



Thematic Note
Cross-Cutting Theme: Co-production and Impact

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Introduction

This theme focuses on making sure that the knowledge generated by Urban ARK is legitimate and accessible in its conception, generation, dissemination and application. All aspects of the work of Urban ARK aim to reduce urban risk in Africa, more specifically to enhance:

1. Evidence based planning and policy making amongst implementing agencies, including community groups within the urban ARK target cities
2. A more Africa-centric and urban –centric international policy and academic landscape for resilience and disaster risk management.

Approaching the project from this normative starting point implies that residents, scholars and practitioners have to all agree that what we ask, what we find, how we found out about it and how the new information is spread and used - is credible. This does not mean that everyone has to agree with all of the academic findings, or that the outcomes will all automatically be practice oriented. It does mean that we need to be clear on our research approach, methods and ethics to ensure that the overarching objective of reducing urban risk is achieved. Each research component will have specific target audiences that they want to reach and will need to prepare the research approach and questions with this in mind.

Approach to the Urban ARK research

There are many innovative ways to link those who will produce knowledge and those who use knowledge – there is no need to restrict ourselves to a one-way relationship that begins with traditional academic investigation and ends with practical take up and application. There are however very different ways of understanding applied urban research, and the mode of working that we select will have implications for the way that our research is imagined, executed and the manner that our collaborator’s contributions are acknowledged. Three well-documented approaches to applied research can set varied modes of working and it is worth being conscious of our choices.

a. Action research is explicitly committed to the notion that ideas can and should have consequences (Reason et al, 2001). Most recently the idea of scholars, practitioners, activists and residents working together to reduce risk and foster more sustainable urban development has been promoted through ideas of co-production.

b. Co-production is a bit different from action research in that the source of the ideas are seen to come from both the scholars and the practitioners who, when working together, draw from the best of the academic debates and insights and the real world experiences of those responsible for or living in the areas under study. The joint effort and insight of the partners, as well as access to different sources of information, generates fresh insights about how to change cities for the better (Patel et al, 2015). Most recently there has been a call in the urban literature, which notes the imperative of rapid and radical intervention, to combine the ideas of action research and co-production and to promote the practice of translational research in order to respond directly to the African urban crisis.

c. Translational research

The notion of translational urban research praxis captures more than the idea of applied research or even co-production and encompasses integrating the research conception, design, execution, application, reflection and dissemination - and conceiving of this set of activities as a singular research/practice process that is by its nature deeply political and locationally embedded (Parnell, and Pieterse, 2015).

Given Urban ARK's concern with urban risk reduction and the seriousness of the problem in African cities (Bull-Kamanga et al, 2003; Adelekan et al., 2015), a translational research approach is proposed. The core idea is that working together to define solutions to the problems, agree on the methods and sources of information and possible sites of intervention from the outset is a better way to achieve long term impact than trying to disseminate or publicise the findings of research that were produced in isolation from those who could and should be using the new knowledge. Translational research is also proposed as an alternative to the lobbying and other known problems associated with seeking impact to fulfil funded demands in developmental research projects such as this (Williams, 2012).

Methods in designing translational research

Most, though not all, of the Urban ARK work packages involve direct engagement with people and institutions that are currently actively involved with urban risk. Work packages 1 and 3 are already clearly designed around a co-production methodology. A translational approach might push this further – looking explicitly for the kind of knowledge that would generate solutions to the problems of risk. It would also take very seriously the institutional realities and resources of those who must implement change, looking for innovation within the capacity envelopes that actually exist.

It is an error to assume that only those aspects of the research that have an immediate engagement with affected communities or with future policy can have practical impact or lend themselves to working in a translational manner. The historical and modelling components of Urban ARK (WP 2 and 4) may draw on sources of information that are found in archives, secondary published material and formal data sets (weather, geological data etc.), but the way the questions are posed and the analysis is shaped can be informed by scholarly debates and the needs of the different communities of practice. By establishing long-term trends (for example in climate or the burden of disease) the pattern and magnitude of current and projected risk will be better understood. Invoking a back-casting methodology, that seeks to explain how the current problems emerged and what can be learnt about what can and can't be readily changed in the management of African cities, will also contribute to a translational research agenda.

Across the project as a whole particular attention should be given to the presentation and integration of the findings of the work packages that draw in knowledge from sources beyond the local case study sites. This is both to maximise opportunities of learning about urban risk management from other places, but also to draw from past experiences and the wider scientific data.

There will also be need to highlight how risks are distributed spatially, by gender and across the lifecourse-infants, children, adults and older people. This differentiation will enable

targeted interventions among the most vulnerable urban dwellers. It is also consistent with localizing risks for easy targeting.

