Deliverable: Policies for Working with Communities of Colour

This is what was found by the CREEM Pod at the University of St Andrews on Policies for Working with Communities of Colour as well as plans for improved processes and/or needed resources.

The Centre for Research into Ecological & Environmental Modelling is an interdisciplinary research centre. Researchers belong to the Schools of Mathematics & Statistics, Biology, Computer Science, and Geography and Sustainable Development. In practice, most members (including the three members of this pod, and the three individuals surveyed for this deliverable) belong to the School of Mathematics & Statistics and provide expertise on the design and analysis of data but generally do not conduct fieldwork. Nevertheless, CREEM has been working with communities of colour through the delivery of statistical courses in Mozambique, and collaborates on survey design and data collection in Laos, Nepal and Namibia.

This deliverable is divided into two sections: a survey of CREEM members involved in research with communities of colour and a summary of findings and next steps

Survey of CREEM members involved in research with communities of colour

We asked three members of CREEM who participate in international collaborations about their experiences working with communities of colour. We asked researchers working on three different projects at three different career stages: a PhD student, a Research Fellow, and a Professor who is also the current Director of CREEM. Questions are shown in black text and answers are shown in coloured text as follows:

Snow Leopard design project (SLP)
Ian Durbach (ID), Research Fellow

Movement ecology and conservation: the case of African vultures (VAP)
Claudia Faustino (CF), PhD student

Aerial Digital Acoustic Survey (ADAS) to map gibbon distribution in Laos (GDL)
David Borchers (DB), Professor and Director of CREEM

If you are involved in research with communities of colour, in the US or abroad, have you…

Actively sought out local collaborators / liaisons / guides? Why or why not?

- GDL – DB: Yes, but as it has turned out, always through a local project leader, who has European origins, even if they are living locally (outside Europe). Lao work Contact is Camille Coudrat, a French scientist who lives in Laos, and who founded and manages a conservation charity (https://www.conservationlaos.com/) that employs 44 people, of which she is the only non-Lao employee. My work in Laos employed some of her staff and some guides from local communities who Camille has links with but are not her staff, shot-term while we were in Laos. Reason for going via person with European origins: they are the ones I have initial access to/contact with and act as a bridge to local communities.

Were they included in the early development and/or proposal of the research or project itself, or added at a later stage?

- GDL – DB: Lao: At early stage, but only Camille – she organized everything locally. Two reasons: 1) I only had contact with Camille and 2) a more structural obstacle is that other local staff have much more limited technical expertise.

Were any local collaborators included as authors on presentations and/or papers?

- SLP – ID: For snow leopard survey design work, local collaborators are always included as these are the people ultimately doing the survey work and having to report to their managers. Local collaborators collect data for their own purposes, with us providing support. In those cases they are usually the main authors on papers.

- VAP – CF: My PhD was set on data collected in a collaboration between a UK and Namibian Uni, where data collection also involved National park rangers.

- GDL – DB: No papers so far, only presentations, but only Camille was included. Thinking about it now, this was negligence/inconsideration on my part! While Camille was way the biggest contributor to the work, there were others who could and should really be included. Will do in the future.

Actively sought to include local students in your research? Why or why not?

- SLP – ID: No. Lack of time/initiative on my part I guess. Have chatted to one student from Nepal about collaborating.

- VAP – CF: My PhD was set on data collected in a collaboration between a UK and Namibian Uni, where data collection also involved National park rangers.

- GDL – DB: Laos: No local students at university level (and mostly not even at high school level) anywhere near the research. Kyrgyzstan and Botswana: Am in process of arranging Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) for collaborative work that will include local students.

Sought to build trust and form long-term connections and collaborations with local institutions if your project is multi-year / ongoing? Why or why not?

- GDL – DB: Lao: yes, with Association Anoulak. We now have a solid collaboration and have jointly obtained funding for further work. Why: Local organization, absolutely central to continued work and collaboration to our mutual benefit.

Were previous negative interactions, whether from inside or outside of your organization, addressed in the plans for building these connections and trust?

- VAP – CF: The project I was part of is ongoing, it relies on collaborations with local institutions, and I believe that work is done mostly by the Namibian PI. The UK team has always been open, welcoming every contribution, and nurtured the connections with those people it's been liaising with.

- GDL – DB: NA – never had negative interactions

Shared data and findings with the local/regional community in a way that is more accessible? (i.e., translating into different languages). Why or why not?

- SLP – ID: There's a dedicated outreach/communications team as part of the Snow Leopard Trust (the people I mentioned above).

- VAP – CF: Yes. Presentations have been done in African conferences and meetings, and papers are planned to be published in a Namibian journal to ease local access to the findings.

- GDL – DB: Association Anoulak is in my opinion a great role model for how to do this. None of the St Andrews research been disseminated yet – too early, no useful results yet.

Educated yourself and your group/team about local politics, culture, customs, and knowledge, including the history of colonialism / settler colonialism in the region? Why or why not?

- VAP - CF: I am not aware of this targeted action in the overall project. I personally was in Namibia once for data collection. In my stay, I interacted with locals and educated myself, namely by visiting cultural heritage museums. And to illustrate how well and respectful I always was, in multiple occasions I was mistaken by a local.

