ReBUILD FOR RESILIENCE

SCAN ME

Using participatory methods for data collection in a fragile and conflict-affected setting: lessons from the Myanmar experience

Background

- Myanmar has a long history of unrest and conflict, exacerbated by the military coup in 2021
- In such a setting, conducting primary research and data collection is particularly complex, especially when attempting to gather community insights into public healthcare service delivery, which can be seen as an emanation of central power
- Using participatory tools to build trust and reveal communities' opinions has proved promising in such context

This poster presents the participatory approach used to engage with local-level participants for a study on non-state actors (NSA) in Myanmar's health system (see poster 1300). The study aimed to understand the changing roles of NSA in Myanmar's shifting political environment between 2010-22 and to explore their contribution to health system resilience.

What we did

- Data was collected between December 2022 and March 2023 in two regions of Myanmar.
- Participatory methods helped gain an in-depth understanding of local communities and their situations. The research team facilitated topical discussions and did not intervene while the discussion met objectives and was constructive.
- Four group discussions (39 participants in total):
  o listed and mapped available health service providers (eg public, private, NGOs and community associations)
  o grouped, discussed and ranked service providers based on community preferences
  o described health seeking behavior and how it changed over time
- Community members actively participated but sometimes trust was an issue, eg lack of familiarity sometimes inhibited engagement. To build rapport and trust, facilitators introduced safe, energizing activities at the beginning of sessions.

Before the workshops, researchers, participants and the safeguarding lead brainstormed risks and mitigation steps (see table).

Risk	Mitigation	Results
Participant safety at checkpoints	With the local representative we chose workshop sites participants felt safe travelling to	Participants appreciated we asked their opinion on the interview site
Researcher safety at checkpoints	Chose the safest transportation after discussion with the local representative and safeguarding lead, and kept them updated	All research team members were safe - good practice adopted for other projects
Participants would not attend because of safety and security concerns	People on the ground were given information about the study. Participants were encouraged to contact researchers if concerned.	We received enquiries from most service providers, who then agreed to participate

Table: Risks when conducting research, mitigation strategies and outcomes

What we found

- A deep understanding of the context and maintaining flexibility in deploying data collection tools is important in a volatile, changing environment.
- To recruit willing participants, it was essential to thoroughly explain the study objective and activities, understand local sensitivities, and ensure a safe research environment.
- While participatory tools encouraged engagement, it was important that facilitators actively managed discussions to avoid tensions between participants in a politically charged, volatile environment, eg intervening to refocus discussions when political issues threatened to trigger disagreement.
- Local knowledge and an established, trusting relationship with the community was an asset in a conflict situation - the study sites had been previously used by the team for research, becoming akin to 'learning sites'.

Break down the barriers

Build rapport

Encourage inclusivity

Ranking activities followed by discussion

- **Openness**
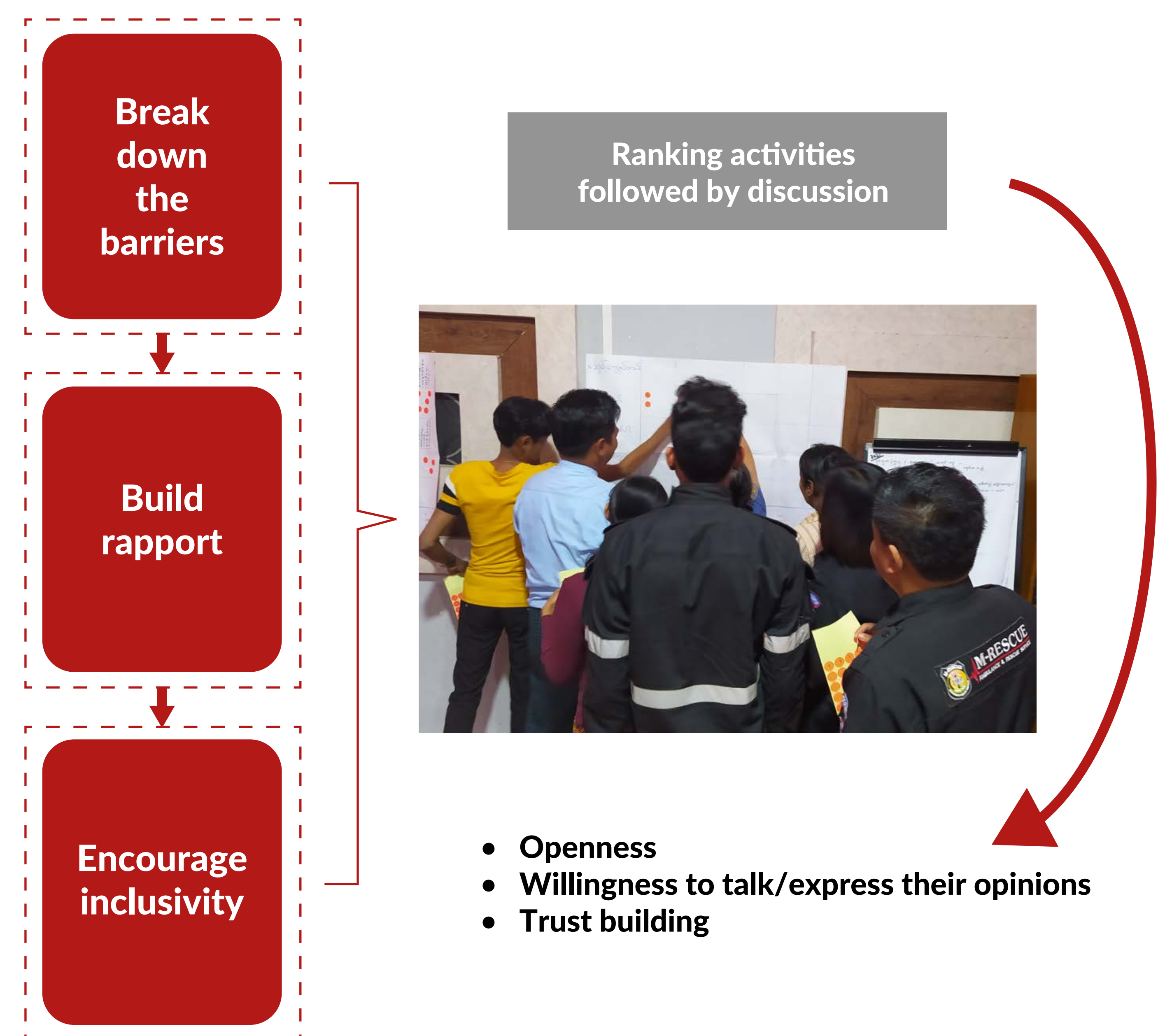- **Willingness to talk/express their opinions**
- **Trust building**

Fig 1. Using participatory approaches to break down barriers, increase trust and encourage sharing and inclusion

Conclusion

Conducting participatory research at community level is challenging in fragile and conflict-affected settings such as Myanmar, where trust is weak, and participants and researchers have safety concerns. Flexibility, good communication and trust-building approaches, along with an awareness of the context, are essential to overcoming those challenges.