather information so everyone in the community can fully participate. For example, if some community members do not read or write, explain and conduct the research process so everyone can participate equally. Ask if participants want their images, names, and identities to be made public. Again, it is important to **carefully protect the identity of community members** participating in the research.

To help identify participants, consult people who are active in community organizations and know many people in the community. Determine how the research team will integrate people regularly underrepresented or excluded from community conversations. If some people decide not to participate in the community-led research, make sure the research team respects their decision.

Involving the entire community in the research process may not be possible. To collect a good sample of viewpoints, set a goal to conduct the research process with at least 100 people. Based on your security assessment, the research team may discuss questions one-on-one or in small groups of less than 10 people, and if needed, help record an individual's exact answers and comments. Each research team member should actively engage in the collection process to ensure the data collected is clear and consistent.

When conducting surveys, for example, research team members should ask one question at a time and clarify unknown words. Remember, listen carefully, don't interrupt or comment on anyone's responses, and give participants enough time to respond to each question. Sometimes people may become emotional when remembering traumatic experiences. Be supportive and patient.

RESOURCE BOX

Transect Walks: A tool created by CatComm for groups undertaking observation-based community improvement

→ *http://catcomm.org/transect-walk*

8. DRAFT THE RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With all the data collected, it's time bring your research together to understand it better. If you are using software to analyze your research, make sure the research team tests it. If you plan to analyze your research without software, determine how best to track your progress at each stage.

If a survey is your research tool, first number each survey and make photocopies. To protect the data and participants, keep the survey and copies in a safe and secure place as you review them.

After all the data has been recorded in one place, the research team should check for accuracy. Has each answer been recorded properly? For questions where people selected answers from a list, calculate the percentage of responses per answer for each question.

Pay attention to people's comments. For example, maybe you find that in a community where people were forcibly evicted, many shared stories of physical violence. Document these experiences - a powerful, personal story can show the real people behind the numerical data.

Telling individual stories can make the research more compelling and personal. While you must always protect information about those who participated, some may wish their stories to be made public. Remember to obtain their consent before using a story publicly, even if you do not use their real name.

Now, look at your research (including the comments) for information, trends, and patterns that connect directly with your research objectives. An ally with data analysis experience can also help you analyze your results.

RESOURCE BOX

Use **A Step-by-Step Guide to Qualitative Data Analysis** featured in Pimatiziwin to help you analyze your findings

→ *bit.ly/QualitativeDataAnalysis*

Use the **Storytelling Manual** from Capacity Canada for ideas on how to tell the story of your community's research and findings

→ *bit.ly/StorytellingManual*

9. SHARE DRAFT VERSIONS FOR FEEDBACK

Create a first draft of the results of your entire research and share it with the community. You may need to share the results in a variety formats so they are accessible to everyone. For example, if not everyone in the community reads, perhaps create a photo presentation to share the results. Seek their feedback and ask what results should be prioritized and if any recommendations could be integrated into the community-led campaign.

If safe to do so, consider asking the allies and influencers you may have contacted at the beginning of the research to review your results. If helpful, ask them to review the research and initial recommendations before you make them public. However, their feedback should not change the priorities recommended by the community. Once all inputs have been received, depending on your advocacy objectives, decide what research to prioritize and integrate into your campaign.

RESOURCE BOX

Read about the experiences of community organizers from around the world, who conducted community-led research with the *Survey Template for Community-Led Research* created by IAP's Global Advocacy Team.

Community-Led Research: Sukhgerel's Story
→ *bit.ly/sukhgerelstory*

Community-Led Research: Elias' Story
→ *bit.ly/eliasstory*

Community-Led Research: Mela's Story
→ *bit.ly/melasstory*

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Advocate

10. SHARE THE FINAL RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Now, it's time to add the community-led research to the campaign!

Since key audiences were identified in the Prepare phase, review your strategy to distribute the results and recommendations. For example, if you determined it was safe to influence decision-makers locally, consider holding events in the community to share the survey results and consider documenting them with photos and videos. If the target audience is outside your community or country, allies with existing relationships may provide advice and help you get access.

Review the people you want to influence, and think about the best way for them to receive and act upon the research and recommendations. Consider again how the research team and community decided to share the research and recommendations. Is a written report the best way? If so, how long, and what format will convince them to read it? Should you do an in-person presentation, or create protest signs, a video, infographic, or website? Allies can help you - whether it is a volunteer video editor, a graphic designer, or an artist. Be strategic and creative!

RESOURCE BOX

Back to Development: A Call for What Development Could Be from the International Accountability Project provides examples and stories of how 8 community organizers shared the results of their community-led research

→ *bit.ly/whatdevelopmentcouldbe*

Use **The Mobilisation Cookbook:** A Moblab guide to people-powered campaigns to learn how to use your findings within a larger campaign

→ *bit.ly/MobilisationCookbook*

Use the last chapter of the **Visualizing Information for Advocacy** guidebook from Tactical Tech to learn how to create visuals from your data

→ *bit.ly/VisualisingForAdvocacy*

Critical Path Analysis from The Change Agency is a series of exercises to help think about how you can position your research to make meaningful change

→ *bit.ly/changeagency*

11. TOGETHER, TAKE ACTION!

Sharing your research and recommendations can be an important step in demanding change, as well as in mobilizing and informing others about the community's development plans and ideas.

Follow the timeline set out at the beginning of the community-led research process, review each step regularly, and adjust the approach, if needed, to take advantage of victories and new opportunities.

Other communities, social movements, or civil society groups, may benefit from learning about your research and recommendations. Consider sharing your work with them!

RESOURCE BOX

IAP's Community Action Guide to the Asian Development Bank offers ideas on different ways to take action with your community-led research

→ *bit.ly/Adbguide*

Counting Our Victories: A Training Guide on Popular Education and Organizing from Repeal the Deal Productions provides training materials on organizing and educating others about your research topic

→ *bit.ly/CountingOurVictories*

Develop and evaluate an action plan using **ActionAid's Bridge**

→ *bit.ly/actionbridge*

12. REFLECT

After the advocacy has started, set several dates for the research team to measure and reflect on your progress to reach the campaign objectives. Invite your research team to reflect on the overall community-led research process, measure where you are in reaching your objectives, discuss new challenges and consider any adjustments on your next steps. Reflecting can be a learning and celebratory experience for both individuals and the wider community. Reflections can happen at each step of the research process and when the campaign ends.

RESOURCE BOX

Use the **Counting Seeds for Change: Reflect Evaluation Framework** by SARN as a structured way to reflect on your research process and campaign

→ *bit.ly/CountingSeedsForChange*

Now that you have gone through these 12 steps, we hope you have a better idea of what community-led research is about, and how you can do it yourself. Different communities organize community-led research differently - this is the beauty of it!

Are you ready to start your own community-led research? Use this Checklist as a compass for your journey!

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