

**Challenges of community
involvement:**

Realities and practicalities

Personal reflections

John Imrie



Content

- ❑ Background**
- ❑ Models of community collaboration**
- ❑ Researching with communities – Why?**
- ❑ Practicalities of collaboration**
- ❑ Collaborators' checklist**

Disclaimer

- ❑ **Observations and reflections only**

- ❑ **Own experience**
 - **Volunteer in a research organisation – 1988**
 - **Researcher employed by CBO – 1995**
 - **Researcher for statutory provider – 1998**
 - **Several collaborations with THT, 1999 - ...**
 - **SH research implementation coordinator**

Disclaimer

- Observations and reflections only**
- Own experience**
- Research involving HE academics and
voluntary sector agencies**
- Practical, not prescriptive**

Background

- ❑ **Community participation seen as a good thing**
- ❑ **Limited evidence to support it**
 - **Publication bias**

Limited evidence 1

- ❑ **Kelly J, Somlai A, Otto-Salaj L *et al*,
12th World AIDS Conference, Geneva, 1998.**
- ❑ **Provided TA in research & evaluation to 50
state-wide CBOs in 3 formats**
 - ARM 1. Six session course & ongoing support**
 - ARM 2. Two-day course**
 - ARM 3. Manuals and research tools only**
- ❑ **Arm 1 achieved better dissemination;
3 fold increase in annual charitable funding.**

Limited evidence 2

- ❑ Bitel M, Kafeero S, *Mayisha Study*, 2000.
- ❑ “Successful community participation in the research seen to be key to the success of the study for 2 main reasons:
 1. Overcame sense of being ‘over-researched’
 2. Given ownership of research, results and action.”

Background

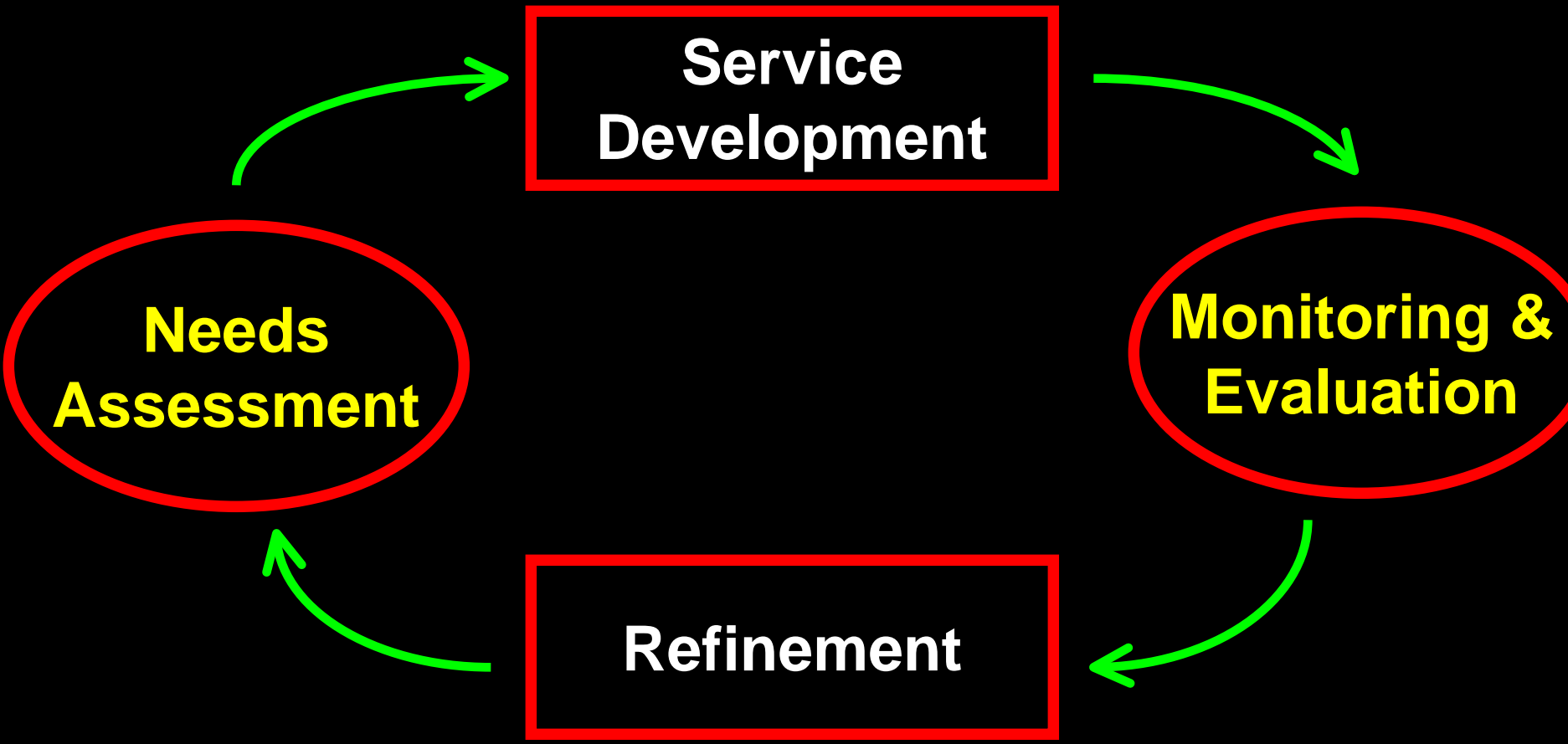
- ❑ **Community participation seen as a good thing**
- ❑ **Limited evidence to support it**
 - **Publication bias**
- ❑ **Building track record in HIV & sexual health**
- ❑ **Exemplar in UK is work with African communities**
- ❑ **Priority with funders**

