Building on each other’s strengths: A participatory action research (PAR) partnership on the need for churches to better respond to Canada’s immigrant reality

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A Collaborative Structure

The purpose of this eight-month research project was twofold:
1) to explore how and to what extent Canadian churches are welcoming and integrating recent immigrants in their church-life, and
2) to determine the necessary strategies and structures that would better facilitate the active participation of recent immigrants within Canadian churches.

A national study was carried out collaboratively by World Vision (WV), The Tyndale Intercultural Ministries Centre (TIM Centre), and the Centre for Community Based Research (CCBR). At the heart of this study was a shared vision of Canadian churches where recent immigrants are fully welcomed and included (Janzen, Dildar & Araujo, 2010; Janzen, Chapman & Watson, 2011).

The structure was designed to meaningfully involve diverse Christian congregational, denominational and interdenominational leaders across Canada (both immigrant and non-immigrant) in guiding the research process, in data gathering and analysis, and in setting future action.

A number of mechanisms were adopted to apply a PAR approach (Ochocka & Janzen, 2007):
- Cross-stakeholder steering committee (interdenominational, immigrant and non-immigrant)
- Diverse research team (including trained community researchers: people living the issue under study)
- Diverse participant perspectives (mixed-methods considering bilingual and interdenominational perspectives in multiple sites)
- Ongoing feedback (regular research updates, community forums in four Canadian cities, online updates)
- Multiple audience dissemination (open access final report, city-specific reports, congregational tool)

Partner Roles

The project was structured in such a way as to maximize partner resources and to share power in all phases of the research process (thereby mirroring the project’s social change agenda). It was co-lead by an independent, non-profit social research organization (Centre for Community Based Research), a funder (World Vision Canada), and a university (Tyndale University College & Seminary).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Traditional contribution to research partnerships</th>
<th>Value added to this project</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Centre for Community Based Research</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Experiential knowledge and community connections</td>
<td>29 years experience in participatory action research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tyndale University College &amp; Seminary</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Theoretical and research expertise</td>
<td>Connections to faith and immigrant communities and networks</td>
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<tr>
<td>World Vision Canada</td>
<td>Philanthropic</td>
<td>Financial resources</td>
<td>Connections to national faith constituency (site staff)</td>
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Benefits
- Broad-based national engagement
- Synergy of resources for data gathering, analysis and dissemination
- Efficiency of resources – relatively small funding for activity generated
- Increased potential for future action
- Foundation for future partnerships

Challenges
- Intense coordination in short time frame and over long distances
- Ensuring clear communication with multiple partners
- Navigating potential theological / denominational differences
- Accessing newer immigrant faith groups
- Limited community mobilization in smaller site (Winnipeg)

Citations