

## Webinar recap – Engaging communities in humanitarian research: Sharing Research Findings with Communities in Humanitarian Settings

Last week, Elrha hosted a webinar titled [Engaging Communities in Humanitarian Research: How Should We Share Our Findings?](#) Chaired by Cordelia Lonsdale from Elrha’s R2HC programme, the session emphasized the ethical responsibility to engage crisis-affected communities not only during research but also when sharing and applying findings. In response to a lack of practical guidance on research restitution, Elrha has commissioned a [literature review](#) and is now developing new researcher-focused good practice guidance on restitution of findings for crisis contexts. This webinar formed a key learning opportunity in the process.

### GROUNDING RESTITUTION IN ETHICS

Professor Mandy Kader Konde (FOSAD-CEFOPAG) highlighted ethical concerns around research with vulnerable populations during health emergencies. Many African clinical trial participants may have limited literacy or experience with research. He introduced the open-access [Participatory Research Ethics Toolbox \(PRET\)](#), developed with Ebola survivors, which outlines 11 participant rights—including the right to be informed of study findings. He emphasised that informed consent operates at both community and individual levels.

### MAKING FINDINGS MEANINGFUL

Hannah Miles (Ground Truth Solutions) explained that sharing findings helps build trust, reduces survey fatigue, and increases research relevance by grounding insights in lived experience. But effective sharing goes beyond distributing a report. It requires accessible formats—like visuals, local meetings, or radio broadcasts—and clear objectives: are you seeking feedback or co-creating solutions? Framing findings as “what we heard” rather than “what we found” fosters collaboration and ensuring sufficient focus on listening as well as clear explanation of research findings avoids extractive practices.

### BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT

Dr Gloria Seruwagi (Baobab-Population Council) identified four main challenges researchers may face in sharing findings with communities: ‘Prioritising, Packaging, Pathways, and Capacity’. She proposed solutions such as engaging in stages, beginning by relationship building with individual community leaders; using existing community media channels, and incorporating creative approaches like drama to engage children in research. Meaningful engagement requires communities to be involved from the outset—leading to stronger ownership, accountability, and behavioural change. Researchers, she said, must “move out of centre stage” and make space for communities to lead, as they can become instrumental in driving behaviour change informed by research knowledge as well as holding leaders accountable for change.

## SHARING THROUGH THE COMMUNITY

Dr Sayed Jafar Ahmadi compared unused research to products “sitting on a shelf.” In his mental health research in Afghanistan, he considers two key audiences for research findings: affected communities and the professionals who support them. He believes a powerful approach to sharing findings is through participants themselves. Focus group discussions with adolescents and parents have built trust and understanding around research and even led to demand for services. He also highlighted the importance of academic publication to broaden impact and strengthen research quality.

## CO-OWNERSHIP IN PRACTICE

Stephanie Stern (ACF) and Nixon Ochatre (Amani Initiative) presented the *Trio Fantastico* model, which embeds community co-ownership of research projects through roles like “Community Knowledge Holders.” Beginning this engagement at the research design stage ensures community members are not just beneficiaries but co-creators and co-owners of research. Effective communication includes being mindful of timing (community schedules), language, and the messenger. Their approach has improved programme quality and community-research relations, influenced policy, and strengthened sustainability of interventions.

## HANDLING SENSITIVE FINDINGS WITH CARE

Panelists also discussed how to present sensitive findings—especially around trauma, conflict, or stigma. It's crucial to ask: “Am I the right person to share this?” ‘Do no harm’ must be a first consideration. Communities must be given space to reflect and respond, and researchers should be aware of power dynamics that could silence some voices. Segmented discussions, referral systems, and consultation with local leaders and service providers are all essential steps to ensure these dialogues are handled mindfully.

## LOOKING AHEAD

The session concluded with a clear message: meaningful engagement, including restitution activities, must be properly resourced. While easily deprioritised (particularly when timelines are constrained), sharing findings ethically and accessibly is vital for impact, legitimacy, and credibility. The practical approaches shared during the webinar will inform Elrha’s upcoming guidance, and contributions to this work are welcomed. To share input on best practices in research restitution, contact **R2HC@elrha.org**.