



“Using Qualitative Feminist Methodologies to Study Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality”



will begin at 1:00pm (EST)



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Using Qualitative Feminist Methodologies to Study Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality

*Women's Empowerment in Development (WED) Lab
Seminar Series*



McGill



IDRC | CRDI

International Development Research Centre
Centre de recherches pour le développement international



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We will take one short round of questions in the first hour, and another round in the second hour.

For those participating online, you can submit your questions for the facilitator/panel to: kathleen.grantham@mcgill.ca



Facilitator: Dr. Rebecca Tiessen



Professor and Deputy Director in the School of International Development and Global Studies and University Chair in Teaching at the University of Ottawa



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FEMINIST QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

***FOR RESEARCH ON GENDER EQUALITY AND
WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT***

Rebecca Tiessen, University of Ottawa, Canada

WEDLab Presentation

Ottawa, September 9, 2019



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Presentation Overview

1. Introduction to feminist methodology: core principles, values and approaches.
2. Two priorities at the centre of my feminist methodology:
 - Scholar/practitioner research collaborations
 - Inclusive research involving diverse research partners but especially emerging and next generation researchers and scholars (all stages).



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Characteristics of Feminist Research

- the **construction of new knowledge** (standard) and the **production of social change**
- ❖ Historically informed by women's struggles against multiple forms oppression.
- ❖ Informed by diverse struggles of marginalized groups and the employment of an intersectional analysis.





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Feminist research grounded in feminist values and beliefs

- Focussing on meanings women and other marginalized (or silenced) groups give to their world
- Inspired by questions: “where are the women”? & “why and how are marginalized groups overlooked”?



Image from Wadsworth
1998 *What is Participatory
Action Research?*
[http://www.aral.com.au/ari
/p-ywadsworth98.html](http://www.aral.com.au/ari/p-ywadsworth98.html)



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Characteristics continued

- Considers the value, knowledge and insights of overlooked groups

Works toward:

- Informing all stages of the research, from choice of topic to presentation of data & knowledge mobilization (changing the way we view ownership of research projects)



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Feminist Research is interdisciplinary (construction of new knowledge)

- it uses different methods and tools for data collection and knowledge generation (qualitative and quantitative)
- it is constantly being redefined by the concerns of women and other marginalized groups coming from very different backgrounds and experiences





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Feminist Research is Activist (production of social change)

- seeks to remove the power imbalance between research and subject (to some extent)
- seeks to change social inequality in the process of data collection/dissemination
- beyond **recognizing** value of diverse knowledges, actively incorporates them in research stages



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Benefits

- diverse and unheard stories
- can be deeply qualitative
- avoid some of the polite or formal research biases
- Generative: facilitate dialogue/knowledge sharing rather than inquiry-based, stories are richer and more comprehensive





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Challenges

- Takes time
- Takes different funding commitments (implications for existing funding and rewards structures)
- Navigate gate keepers
- Can take new & unexpected directions
- Goal (something you work toward), not easy/perfect



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Scholar/Practitioner Collaboration

- **construction of new knowledge & production of social change** – requires collaboration
- Collaboration helps with **access** - to information, to research participants, and 'local knowledge'.
- **Generative**: insights from diverse team members informs the research
- **Timely**: practitioners may have better contemporary knowledge of current issues/realities (scholarship is dated)
- Improved potential for **social impact**



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Considerations

- Research that is arms-length can have value (not linked to donor reporting), respect for critical analysis is needed, learning-centred organizations benefit
- Funding needs to be allocated to develop and sustain the collaborative process (Cottrell & Parpart, 2006), funds for buying time
- Importance of trust and reciprocity
- Involves professional training and ongoing support (CCIC & CASID, 2017; Chernikova, 2011).



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Second Priority: Inclusive

- Inclusive of the research team
- Increased partner ownership of the research and knowledge dissemination processes
- Hiring locally-based research partners and mentoring emerging scholars in the development of the full research process from research design to publication of results



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Rational for Inclusivity:

- Decentering critical analysis
- De-colonize the scholarship = ensuring peripheral voices valorized and included
- Reduce “othering” and challenge “the assumption of *host communities* as an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires [...] which can be applied universally and cross-culturally” (Mohanty, 336).



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I'm a Feminist,

now what?





