

Researching research: The ethics of research and work with children in the Palestinian context

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Abstract

This paper discusses research in the Palestinian context, focusing on both research and practice linked to the development sector. This is done through centering the experiences of academics and development practitioners, analyzing experiences within academic institutions and development organizations, and how knowledge and practice are produced in these contexts. The research also focuses on how methodologies and ethical questions are constituted and how they guide work within these contexts. The article further analyzes research and community development work which focuses on Palestinian children. These various levels of analyses connect as they illuminate positions within globalized systems of power that shape knowledge production and community development practice, how they relate to each other, and the separation between them. The article also analyzes how these complexities particularly manifest in the Palestinian context, where Palestinians are faced with ongoing settler colonialism and the silencing of their narratives. The research adopts an empirical approach utilizing an action research methodology, focusing on researchers, development practitioners, and Palestinian children and adolescents, analyzing them as social actors, and as communities of practice. Whether through their positions in relation to dominant discourses, through their capacities to produce counter-discourses and practice, or through their capacities re-constitute their struggles within shifting terrains.

1. Introduction

Research has been understood to be entangled in colonial projects, where knowledge production, despite discourse over neutrality, is always tied to political projects. This has been the case in relation to various political projects, including Europe's Enlightenment knowledge project and its politics, evident through the development of science's relationship to capitalism and the industrial revolution. This is also apparent in how science has related to the colonies and the scientific discourse it produced, a discourse that has influenced and shaped societies of colonized peoples.

Prominent examples of the utilization of science for colonial war and genocide are plenty, and can be read throughout colonial and imperial history.

Colonial development has also been historically tied to colonial research and narratives of a civilizing mission. Research was used to fuel agendas of modernization and development in the colonial era, in addition to presenting interpretive arguments to explain and justify the effects of colonialism, slavery, and other aspects of imperial violence (Bush, 2013).

Smith (2005) describes a complex world of research interests, institutions, ethical dimensions, researchers, and socially organized actors and communities - depicting a complex reading of the research and knowledge world as an arena of negotiation and competing interests. These complex relations and worlds present evolving critical stances and dangers simultaneously, as old colonial discourses of discovery appear and re-appear in scientific contexts, presenting new and evolving ethical implications. She stresses, that the complexities of these processes appear more pronounced in the margins, such as those of Indigenous communities and vulnerable groups who have been historically targeted by research, and who can find ways to reshape research to revolve around their interests (Smith, 2005).

The Palestinian context presents such a complex context that is certainly a site that has been, and is still targeted by research, international development, and the global institutional frameworks of neo-colonial systems. All the while, still confronted with direct Israeli settler colonialism and its violent processes. At the heart of these encounters, Palestinian children present one of the most vulnerable of groups faced with settler colonial processes and their genocidal dimensions, but also to the knowledge processes tied to these projects (Al-Malki, 2011; Haddad, 2015; Hanieh, 2016; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2014).

On the other end of the spectrum, research is also argued to be an important tool for activism and change as well, and is seen to be also vital for the Palestinian anti-colonial struggle. However, there are challenges and limitations creating fragile environments where such knowledge production and liberatory thinking is persecuted. This is due to a myriad of intersecting factors that repress the Palestinian narrative and Palestinian knowledge production (Abu Moghli, 2023).

Based on these complexities, this research project developed with the goal of researching research in the Palestinian context, and questioning and interrogating research, methodologies, and ethics in the Palestinian context, in addition to the specifics of the topic of research and development work with children. Placing research as an object and subject of inquiry is thus necessary due to its political and colonial entanglements as discussed. Moreover, our research also focuses on the institutional infrastructure of research and community intervention through addressing the methodologies and ethics of the practice of development. Whether it is international development, or local community development, they are all analyzed as spaces which play a crucial role in producing knowledge about Palestinians and Palestinian children, in addition to shaping social and institutional transformations in Palestine through applied practice. This is presented in this research within a complex interplay of factors, recognizing that Palestinian research also exists in confrontation with an ongoing settler-colonial encounter and

within a global system of power that has colonial and imperial effects influencing and suppressing Palestinian narratives.

