



‘Knocking’ - a Useful Entry Requirement Tool in Post-Conflict Environment: A Critical Appraisal based on Empirical Research in Sierra Leone

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There are substantial literatures on qualitative research methods used in post-conflict environment such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) or Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) to collect data. These methods, which sometimes rely more on visualisation, are often used in rural areas where illiteracy poses a major problem of obtaining the required information through structured questionnaires. While the use of these methods continue to grow, one will question whether they (as stand-alone methods) provide the required information needed to obtain research validity in post-conflict environment where the lack of trust poses a major issue of concern. Also, do respondents answer questions by providing every bit of information they know for the researcher or they hold back some information because of their distant relationship with them? While considering the above questions, one cannot overlook other challenges such as (1) methodological (access, construct validity, sampling, language and objectivity); and (2) ethical issues (trust, use of translators, informed consent, anonymity and emotional safety) such a research is likely to face.

These critical insights emerged from a technique used by the author of this paper in post-conflict Sierra Leone known as ‘knocking’ to familiarise himself with the community to gain trust and confidence prior to the commencement of employing his research methods. ‘Knocking’ is a term used in some African countries where serious suitors (those ready for marriage) announce their relationship officially to their partners’ parents with a bottle of spirit (preferably whisky). It enables suitors to familiarise themselves with their partners parents so that they can plan and set up a date to perform the actual married rites.

This paper argues how ‘knocking’ addresses some methodological and ethical challenges such as sampling, access, language, trust, and emotional safety; and also how the researcher was able to obtain data without causing emotional distress to respondents. However, the author would highlight ethical dilemmas associated with such familiarisation such as becoming integrated into the community way of life which could affect ones interpretation and argument and hence compromise the research findings; and also (2) raising false expectations of individuals in communities which could open up old wounds. This paper is an empirical appraisal of the author’s field work in Sierra Leone for the study of how community-based disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) can facilitate a more sustainable peace-building.