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The Experience so far:

1. Research for SSHRC PDG (2014-2018)
2. Research for SSHRC Insights (2019-2024)

Overview:

1. What we have tried to do.
2. The benefits and challenges.
3. The learning process.



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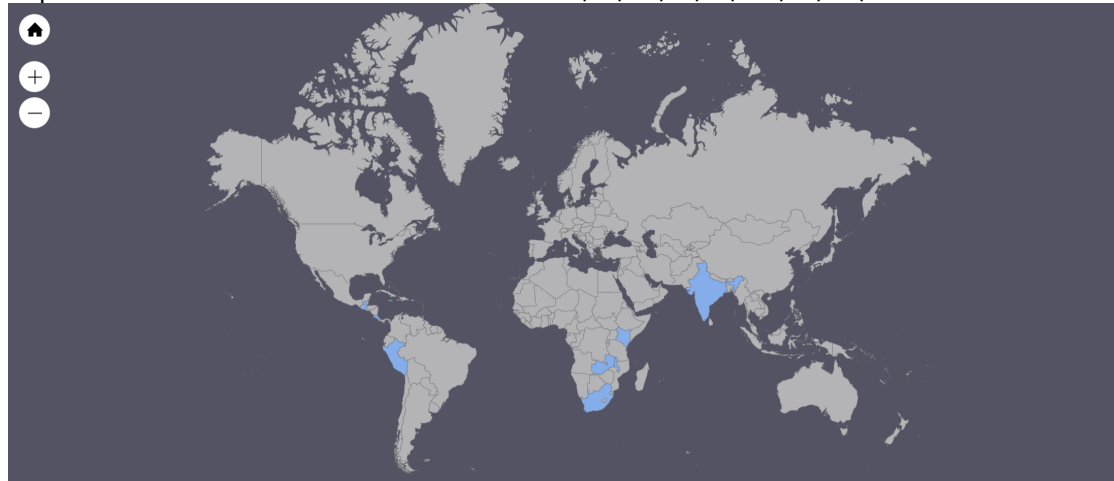
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- Guatemala
- Jamaica
- Peru
- Costa Rica
- Malawi
- Zambia
- South Africa
- Kenya
- India

Study 1 (2014-2018): Partner country perspectives on the role and impact of international volunteers

Saved from:

https://www.amcharts.com/visited_countries/#CR,GT,JM,PE,KE,MW,ZA,ZM,IN





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Stages of Research

1. Hiring locally-based consultants to collect data
2. Hiring locally-based researchers to analyse data
3. Collaborating with locally-based scholars in production of final papers.
4. Bringing some of the researchers/authors together to dissemination information at a regional conference in South Africa.
5. Authorship in the name of the researchers who analysed and drafted material.



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Sharing the Stage

- Four of the researchers presented their research at the IEASA (International Education Association of South Africa) conference in South Africa (2016):

- *Front row: Claire, Denis, Sarah, Andrew,*
- *Back row: Kate, Anna, Rebecca*





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Current Research Project:

- Using a Feminist methodology to study impacts of development programs promoting gender equality and women's empowerment projects
- Partner organization/community perspectives
- Focus on knowledge sharing/capacity building and relationship building



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Activities

- Hiring research assistants for data collection in 10 countries:
- 4 locally-based research assistants (Vietnam, Ghana, Malawi, Kenya)
- 6 uOttawa students/recent grads (Uganda, Senegal, Tanzania, Nepal, Guatemala, Peru)
- Collaborations with two NGOs and their partner organizations in 10 countries
- Dissemination: presentations by research team and publications of all 10 researchers (case studies + book chapters)
- Training + Trust



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Focus of the Findings

- Person-to-person impacts and the role of relationship building
- Tells a story of co-operation, partnership and collaboration
- “They become our friends”
- Agency-oriented focus, in the context of navigating problematic structural realities
- IV programs inspire new attitudes and behaviours in the promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment
- Create space for critical reflection and discussions/dialogue



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Creating spaces for critical reflection:

Nepal: “My domestic work is actually considered labour, because I do it all. I never thought to think critically about my life.”

- conversations are shaping the way that women’s rights, youth participation, and diverse experiences n
- Result: gender equality is increasingly becoming part of the language and practice of development programming.
- IVs, who dedicate time and build strong relationships with community members in partner countries, are central to the coordinating efforts required and they help build the capacity to initiate and sustain initiatives for gender equality and women’s empowerment



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Challenges or Limitations

- Research funding: limited opportunities to meet with teams in advance to co-design research, to determine collectively the research questions
- Deliverables must align with funder priorities (open access publications in refereed journals/other knowledge mobilization welcome)
- Semi-structured interviews create opportunities for rich discussions but require strong probing skills and good listening techniques (difficult to monitor)
- Can never do enough?