Models of community collaboration

Stakeholder Input



Research into Practice



Partnership Model

Researchers



**Voluntary
Sector**

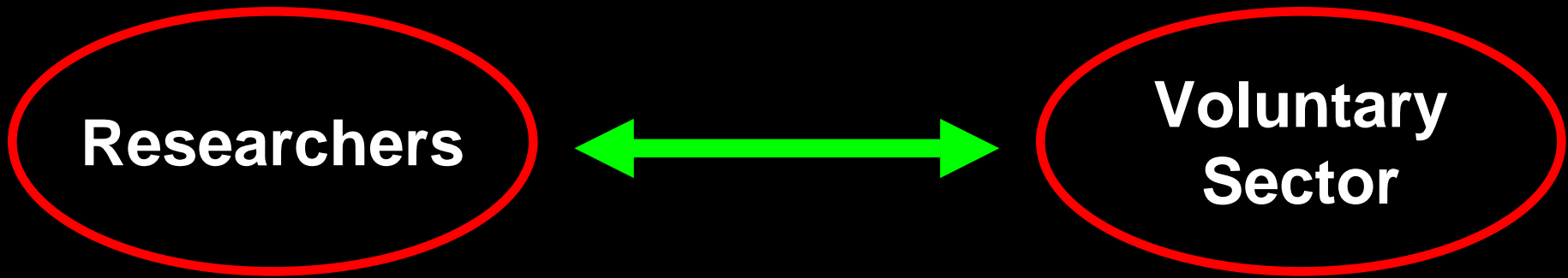
Partnership Model

Researchers

**Voluntary
Sector**



Partnership Model



Researching with CBOs – Why?

- ❑ **Relevance of research question / design**
- ❑ **Service provider insight – the ‘real’ world**
- ❑ **Access to research subjects**
- ❑ **Relevance & speed of results into practice**
- ❑ **Effective dissemination**

Researching with researchers – Why?

- Contribution to research question & design**
- Ensure relevance to services & organisation**
- Obtain insight into the research ‘world’**
- Capacity building within organisation**
- Speed of results into practice - appropriateness**

Get to know your partner first

Before I take you
as my researcher

Before I take you
as my CBO



Pre-nuptial agreements have a place !

Practicalities of collaboration

- Why are we doing this?**
- Which model best suits the project aims?**
- Appropriate infrastructure to support collaboration?**
- Can you deliver what you're signing up to?**
- Is there a contingency plan?**

‘A research collaboration isn’t just for Christmas ‘



Potential tensions in collaboration

- ❑ Principles of the scientific approach to research
- ❑ Research moves too slowly, not flexible enough
- ❑ Management – who ultimately calls the shots?
- ❑ Conflicting agendas – research *vs* service & policy
- ❑ Funding – who gets money for what

Who does tension affect? Who picks up the pieces?

That's easy for them to say!
But you don't need three
guess to figure out who'll
be picking up the pieces!



Collaborators' checklist

Before embarking on a research collaboration make sure you both have answers to the following....

- Is collaboration useful to both partners? How? Is this a shared view?**

- Have both partners contributed to the study design? Are roles in the study implementation clear?**

- Have any and all ownership issues been resolved?**

Collaborators' checklist 2

- Money being sought to compensate CBO?**
- Can and will partners deliver what they've agreed?**
- Appropriate infrastructure & support facilities?**
- All lines of management & accountability clear?**
- Is there an agreed contingency plan?**

Conclusions

- ❑ **Research/community collaborations increasingly popular**
- ❑ **Models vary, based on particulars of project**
- ❑ **Significant added value, but not the 'cheap' option'**
- ❑ **Success requires careful thought, planning & negotiation**
- ❑ **Full & frank discussion of all issues**
- ❑ **Potential pitfalls. Be alert. Have a Plan and have a 'Plan B'.**

**Challenges of community
involvement:**

Realities and practicalities

Personal reflections

John Imrie

