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“Reconcile land system changes
with planetary health”

Harnessing youth through participatory action research for transformative territorial health solutions

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Abstract

Integrating One Health approaches with agroecological principles presents a promising framework for enhancing the territories' health. This is especially true when local inhabitants define the key components of their territories and the interconnection of Healths. Such integration can foster agroecological transitions guided by local stakeholders. The present study adopted a participatory action-research methodology to foster research ownership through collaborative training and analysis. A particular emphasis was placed on including youth, balanced representation of ethnic groups, and gender equity during participant selection. We engaged 20 young residents from Keur Momar Sarr, Senegal, who assessed local perceptions, practices, and interactions regarding their territory's health. These residents conducted 148 open-ended structured interviews with randomly selected community members and collectively analysed the data during a weeklong workshop. This collaborative analysis produced comprehensive causal maps illustrating the key actors, components, and drivers affecting territorial health according to residents' perspectives. These systemic causal maps highlighted several interconnected elements related to the evolution of the village, social relations, educational sector in crisis, adverse environmental and socio-economic impacts caused by unsustainable agricultural practices and absent water and forest services, pasture-related challenges including corruption, poor eating habits, and unsanitary conditions. This study examines how involving young residents in the research process can enhance community engagement and support mutual learning. We notably reflect on both the substantive findings from this causal mapping exercise and its influence on participants' sense of legitimacy, empowerment, and agency. The methodology enables understanding the complex causality and interactions that define territorial health from local perspectives, positioning researchers as critical companions rather than analysis leaders. Nonetheless, the approach necessitates building trust with local communities and developing a shared capacity for knowledge co-production, which remains challenging regarding project-based research economy. Particular attention must be addressed to local power dynamics, ensuring equitable participation and fostering empowerment as catalysts for social change.

Keywords: Agroecology, community-driven research methods, empowerment, one health, territorial health

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