Institution: The Open University	
Unit of Assessment: C22 Anthropology and Development Studies	
Title of case study: Identifying and promoting community owned solutions within marginalised communities, practitioners and policy	
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 1st September 2011 - 28th February 2015	
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:	

Name(s): Andrea Berardi	**Role(s) (e.g. job title):** Senior Lecturer in Environmental Information Systems	**Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:** June 2002 onwards

Period when the claimed impact occurred: 1st August 2013 - 31st July 2020	
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No	

1. Summary of the impact

The Open University has conducted participatory action research with marginalised groups to drive community owned solutions to challenges they face, and to influence sustainable development decision-making in their localities. The main impacts took place in the areas of (i) **health and well-being,** (ii) **practitioners** and (iii) **policy and understanding**, and include: successfully promoting community-led solutions and self-help; facilitating participation and professional development of indigenous facilitators, researchers and champions; establishing the Cobra Collective, a UK-based social enterprise to support community-led solutions in 13 countries; and incorporating community owned solutions into national policy in Guiana and Guyana.

2. Underpinning research

Dr Andrea **Berardi** was employed by The Open University in 2002 to undertake transdisciplinary research to support communities in working through complex, intractable challenges by applying Systems Thinking techniques and methodologies. The novel research outcomes described below emerged from the EC 7th Framework-funded 'Project COBRA' (2011-2015). Project COBRA studied the impact of new funding sources to address emerging challenges, such as climate change, on the most marginalised sectors of society, and investigated how civil society organisations can work with marginalised communities to respond more effectively to these new funding opportunities.

Highly marginalised groups, such as Indigenous peoples, are generally represented as 'poor', 'backwards' and 'requiring help'. This perception all-too-often prevails at every level of practice, policy and decision-making. As a result, government and market-led approaches to sustainable development are generally designed and implemented by external 'experts' that impose generic, blueprint solutions that can undermine local solutions that already exist.

The need to support, rather than undermine, local solutions was an integral part of **Berardi's** research design within Project COBRA, developed in collaboration with Dr Jay Mistry (Royal Holloway University of London) and community researchers (which are always named as co-authors in all publications). **Berardi's** remit on Project COBRA was to: develop and apply the core 'community owned solutions' concept underpinning community engagement; contribute to the development and evaluation of participatory visual techniques for supporting knowledge exchange; and develop and apply the 'System Viability Framework', enabling support for 'community owned solutions' at all levels of decision-making. Project COBRA's research strategy promoted a move away from dependency on expert-led blue-print solutions, towards enabling community participants to directly have an impact. One year after the start of Project COBRA, the United Nations Development Programme published a report stressing the need to take community-based approaches seriously "*because they help national governments advance people centred development solutions […] local successes must inform global solutions as we build a path to a sustainable future*".

Community Owned Solutions

Berardi's research has pioneered the concept of 'community owned solutions': practices that are conceived, developed and successfully implemented within communities, by communities, and without major influence from external stakeholders **[O1, O2]**. The 'community owned solutions' approach applies the concept of 'positive deviance': challenges within a community can be better solved by identifying positive practices from within and trying to promote their use, as opposed to focusing on behaviours that are negative and trying to fix them with solutions that have emerged from outside. Encouraging communities to adopt solutions from outside often results in failure, because community members find it difficult to maintain the practices once the outside intervention is no longer supported. Also, external solutions may be culturally inappropriate, reducing acceptance. In contrast, a strong sense of belonging and empowerment can develop from the identification of 'community champions' who can face up to challenges with existing resources. 'Community owned solutions' are thus affordable, acceptable and sustainable because they are already being practised by community members without external support.

Participatory Visual Techniques for Recording and Sharing Community Owned Solutions

Berardi has co-led the development and evaluation of community-based peer-to-peer knowledge exchange of community owned solutions using accessible, participatory and visual communication techniques **[O3]**. Visual techniques, such as participatory video and photostories, were established to be best for capturing local knowledge and practice and giving voice and ownership to marginalised people in the research. The novel approach involved Indigenous champions producing audio-visual assets of their solutions, and then travelling to other Indigenous communities and building capacity for implementing these solutions. This direct peer-to-peer knowledge exchange without intermediaries was shown to be effective in reviving established practices and inspiring communities into new forms of action **[O4]**.

