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Values-Based Participatory Action Research in Development Ethics

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Introduction

Given their complexity, values have always been part of the academic research but often ignored or relegated to the realm of insignificance because values are not easily identified or negotiated at the naked eye (Petrova et al., 2006). In the traditional research encounter, though participants have always been bearers of values, researchers have often entered the research space disarmed or even unsure of the values they bring. The attempt to ignore, exclude, or even impose values cannot prevail without undermining the very norms and values which form the social base of a pluralist society, gradually destroying the dignity, the freedom, and responsibility of the human person (Nürnberg, 1999). The present chapter argues that the need for values-based participatory actions and decisions that take values seriously is not only a moral equivalent but a compelling base for research that takes people and the values they hold seriously. Hence, to ask whose values count and whose needs and choices

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are neglected, when certain values are denied, is one perspective of doing research on values work. The present chapter claims that the need for research on values work is self-revealing evidence that we live in a pluralist society, where moral pluralism, the plurality of social values, requires participatory actions, negotiation, and recognition in every space of human encounter where values are identified, shared, or even contested. Increasing acknowledgement of values in the field of academic research is a clear tribute in favour of the growing demands for recognition of the participants' abilities, as bearers of values, to contribute to knowledge. A transformation of the research landscape occurs when values are participatorily identified, negotiated, or even incorporated as part of the institutional paradigm, practice, and ethos. Yet, one of the pros and cons to bear in mind, as values are researched, is the fact that values, as standards of right and wrong that influence our actions and behaviour, may also raise both ontological and epistemological questions of a liberal nature, which cannot be ignored (Delanty & Strydom, 2003).

Moving from ontology (what is known) to epistemology (what ought to be) is not an easy undertaking, it is like moving from morality (is) to ethics (ought). This means that moving from what is known about the nature of a given reality (what is) to justification and explanation of the validity of the values we hold (what ought to be) is an epistemological exercise. Further, this implies that relocating from morality to ethics, from what is morally acceptable to what may be ethically sound, may lead to a conflict of values (Delanty & Strydom, 2003). When it comes to values, the ontological and the epistemological seem to conflict, which, by implication, may also lead to a conflict of values. The epistemological always tends to influence the research design and outcomes (Delanty & Strydom, 2003). In other words, what is known may conflict with what ought to be, the means may not lead to ends. In the research encounter, as one relocates from one space to the next, there is also a shift in values. One of the key pros and cons is that what is morally acceptable (good) may not lead to what is ethically fitting (right). Engaging with this complex reality, linking the ontological to epistemological is at the root of the pros and cons of values-based participatory action research. Mitigating this complexity, underlying this relationship, is a way of doing values work (Delanty & Strydom, 2003). Thus, values-based participatory

action research and the ethics of regards work together as a basis of shared decision-making between participants in the research encounter. In the end, values-based participatory action research provides an approach for reaching balanced decisions, where values shift, or wherever 'framework values' are in conflict (Petrova et al., 2006).

The chapter's argument is threefold: Firstly, this chapter argues that, in participatory action research, though participation is part of the underlying paradigm, when participants enter the research encounter, the values they bring are often ignored or given no sufficient attention. Ethics of regards, as part of values-based practices, holds that values have to be identified, negotiated, or even contested. By applying values-based participatory action research, from ethics of regards, the present chapter seeks to demonstrate how participatory research practices can contribute to the development of knowledge, hence enhancing values work, when participants enter the research encounter as key role-players and bearers of values. Values-based participatory action research insists that, as bearers of values, participants enter the research encounter, not only as participants but also as producers of meaning and transformers of the research landscape, with the potential of furthering the creation of new values. Key in the argument is that values-based practices insist that values rather than principles, take centre stage in the research design. Secondly, the chapter insists that how values are assumed and understood may impact and influence the design and research outcomes and methodology. Hence, the chapter illustrates how values-based participatory action research and practice, as a new approach that incorporates values in research decisions and practices, can contribute to the development of knowledge by incorporating values in the research design. Thirdly, key in the argument is how could the approach assist in clarifying the epistemological and ontological assumptions linked to values research. By using development ethics as research context, the present chapter will engage with the pros and cons of values-based participatory action research from ethics of regards, to ascertain whether and how ethics of regards, as a research methodology, could contribute to the development of practices, in values-informed research methods, as well as assisting practitioners in developing skills to identify and negotiate values, where diversity of values may seem to conflict. Assisting practitioners with skills to identify and negotiate values is a form of doing values work.