Based on these discussions, the research set out to answer the following main research questions:

2. Research questions

- How do Palestinian researchers and development practitioners understand research and research methodologies in light of the complexities of the Palestinian context?
- How are ethical considerations and questions surrounding research and community development practice formulated?
- How do these issues manifest in relation to work with Palestinian children specifically?

3. Research objectives

- To analyze how Palestinian researchers and development practitioners understand and develop research and development-related interventions methodologically
- To analyze the ethical considerations, dilemma's, understandings, and practices surrounding research and community development work in Palestine.
- To analyze how work with Palestinian children is understood and conducted particularly in research and community development.
- To develop better approaches to research and development work, in general, and in relation to work with children, particularly focusing on more analytical notions of research ethics.

4. Methodology

Twalo (2019) argues that researchers and policy-makers are on different ends of a spectrum. This is an interpretation that can be utilized to understand the positions and entanglements of researchers and development practitioners. This means that generally, researchers lean more towards the production of knowledge while practitioners on the other end lean towards the use and application of knowledge, however, with varying degrees of difference. The relationship between theory and practice itself and how it is analyzed is a complicated matter, with the overreaching question of whether there are really different kinds of knowledges, whether it is a problem of knowledge transfer, or a problem pertaining to knowledge production. Proposals to resolve these predicaments include practicing engaged scholarship with knowledge producers and practitioners co-producing knowledge. It is argued further that the relationship between theory and practice is addressed through the conversion of knowledge by practitioners and researchers into action, thereby contributing to bridging the gap (Van De Ven & Johnson, 2006). This is interpreted in this research toward approaching the research problem through multiple points of entry while utilizing questions pertaining to both research and practice, thereby building a more nuanced view contributing to both knowledge and action.

Focusing on the processes and production of research can sometimes lead to the assumption that research is a process that occurs within a specified timeframe, and specified positionalities. However, one main aspect of this research is to build on work that analyzes research as a process linked to power-relations, change, and ever-shifting positionalities, which are central aspects for thinking about action research approaches. It is argued that research continues to have effects on researchers and research communities long after it is conducted, with data unfolding and refolding, relations and positionalities shifting, with research continuing to live on (Johansson et al., 2022). This means that our research approach, which works with researchers and development practitioners, and discusses issues pertaining to both knowledge and practice, is also an intervention in these worlds, while still allowing room for everyone involved to reflect on this process, thereby influencing both research and practice.

Robertson (2000) discusses action research as a participatory research methodology where in some cases, the utilization of the methodology itself, can produce interventions within cultures of practice. Action research produces greater awareness among those who utilize the methodology and interact within its frameworks, thereby influencing communities of practice and knowledge production in complex ways. He describes how this influence can be produced on multiple levels, through aiming to produce knowledge and theory about practices, through aiming to use knowledge in practices, and through aiming to form critical groups of researchers and knowledge producers as these interactive processes unfold.

To these ends, reciprocity, reflexivity, and reflections on reality are important. The research itself becomes an interactive process intervening in the work of participants, in addition to the knowledge produced, the researcher's position, and the developing stances of those involved in the process (Robertson, 2000). This is important for this implementation of the methodology in this project's context, where the intervention is not seen to be pertaining only to the action researchers but also to all research participants who are linked in different ways as practitioners of research and development. This is linked to what is seen to be the reciprocity between theory and practice, researcher and researched, thus aiming to produce ripple effects and influence toward the research community as a whole in terms of knowledge produced and the practices and cultures of knowledge (Robertson, 2000).

Based on these foundations, the methodology adopted operationalizes these principles towards Palestinian research, research methodologies, the question of ethics, and how this pertains to research and community development practice in the Palestinian context. This means focusing on how communities of practitioners of research and development understand research, development and community work, and their roles as researchers and development practitioners. Our methodology also investigates their understandings of research methodologies and ethics, research and development work with children, and how these issues are understood within the complexities of the Palestinian context. This is aided by the discussion on how better understandings and cultures of work can be developed within these fields.

