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Research Article

Serving the People in Long Beach, California: Advancing Justice for Southeast Asian Youth through Community-University Research Partnerships

R. Varisa Patraporn

Abstract

Khmer Girl's in Action is a nonprofit that successfully utilizes community-based participatory research (CBPR) with university partners to create social change for youth in Long Beach, CA. Based on semi-structured interviews and content analysis of news articles, I explore the impact and sustainability of this research work and the research partnerships. Findings highlight impacts such as youth empowerment, heightened awareness around community needs, policy change, and CBPR curriculum improvements in the field as impacts. Sustainability requires integrating research into program funding, utilizing a tailored training curriculum, building on community members prior relationships, and selecting partners that share common goals, levels of commitment, and flexibility. As funders demand more data to justify community needs, understanding more examples of such work in the Asian American community will be useful for informing future partnerships.

Introduction

Community-university research partnerships bring nonprofit and university representatives together to produce research that impacts policy and social change (Savan, 2004). Over the last three decades, there has been tremendous growth in such partnerships because public funders and philanthropy have increased their desire for data driven programs (Pettijohn and Borris, 2013). Another reason is a growing public

desire for universities to serve local communities, for scholars to be more responsive, and to train more civically engaged students. For many nonprofits, producing this data is a challenge due limited staff or capacity in terms of research skills. Thus, the opportunity for community-university partnerships to generate impactful research is great.

Community-university research partnerships can especially benefit Asian American–serving organizations. First, the smaller size of Asian American–serving nonprofits compared to other organizations serving larger populations and geographies means that such partnerships may be the only way to produce research. Second, a challenge similar to other nonprofits is that many Asian American–serving nonprofits do not have the expertise and/or training to conduct research. Perhaps the most salient reason is that they can provide disaggregated data by Asian ethnicity, which is rarely available and/or collected. Thus, partnerships can help produce critical and important data for Asian American–serving organizations to demonstrate program needs and receive their fair share of funding. Even though Asian Americans continue to be the fastest-growing racial group in the United States, the research examining community-university partnerships serving the Asian American community remains limited (Lopez, Ruiz, and Patten, 2017; Strand et al., 2003).

Community-university research partnerships often appear in the prior research in the context of community-based participatory research (CBPR). CBPR is research that includes community members or representatives of the community with the goal of impacting policy and social change. It has been utilized in many fields including anthropology, education, and psychology (Hacker, 2017). However, the primary field for which much of the scholarly exists is in the area of public health with a goal to improve health outcomes (Israel et al., 1998; Israel et al., 2005; Israel et al., 2010; Minkler and Wallerstein, 2008). These scholars typically describe the methodology and process for conducting community-engaged work along with reporting findings. *Community engaged* here means including the community at some level whether it be incorporating community feedback to training community members to collect and analyze data.

Having university partners can be beneficial because of the skills and experience faculty can bring, the possibility of additional resources, and a legitimacy to research findings. Because of these benefits, the amount of research focused on understanding partnerships has grown so that we may better understand how to establish and sustain more partnerships. This research discusses ethics, professional norms, part-

ner role, and partnership development (Campano, Ghiso, and Welch, 2015; Felt, Rowe, and Curlew, 2004; Hart and Wolff, 2006; Mendes et al., 2014; Savan, 2004). However, research that examines the sustainability of the partnerships remains limited (Dong et al., 2011; Nation et al., 2011; Savan, 2004). Sustainability here relates to the continual and/or enduring nature of the partnerships (Savan, 2004).

Sustainability and impacts are important to study as they relate to the long-term results or change that we hope community-university research partnerships generate. Studying impact is equally if not more important than short-term outcomes such as the number of workshops conducted or research publications produced (Hacker, 2017). However, less research examines impacts because they are less tangible (not easily quantifiable) and more indirect as long-term effects of outcomes (Penna, 2011; Savan, 2004). Moreover, measuring such impact and sustainability requires analysis over a longer period into the future.

As CBPR has become more expansive, so has the research in terms of documenting examples from various ethnic communities. More recently, studies describing experiences in Asian American communities have been published (Chang et al. 2013; Cohen and Poon, 2011; Helm et al. 2008; Nguyen et al. 2006; Poon and Cohen, 2012; Sangalang, Ngouy, and Lau, 2015). Similar to the prior and broader work in the field, these publications have focused on reporting findings and research process with some reflection about partnerships and impact. Having more examples of successful Asian American cases of CBPR and community-university research partnerships in the literature can serve as motivation for other Asian American–serving organizations who also wish to impart on this journey.

My research builds on the existing literature by exploring in-depth and overtime an Asian American–serving organization that has been successful at utilizing CBPR to serve the community. I ask the following questions: What impact (opposed to short-term outcomes) has Khmer Girls in Action (KGA)–university partnered research had? What impact if any has the process of CBPR had on KGA and the community? Finally, what can nonprofits do to sustain such projects as well as the research partnerships?

To answer these questions I use a case study approach including data from ten key informant interviews, news articles, and organizational documents to examine KGA's use of CBPR with two partners, UCLA and California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) over a ten-year period. Exploring these relationships along with the research process are com-

plex phenomena that require an in-depth and holistic perspective that makes a case study appropriate.

KGA can serve as a model for CBPR because it has continued utilizing research to develop programs and advocate for policy change since its founding in 1997. The results of their research have important impacts such as policy change, awareness about community needs, youth empowerment, and the field of CBPR. I also found that KGA has been able to sustain its research work because of their early investment in developing a tailored curriculum for youth members, integrating research funding into programs, and building on prior relationships within the community.

KGA's success at sustaining partnerships with two different universities for ten years is also noteworthy. Upon reflection, research partners identified the significant role of integrating funding for research into programs, developing a tailored training curriculum, and building on community members' existing relationship to ensure sustainability of research. Key informants also emphasized the following in sustainable partnerships: commitment to common goals, trust, flexibility, community-led and/or -shaped projects, and the importance of personal relationships.

Background

The literature that describes research that includes the participation of community members uses several terms interchangeably including: community-engaged research, CBPR, participatory action research, and community-based research. For this article, I use the term *community-based participatory research* as one that is consistent with KGA's origins (Cheatham-Rojas and Shen, 2008). The most recent book on the topic utilizes Viswanathan et al.'s (2004) definition of *community-based participatory research* as "a collaborative research approach that is designed to ensure and establish structures for participation by communities affected by the issue being studied, representatives of organizations, and researchers in all aspects of the research process to improve health and well-being through taking action including, including social change" (Hacker, 2017, 2).