Participatory Action Research

Participatory action research (PAR) from which values-based practices spring is a well-established platform in the field of academic research where its growing presence plays a critical role in the development of society, engaging levels of democracy, social justice, and freedom as fundamental values and key indexes in participatory development practices, hence contributing to the development of knowledge:

PAR is an iterative process in which groups of people come together to grapple with a serious social issue that affects them in their daily lives. In principle, participants design the process, define the action-research questions and goal, choose the methods, interpret the results, and draw conclusions about the implications of what they have learnt. (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019, p. 4)

As such, PAR is a boundary-breaking methodology in the research field. It breaks the boundaries of power, culture, gender, ideology, status, elitism, and class, defining one's roles and position in the research. As the name itself implies, PAR, as part of the wider umbrella of action research, is rooted in action research itself, in terms of its methodological principles and underlying approach. PAR reveals a rich diversity of philosophical and ethical insights that may give us the vocabulary and the insights we need in order to articulate values-based participatory action research from ethics of regards. Ethics of regards is in itself a participatory ethical principle to moral action, based on the virtue of mutual recognition and reciprocity, for it defends the view that my own wellbeing is dependent on the wellbeing of others. My own regards is rooted in my own acknowledgement, recognition, and appreciation of the fact that everyone else's welfare is worthy of moral regards. Action research, in which PAR emerges, is 'a means whereby research can become a systemic intervention, going beyond describing, analysing and theorizing social practices to working in partnership with participants to reconstruct and transform those practices' (Somekh, 2006, p. 1).

PAR is a community-engaging research methodology that emphasises participation, mutual understanding, and common action as methods of

inquiry. PAR insists that context informs the extent to which participatory ethical decisions are made. As the name indicates, since participatory action research entails participation, ethics of regards is adopted in order to include and enhance the perspectives of ordinary people and their experiences of exclusion and marginalisation who at times are excluded or ignored when more formalised methods of research are applied. Against this background, PAR takes an empowering agenda as its starting point:

Participatory action is recursive or dialectical and is focused on bringing about change in practices. Thus, in participatory action research studies, inquirers advance an action agenda for change. It is focused on helping individuals free themselves from constraints found in the media, in language, in work procedures, and in the relationships of power in educational settings. Participatory studies often begin with an important issue or stance about the problems in society, such as the need for empowerment. (Creswell, 2013, p. 28)

In PAR, when ethics of regards is applied, one cannot speak of research in community development without reference to the economy, equity, and redress. Using development ethics as a conceptual framework, the present study applies PAR as a methodological tool to bridge the gap between theory and practice in community development. Despite the advantages of employing action research as a conceptual framework, participatory action researchers are often confronted with challenging ethical dilemmas, when dealing with research questions involving real people in real-time and space. Earning the trust of the participants, in order for them to not regard the researcher as an outsider, but to be comfortable in taking ownership of the process and allowing your insight into their perceptions and experiences, does not often come easily (Ferreira, 2016). It may take time for a researcher to be immersed and embedded in a specific context and win the trust of the locals in the research field, so as to shift the role she leads as a researcher and allow the locals to move in self-esteem and confidence. The attempt to move towards changing attitudes and behaviour, allowing the participants to determine the process and sensitising them to the idea that they themselves could come with

solutions, as opposed to receiving answers from outside experts, may frustrate one's objectives and outcomes in the research process. The researcher's quest to be ethically accurate, while acknowledging contextual imperatives, ignoring certain social relationships within the selected community, by implication excluding certain voices which are not heard remains an underlying risk (Ferreira, 2016). As PAR is rooted in the underlying principles of action research, according to action research philosophy, there are no experts in the research field. The basic assumption is that local problems require local solutions by relying on local materials and representations. Accepting diversity, differences, and complexities as methods of inquiry, while keeping in mind that no single thrust exists, is one of participatory action research's key requirements.