System Viability Framework for Supporting Community Owned Solutions within Policies

Berardi developed an original 'local to international governance framework' to embed support for community owned solutions at all levels of decision-making, named the System Viability Framework (SVF) **[O1]**. The SVF can be applied by decision-makers to evaluate whether policies support or undermine community owned solutions, enabling users to employ a range of strategies that they feel are important for the survival of nested social-ecological systems in their region of interest. The application of SVF supported the emergence of policies at all levels of decision-making without undermining community owned solutions.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

The following articles emerged from research led by Andrea **Berardi** within Project COBRA (sponsor 'EC 7th Framework'; period of grant 'September 2011-Febuary 2015' GBP1,700,900):

O1. Mistry, J., **Berardi, A**., Tschirhart, C., Bignante, E., Haynes, L., Benjamin, R., Albert, G., Xavier, R., Robertson, B., Davis, O., Jafferally, D., and de Ville, G. (2016) Community owned solutions: identifying local best practices for social-ecological sustainability. Ecology and Society, Vol 21, Issue 2, Article 42, Pp. 1-17. URL: https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-08496-210242

O2. Berardi, A., Mistry, J., Tschirhart, C., Bignante, E., Davis, O., Haynes, L., Benjamin, R., Albert, G., Xavier, R., Jafferally, D., and de Ville, G. (2015) Applying the system viability framework for cross-scalar governance of nested social-ecological systems in the Guiana Shield, South America. Ecology and Society, Vol 20, Issue 3, Article 42, Pp. 1-16. URL: https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-07865-200342

O3. Berardi, A., Mistry, J., Haynes, L., Jafferally, D., Bignante, E., Albert, G., Xavier, R., Benjamin, R., and de Ville, G. (2017) Using visual approaches with Indigenous

communities. In: 'Mapping environmental sustainability; Reflecting on systemic practices for participatory research', Eds Oreszczyn, S. & Lane, A., Policy Press, Bristol, UK. Pp. 103-128. URL: http://oro.open.ac.uk/52365/

O4. Tschirhart, C., Mistry, J., **Berardi, A**., Bignante, E., Simpson, M., Haynes, L., Benjamin, R., Albert, G., Xavier, R., Robertson, B., Davis, O., Verwer, C., de Ville, G., and Jafferally, D. (2016) Learning from one another: the effectiveness of horizontal knowledge exchange for natural resource management and governance. Ecology and Society, Vol 21, Issue 2, Article 41, Pp. 1-14. URL: https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-08495-210241

4. Details of the impact

General Pathway to Impact

Project COBRA's pathway to impact strategy involved building capacity at individual and organisational levels for recording, sharing and implementing community owned solutions, practices and other research outcomes. This was initially achieved by training local Indigenous and community researchers in the 'community owned solutions' concept, including: use of empowering and inclusive visual techniques; applying the SVF; and in an intense process of knowledge exchange aimed at changing mindsets within communities and decision-makers for championing and promoting lay expertise and community solutions. 6 Indigenous community facilitators from the North Rupununi region, Guyana, were first trained to deploy participatory visual methods to identify, record, share and implement community owned solutions in their localities using SVF as guidance. They were then able to share their community owned solutions to inspire 8 Indigenous communities in Suriname, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, French Guiana and in Guyana itself, comprising over 5,000 inhabitants. This approach included them training up to 4 Indigenous researchers within each community (30 in total). Since Project COBRA ended in 2015, these 30 trained community researchers have undertaken capacity building among institutional staff, including conservation organisations (e.g. WWF-Guyana), and mental wellbeing organisations (e.g. Help & Shelter). This has changed how these organisations work by appreciating community owned solutions and increasing intercultural capacity and competence.

In December 2016, the Cobra Collective Community Interest Company (CIC) was launched by Project COBRA staff with a mission for social innovation by empowering marginalised communities to identify, record, promote and practice community owned solutions, further expanding the pool of trained community researchers to 60 and intervening in 13 countries. Thus, impacts are in the areas of (i) **health and wellbeing**; (ii) **practitioners**; and (iii) **policy and understanding**, while the main beneficiaries are the **indigenous participants and communities in 13 countries**; and **national policymakers**.

(i) Impact on health and wellbeing

In Project COBRA, the visual materials produced by the Indigenous community researchers were, in essence, 'how to' instructions on how a wide range of community owned solutions could be implemented to confront challenges such as food security, environmental degradation and domestic abuse. Community solutions included practices, such as: organising community self-help; promoting traditional fishing and farming techniques; supporting Indigenous cultural events; the operation of a community radio station; confronting child abuse and domestic violence; and training in how to forge partnerships with external organisations to support community owned solutions. Showcasing and encouraging the use of these visual 'how to' instructions alongside mentoring by the community owned solutions champions directly resulted in wellbeing impact within participating communities **[C1]**. In the words of an Indigenous female community member: "*the communities have changed their mind set. At first they were asking why you want information from me, but then they learn about finding own solution without waiting for the government"* **[C1**, p.4**]**.