Much of the prior research on CBPR discusses its use in the area of public health (Israel et al., 1998; Israel et al., 2005; Israel et al., 2010; Minkler and Wallerstein, 2008). These articles discuss a range of topics including how to improve community researcher retention, the history and principles of community-based research, partnership development,

ethics and norms, and partner roles (Curnow, 2017; De Las Nueces et al., 2012; Campano, Ghiso and Welch, 2015; Hart and Wolff, 2006; Israel et al., 2005; Strand et al., 2003; Sullivan et al., 2001). To date, the literature on community-university partnerships has mostly discussed the research process and findings (Minkler and Wallerstein, 2008). Few studies document outcomes that result from community-university research partnerships and it remains a challenging area for scholars (Cargo and Mercer, 2008; Minkler et al., 2008; Viswanathan et al., 2004). The research that does explore outcomes typically discusses more short outcomes that are tangible and easy to quantify such as the number of research publications and presentations, staff trained, and/or workshops given (Savan, 2004).

The discussion of impact or long-term outcomes in the literature is rare but includes policy change, greater awareness based on new data, greater equity in partnerships, increased community capacity, and community empowerment. Few studies document policy change as an outcome of CBPR because it requires a considerable amount of time for the change to occur and because multiple factors can be attributed to policy change (Minkler 2010). Such long-term outcomes are far more difficult to achieve and measure and may require a longitudinal or historical approach (Minkler and Wallerstein, 2008).

The academic literature refers to outcomes much more often than impact and it is not clear how scholars distinguish the two (Minkler and Wallerstein, 2008; Nguyen et al., 2006; Savan, 2004). One way to distinguish the two may be to take from definitions and measurements created by the philanthropic sector. Because of their desire to fund evidenced-based approaches, philanthropy has been at the forefront of developing measures and distinctions between the term's uses. I apply these definitions to CBPR so that outcomes occur because of the research, and impacts are the "long term or indirect effect" of the outcomes (Penna, 2011). According to Penna (2011), impacts are what we hope will eventually happen, but outcomes are what we make happen. Impacts are less tangible (more difficult to measure and quantify) and broader in their influence. Based on Penna's definition, policy change can be seen as impacts of CBPR and, thus, this is why I define policy change as such.

Sustainability is another concept that has been understudied because of the difficulty to measure and lack of consensus about definition in the literature. Savan (2004) provides one that is marked simply by a working relationship period of more than a year. According to Alexander et al. (2003), sustainability is by definition a future-based concept

and cannot be assessed directly other than in retrospective fashion such as in this study. Thus, scholars often have to rely on an assessment of factors that serve as the precursors or foundations for potential sustainability opposed to sustainability. Examples of these include several factors important to the sustainability of research partnerships including common policy and systems change goals, openness, respect, trust, communication, and joint decision making (Israel et al., 2005; Minkler and Wallerstein, 2008; Savan, 2004).

More specifically for example, Nation et al. (2011) discuss the importance of power in partnerships mostly from the perspective of how academics should pursue partnerships. They find that researchers need to reflect on their goals and the degree to which this matches the community's strategy, and be flexible and pragmatic in research design, implementation, and analysis. Similarly, Stoecker (1999) discusses various roles partners can play in the research process whether they be more advisory, such as a consultant opposed to the lead initiator. He also provides recommendations for academics wanting to engage in such research with communities.

Similar to the broader literature on CBPR, scholars CBPR in the context of Asian Americans communities have focused on describing the research process, sharing findings and short-term outcomes (Chang et al. 2013; Cohen and Poon, 2011; Collier, Munger, and Moua, 2011; Nguyen et al., 2006; Poon and Cohen, 2012; Sangalang et al., 2015; Wang-Letzkus et al., 2012). For instance, Sangalang et al. (2015) focused on describing how UCLA and KGA implemented CPRB and shared research findings about the mental health status of young Cambodian Americans. They mentioned some short-term outcomes such as presentations made and a report produced. In comparison, Dong et al. (2011) and Ma et al. (2004) put greater focus on examining the research partnership. Dong et al. (2011) shares lessons learned about how to sustain the partnership over the course of the project while Ma et al. (2004) discusses challenges to establishing a partnership.

The lack of research with this focus is expected though, due to the amount of time it takes for impact and sustainability to occur. A contribution of this study is that enough time has passed (a little more than ten years) that I can analyze the effect of outcomes (impact) and partnerships (for sustainability) over a longer period. Thus, this research will contribute to the broader literature on CBPR by illuminating the potential impact of CBPR opposed to describing the process, research findings, and short-term outcomes. In addition, I will examine the sustainability of partner-

ships in an Asian American context beyond the life of a singular project (Dong et al., 2011). This study will also highlight the strategies nonprofits can use to sustain such work internally and with partners by exploring the work of an organization that has been successful at just that.

Methods and Data

To answer the research questions proposed by this study, I use semistructured interviews with key informants and content analysis of news articles. There are several complex phenomena explored in this manuscript including impact of research, sustainability of research partnerships, and the sustainability of conducting research within a nonprofit organization. Such complex phenomena benefits from a case study approach (Yin, 2014). A case study design enables me to explore more deeply the nuances and complexities around KGA's long twenty-year history of community-university research partnerships.

I utilized interviews with informants to analyze the impact of CBPR as well as, the sustainability of the partnerships that support it. Key informants include four current and former KGA staff, four current and former members, one third-party technical assistance provider, and three university faculty and graduate student researchers. Because two of the staff are also former youth members, this brings the total number of interviews to ten opposed to twelve. All former youth members interviewed were involved with the UCLA-KGA partnership in different roles and levels of participation between 2008 and 2011. One KGA staff member played a key role in both the UCLA and CSULB partnerships and research from 2009 to present time, while the other was lead staff involved with the establishment of the UCLA partnership to the conclusion of data dissemination (2007–11).

I used personal contacts as a former board member to initiate interviews with KGA staff. From there, I was able to identify other key informants as well as use snowball sampling to reach former members, staff, and researchers. As a former KGA board member and faculty member at CSULB, I had an understanding of KGA's history, staff, and university partners. And while I believe that the rapport I had with some informants generated more frank responses, they may also have biased responses. For instance, current KGA staff may have felt compelled to exclude certain responses due to my support of KGA and experience as an engaged scholar. For this reason, I interviewed individuals in various roles including former staff and members who would presumably be less likely to be concerned with my current and future relationship with KGA. The

inclusion of a third-party technical assistance provider along with faculty members also ensured greater reliability. I was either junior to or not in the same department or institution as faculty interviewed limiting potential bias due to power differences.

