



PARTICIPATORY MARKET RESEARCH AND PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT WITH YOUTH IN UGANDA

PBU 'S APPROACH FOR PRO-YOUTH OUTREACH

Methodology

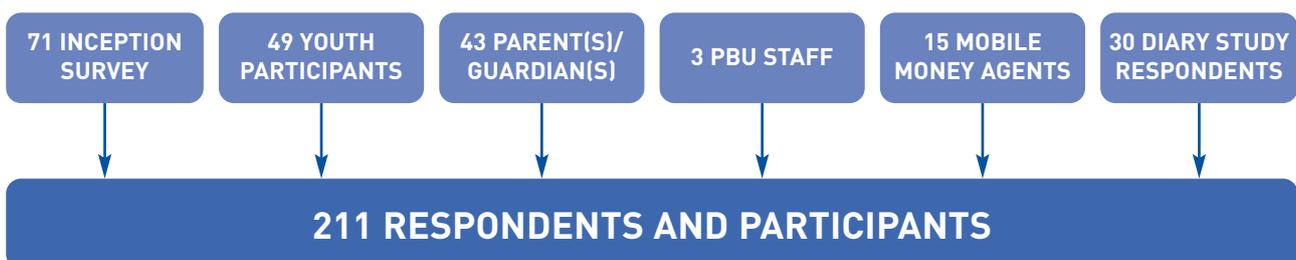
The main methodology was based on the conviction that youth can and must be part of all stages of a product cycle that aims to affect them. By engaging youth in a respectful way in an enabling environment that is based on their strengths, their participation becomes meaningful as their conclusions based on discussions and findings as well as their recommendations are brought to the core of product development⁹.

Such a methodology states that it is possible to change a didactic novel, from being inherently top-down, assuming and excluding to being participatory and inclusive of youth's views, experiences and knowledge⁹. The Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach allows youth to combine their knowledge and experiences in an attempt to reach the study's objectives: The PAR methodology is based on the belief that a problem should be solved collectively, based on a joint decision to engage in action, explore the issue at hand in group and on building alliances between youth, the consultant and PBU.

A mixed methods approach allowed the outcomes of the study to be based on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. An initial inception survey provided a first view of youth financial behaviours and was used to form groups for the working groups. Parent(s)/guardian(s) participated in FGDs and semi-structured interviews were held with techno store owners/workers as well as mobile money agents. PBU staff was engaged in co-creation of the mobile banking app. The final stage of the study incorporated a 10-week diary study.

In total, 120 youth (aged 12-30), 61 parent(s)/guardian(s), mobile money agents and PBU staff in Mbarara, Western Uganda. Figure 2 provides an overview of the number of participants per study method employed.

Figure 2: An overview of the number of participants per study method employed



⁹ Collins D., Morduch J., Rutherford S. And Ruthven O. (2009) Portfolios of the Poor: How the World's Poor Live on \$2 a Day, Princeton University Press



Participatory approaches and the idea behind incorporating customer-centric input are not foreign to PBU, as they were the ones to suggest the study. However, the methodology employed proved different from prior methods used and extended youth's involvement in product design to the core of the design process. In addition, the methodology indirectly empowered youth.

Empowering youth

The first step towards engaging youth in a participatory process is to relay the challenge that PBU is facing. The second step in working with youth is to encourage laughter through games and play. A PBU staff member noted that games 'kept youth happy and expectant during the sessions'. Laughter is a powerful mechanism through which barriers to participation become easier to overcome: Laughter efficiently breaks and lowers thresholds between youth and the consultant and between youth and PBU, provided all participants join in the activities.

Working group sessions provide a direction for exploration and a process to the experience. They provide a framework and space in which discussion is encouraged, insights and experiences are shared and conclusions are drawn together. Evaluation at the end of each working session ensures all participants are comfortable.

Such a process does not only make the participatory process extremely rich, but it gives youth space to talk about things that are important to them and may not be able to talk about outside of the working sessions. A youth participant noted that he learned "to work effectively in a team with a lot of understanding and to give others a chance to express themselves".

As participants are directly involved in the process, they gain skills and knowledge. A participatory process often leaves behind enhanced capacities. For this specific study, youth became aware of their existing savings and financial behaviors. Awareness was created as youth were exposed to questions and were made to discuss among themselves. For both youth and PBU, this participatory study was a learning process.

Benefits for PBU

In conventional study methodologies, knowledge and expertise gained during the study are provided in report-form and progress is supported by the consultant's recommendations. However, in a process whereby youth participate and are fully engaged, knowledge and expertise is actively transferred to PBU. Such an exercise leads to rethinking and restructuring of relations, which support impact of the process in the long-term.

A PBU staff member argued that the methodology provides "a complete journey from identifying, appreciating and defining the needed output". Together with the consultant, PBU actively participated throughout the research process, starting from the initial design of the study to the final presentation of results and discussion of action implications during a feedback workshop.

The participatory process demanded rigorous checking and double-checking of facts. A multitude of reflections and insights from youth, parent(s)/guardian(s) and techno store owners/workers, who have first-hand knowledge, provided richness to the study's outcomes and perhaps early buy-in and support from beneficiaries.

A PBU staff member identified a learning moment when she said: 'What stood out was that youth take targeted saving seriously. This was surprising.' Hence, the methodology calls for rethinking current approaches and evaluate institutional thinking. Another PBU staff member noted that 'as a team, we acquired skills in overall product review'.

PBU notes that the participatory methodology has provided them with an opportunity to receive information from youth about their experiences, enabling factors and barriers to access and use. Above all, the methodology provided PBU with a clear direction, which has supported PBU in their design for a complete product development and implementation plan.

PBU is currently proceeding to design a product and marketing strategy that is based on youth's insights.

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Published by WSBI. © March 2016