Questions to ask in designing translational research

Operational research questions for all Urban ARK work packages and overall project leaders are:

- a) How have the phases of translational research (conception, design, execution, application, reflection and dissemination) been conceptually linked?
- b) Has the research process been practically designed to enable a translational mode of working?
 - i. Funding distribution
 - ii. Staff appointments
 - iii. Scheduling (field work, time for analysis and reflection, integration of findings, publication submission etc.)
 - iv. Other practical arrangements (invitations, venues, visas etc.)
- c) If all the targeted stakeholders were in the room together for affirmation and dissemination of the findings of Urban ARK would they all:
 - i. Recognise the integration of the research questions that came from a synthesis of issues taken from the academic debates and on the ground questions?
 - ii. Approve of the range of sources used to verify and inform the findings?
 - iii. Confirm that the way their own contributions are accurately reflected and appropriately situated relative to other positions?
 - iv. Concede that the conclusions drawn use the available evidence effectively, even where they do not agree with the point made?
- d) Has the necessary communication been undertaken?
 - i. Was information distributed to the right people at the appropriate moments in the life of the project to ensure that the right stakeholders were engaged in the research itself?
 - ii. Were key messages from the project isolated to inform a wider academic and popular audience?
 - iii. Were different kinds of media (radio, social media, print) used for the diverse constituencies?
 - iv. Were issues of language and literacy given adequate attention?
 - v. Was the project reporting designed to ensure cross fertilisation between sites, work packages and different types of researchers?
- e) On the basis of the overall evidence and argument is it possible to identify either where the evidence and arguments might contribute to new scholarly insights or practical action to reduce urban risk?

Dissemination and impact

In urban ARK we are proposing adopting a mode of undertaking research that fits into a long tradition of applied research rather than relying just on using media and post research dissemination strategies to popularise our findings among stakeholders. That said, there are critical phases at which it is important to think about impact.

- a) During the research design and implementation process (to enable realignment of the questions, identify extra sources and, if necessary, bring in additional stakeholders. Targeting specific stakeholders)
- b) At the stage of reviewing results (to identify specialist findings, to build synergies and to maximise collective awareness of the project findings)
- c) In delivering the summative messages (these should be both academic and for practice) and crafting messages particularly for the target stakeholders.
- d) As a legacy project (for example in pilot interventions or using the findings to train the next generation of urban risk reduction leadership)

Practical Guidance

Much of the preceding discussion is theoretical – to allow each project to develop its own impact approach. In addition though, it might be useful to be reminded of key practical aspects of impact that we have agreed to in Urban ARK. We have in the Theory of Change document (see Urban ARK website) three outcomes which we suggest will lead to two impacts, we need to demonstrate we have addressed all these points:

Outcomes:

1. Increased visibility and enhanced advocacy for resilience and risk management in the cities of sub-Saharan Africa amongst international development and humanitarian actors
2. Enhanced commitment and capacity for urban risk management and governance within participating cities.
3. Academic thinking reflects a more comprehensive and systematic coverage and better understanding of urban risk and resilience drivers, processes of change and status in sub-Saharan Africa including focus on gender and conflict.

Impact:

1. More Africa-centric and urban –centric international policy and academic landscape for resilience and disaster risk management.
2. Evidence based planning and policy making amongst implementing agencies, including community groups within the urban ARK target cities

We are committed to these outcomes and need to be able to evidence them in each project. Planning for this is an important element of our design work.

This can be helped by focusing on a core population of interest and associated policy community – child welfare, solid waste management, disaster response and so on. This allows us to pick out a specific **target audience** whose actions and discussions will influence and lead to the greatest change. Once these specific audiences are picked out, it is worth taking the time to **get to know the target audience**, what motivates them, and why they may have done nothing about the above identified risk. Have meetings and read policy documents, invite them to your planning meetings as well as dissemination meetings. If they are not interested you have not lost anything. Generally policy actors are interested to shape work – especially if this supports their portfolio and is free! These contacts then can work with you to design AND craft **messages** that speak to each of the target audiences. Thus there would be different messages for each of the target audiences and different channels that deliver the messages. This means using different metrics and terms. For example if seeking to influence city planning

economic loss may be most persuasive, for the land-use management community tensions of illegal land use would be more appropriate. Try to target messages but before this identify where the power lies in urban risk management. Usually this is with the Economic Planning or Political Lobby who then instruct land-use and emergency management actors what to do. It would be a mistake to assume that partnering with emergency managers will bring anything more than superficial openings for policy development.

The great thing about the approaches outlined in the document is that as Urban ARK interacts with the different target audiences, there will be a lot of learning about what each of the target audience responds to and it will be easier to craft messages. However, its also important to think about each of the stages as an opportunity for dissemination, rather than only the new information towards the end of the research process. Each interaction is an opportunity to create awareness, grow commitment and propel towards action.

A short list of five accessible further readings

Adelekan, I., Johnson, C., Manda, M., Matyas, D., Mberu, B.U., Parnell, S., Pelling M., Satterthwaite, D. and Vivekananda, J. (2015). Disaster risk and its reduction: an agenda for urban Africa. *International Development Planning Review*. Vol. 37, No.1, pp. 33–43.

Bull-Kamanga, Liseli, Kade Diagne, Allan Lavell, E. Leon, F. Lerise, H. MacGregor, A. Maskrey et al. (2003) "From everyday hazards to disasters: the accumulation of risk in urban areas." *Environment and Urbanization* 15, no. 1, 193-204.

Parnell, S and Pieterse, E. (2015) Methods of transformative global urban praxis: experimentation at the African Centre for Cities, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*), in press.

Patel, Z.; Greyling, S. Parnell, S. and G. Pirie. (2015) Co-producing urban knowledge: experimenting with alternatives to 'best practice' for Cape Town, South Africa, *International Development Planning Review*, 37, 187-203.

Williams, Glyn (2012) The disciplining effects of impact evaluation practices: negotiating the pressures of impact within an ESRC–DFID project, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 37, 489-495.

Reason, Peter, and Hilary Bradbury (eds.) (2001): *Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice*. Sage.

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