I conducted interviews in person and using Zoom video conferencing at KGA and in CSULB faculty offices. For one interview, I used e-mail correspondence at the preference of the informant. Interviews ranged from forty minutes to two and half hours long with the majority lasting more than an hour.

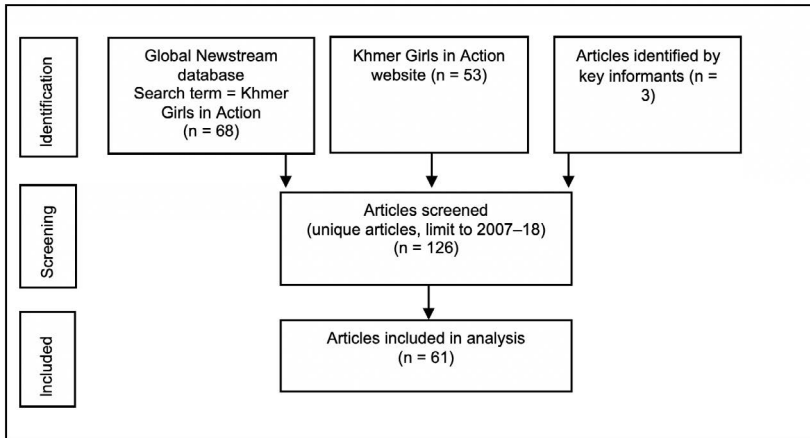
I used a semistructured interview guide contained several sections. The first section contains questions about partnership development. The second asked about challenges with both the research process and partnership. The last section sought to understand the informant's perspective on research benefits and impact. I concluded the interviews by exploring thoughts about what may improve partnership and research sustainability in the future.

All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. I analyzed transcriptions for impact and sustainability. While I took codes and themes from the literature (e.g., policy change, awareness for impact and, e.g., shared vision, flexibility, respect for sustainability) to guide coding, I primarily used open coding. I then looked for common patterns across all interviews. For determining sustainability specifically, I used the following codes identified by the literature trust, openness, respect, capacity to engage as a partner, and sharing of power and decision making (Minkler and Wallerstein, 2008). I also allowed other codes to emerge from the process of open coding.

I identified news articles using the Global Newstream database and by viewing the media tab on KGA's website. Because my work is focused on the impact of research that resulted from partnerships, I limited the period to 2007 (UCLA partnership established) to the present. Figure 1 shows the process by which I identified sixty-one articles. To avoid duplication I eliminated articles that appeared from different sources.

To code news and media content, I relied on concepts and terms identified by the literature on CBPR outcomes and by key informants. Codes from both the literature on outcomes included terms such as *publications, reports, results, findings, testimony, and policy change*. Terms utilized and described by key informants to demonstrate policy change included "invest in youth campaign" and "wellness campaign." I also counted the number of articles that used statistics from CBPR process

Figure 1. Selection and Inclusion Process and Criteria for News Articles



and/or report findings. To measure awareness, I examined the breadth of media outlets in terms of geographic reach, time of publications, and the number of articles that cited report findings. The concept of youth empowerment was identified mostly by reviewing the context of the articles overall for quotes or references to changes in youth confidence, skills, attitude, efficacy, and leadership.

I ensured the reliability of my coding by triangulation of data. I compared my findings from content analysis with those themes that emerged from the interviews as well as a review of organizational documents. In addition to news articles and interview transcriptions, I reviewed organizational and partnership documents, videos, and news articles provided by key informants to enhance and corroborate my understanding of events and facts. These documents included a grant application, scope of work, training curriculum, policy report, and fact sheet.

Khmer Girls in Action

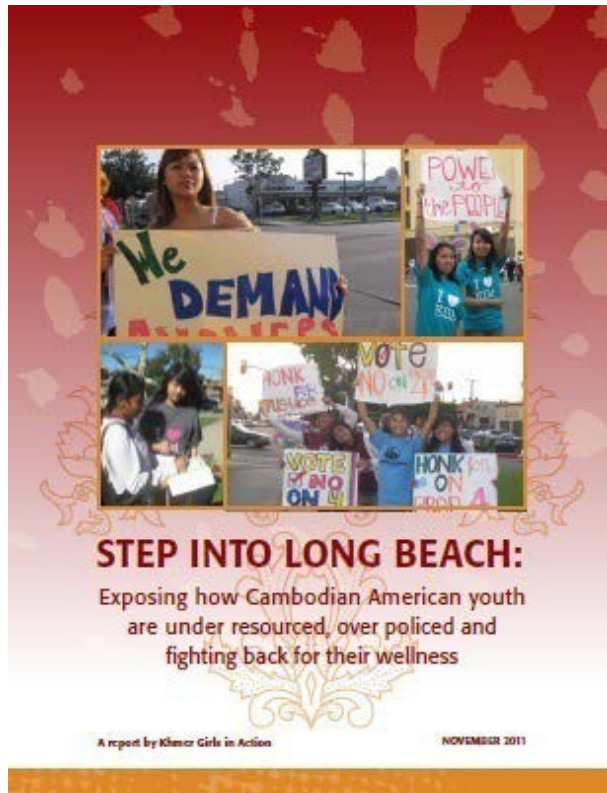
KGA began in 1997 as HOPE for Girls, a Cambodian young women's reproductive health and empowerment project of Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice. According to their website, KGA's mission is "to build a progressive and sustainable Long Beach community that works for gender, racial and economic justice led by Southeast young women" (KGA, n.d.).

From its inception, KGA's culture valued and integrated research into planning and evaluation, and as part of their social justice agenda. KGA is the result of CBPR. In 1999 KGA surveyed four hundred teenage girls at Polytechnic High in Long Beach and found that nine out of ten peers experienced sexual harassment at school. A meeting with city and school officials to share survey findings resulted in mandatory sexual harassment awareness training for teacher and students, an improved grievance policy, and a complaint hotline (Cheatham-Rojas and Shen, 2008).

Their works seeks to improve specifically the needs of youth in the Long Beach community. Their location in Long Beach is important in the current and historical context of Cambodians in the United States. It is home to the first Cambodia Town and it has the largest concentration of Cambodians outside of Cambodia. The first Cambodians arrived as CSULB students in the 1950s. Since then the population has grown tremendously with 80 percent of all Asians in Long Beach identifying as Cambodian in 2010 (Adebisi et al., 2013). Despite such growth, Cambodians in this area are struggling compared to others in Los Angeles County; unemployment is 12 percent compared to 8 percent; poverty is at 33 percent versus 16 percent, and more than 44 percent have less than a high school diploma compared to the total population in Los Angeles County at 24 percent (Adebisi et al., 2013).