Development

Development is a values-sensitive subject. Amongst the values (Des Gasper, 2015, p. 1) is whether 'values of human well-being, justice and human dignity adequately are reflected in practice; and how can attention to those values be supported; as well as what is the significance of culture and how far are values justifiably culturally relative?' In the present chapter, development ethics is used as a study context to ascertain the pros and cons of values-based participatory action research. In development ethics, values-based participatory action research insists that how values are conceived and articulated may impact research design and possible outcomes. Des Gasper (2015, p. 1) gives us the vocabulary we need to speak about values-based participatory action research in development ethics when he insists that 'development in human societies involves value-laden choices. Different choices and ways of thinking about development bring greatly different outcomes for different people.' For Des Gasper (2015, p. 1), '[t]he key role of development ethics is to reveal, reflect on and assess these choices, and add a voice for those who otherwise are unreasonably neglected or sacrificed.' Therefore, development is a complex process of structural transformation that cannot be conceptually captured without leaving out some of its critical components. It encompasses socio-economic transformation to political, and human

development. Human development is the foundational premise in which other complementary means of development may be lodged. Development ethics provides strategies of how action inquiry initiatives may shape and be shaped by theoretical debates to show how the practice of participatory action research could support social change but also the advancement of knowledge in the field of academic research (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019, p. 4).

For the purpose of this chapter, the best approach to development that may seem to capture a range of arrays that development entails is offered by Amartya Sen, who insists that ‘economic growth cannot be sensibly treated as an end in itself. Development has to be more concerned with enhancing the lives people lead and the freedom people enjoy’ (Sen 1999, p. 19). Given its concern on wellbeing and capabilities, this approach has been termed the capability approach by policymakers. In the light of this approach, development can no longer be about an increase in commodities but the need to augment people’s capabilities to use such commodities. Returning to values, Des Gasper (2015, p. 2) insists that we should try to think openly, carefully, and fairly about the priorities and principles that guide peoples’ choices, ‘about which groups are favoured, neglected or even sacrificed, and about the choices involved also in the related ways of thinking.’ For Des Gasper (2015, p. 2), apart from their importance for guiding action, attention to values is important for trying to understand people. In his view, ‘[h]umans hold and use and are partly driven by values, including ethical ideas; and the types of ethical ideas they hold affect their motivation for thinking empathetically about other people and for engaging in action.’ Still, ‘[p]owerful groups often keep values concealed and deny choices, to hide who is favoured, neglected or sacrificed’ (Des Gasper, 2015, p. 2).

According to the UN human development goals (HDGs), there are three core values to development reformulated from Amartya Sen’s capability approach: sustenance, self-esteem, and freedom. Sustenance or the ability to meet the basic needs of people is one of the key values over which every other value may find resonance. Self-esteem or a sense of worth and self-respect and a feeling of not being marginalised is an extremely important value for individual’s wellbeing. All peoples and societies seek some form of self-esteem (identity, dignity, respect, honour

etc.). The nature and form of self-esteem may vary from culture to culture. Freedom or the ability to choose is essential for the wellbeing of individuals. In values-based participatory action research these three core values are essential, but the value of self-esteem is the most critical one for may impact on values identification and possible negotiation for the lack of self-esteem. But self-esteem without freedom or the ability to meet one's basic needs is impossible or pointless.

Though the individual should at least strive to have access to one of these values to be able to function as a dignified member of society, to achieve one of the values does not come easily. Given the challenges to address these three core values simultaneously, it was finally realised that problems of poverty, inequality, and institutional changes require a direct attack and policy interventions (Des Gasper, 2015, p. 3). It led key policymakers, such as IMF and World Bank, to realise that development is a complex process involving major changes in social structures, attitudes, and institutions as well as growth and redistribution. It is here where Amartya Sen's conclusion springs, in the sense that though wealth is key for human wellbeing, development is more than wealth; it is concerned with enhancing the lives people lead and the freedoms they enjoy. Income and wealth are not ends in themselves but instruments for other purposes (Sen, 1999, p. 73). For, Sen (1999, p. 88), '[r]elative deprivation in terms of income can yield absolute deprivation in terms of capabilities. Being relatively poor in a rich country can be a great capability handicap, even when one's absolute income is high in terms of world standards.'