(ii) Impact on practitioners

The impact on individuals emerging from their involvement in Project COBRA has been transformational: the 30 Indigenous facilitators initially trained within Project COBRA have been hired by more than 10 civil society organisations, such as WWF (Guyana), Cooperativa Pemón de Turismo Emasensen (Venezuela), Conselho Indígena de Roraima (Brazil) and Actions pour le Développement, l'Éducation et la Recherche (French Guiana) to provide training in the 'community owned solutions' approach. During interviews carried out in 2017 **[C2]**, a male Indigenous training participant stated: "*Since COBRA project ended, I have done so many things especially with NGOs, using the COBRA handbook and the same approach of COBRA*". "*Photography and videography turned into a business for me*". "*I am bringing more PV* [Participatory Videos] *in the communities and also it turns in a business that is going well*", while a female indigenous participant stated: "*I feel more confident […] COBRA project has given me time, discipline and initiative, and training*". "*I deal with things instead of waiting for someone telling me what to do*". "*Since the COBRA project finished I was engaged in a community development project and the skills and knowledge that I gained in Project COBRA allow me to lead the current project*".

A community researcher in Kwatamang, Guyana, has become an elected community leader as a result of their enhanced confidence and capacity: "*I don't use the [COBRA] handbook page by page but I use the approach. Also, as leader in my village, it is very useful*" **[C2]**. Significant effort was also spent in building the capacity of Project COBRA's own staff members in Guyana. Project COBRA funded 1 staff member to achieve a PhD and several staff members are now at the higher levels of management in government agencies. For example, Project COBRA's in-country Guyana coordinator became the Deputy Director of Guyana's Protected Areas Commission (June 2017 to present), while the Indigenous leader who participated in Project COBRA's design, training and implementation became Guyana's Minister for Indigenous People's Affairs and one of its vice presidents (May 2015 to August 2020) **[C1, C2]**.

From December 2016 to July 2020, the Cobra Collective CIC has won in excess of GBP650,000, capitalising on its network of 60 (and growing) trained community facilitators. Cobra Collective CIC Co-Director states: "*As a result of Dr **Berardi's** contributions to the Collective's underpinning concepts and practices, since 2016 we have successfully undertaken projects that empower marginalised community members in Guyana, UK, Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Cameroon, Jordan, Italy, India, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia, Angola and Australia. For example, the Collective is now working with UN Women to develop, pilot and test online courses underpinned by community-produced participatory videos targeting 67,000 disadvantaged women from Indigenous, refugee, displaced, and low-income groups with the aim of catalysing improved economic and employment opportunities*" **[C3]**.

(iii) Impact on policy and understanding

A key impact at policy-level has been the use of the SVF by decision-makers. For example, the themes of land rights, leadership, partnerships, lifestyle and identity in support of community owned solutions were subsequently included in the 2015-2020 programme of the Guiana Shield Facility (United National Development Programme), a multi-donor funding facility for the region [C4]. Critically, rather than a separate stream of work, the inclusion of the themes was integrated within policies for addressing larger social-ecological challenges, such as gold mining, forest management and water quality monitoring.

Key policy initiatives that are now implementing the 'community owned solutions' and SVF approaches include the DEFRA/DFID funded 'Integrating Indigenous knowledge into conservation policy-making in Guyana'. Applying the techniques in participatory video and employing Cobra Collective's Indigenous researchers, this project is facilitating and evaluating dialogue between decision-makers and local communities on how local practices can inform the management of protected areas, as well as wider environmental, wellbeing and development strategies and policies. By streamlining a participatory cross-scalar process to incorporate local

knowledge and practices at the national scale, initiatives like these are having a direct impact through, for example, the development of Guyana's National Action Plan for Traditional Knowledge (TKNAP) that is being used as a model of best practice for other countries of the Guiana Shield and worldwide. The TKNAP is currently in consultation phase, and prior to Covid-19, was due to be ratified by the Guyanese Cabinet by December 2020.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

C1. Mistry, J., **Berardi**, A. et al (in press) The lasting impact of peer research with Indigenous communities of Guyana, South America. In: 'Peer Research in Health and Social Development: International perspectives on participatory research' (Eds. Bell, S., Aggleton, P., and Gibson, A), Routledge, UK.

C2. Project COBRA Impact videos.

C3. Testimonial from Dr Matthew Simpson, Cobra Collective CIC Co-Director.

C4. United National Development Programme. 2016-2020 programme of the Guiana Shield Facility.