As an engaged scholar, I find that KGA's work can serve as a model of success for several reasons. Their first research project conducted on a larger scale with a UCLA (2008–11) resulted in the establishment of a wellness clinic in 2015, one of the desired policy changes of the research. The impact of their efforts has been documented widely by local and regional media as well as in academic journals and books. Not all CBPR results in the desired policy change and not all are able to achieve the response rates that KGA has had in collecting data. KGA repeatedly engages more than four hundred (at least) respondents each time they develop a survey. Another factor that distinguishes KGA's partnerships with universities is that it is not simply hiring universities and faculty to conduct research, but rather to help support and guide the research it is doing. Thus, these partnerships represent building community capacity because the community organization and its members are taking a leadership role in shaping and implementing research. Further evidence of their success is that other organizations and faculty members have requested their assistance in conducting similar work.

Figure 2: KGA Report Cover



This case study explores two particular partnerships. They are the two action research projects that KGA highlights on their website. First, in 2007 KGA in conjunction with a UCLA faculty member and graduate student applied for and received a grant from the UCLA Center for Community Partnerships to conduct CBPR. No additional university researchers were involved in the project. However, KGA did include a third partner, the DataCenter, an independent research organization for social justice movements and grassroots organizing to help with planning and training of youth and staff. The goal of the research “was to examine the emotional well-being, health, and safety issues for Cambodian American youth as well as explore factors that may be related to these outcomes at the individual, family, school and community levels” (Sangalang et al., 2015, 56).

While KGA had participated in the gathering and use of qualitative data prior to this, KGA staff report that this was the first time that quantitative data was collected at this scale. The research also included five focus groups (with an average of eight participants per group) and the collection of 502 surveys. At the time, it was the first survey developed to understand the needs of Cambodian youth. KGA spent a year planning and training youth and staff prior to data collection that began in 2010. This partnership was defined mostly by the grant period (2008–10) but did continue until 2011 when the results of the research were disseminated through a report (see Figure 2). Among the three roles that youth can have in this type of research, KGA youth members were leaders of the research process and data collectors (Kirshner, O’ Donaghue, and McLaughlin, 2005).

The other partnership with a university that exists in KGA’s history is with a faculty member at CSULB. This partnership has resulted in multiple points of collaboration since 2010 when the California Endowment began its Building Health Communities Initiative in Long Beach. Currently, the faculty member and one graduate student researcher are working with KGA on their “Invest in Youth Campaign,” which advocates for a share of the city budget to be allocated for youth development. KGA along with a coalition of other youth-focused entities in Long Beach developed and collected more than seven hundred surveys. The release of survey results happened in February 2018 and findings can be seen in Figure 3.

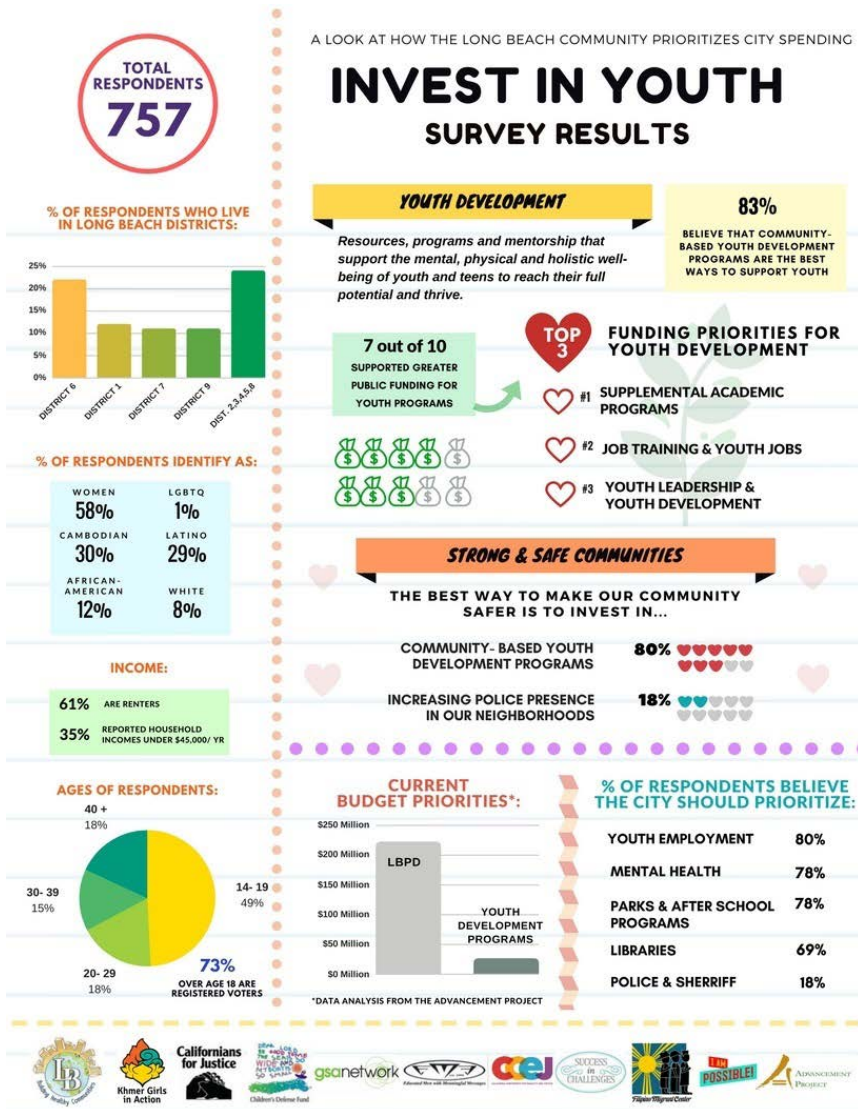
Lasting Impact of Community-Based Participation Research

Findings from the interviews as well as content analysis show that the impact of KGA’s work with UCLA and CSULB has been long-lasting and widespread. Their work with both has resulted in policy change and their work with CSULB continues to shape the direction of KGA’s current organizing campaigns. The findings distinguish between those impacts resulting from the data opposed to the research process. The latter gave rise to changes in the field and practice of CBPR and youth empowerment while the former resulted in a greater awareness of community needs and concrete policy changes.

Policy Change

Several outcomes resulted from the research produced in conjunction with UCLA including research papers and presentations that highlight Cambodian youth needs (Sanglang et al., 2015). The outcomes

Figure 3: One-pager for Invest in Youth Campaign



were utilized in advocacy efforts that resulted in the impact of policy change by the school district to establish a school-based wellness clinic serving teens. This clinic established in late 2015 directly addresses report recommendations to improve access to available mental health services and devote additional resources to reproductive health education (Khmer Girls in Action, 2011). This example shows not only how long it takes for policy and social change to happen (close to ten years) but also how long the impact of research results can have.