Such an approach thus necessitates a qualitative narrative-rich approach, utilizing theoretical themes and concepts while still allowing room for emergence, thus a semi-structured in-depth interview approach, with a sample of Palestinian researchers, development practitioners, researchers working on child-related issues, and development practitioners

working on child-related issues as well. The sample also incorporated the voices of adolescents through a focus group with adolescents organized in partnership with a local organization. In addition, more analytical insight was developed through an analytical workshop held at the end of the data collection stage. In total, 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted, 1 focus group, and 1 analytical workshop, with data being transcribed, and then coded into Atlas TI, where category construction and analysis was produced thematically. The sample was limited to the West Bank areas, with more focus on the central West Bank. While this is a limitation important to consider, it is also important to note that these are the areas with the highest concentration of development organizations and those particularly working with children, in addition to being the areas where organizational headquarters of many organizations are located. Still the sample did diversify locations across the West Bank, with interviews conducted with those working in marginalized areas such as areas in the South and North West Bank

As ethics is a central topic in this research, the research has taken ethical considerations in mind, where it has undergone serious critical consideration. One main aspect was focusing on the benefit of this research towards researched communities as a main guiding principle, but also the research as committed to an anti-colonial stance in terms of the knowledge produced. Another important ethical dimension was the inclusion of the researcher participants as carriers of analytical stances rather than as sources of raw knowledge, an important aspect which indicates how we interpret a participatory outlook. These perspectives tickled down in every step in term of sample, interview practices, and data analysis. All data has been anonymized, in that no identifying information appears in the data, and informed consent has been gained from all participants. The sample included a focus group with adolescents, already active participants in a local organization, thereby aiming to include their voices. The research underwent ethical review and gained approval by the Research Ethics Review Committee of the Center for Development Studies, Birzeit University.

5. Theoretical framework

The central dimension of the theoretical approach adopted was facilitating the analysis of research and development practice in relation to actors' positions within the larger frameworks we have discussed. This includes actors' institutional positioning, but also the larger structures that influence them, including colonial and anti-colonial ones, and their positioning in relation to cultures and histories as well.

Through focusing on the practices of knowledge producers and practitioners as a starting point to construct the theoretical framework, the research thus adopts a social practice approach that is historically and contextually situated. Here, social actors are shaped historically and structurally by the world which they are also influencing and shaping (Holland & Lave, 2019). People are thus historically situated and are influenced by external institutions and forces while they negotiate to reconstitute themselves. Local practice produces and reproduces enduring struggles even within frameworks of local and trans-local institutions and practices. Practice thus entails not just the routinized notions of behaviors but also identity formations and meanings which are shaped and reshaped. The prospects of change and transformation are essential as

history is constructed in-person and through social interaction. Moreover, it is important to stress the positions of difference between actors, which can share many dimensions of enduring struggles and identities but can also contest meaning and practice, aspects which add analytical depth to this formulation (Holland & Lave, 2019).

This brings us to another layer of the analysis produced by this theoretical approach, which is questioning whether these enduring or emerging struggles emerge as new emergent structures in light of new shifting realities. Meaning, as new hybrid identities formulate, do they produce collective identities and action? In this case, and in the world of research, NGOs, and community development, the question is whether Palestinian researchers and development practitioners constitute communities of practice, and in what ways they do so. The same question is also raised in relation to children and adolescents, in how they participate in knowledge production and community development practice in relation to their realities as well.

In terms of communities of practice, this is yet another element of the theoretical framework, and it is within this domain that learning, transformation, and practice-related knowledge can occur as a multidirectional and bidirectional process. Theoretical approaches toward communities of practice recognize different types of knowledges. The concept has been utilized in relation to work with children. Of particular importance here, is bringing in the knowledge-practice nexus more in interaction. Communities of practice as a concept had emerged to understand professional communities and how complex meanings, beliefs, and interactions are produced and mediated. With the contention that communities are entered by newcomers who move slowly from the periphery toward full participation as they acquire the communities' practices and culture (Buysse et al., 2003). Accordingly, what is learned in these communities and the practice-related knowledge of both research and development practice can be analyzed from actors' perspectives, but also how they relate to one another, and whether they can produce communities of practice with collective agencies related to their positions as contextualized social actors.