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Summary of Feminist Research

- **construction of new knowledge & production of social change**
- Both strategies (scholar/practitioner collaboration and inclusive research) have facilitated these priorities.
- Production of social change is much harder to measure beyond inclusion of emerging scholars.
- Goal-oriented means continuous learning, adaptation, new strategies to address challenges.
- Overview of general ideas of what constitutes feminist research and two priorities that have been central to my own research process
- Panelists can give more concrete examples of their work, methods and approaches



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Thank you

Thanks to all the fantastic colleagues I get to work with (NGO staff, students, researchers, international volunteers, partner organization staff)

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Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, WUSC &
Cuso International**



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada



WUSC EUMC

CUSO
International



Questions from the audience



Rebecca Tiessen,
University of Ottawa



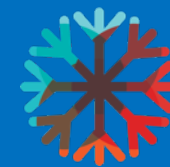
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5 minute break



Jana Garay



Global Lead, Monitoring, Evaluation Accountability and Learning, Cuso International



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Capturing the effects of our programming on gender equality and women's empowerment

Jana Garay, Cuso International
WEDLab Presentation
September 9, 2019





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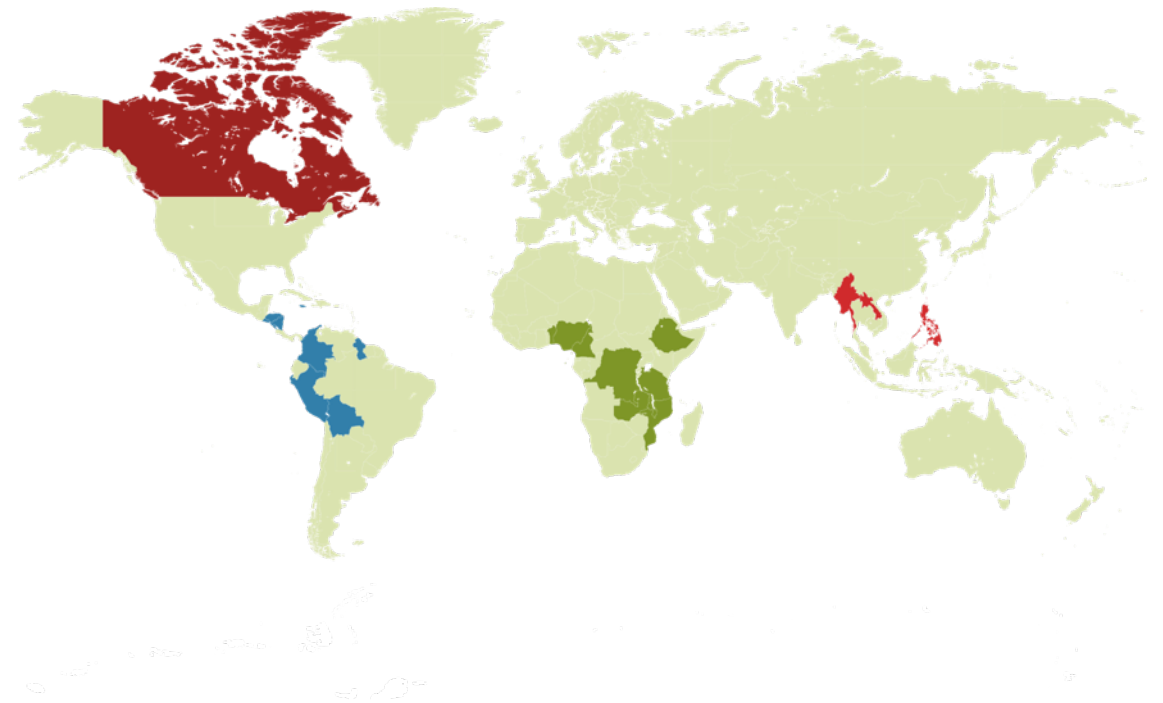
What does Cuso do for GEWE?

Volunteering for development (V4D)

- GESI programmatic and cross-cutting

Women's Voices and Leadership

Alignment with FIAP





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Challenges in capturing results in GEWE

- Degrees of distance
- Business Model – Capacity building
- Resources
- Internal Capacity



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V4D Programming

VOICE end-of-project evaluation

- Reaching communities
- Peru project

Outcome harvesting internal exercise





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Women's Voices and Leadership

- Four leading feminist organizations
- Equal partnership in all project implementation, including MEAL
- Transformative paradigm and feminist approach
- Quarterly reflective meetings facilitated by a MEAL consultant





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Other options/ideas

CEDIL Call Proposal

- Global effect of V4D on communities in fragile contexts
- Ripple Effect Mapping
- CDA Collaborative Learning Listening Project and Development Effectiveness
- Distinct categories of community capital