Development cannot be an isolated effort; it cannot take place on its own. It is part and parcel of the social, cultural, political, constitutional, legal, economic, psychological, environmental, and the spiritual makeup of a given society. Without any political will, any ideal of development cannot be possible and its effort may be deemed to be a failure. For this reason, that is why it is so crucial and critically important to make development a human right and policy issue and try to relate it to the United Nations' declarations such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a collection of 17 interdependent global goals established in 2015 designed to be a blueprint to achieve a more sustainable future for all which many individual countries are signatories. By virtue of their membership, these countries have committed

themselves not only to abide to but also to make the development agenda and aspirations of their individual nations mandatory and possible by the order of importance. Hence, to be authentic, studies show that ‘development model has to build on and execute government policies and strategies’ (Swanepoel & De Beer, 2006, p. 8). In South Africa, examples of such models include ‘the South African Integrated Development Plan, aimed at sustainable municipal development in a sound environment, and the integrated Sustainable Rural Development Programme, aimed at rural development’ (Swanepoel & De Beer, 2006, p. 8).

An Ethics of Regards

Ethics of regards sees the ideal of human dignity as a wellspring of regards. One author in modern scholarship who has engaged with the ideal of human dignity as a defining paradigm of liberal theory of justice is the American Philosopher John Rawls. According to Nussbaum (2000), Rawls’ views are always presented abstractly and are often difficult to understand and for philosophers and civic actors to penetrate. But Rawls himself has given new specificities and vigour to one of the most valuable legacies of the liberal political tradition: the idea that a person has a dignity and worth that social (structures) institutions should not be permitted to violate. Like Kant, Rawls (1971) has held that the moral judgements of ordinary people are an essential ingredient and starting point for good political deliberation. Though its Kantian roots cannot be completely dismissed, the idea of dignity also occupies centre stage in Aristotelianism where the ideal is understood in relational terms. Rawls’ theory of justice is a synthesis of both Kant and Aristotle remarkably made clear in his ‘difference principle.’ In the light of difference principle, for Rawls (1971, p. 60), a just distribution of welfare means an equal distribution unless an unequal distribution would be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged. In his description of virtue ethics, Aristotle sees dignity not only as a concept but also as a key component that guides moral reasoning in practical wisdom. The Aristotelian stance based on the ethics of virtues takes human fellowship, participation, relationality, and sociality as a springboard for regards, hence an avenue for human flourishing and

dignity (MacIntyre, 1999, p. 226). In this case, dignity can no longer be conceptualised as an abstract category but materialised as a lived experience, a consequence of human interaction and exchange whose result is regards itself.

In the realm of an ethics of regards, the capacity for development is innate; it takes its roots from within out. An ethics of regards insists that for community development to be authentic it should take its roots in the realm of two key paradigms, namely the participatory paradigm and the sustainable development paradigm (Swanepoel & De Beer, 2006, p. 27). In line with the sustainability paradigm, regards insist that community development is a bottom-up process that requires the empowerment of people to be responsible for their own development. Local development efforts should be in harmony with local ecology. Local people are the experts on local ecology; they know and understand the challenges of their surrounding environments best (Swanepoel & De Beer, 2006). Regards insist that participation is more than involvement, yet participation without power is futile and worse than marginalisation. Participation should be matched by recognition and authenticity. Participation is dialogical and engaging, when one participates, they become part of the decision-making process and planning. The research, by being context sensitive, provides rich contextual data so vital in the reshaping and reframing of the participants' worldview. Like action research itself, the advantages of an ethics of regards is that 'plans that are made by local people (participants) usually have a higher propensity of being successful than those planned by outsiders, as local people have first-hand knowledge of their situation and take into account local conditions when planning activities to address challenges' (Ferreira, 2016, p. 12). At the core, when an ethics of regards informs the *pros* and *cons* of participatory action research, community members begin to experience feelings of enablement and empowerment during the research process, increasing their understanding of the challenges and opportunities they face, generating local solutions to overcome local challenges.