KGA consistently utilizes the findings from the 2011 report in organizing campaigns and programs. When asked about whether and/or how they use the research findings from the study today, two KGA staff members report utilizing the same statistics. As one of them explained, “[W]hen we do rallies and stuff like that we also give them like flyers and then in the back of the flyers is like some statistics and that we will also pull out of here like for examples one in four youth is.” Thus, current use of research findings continues to generate awareness about the population and heighten the visibility of Cambodian youth issues overall.

The research partnership with CSULB has also resulted in data that informed campaigns for restorative justice within schools and most currently to ensure youth their fair share of the city budget. After analyzing data on and off for three years, one of the results from evaluation research was that “the Long Beach Unified School District passed a resolution to promote positive alternatives to exclusionary school discipline by a unanimous vote” (Khmer Girls in Action, n.d.). Again, this shows the policy impact of such data produced.

Awareness

Heightening the awareness and visibility of the Cambodian population in Long Beach, particularly, the youth is also an important impact. In addition to the research being used by university researchers at academic conferences and in their publications (short-term outcomes), KGA also released report findings in 2011 at the first-ever policy and legislative forum in the state centered on Southeast Asian youth (Little, 2014). The hearing demonstrated how youth increased their capacity as it relates to communication of research findings but, equally important, it brought the issues to the forefront for policy makers. The credibility of UCLA-backed research along with KGA’s leadership and organizing effort to bring policy makers together created this monumental event that included attendance of members of the California Legislative Asian

& Pacific Islander Caucus, the California Legislative Women's Caucus, and the White House Initiative on Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders (Little, 2014). The event brought together more than two hundred youth and community members and streamed live (Khmer Girls in Action, 2012). The high-profile nature of the policy makers in attendance as well as the number of community members demonstrate how the research had a widespread impact on awareness.

Most informants discussed how the UCLA-KGA report in particular helped create awareness around the status of Cambodian youth. One UCLA partner commented that:

I was really impressed with the ways in which they used the report, they used the study, they did the community forum, and they were really savvy with having media pick up online and maybe even the local news.... I remember them saying this was research backed by UCLA. I felt like they saw that UCLA also brought a level of legitimacy to back the data and that sort of heightened their profile on a sort of broader scale.... I'm very proud of the fact that they find the report [it] useful in being able to use it for different things.

An analysis of media coverage shows the range of news outlets that cover KGA and cite the statistics from their CBPR efforts. Out of sixty-eight news articles reviewed, twenty-two included statistics from the results of three different surveys. The overwhelming majority of research cited was from the oldest survey generated with UCLA in 2011. This demonstrates how this outcome (data with report) has had a long-lasting impact on the organization and its ability to articulate its program needs.

The broad range of media outlets indicate the widespread potential impact of KGA's research on awareness: *Gazettes*, *Press Telegram*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Orange County Register*. Together these publications have a circulation of greater than eight million readers on a weekly basis including print and online. According to their respective websites, the *Los Angeles Times* alone has a thirty-nine unique users online and 4.3 million weekly print and online readers, and the *Orange County Register* has a print circulation of about 110,000 (Los Angeles Times, n.d. Statista, n.d.). In addition, the Tribune Content Agency based in Chicago has also covered KGA's research, and while I was not able to compute total circulation, their website claims that they provide content to more than "2,000 media and digital information publishers in nearly 100 countries" (Tri-

bune Content Agency, n.d.). Clearly, the awareness has likely increased due to the widespread media coverage over a significant period.

In addition, KGA and CSULB's recently released survey results regarding youth priorities in local budgeting on February 20, 2018, and it has already been covered by local media (i.e., *Long Beach Post*) on February 24, 2018 and March 7, 2018 (Rivera, 2018). Once again, this shows how the research results (outcome) is used to raise awareness and the potential it has to be widespread.

Youth Empowerment

Most informants including KGA staff and faculty partners identified youth empowerment as an impact of the research process. Empowerment resulted from outcomes such as youth gaining confidence in their leadership, improvements to their oral communication and development, and expansion of research skills. These outcomes lead to youth feeling empowered. One KGA staff member who worked closely with youth during the UCLA partnership expressed how youth felt about being a part of the research process, "[F]or some of the youth that's very foreign, like they didn't realize that they could be researchers and then so it was very empowering to the process of like, wow, I could produce data!" Similarly, a CSULB partner shared his thoughts about youth, "I think the most incredible part of the whole campaign is seeing these kids, fourteen and fifteen years old going from these really shy, reserved kids to being able to speak in ways that were confident ... these youth are doing things that they would've never done before." But not just staff and faculty noticed the difference in youth.

All youth informants expressed similar sentiments. When I asked a former KGA member whether she knew how to conduct research prior to her involvement, she responded:

I learned all that from KGA. They taught me everything. I was really nervous at first but then as I kept doing it a lot more often like we did a lot of flyer giving out, canvassing, we would go door to door, I kind of gained that experience so as it went it became like a lot easier for me.

Being able to speak about their experiences with support CBPR data validated their experience and resulted in feelings of empowerment. A core member of KGA at the time of the UCLA partnership said, "I definitely am proud to know that I was a part of it, knowing that students exactly, and it's not so often when you see students be involved

in something that big and coming from a community, a big community like Long Beach, where we don't have that many support systems and knowing that KGA was able to offer that was pretty huge." She recalls how being involved made her more aware: "And being a part of it, I opened myself, I opened my eyes and I was able to grow from it."

Impact on the Field

There are two major ways that KGA's engagement in CBPR has impacted other nonprofits seeking to do similar work. First, other organizations have been able to use KGA's experience with CBPR and curriculum in their own work. One KGA staff member noted that they do not receive payment or income from sharing their work experience. She stated, "[R]equests for the curriculum ... we shared key documents with folks who ask us because we much rather young people have the opportunity to do research." She went onto explain that they wanted to "add our own spin too because we had to make adjustments based on young people's questions, what we notice gets glossed over in training ... so we made a lot of edits to different things as well." By sharing their experience they provide other organizations with a model and tools for how to replicate similar efforts.