- GDL – DB: Myself: somewhat; have read about history and politics of the country and region, and discussed with some locals when visiting. Why? 1) respect - it is very rude to make no attempt to find out about the background and environment collaborators work in 2) utility – it is easier to collaborate if you understand your collaborator, 3) personal interest.

Was sufficient time allocated to the process of working within the community's governance, customs, and priorities?

- VAP – CF: I am not involved at that level with the project; I don't know.

- GDL –DB: None by me. A HUGE amount by Camille and Association Anoulak!

Is respecting culture and customs included as part of your code of conduct?

- SLP – ID: Local customs, reasons for human-snow leopard conflict, history, etc is a part of the whole project, but not something we in the CREEM group do. **CREEM could be more informed in the future.**

- VAP – CF: I am not involved at that level with the project; I don't know

- GDL – DB: No - had no explicit code of conduct

Acknowledged local communities / Indigenous tribes in your research results?

- SLP – ID: Hasn't been applicable so far. Papers acknowledge local groups doing fieldwork etc. **I'm not sure thanking the communities living in snow leopard terrain would mean much.**

- VAP – CF: All parties are being acknowledged as we go, I believe, yes.

- GDL – DB: I have not. Fortunately, most research results are still to come, and **I will now acknowledge.**

Included local communities in your broader impacts in a meaningful way that builds on the community's identified needs and concerns?

- GDL – DB: Me: no. Association Anoulak: yes.

Did these efforts leverage community members, and was that work compensated appropriately?

- VAP – CF: I am not involved at that level with the project; I don't know.

Considered and prioritized research questions and research locations based on needs of local communities, in addition to how impactful they are seen within academia?

- SLP – ID: Not directly applicable. This gets done pretty well by some of the SL group, in terms of identifying areas like stock predation by SLs, poaching, etc and making these the subject of research. Not something that we at CREEM are involved in, but it happens

- VAP – CF: I am not involved at that level with the project; I don't know.

- GDL – DB: No, I have not thought about this. Will think about it for future. I believe that Association Anoulak has and does.

Summary of findings and next steps

Audit of previous interactions with communities of colour at our organization:

At least five different projects in CREEM have included or currently include interactions with communities of colour. All interactions with communities of colour (as reported by participants in the case study projects) have been positive interactions. However, the level of interaction between CREEM staff and the communities is quite variable, and in some cases interactions would probably not be considered meaningful. This is sometimes by design, where CREEM staff are brought in specifically to help with survey design and data analysis while other project members are tasked with community engagement. Creating long-term interactions with local communities is crucial for good communication and collaboration and for mutual benefit. In cases where CREEM staff are not directly involved in community interactions, it would be good to ensure that community engagement is built into the project and is being adequately addressed by others before agreeing to participate.

What worked well in these interactions?

Some CREEM members had done prior research into the politics and customs of the country where the project was conducted. This was done out of respect for the local collaborators, as a means for promoting good communication, and out of personal interest. In some cases a specialized translator was used for countries where courses where delivered; i.e., a Portuguese-speaking statistician for statistical courses delivered in Mozambique.

For projects where the collection of data is conducted mainly by local people, CREEM members report being open and welcoming of contributions.

Sharing and translation of results and project outcomes in many cases has been done by a dedicated group within the larger project. Similarly, presentations have been given at conferences in the country where project was conducted.

What did not work well, and how can this be better addressed in future plans?

It seems that not much effort has been put into prioritizing or addressing research questions of local communities of colour when developing proposals. When this has happened, the person in the project country has been a person of European origins living locally in the country and responsible

for managing a charity that employs local people of colour. This lack of consideration and prioritization has now been acknowledged by the Director of CREEM and will be considered in the future.

Similarly, there is not a strong convention of acknowledging local communities/indigenous tribes in the research results. At least one CREEM researcher felt that it would not be meaningful to local communities to be acknowledged in scientific presentations or publications. As research is still undergoing for some of the projects, results and papers are still to come, CREEM will make sure will acknowledge where appropriate from now on.

Are there ways to improve the outcome of projects already undertaken?

In some cases, the dissemination of results, outcomes and outreach has been passed on to local associations. For sure additional funding to promote outreach associated with those projects would be helpful.

Acknowledge local communities and collaborators on papers and presentations to come.

Present the results at conferences or in academic journals that are more accessible to local communities and consider translating results for dissemination where applicable.

Are there specific resources or guidelines that are needed to improve the process for planning ahead and working with communities of color?

It is becoming increasingly clear that CREEM would benefit from a Code of Conduct, part of which could include recommendations for working with communities of colour, including:

- Thinking about local communities and how to incorporate them in early stages of project development and proposal writing, including researching, listening to, and incorporating research priorities of communities of colour at early stages of project proposals
- Increasing involvement of local students and researchers, and ensuring that all collaborators are credited appropriately in presentations and publications
- Encouraging all project members to, as part of their time on the project, read and learn about local politics, culture, customs, and knowledge, including the history of colonialism / settler colonialism in the region
- Informing all the different members of a project about the different guidelines and resources for working with communities of colour regardless of level of involvement