Moving from PAR to values-based participatory action research and the insights it creates is, in itself, a participatory ethical action that underlies and inspires the conceptual framework of an ethics of regards that takes us well beyond our narrow understanding of what development and

sustainability entail. In the realm of an ethics of regards, the attempt to move from a participatory action research into a values-based participatory action research is not automatic and does not come easily. And to identify which values might be conducive to a fair, just, liberating, and empowering participatory actions is not easily discernible either. Indeed, it might require listening to the voices of other fields of study, as my effort to dig into the field of classical economics so as to retrieve the ideal of an economy of regards in which an ethics of regards is rooted has shown. At times, one might need to strategise the possibility of adopting an etic or outsider perspective, as well an emic or insider perspective, as a clue to understanding the complexity of institutional arrangements, structures, culture, and memory influencing the way people relate and regard each other, as well as to why things are the way they are, and why people relate the way they do. Values are repositories of people's identities. Here is where Des Gasper's (2015, p. 1) point makes sense that we need to try to understand values in order to understand people.

The words emic and etic are specifically used, though not uniquely so, in the field of social research, to indicate both objectivity and subjectivity of a given phenomenon. They have their root in anthropology where they are applied to denote, respectively, an insider, subjective perspective and outsider, objective perspective. Firstly, when an ethics of regards is embraced, the researcher's role shifts from outsider professional who might provide information and advice (so-called etic approach) to insider participation and understanding from an insider's perspective (emic approach). Secondly, when an ethics of regards is embraced, the *participants* in action research projects are encouraged to think for themselves, contribute to their own learning rather than merely receiving information from outsiders, and share knowledge and work together in order to face challenges that exist (Creswell, 2013, p. 51).

Based on the ideal of reciprocity as a key virtue in the exercise of mutual regards, when an ethics of regards is guided by sympathy and empathy, roles are reversed and a new relationship based on the ideal of

human dignity comes into being as a result. Hence, as Swanepoel and De Beer put it, 'dignity is promoted by giving people recognition; by recognizing them as capable of making their own decisions and accepting responsibility for their own decisions' (Swanepoel & De Beer, 2006, p. 27). As in PAR, when an ethics of regards is implied, the researcher is expected to regard the participants as research partners worthy of moral regards, thereby enhancing mutual collaboration where power and domination in research are not only discouraged but abolished. An ethics of regards has the propensity of horizontalising vertical and hierarchical relationships, allowing for opportunities to create insights of power from inside out from the previously disempowered, as opposed to merely receiving power from who seemingly seems to possess it. In the realm of an ethics of regards in participatory action research, participants gain ownership in participatory decision-making, thereby setting their own priorities and working towards their goals. As participants become gradually motivated by an ethics of regards, they become gradually 'responsible in initiating change.'

Translating Values-Based Participatory Action Research into Research Design

Values-based participatory action research, as a family of values-based practices, is a new research methodology that 'emphasises the centrality of values in decision making, the diversity of values, which may remain unnoticed if they are presumed shared; and the importance of practitioners' developing skills to identify and negotiate values' (Petrova et al., 2006, p. 703). Central to values-based participatory action research is the assumption that a shift in human social values may have consequence on how research methodologies and practice are conducted. While PAR is research with and along ordinary people, values-based participatory action research goes a step further to see research not only in terms of participation, or in terms of the participant's ability to participate, but also in the light of what the participants value most and the ability they have to identify and negotiate the valuable.

In values-based practices, from an ethics of regards, participation is more than inclusion. Values-based participatory action research takes a step further to see participation in terms of one having a voice and the ability to articulate, identify, and negotiate values. In the traditional research methodologies, researchers are experts who speak on behalf of the voiceless or those whose voices have been suppressed or marginalised; in values-based participatory action research, as a wellspring of an ethics of regards, everybody has a voice that is recognised and acknowledged. Participants are seen as persons worthy of moral regards, whose dignity is recognised and afforded equal worth. Participants are valued as competent members of the team who are able to speak from within—in a manner that affirms and strengthens their social standing and self-worth. They have the ability to identify and express the values they hold as dear in the light of their own situation, as well as in the light of their ability to identify and negotiate those values. Collection, prioritisation, use, and exchange of information in the research process is an act of regards that requires to be handled with dignity. Information is not only information but a repository of people's life stories that may be handled and wounded. Those handling it should do so with a degree of care and discretion, conscious of the fact that people may be mishandled or wounded if their lives' stories are not handled properly or with a degree of discretion and respect (Taylor, 1995, p. 225).