Second, the level of youth involvement and leadership in the UCLA-supported study resulted in changes to a national independent researcher organization's training curriculum for CBPR. According to former KGA staff, they were there to ensure that the research was community based and that youth would lead the research work from the beginning to the end of the process. Following work with KGA in 2008–9, the DataCenter got requests from other organizations that wanted to do similar CBPR. Working with KGA also challenged DataCenter's training curriculum. A DataCenter partner recalled that:

it pushed us to like make sure our stuff was more accessible, making sure that we were popularizing things even further ... like it upped our curriculum, like it pushed her and pushed our process, our process in terms of you know like the level of participatory it was, like strengthened our curriculum, expanded our curriculum, which then got integrated into future projects.

Both examples point to how a tailored curriculum and the CBPR process effected both the nonprofit field serving youth and the field of CBPR.

Moving Forward in a Sustainable Way

Sustaining the use of CBPR over the course of multiple projects as well as the partnership over the long run can be quite a challenge. Upon reflection, research partners identified how they addressed challenges and the strategies that help KGA continue to conduct research but also how research partnerships with universities has been sustained. While most findings point to similar strategies employed by other nonprofits, some unique to KGA have been their ability to integrate research funding into programs, the level of community integration into the process, and how selective they are about partners.

Sustaining Community-Based Participatory Research

Informants explain KGA's ability to continue to sustain research due to a number of factors: (1) KGA invested early on and continues to invest in substantial planning and CBPR training that is tailored to their community members; (2) KGA integrates research into programs and program funding; and (3) KGA builds on community members with a prior relationship working together to sustain research work.

When KGA began research with UCLA they spent a year (2008–9) with UCLA and the DataCenter from 2008 to 2009 planning the first-ever survey on Cambodian youth. The time vested in explaining each part of the research process and preparing youth allowed for proper training and preparation that would lead to greater sustainability. A KGA staff person explains that:

because we wanted the research to be youth led, so we wanted them to develop the questions. What's cool about the UCLA grant is that it gave us time for planning and development. So we actually had the time to develop, to train young women, to get their perspective.... I remember that first year, none of that was actually survey collection. It was really just preparing for it, and understanding how to the survey in the field.

In addition, time spent tailoring curriculum also benefited KGA's success. While the staff were appreciative they identified a useful training curriculum (from DataCenter), they did feel the need to "Make it more relevant to our young people," stated a KGA staff member. Thus, KGA and DataCenter worked together to develop a curriculum that would keep youth engaged and committed.¹ A DataCenter partner recalled the thinking at the time. She explained:

I feel like the first thing we had to do was like, how can we show that research is gonna be fun ... but you know I think that is why it pushed us to like, kind of bring it back to like storytelling and games and making it interactive to see the power in it ... like almost reimagining what research is for folks to get it you know.

In addition to developing a customized curriculum, KGA demonstrated a commitment to invest significant resources toward the cause. A former KGA staff person recalled how challenging it was to commit to the UCLA partnership at a time because the organization was smaller and growing at the time: "I think the challenge was adding another layer of new and different kind of work and new partnership on top of that. And so it was challenging to figure out, to make that decision that we were going to add this on top of everything we are doing because the opportunity is now." In this case, the risk and commitment to invest in the curriculum and partnership for KGA paid off and resulted in their ability to sustain their research.

Because different funders may in fact want to fund different parts of the process, KGA integrates research into funding for their programs. A current KGA staff member explained this approach. She stated,

[R]esearch grants for community groups barely exist. And so we actually use some of our youth development funding because we see research as part of youth development. So we like build that in as part of youth development activity ... there's so many biases around what is youth development and what's healthy youth development ... the funding stuff is really all about the framing—that's part of sustaining the research component of our work.

A former KGA staff member recalled that "it was really integrated in a way where it was not just a separate thing, research, but it was integrated program work cause that's why we are providing training and were able to get funding for that." According Nguyen et al. (2006), building research planning into program budgets is important and is an effective strategy for securing funds for CBPR. Thus, KGA has been successful at sustaining the research because it continues to integrate research into programs on a consistent basis.

Another challenge to sustaining CBPR projects is maintaining community member participation. KGA has addressed this partially through

stipends, but also because it already had a core group of members who were familiar with one another and had worked together previously and on other projects (Sangalang et al., 2015). As Walter (2005) found, team building becomes important to sustaining member participation. In the case of youth, their relationship with each other a core peer group prior to the CBPR resulted in greater commitment. A former KGA youth member shared with me why she felt committed. She shared that, “I mean, for me it was easy, all my friends were also involved in it. So, coming away from school, coming away from home, I guess that KGA was a second home for us. And also a place for us to be with our friends and doing the same exact thing together ... we were all friends way beforehand.” KGA’s example shows that building the relationships between community members who are participating or finding individuals who are already a committed group can help to retain community members critical to the CBPR process.

Sustainability of Partnerships

Sustaining partners is distinct from the research process and requires different factors. Sustainability in partnerships can mean through the life of a project and, in some cases, beyond to other research projects. First, partnerships represent committed individuals who trust one another, share common values and goals, and have genuine personal relationships. Second, in both cases a more community-centered process has resulted in more sustainable partnerships. Finally, having flexibility and the ability to adapt to each other’s competing demands has also been critical.

Several partners interviewed for this study emphasized the importance of genuine relationships that demonstrate trust, commitment, and shared values. A UCLA partner shared her sense of what is important:

I feel like the reality is that there has to be a relationship outside the work in terms of really connecting with each other as people, and having that connection be based on similar values. Because otherwise, I think when people talk about research partnerships they’ll say it is like dating. It’s like being in a relationship with someone and wherever you are in terms of that trajectory you have challenges. We could have easily gone our separate ways to do our own work. But because there is value in seeing value in the partnership, that’s how it was able to sustain itself—the

project over several years ... you're committed to the relationship, your committed to the work you want to do for the community, and that's what helps keep you centered.

All KGA staff express a similar sentiment about relationship building and its importance. For example, one KGA staff person stated that "we need to build better relationships with each other in general, people have gotten into their own silo. They forget to build like a genuine relationship with other ... you know like knowing each other and understanding who we are in our work ... you want to have an institutional relationship but you also want to have the one to one person relationship."

University partners that show their commitment build trust. One example, is a UCLA partner who decided to be in the physical space on a continual basis to show her commitment: "I think by the time I started collecting data, I tried coming out to the office and actually literally working in the office with them once a week, just so they knew I would just be around to talk about stuff, and I just wanted them to know that I was committed to them too." Current staff expressed that they feel a sense of commitment from their CSULB partner. The staff member stated, "Because that's really where the relationship building is, that to feel like there's not just a work relationship but also a personal relationship you know? He's come out to our gala last year, he's donated and things like that so we also see that there is an investment on his end too." While KGA staff emphasized commitment to the organization, a CSULB partner emphasized a commitment to shared goals and values. He stated, "We seem to be pretty much on the same page in terms of values and goals. And what I feel is the right way to do things ... we knew what the data was going to be used for. It was for policy."

