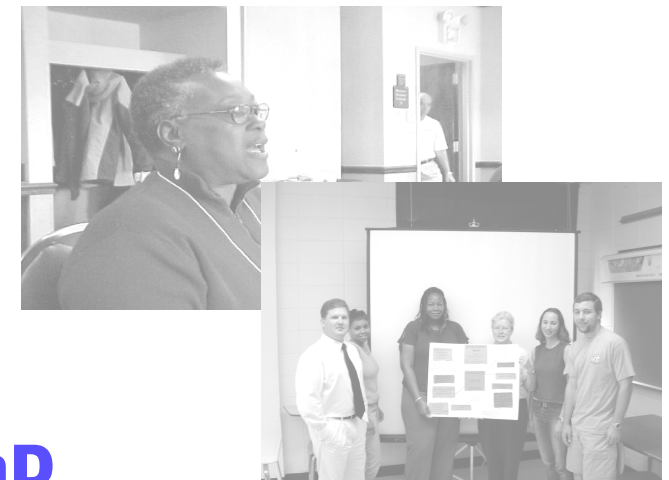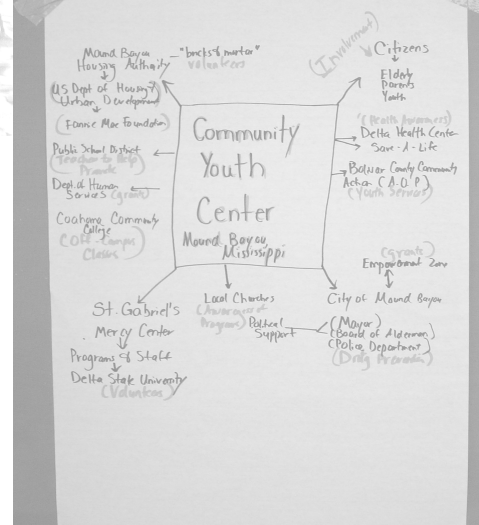# Community-Based Research to Inform Development

John J. Green, PhD

Institute for Community-Based Research

Division of Social Sciences/Center for Community and Economic Development

Delta State University

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Reasons for Conducting Research

There are numerous reasons for conducting research…

   To better understand the world around us

   To inform action, programs and policies

   To provide input in the democratic process (amplify "voices" in decision making)

These reasons are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Types of Research to
Inform the Democratic Process

Action research in organizations and education (Dewey, 1929; Selener, 1997; Whyte, 1989)

Needs assessment (Johnson et al., 1987)

Participatory research in community development (Selener, 1997)

Rapid rural appraisal (RRA) and rapid participatory appraisal (RPA) (Chambers, 1994; Pretty et al., 1995; Townsley, 1996)