Since in values-based practices values are identified when in conflict, as a family of participatory action research, in contrast to more conventional research design strategies, researchers are seeking to apply more regards-informed decision-making in their theoretical formulations. As ethics of regards as a methodological principle inspires values-based practices, it would often be expected to be selectively biased towards research methods and tools that are particularly participatory, democratic, context-sensitive, humanely grounded and geared towards solidarity amidst diversity where difference is emulated as a source of strength and recognition. Values-based participatory action research tends to take the situation of the excluded and marginalised of society as defining principles of research. Values-based participatory action research, from an ethics of regards, defends that regardless of circumstances, each participant is worthy of moral regards. The foundational premise of an ethics of regards is

the value placed on the idea of human dignity and equal worth—methods that offer not only the ability to empower and encourage oneself to participate but also the ability to identify, negotiate, and add value in the discourse as recognised member in the research project, to experience oneself as a competent and effective member of the research team and to be experienced by others as a person whose self-worth and dignity are inherently recognised, affirmed, and valued by others (Abma et al., 2019, p. 127).

Discussion: Pros and Cons of Values-Based Participatory Action Research

Values-based participatory action research is a cutting-edge methodology that combines top-down approaches and bottom-up initiatives in research design. Values-based participatory action research shares a common pledge, together with other fields of studies, insisting that transforming societies for sustainable living depends not only on top-down decisions but also on bottom-up initiatives embraced by local communities, together with efforts made by civil society, and the corporate sector. A values-based participatory action research sees values as defining features in the research encounter. It shares similar tools with the qualitative research methodology in which the participants' meanings, in terms of the values they hold, take centre stage. 'In the entire qualitative research process, the researchers keep a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or writers from the literature' (Creswell, 2013, p. 51). Key, in the pros and cons, is that the adoption of the sustainable development goals in 2015 marked a shift in global values, introducing the idea that people everywhere should aspire to universally acceptable development aspirations that 'leave no one behind', yet because of pressures imposed by IMF and the World Bank 'policy-makers face philosophical dilemmas' in policy choices, when having to frame their decisions according to the standards of international institutions while, at the same time, having to adhere to

the needs and aspirations of local communities (World Development Report, 2003, p. 193).

While the interplay between top-down and bottom-up initiatives is widely recognised, a considerable debate about what the level of participation in the encounter really mean remains a matter of values contestation. For example, to use the example of Life & Peace Institute (LPI) in Uppsala in its effort in trying to bring together global policymakers and local actors on peace initiatives reveals a myriad of challenges. According to LPI, a ‘challenge that follows direct engagement is that inclusion and participation in global peacebuilding policy processes often still means being invited to participate in a system of power and adapting to it, rather than transforming the system’ (Life & Peace Institute, 2020, p. 14). It could be argued, however, they say, ‘that the very fact of inviting local actors to participate in the global peacebuilding policy space is transforming the system away from an elite-only club towards a more inclusive space’ (Life & Peace Institute, 2020, p. 14). However, ‘most civil society engagement with UN agenda setting occurs through invited spaces, where the terms of discussion are largely pre-determined by global policy actors’ (Life and Peace Institute, 2020, p. 15). An ethics of regards insists that how development and sustainability are understood impacts policy formulation and implementation. One more important view, linked to the one shared by Life & Peace Institute amongst the pros and cons, which many scholars also seem to share, is that development indexes, assumptions, and constructs made at the level of international bodies, such as the IMF and the World Bank, tend to be more globalised, hence impacting how development and policy formulations are understood locally, regardless of context (Des Jardins, 2006).