KGA staff revealed they appreciate the autonomy and respect that the university partners have for them as an organization. During the KGA-UCLA project, all partner informants concurred that KGA really took ownership of the process. As one staff member recalled, "[T]hey [UCLA] gave us a lot of space and a lot of room, which I would much prefer." KGA's initiative in the framing research goals and university researchers being willing to work in support of these goals and efforts have resulted in stronger sustainable partnerships. The KGA-UCLA study resulted in a process and

partnership that lasted about five years while the CSULB the partnership has been more intermittent over the last eight years.

The CSULB partnership has developed differently in that KGA already had an established model for how to conduct CBPR. The scope of these projects are more narrow in focus and implemented in conjunction with other coalition partners. Thus, while KGA has taken a lead in setting research goals and questions, the CSULB partner transforms that into a data-collection tool that KGA reviews and provides feedback on.

Collaboration in the research process and funding is another important factor in sustaining a partnership. A current KGA staff member and former youth member explained that “you have to make it as collaborative as possible even though it could take longer to collaborate because a lot of feedback is back and forth but just recognizing that like once we just get this data, there’s so much we can build off of it.” Another staff person emphasized the need for both parties to show a commitment to securing resources. She stated that:

like I would only want to go in like deeper, longer partnership, like a power project with joint resources. So like you can’t come to us and only having one sided resource. You know that you are the only side of the research that gets funded. You have to come and say, let’s do joint fundraising so that we are resourced together to do the work because otherwise you’re draining capacity from the community again, and it’s all about then the university accolade and not like the cause, that’s where reciprocity is.

Finally, flexibility and availability on the part of both partners are also seen as important. When asked what makes their partnership work, the CSULB partner explained, “I think KGA’s [they’re] really flexible. I don’t think they’re overly demanding and they’re flexible in terms of the competing demands that faculty have. Because they have the same sort of demand as well... It is not an easy relationship to maintain given the different schedules we’re on but I think they understand that and are aware that not everything gets done today.” Understanding each other’s time is important and valuable to KGA as well. A few KGA staff report that some academic researchers and students do not have this understanding and this

can create tension as competing deadlines do not meet. According to all KGA staff, they feel that their CSULB partner is both available and committed to the work and that makes them feel vested in continuing that partnership into the future. As one current KGA staff member explained, “[H]e’s available, and to have someone that’s committed and to want to be able to see the work through is necessary. And to work with our schedules too, you know what I mean?”

Discussion

As rich and compelling as reflections can be, there are some limitations to this kind of research. For instance, the use of interviews relies on the ability to recall events from almost ten years ago. Individuals may have selective memory; forgetting challenges in the past or recalling parts that are more positive. In addition, informants could have not been as forthcoming. However, I was able to corroborate some facts and points by triangulating data. For example, interviewing different individuals involved with the same projects to compare narratives and descriptions. In addition, I analyzed and reviewed organization documents and news articles to help ensure the accuracy of events and processes.

Future research could address these limitations by collecting additional and different sources of data such as journals that include reflections and experiences in real time as the research process is happening. In addition, audio files of partners’ recording their daily experiences going through partnership development and/or maintaining research partnerships could also increase reliability. In addition, a longitudinal design that includes interviews and observations would allow us to learn more about how such relationships develop and change over time in a real time way that would most improve reliability. Observations would add to interviews by engaging an independent third-party individual to see and interpret what is occurring.

Another challenge in this study is the difficulty with documenting impact. Because by definition impact is the longer-term effect of outcomes not only do they require significant time to pass but also are more difficult to measure because they are intangible and indirect. However, this does not mean that the research results and/or process did not contribute to the impact. Thus, we should not overlook mentioning such impact, but rather continue to explore how to disentangle what aspects of research findings and/

or processes generate impact and what kind. In this research, one of the major impacts of the research was policy change in the form of a new wellness clinic for youth. The idea that research results changed awareness was measured by the potential based on the number of news articles discussing community statistics and the variety and widespread coverage of media. While not perfect (a survey to test individuals' knowledge and before and after seeing statistics would be time and resource intensive), they point to the potential impact being great. Future studies should also continue to explore ways to measure impact and discuss the distinctions between the desired research outcomes and impact.

Despite this study's limitations, the findings show that impact of the partnerships research and the research process. KGA has been able to heighten awareness around the needs of Cambodian youth and youth of color in Long Beach, advocate for policy change, empower youth, and change the field of CBPR. Much of these findings are similar to those already found in the existing literature (Ardoin, Castretchini, and Hofstedt, 2014; Savan, 2004). However, the finding regarding changes to the field has rarely been mentioned by the prior research if at all.

KGA sustained research projects and partnerships by shaping the goals and focus with community engagement from the very beginning. In doing so, KGA shows how an organization can avoid the problems of power imbalance that can occur with CBPR (National et al., 2011; Sullivan et al., 2001). It has worked well for them to have the university play a supportive role opposed to a leadership role. This approach has been found to be more sustainable than those led by faculty members (Maury et al., 2011; Minkler, 2010; Stoecker, 1999). KGA may be rare in that it has developed the capacity to lead and conduct such work. However, there has also been a commitment on their part as an organization to invest in the capacity of their members and staff because of their understanding of how research plays can improve programs and support policy advocacy.

While the UCLA and CSULB partnerships were and are sustainable, they are similar and distinct in important ways. Both partnerships had key principles to sustain partnerships including sharing common vision, clearly outlining responsibilities, trust, and respecting community expertise (Israel et al., 1998; Minkler and Wallerstein, 2008; Nation et al., 2011; Savan 2004; Sullivan et al., 2001). In my own experience as engaged scholar, finding partners whose goals

align with my own research agenda and that would create meaningful products toward tenure has proved challenging. I have overcome this in the past by making clear my intention and goals at the beginning of the process. In one case, I asked for additional questions to be included on a needs assessment so that I could conduct my own analysis for a peer-reviewed publication. The community organization's openness to this made the survey results mutually beneficial.

In the case of KGA and UCLA, not only were their agendas aligned but also there were trusted parties involved from the very beginning. By looking within their existing networks, KGA built a successful partnership; the main UCLA researcher was previously a staff member and volunteer; and in the case of CSULB, the main faculty partner had worked with KGA as part of a larger Long Beach community initiative. Both exemplify common ways to build sustainable partnerships (Strand et al., 2003).