Accordingly, the theoretical framework focuses on the positions of actors, how they understand themselves as being influenced by various forces and institutions, and how they attempt to constitute themselves in relation to these different forces and in relation to historical struggles, particularly those of being colonized and within dominant colonial knowledge systems and development contexts. Moreover, the research further attempts to analyze how researchers, development practitioners, and children and adolescents in Palestine, produce meanings in light of these discussions and whether they constitute themselves as communities of practice with shared meanings and senses of agency that can produce collective action (Bhattacharyya, 1995).

6. Analysis of data

6.1 Research, coloniality, and the Palestinian context.

Science and scientific research, are no longer understood simply as neutral or apolitical. Science has always been indicated in political, social, and economic contexts. Historically there were many

scientific developments tied to colonial processes and toward the subjugation of populations and the administration of colonized peoples and their lands. The examples of this are plenty, whether the racialized sciences that were produced, or through the use of science in different discursive approaches, such as statistics and cartography by the British East India Company, an example of many such practices of colonial states.

Colonial ethnographies were essential elements of colonial rule, in addition to the extensive use of scientific surveys, mappings, and categorizations which, in the example of India, played a pivotal role in the social engineering of the Indian nation-state, showing the deep entanglements of science, coloniality, and culture (Baber, 2001).

In the Palestinian context, the heritage of British colonialism was utilized in the British mandate's fostering of Zionist colonization. The Zionist Haganna's Intelligence Service (Shai) has conducted surveys of Palestinian areas pre-1948 and produced the village files, which represented an important step towards the violent dispossession of Palestinians from large parts of Palestine in the Nakba. Information gathered about Palestinian villages were detailed and comprehensive, and were seen as crucial prerequisites to the execution of the violent campaigns of ethnic cleansing and forced expulsion in the Nakba in 1948 (Abd al-Jawad, 2016).

The use of research and data-gathering in relation to the colonization of Palestine continued and transformed along with the transformation of the settler-colonial project and its interconnections with imperialism and modes of colonial and imperial governance. Israeli control is very much about such practices, which are intertwined with the Israeli military occupation. An important shift in focus however, entails a focus on the agencies of the colonized through research, and the important and varied attempts of Palestinian knowledge producers to produce their own knowledge projects in relation to these complex realities which they are confronted with.

Yahya (2014) discusses the history of social research and statistics in the Palestinian context toward the contemporary and post-Oslo period. This includes earlier discussions on knowledge production by colonial states, discussed in relation to the British Mandate and beyond, and how Palestinians are narrated and silenced, particularly viewed as objects of colonial administration. Even after the mass expulsion of Palestinians in the Nakba in 1948, remaining Indigenous Palestinians were viewed as a problem for Israel's colonial project in how to bio-politically administer them, particularly narrating Palestinians as demographic threats. In the aftermath of 1967 and the expansion of Israeli settler colonialism through the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Israel sought to bio-politically manage the Palestinians there as well, where knowledge production was also tied to colonial administration.

Since 1967, social science departments, researchers, and students in Palestine began utilizing research to study their own Palestinian society, albeit with limited access to data. The only data available at that time was colonial. There was a preliminary and skeptical use of the Israeli civil administration's data, which was colonial data, not precise, and prediction-based. However, this was the only data available to researchers at that time, who decided to use it albeit recognizing its dangers. This was perceived to be still problematic, leading to the development of small-scale home-grown original research attempts that were more localized in the 1980s, up until the early 1990s (Yahya, 2014).

With time, the Palestinian context saw another important transformation which was also politically infused, through the development of research programs linked to international organizations, such as the Norwegian funded FAFO. These organizations, however, and the work they did was very much linked to the political project at that time, and the developing Oslo political process and how it aimed to reshape Palestinian society. Palestinian society came to be narrated in Oslo's terms to include only the West Bank, Gaza Strip and parts of Jerusalem, excluding historic Palestine and refugee communities abroad, definitions adopted by the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) that came to be established, and the resulting data sets came to be understood as facts by many, and to be used by the emerging development sector where a new research industry emerged and prevailed with the critical outlooks towards data gradually declining (Yahya, 2014).