As one of the cons, for example, Bagele Chilisa is cited to have highlighted ‘how knowledge systems rooted in African philosophies, world-views and history have been marginalized in development discourse while holding the potential to enrich sustainability science.’ Yet, as one of the pros, ‘the interdependence of biological and cultural diversity has led to biocultural diversity as a source of knowledge for scientists, local communities, civil society and policymakers interested in local and global sustainability’ (UNHDI, 2020, p. 150). Still, in the light of values-based participatory action research in community development and public

policy, from an ethics of regards, ‘values systems go beyond conventionally looking at nature and the planet for only their instrumental value (service provision) or intrinsic value (inherent worth) to incorporate relational values (“associated with relationships, both interpersonal and as articulated by policies and social norms”)’ (UNHDI, 2020, p. 153). To achieve wellbeing, people need adequate and secure livelihoods. The majority of people in the world live in rural areas. To them land and nature play a vital role in making secure livelihood possible (Swanepoel & De Beer, 2006, p. 14). As the UNHDI report remarkably emphasises, ‘[p]eople’s attachment to their place of living implies an awareness of the value of territory, local identity and a sense of community, fostering stewardship for the planet’ (UNHDI, 2020, p. 153). Further, the report proceeds to see this effort as being ‘combined with a participatory approach to decision-making as well as institutional respect for people and organized groups, for their identity and for their local culture constitutes a favourable setting for collective action at the local level’ (UNHDI, 2020, p. 153). Such an approach, the report proceeds, ‘is also well equipped to foster the complex and intertwined relationship between equity and sustainability in a way that unleashes positive synergies between the two’ (UNHDI, 2020, p. 153).

Going Beyond Participation to Recognition

In a values-based participatory action research, when the value of moral regards is implied, an ethics of regards is assumed. An ethics of regards contends that a participatory community development to be sustainable should be worthy of moral regards; participation is more than involvement but recognition. Mutual recognition between role-players in the realm of values-based participatory action research is key. In a values-based participatory action research, an ethics of regards bears substance on the reversal of roles. A corresponding illustration that well expresses the nuances of values-based participatory action research process, from an ethics regards, can be found in ‘qualitative research approach.’ As Creswell (2013, p. 52) puts it, ‘[w]e conduct qualitative research when we want to *empower individuals* to share their stories, hear their voices,

and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study.’ Further, Creswell (2013, p. 52) insists that ‘qualitative research, then, should contain an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of participants, the institutions in which they live and work, or even the researchers’ lives.’ As I have alluded earlier that values-based participatory action research should take the context of the oppressed and their experience of injustice as its starting point, Creswell (2013, p. 52) goes a step further to say that ‘the issues facing these marginalized groups are of paramount importance to study, issues such as oppression, domination, suppression, alienation, and hegemony. As these issues are studied and exposed, the researchers provide a voice for these participants, raising their consciousness and improving their lives.’

As one moves from action research to participatory action research, hence values-based participatory decision-making, the roles (See Chap. 12) which researchers and participants now ought to assume in this new dimension ought to be equally informed by the virtue of mutual recognition based on the ideal of human dignity. Recognition is the well-spring of human dignity, hence the springboard of an ethics of regards. Where recognition has been creatively assumed and seriously taken as a defining feature of development, policymaking and prioritisation have indeed led to an extraordinary human flourishing and wellbeing, Scandinavia being the most accurate example in view. An ethics of regards sees development environment and sustainable development as key categories in human flourishing and wellbeing because of the impact they create on how people see, associate, and identify themselves. In the end, this nuanced process informed by an ethics of recognition and regards is a form of conducting values work research.

Conclusion

We have seen how when an ethics of regards is implied, values-based participatory action research may be turned into a boundary-breaking research methodology. This means that when an ethics of regards is assumed, boundaries are not only broken but also turned into bridges. In a postmodern society, when a plurality of values conflicts, values-based

participatory action research offers us the vocabulary we need to be able to take participatory ethical decisions together as a method of inquiry. An ethics of regards allows us to embrace the prevailing plurality and difference not as a form of weakness but as a source of strength. Values-based participatory action research as a boundary-breaking research methodology can indeed assist us in bridging the gap between theory and practice, even in policy dilemmas, where critical decisions are required to be made. An ethics of regards is a way to go in organisational leadership—in corporations, where leaders are systematically confronted with critical policy decisions. Economy and equity are critical ethical questions in development ethics because they impact the way policy decisions are made and justified. When an ethics of regards is implied, values-based participatory action research as boundary-breaking research methodology not only can lead in bridging the gap between theory and practice in sustainable community development and public policy but can also help in turning the existing gaps into bridges.

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