It may be necessary to bring other brokers and create more bridges to understanding. Having a graduate student researcher at UCLA who was already familiar with KGA meant that she could also serve as a bridge to academia and their processes such as getting Institutional Review Board approval. The DataCenter provided a bridge between UCLA and KGA in that they were experienced in community-based participatory action research, something the UCLA partners and KGA were not as experienced in at that time.

The relationship with UCLA was more formal and defined by a singular grant from UCLA. This partnership went one year beyond the grant period to cover the grant application submission, research planning and preparation, data collection, and analysis. This is common practice found with such partnerships and, because it lasted more than one academic year, Savan (2004) would still deem it a sustainable partnership.

The most vested and committed university partner in this case ended up moving on after graduate studies at UCLA and moving outside the Southern California region. Similarly, when I was a graduate student I disconnected with the Chinatown Service Center, South Asian Network, and Thai Community Development Center following the end of a grant received from the UCLA Center for Community Partnership; the same grant that KGA received. I did not feel less committed to these organizations or their causes, but moved on to work on projects, which could financially support my graduate studies. Sometimes my community interests would lead

me to events in the neighborhoods where these community centers were located, but I never did engage at the same level following the end of the grant period.

In comparison, KGA's work with CSULB is intermittent and has a flexibility that suits both partners' needs and work demands outside the necessary research. Sullivan et al. (2001) reports that flexibility is one the main keys to building a sustainable partnership. Another possible explanation for the ongoing relationship with CSULB is the geographic proximity. Such proximity presumably promotes these partnerships through the greater possibility of repeated face-to-face interaction. As an engaged scholar, I have chosen to focus on working with local organizations. This allows me to connect with partners more regularly and have a better understanding of the regional context in which they conduct their work. Thus, geography has a potential role to play because partners may be working in and spending time in the same area. Being in the same location prompts potential to collaborate in regional events and activities. Also, partners are more likely to share more common goals if vested in the same locality. Few scholars if any mention the importance of geography despite this having an effect on many factors deemed relevant such as trust, commitment, and personal relationships beyond the work. Thus, we may be underestimating the importance of geographic proximity and future research should explore the relevance of this. Indeed, findings may suggest the need for a regional hub for partnerships and action research bound geographically but not necessarily tied to a university and/or faculty member.

An additional form of support for this partnership has been the California Endowment's investment in Long Beach as part of the Building Health Communities Initiative. Because of the California Endowment's long-term investment (2010–20) in the area, they funded both partners in their effort to generate data, evaluate programs, and conduct community-engaged research. This infrastructure has been important to the sustaining of the partnership between CSULB and KGA.

Beyond the sustainability of partnerships, KGA has ensured its ability to continue CBPR by developing a tailored training curriculum specifically for their staff and members. In many ways, this practice is similar to other Asian American-serving organizations discussed in the literature (Collier et al., 2012; Dong et al., 2011; Min-

kler et al., 2010; Nguyen et al., 2006). What may have been unique was that the UCLA grant allowed the time and resources to invest in planning. Customizing a curriculum was very time consuming and required great patience from partners and the community, but the benefits have awarded KGA with the ability to continue to conduct research in a similar way to date. Funders in this area should continue or consider supporting planning and technical assistance as critical to this process and sustainability.

Philanthropy can also play a role in promoting such research, its partnerships, and sustainability by targeting its funding priorities in this direction as well. For instance, the Third Wave Foundation has a Mobilize Power Fund that funds participatory action research. And while not all philanthropy and funders will provide this opportunity, there are strategies that nonprofits can employ to ensure funding.

KGA addresses the challenge of funding in this area by integrating research into program funding (research becomes a part of the program). This is a practice is mentioned by only one prior study (Nguyen et al., 2006) as far as the author knows. This practice represents an important strategy for organizations wishing to sustain funding for such work. The idea is that while funders may not be interested in funding participatory action research specifically or exclusively they may be more inclined to as part of funding for a program.

And while some universities have the resources to provide funding in the form of grants, others may want to think more creatively about existing resources that can be utilized to benefit such partnerships and research production. This may be especially true for public universities where resources are declining. For example, the UCLA Center for Community Partnerships that supported me as a graduate student and the UCLA-KGA partnership no longer exist. Universities have research centers that may already have the capacity to match faculty members with community organizations and provide much needed training for faculty to be able to share and demystify the research process (Felt et al., 2004). Universities could also lower their indirect rates so that partnerships are more advantageous and equally reciprocal for nonprofits already in need of overhead funds. This kind of power imbalance does not bode well for the sustainability of such work and high indirect costs discourages partnerships. Universities, especially public ones that already share

a vision and commitment to seeing social change should consider changing such policies to better facilitate partnerships.

Because policy and systems change happens on a local level it make sense for funding to be focused this way. Thus, for foundations seeking to impact policy and systems change such as the California Endowment, the shift to place-based grant making makes sense. This type of approach often disadvantages direct service organizations. However, many foundations have found that without policy and systems change, funding for direct service will continue opposed to holding localities accountable the institutional changes in policies and programs needed to sustain the work. Thus this funding approach may exclude some areas in the shorter term creating further inequities between places but with the long-term hope that change in one locality eventually spurs positive change in neighboring communities within a region.

For community-university research partnerships to continue flourishing, the infrastructure needed to support them needs to exist. Given the considerable resources necessary and the size of the Long Beach region, a community-based research center that brings together multiple partners (universities, colleges, and community organizations) with a common goal of producing impactful research would be helpful. Such a center would create the necessary organization and infrastructure needed to concentrate resources and sustain efforts. Perhaps this an opportunity for a funder such as the California Endowment to leave a lasting impact on a community where they have already concentrated funding the last eight years.

As an engaged scholar, the high level at which KGA incorporates action-based research is admirable. What I mean by that is that KGA believes in research as a tool to help it plan, evaluate, and advocate for policy and programs. In my experience, this is rare. Many organizations do just enough to report some statistics for a grant report or application. But KGA sees research as a critical component to the change it wants to see. In part, this is why it also invests heavily in staff and youth members learning how to conduct such research. Their specific investment in engaging youth in research ensures that the Cambodian community will have the capacity to continue engaging in such research in the future. This not only meets the desired impact of their work but also their overall mission to create “a progressive and sustainable Long Beach” that is led by Southeast Asian you women. There is no better mea-

sure of success than meeting one's mission and, thus, for this KGA should be recognized and lauded.

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Notes

1. The following is a link to the DataCenter's training curriculum: <http://www.datacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/ResearchJusticeforAll.pdf>. KGA customized this curriculum to address the needs of their target population: Khmer youth.

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