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Conclusions

- Questions matter
- The “long” route is often the best route





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Thank you

jana.garay@cusointernational.org

Dr. Sheila Rao



Post-Doctoral Researcher, School of International
Development and Global Studies, University of Ottawa



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*Feminist methodologies in nutrition and agricultural
development research:
Lessons and reflections from fieldwork in Tanzania*

Sheila Rao
Post-Doctoral Fellow
MITACS/CCIC/University of Ottawa



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Presentation Overview

Context and area of research:

Methodology: multi-sited ethnography through a feminist political economy lens

Lessons: collaboration, unanticipated outcomes

Reflections: intersectional research, role of researchers



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Research Context

The Study: examined the gendered dynamics of food systems - the interconnections of dietary practices, food production and development strategies

- case study: promotion of biofortified crops as way to address nutritional health.
- beyond assumptions around normative gender roles in food systems to identify interconnections and relations in everyday livelihood practices



Mwasongwe village,
Misungwi District,
Tanzania

Ethnography through a feminist political economy lens

- In-depth, long-term, participant observation centred on everyday life in a particular setting.

*Examine the **politics** of everyday life, paying attention to:*

- State and non-state engagement with social and economic matters related to food.
- National/international policies, research and investment agendas.
- Productive and reproductive roles (paid/unpaid) in the food system and policy formation processes.





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Lessons

- **Collaborative research processes benefit both academic research and practitioner objectives:**
 - findings move beyond the effectiveness and timeline of an intervention
 - exchange in capacity-building, resource access, new perspectives
- **Unanticipated outcomes**
 - seasonal acute malnutrition from climatic variability
 - exposed the impact of alternative, non-household labour investments around food production and provision systems



Reflections

1. Centering intersectionality in feminist research methodology:

- Analysis across: race, sexuality, ethnicity, class, age, historical, political context.
- Highlight processes of marginalization and vertical power relations - *who has access to social and economic mobility and who does not? why?*

2. Consideration of positionality of researcher and active participation of the researcher and research partners:

- *Mzungu* versus *Mhindi* identity
- Identities beyond mother, researcher, practitioner





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Conclusions

- A Feminist approach to ethnography contributes to the openness and inclusivity of research beyond assumptions that are embedded in framings and knowledge production of normative gender roles.
- It depends on the trust between research participants and researchers, research partners/assistants based in the particular setting - making it collaborative by design.
- It encourages a 'slow' research process that integrates time, resources and space for reflection, collaboration, and include in the analysis connections between political processes at varying scales and every day lives of those we seek to support.



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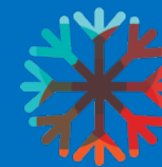
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Jessica Cadesky



PhD Candidate, School of International Development
and Global Studies, University of Ottawa



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**Who stands where?
How feminist standpoint-inspired
methodologies can help us understand
lived experiences in conflict and post-
conflict settings**

Jessica Cadesky, PhD Candidate
School of International Development and Global Studies
University of Ottawa



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Feminist Standpoint Theory in Brief

- Knowledge is socially situated
- Marginalized groups and individuals are best positioned to comment on oppression and unequal power relations, often overlooked in the construction of knowledge
- Therefore, research should start with marginalized voices





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Volunteering in Conflicts and Emergencies (ViCE) Initiative

- Inspired by ‘listening methodology’, Anderson et al (2012)
- Co-production: Red Cross Red Crescent Movement (RCRC), University of Northumbria (UK), six RCRC National Societies
 - Afghanistan, Honduras, Myanmar, South Sudan, Sudan, Ukraine
- 198 RCRC volunteers (78 female, 120 male)
- Highly unstructured ‘listening sessions’: group, pair, individual, mixed and gender-segregated
- Guiding question: “What is it like to be a volunteer here?”
- Not originally conceived of as a feminist standpoint methodology



Volunteering in Conflicts and Emergencies Team



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What we heard

“I’d say, [a] woman’s role, not only in society, but in volunteering as well, on the working side, is quite marginalised. And I compared it, and that helped me back then to reflect on the role that we female volunteers have, because sometimes, many times, we are told: ‘Go ahead, give them your best smile and you’ll manage to get that for us’, because we have been told that occasionally. Then I say, no, I am more than that, going and laughing with somebody in order to try to get something for my colleagues; as a woman, I need to see what I can be for society.” (Female volunteer)



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“Transforming Lives or Simply Ticking Boxes?”