Participatory/empowerment evaluation (Coombe, 1997; Dugan, 1996; Fetterman, 1996)
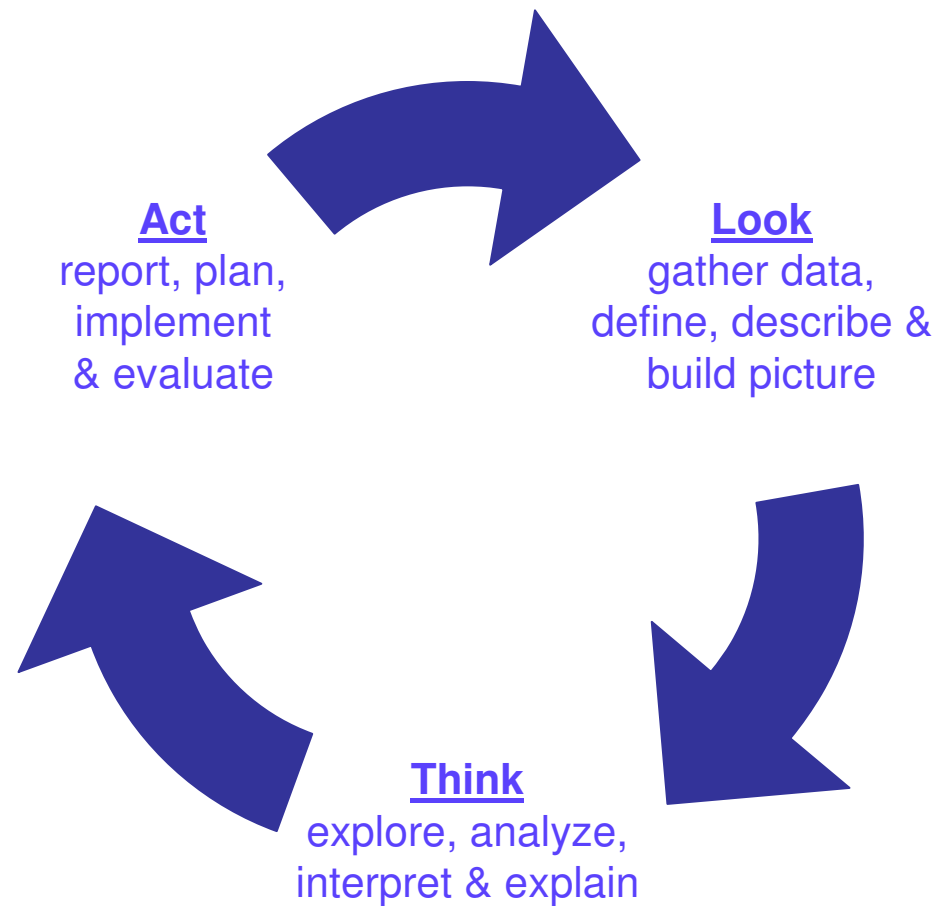
A Synthesis of Participatory and Action-Oriented Research Strategies

According to the Missouri Action Research Connection at the University of Missouri, there are six basic "themes" common to participatory and action-oriented research strategies:

1) *Participatory* – Involving members of the community at all stages of the research process; in essence, it is collaboration through joint participation.

2) *Empowerment* – Supporting the efforts of community members acting on their own behalf. They are assumed to have the knowledge and expertise to know what needs to be researched and often have people who can participate in the research. Researchers also become empowered through enhancement of their research capacities and skills and through engagement in socially meaningful research projects.

3) *Emancipatory* – Supporting actions to make life better for members of the community and to give meaning to the research efforts of all participants.

4) *Learning* – Involving participants in learning or discovering new things relevant to their own lives and situations. Action research improves their abilities to identify, understand, and act on issues impacting their quality of life.

5) *Research* – Involving the growth and dissemination of knowledge.