- Current doctoral research, northern Sri Lanka
- Life histories as primary method
- 10 LH participants (6 female, 4 male)
- Explicitly informed by feminist standpoint theory
- Guiding question: “If you were to write a book about your life, what are the stories that you would fill it with?”



Thavachchelvi Rasan,
Research Assistant

This work was carried out with the aid of a grant from the International Development Research Centre, and with funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (Ottawa, Canada)



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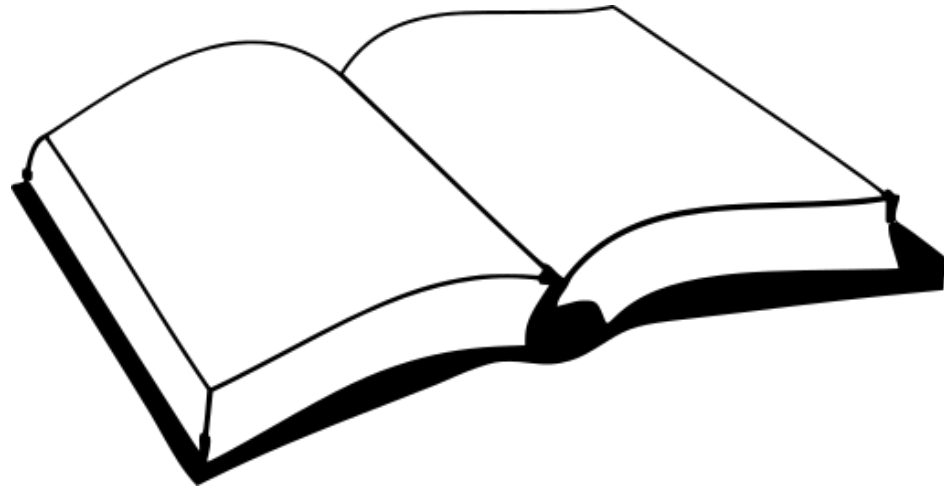
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What we heard

Excerpt from first life history session, woman, age 43





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Reflections

- ‘Just’ listening is harder than it sounds
- Different interpretations of ‘feminism’ and who is marginalized can challenge, expand the discourse
- Often requires intense investment of resources (time, funding)
- Reciprocity: inherent power dynamics between ‘researcher’ and the ‘researched’
- The process of being listened to can be empowering but important not to overstate the role of the researcher
- ‘Truth’ is subjective, memory is imperfect, lived experiences are often visceral
- Diverse experiences and understandings make invaluable contributions to knowledge production, but also complicate: life is messy, so too are these feminist research methodologies



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Thank You

For more information on the ViCE initiative:

- <http://www.rcrcvice.org>
- Cadesky, J., Baillie Smith, M. & Thomas, N. (2019). The Gendered experiences of local volunteers in conflicts and emergencies. *Gender and Development* 27(2), pp. 371-388.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13552074.2019.1615286>



Pascale Saint-Denis



Undergraduate Student and Research Intern,
University of Ottawa



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Evaluating Volunteer Impacts and Contributions to GEWE in Host Communities in Peru

Pascale Saint-Denis



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Focus of Research

- Study on the impacts of international volunteers in the promotion of gender equality and women's economic empowerment
- Evaluation of the VOICE project in Peru





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Methodology Used

- Criteria of the sample
 - Included Indigenous women, youth with disabilities, rural and urban farmers, local feminist volunteers
- 15 semi-structured interviews and two focus groups
 - Emphasis on storytelling
- Methods to attempt to reduce power dynamics





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Factors Influencing Methodology

- Communication between the Ottawa office and the field
- Time constraint





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Key Learning Points

- Methodology gave space for storytelling
- The importance of a more participatory methodology
 - Local decision-making





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Personal Reflections

- Constant learning experience and challenge
 - Adaptability
 - Asking the right questions
- Relationship building over a short period of time
- Using the local knowledge





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Thank you!



Rika Mpogazi



Undergraduate Student and Research Assistant,
University of Ottawa

Audience Q&A with the panel



Rebecca Tiessen,
University of
Ottawa
(Facilitator)



Jana Garay,
Cuso
International



Sheila Rao,
University of
Ottawa



Jessica Cadesky,
University of
Ottawa



Pascale Saint-
Denis, University
of Ottawa



Rika Mpogazi,
University of
Ottawa

Next WED Lab Seminar/Webinar

“Social Norms and Women’s Empowerment”
Tuesday September 24 – 1:00-3:00pm (EST)

Visit the WED Lab website for more information
and to register:

<http://womensempowerment.lab.mcgill.ca>



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