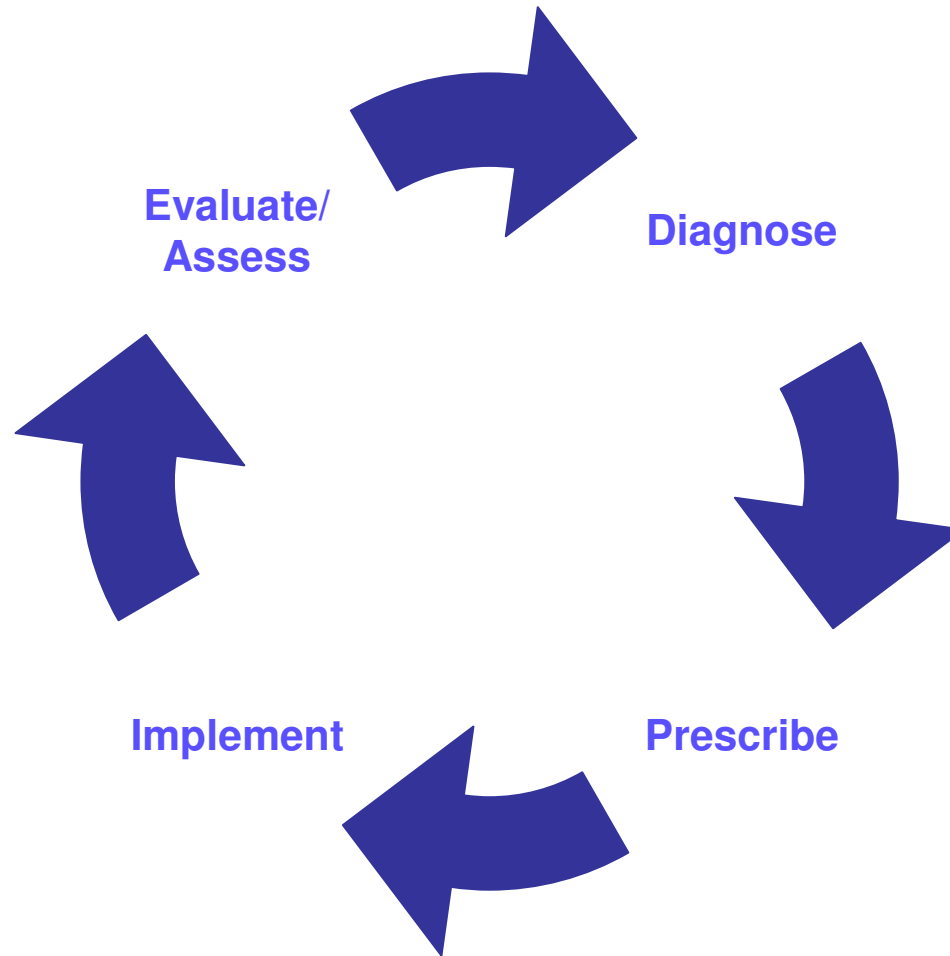6) *Social change* – Involving the use of research to produce positive social change for communities and community participants.

Quoted from: MARC. 2003. *"A framework for participatory and action research."*

Frameworks for Community-Based Research

Act
report, plan,
implement
& evaluate

Look
gather data,
define, describe &
build picture

Think
explore, analyze,
interpret & explain

Adapted from: Stringer. 1999. *Action research.*

Frameworks for CBR (cont'd)

Evaluate/Assess → **Diagnose** → **Prescribe** → **Implement** → (cycle)

Adapted from: Stoecker. 2005. *Research strategies for community change.*

Stoecker's Approach to CBR

Ideally, community-based research…

Focuses on being useful

Employs diverse methods

What methods fit the research question?

What methods will result in data and analysis that will actually be used?

Emphasizes collaboration

The people to be impacted by the research should help guide it.

"Pre-research" interaction and attempts to maximize participation should be given attention from the beginning.

Common Methods for CBR

Traditional Methods

Adapted to allow for community participation

Useful when partnering with organizations having well-articulated issues of concern

Secondary data (U.S. Census)

Surveys

Key-informant interviews

Focus groups

Observation (participant and bystander)

Alternative Methods

Centered on maximum participation

Useful for working with relatively unorganized groups

Strategies include…

Open space technology

Dynamic facilitation

The world café

Adapted from: Kleiner, Green and Howard. 2005. "Three essays on community-based research."

Participation in CBR

There are multiple types and levels of participation in research. CBR seeks to maximize participation, while at the same recognizing the uniqueness of each situation.

According to Stringer, "Participation is most effective when it…"

- Enables significant levels of active involvement
- Enables people to perform significant tasks
- Provides support for people as they learn to act for themselves
- Encourages plans and activities that people are able to accomplish themselves
- Deals personally with people rather than with their representatives or agents

Quoted from: Stringer. 1999. *Action research.*

"Trustworthiness" in CBR

There are several checks and balances that can be used to assess and improve the value of knowledge generated through CBR. These include:

- Transparency in the methods utilized to collect and analyze data
- Use of multiple methods in the same study – triangulation
- Credibility through prolonged engagement with people in the community
- Constant case comparison – comparing results from several different case studies to identify similarities and differences
- Participant validation – addressing the extent to which research participants see their experiences conveyed in the research
- Peer review of research methods and analysis techniques

Adapted from: Stringer. 1999. *Action research.*
Stoecker. 2005. *Research methods for community change.*
Kleiner, Green and Howard. 2005. "Three essays on community-based research."