The aftermath of this complex terrain of research appears in the data, where our research project occurs almost a couple of decades later. With the ongoing intensification of the Israeli settler colonial project and its military occupation years after Oslo and the Second Intifada, a large NGO institutional presence perseveres, albeit different than that of the Oslo years in many ways. Local governance with limited sovereignty is also manifested within this framework, with the Palestinian government operating under colonial rule. Within this framework, the research set out to understand research and community development practices which are placed also within resulting institutional infrastructures of local universities, and local NGOs.

Research is argued to be mainly occurring within the academic landscape in Palestine. Qumsiyeh and Isaac (2012) argue that Palestinian universities are the primary sites of research. In their study, 74.4% of researchers were based in universities, compared to 22.6% in civil society organizations, with a higher level of PhDs in universities as well (66.4%) compared to NGOs (18.4%). On the other hand, MSC holders are a higher percentage in civil society organizations (45.3%), compared to (27.6%) in universities. Their study focuses on what they term research and development, and scientific research, and further showcases that the majority of researchers in Palestine are male (82.3%). Interestingly, the study also reports that around 30% of university staff members in West Bank and Gaza engage in research, on average. While this appears rather high, it is not the case, as the number of full-time researchers in all Palestinian higher education institutes at the time of this study was 78, representing 2% of the total academic staff.

Research participants in this research understood research in varied ways and perspectives, with some interview partners' perspectives understanding it solely through the realm of NGO jargon and international organizations, while others, mostly from the academic side of the sample had a more critical outlook and understanding of research, its role, and the politics and bias of research. However, what is apparent in the data is the general sensation of a weak research infrastructure both at the practice-oriented and the academic-oriented landscape.

Universities here do not see the importance of research. For instance, university research centers are viewed from a financial perspective. It is also an issue dependent on the balance of power. The university even directs researchers toward teaching loads rather than covering research loads. This is due to teaching being more financially viable than research in some important areas. The

issue is that there is no serious interest in research and supporting research. (Interview, a Palestinian academic, 16/7/2025)

As the interview partner has noted, there is a common view that many local academic institutions do not seem to view research as important, or as important as teaching. While some report academic institutions offering some support to research, they generally view it as limited. This view was not that different from views toward research even in more practice-oriented development organization and how research is utilized in their context.

Research has very limited space in development work. Especially since research takes time and requires patience. The right tools and people are needed and missing in civil society and private institutions. Opening up new avenues through research is not easy, but important in order to build future work, develop projects, or develop interventions.

Many organizations rush their work as they rely on secondary information and research. They try to benefit from secondary sources in the context of [development] intervention. While this can be a good thing, it is not for many reasons. Mainly because, in development, you are supposed to be have enough time to produce good work. Development research is rushed, even research components in some projects are planned to occur in conjunction with, or even after completing interventions, making the practice-knowledge link difficult [to manifest]. (Interview, development practitioner at a local NGO, 17/8/2025)

This was a common perspective of interviewees towards academic institutions, local NGOs, and international NGOs alike. Interview partners narrate dominant research practices there being merely part of a checklist, rather than a foundational dimension of understanding, knowing, or practicing.

Similarly, when it comes to work with children, there seems to be an understanding that there is a rising trend in relation to the focus on work with children in Palestine, on both the practice and research levels. Global discussions on work with children are also beginning to appear in the Palestinian context. Noting that research with children has undergone various shifts in perspectives with views alternating between viewing children as passive toward more critical approaches that view children as active participants in the construction of their social lives, thus viewing childhood as a social and cultural category (Cavazzoni et al., 2021). Indigenous children in settler colonial contexts however, are faced with different realities, as they are targeted through state expansion. The Israeli military apparatus normalizes violence against Palestinian children by producing them as dehumanized and denied-of-childhood insurgents deserving of disciplining. This is rejected by Palestinian children who refuse being dehumanized and demonized and resist this, aspects which become clearer through analyzing children's perspectives (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2014). This was similarly noted in the data, in the narratives of adolescents depicting a complex understanding of reality and the effects of settler colonialism and military violence in their lives.

There are many things that we face as challenges. The occupation. I mean, OK, you're in Ramallah, it has relative safety, but it's not always safe, it's temporary safety compared to Al Mughayer village for instance, where the occupation army invades every day. Yesterday, a person was shot in his stomach, and another in his arm. They can shoot you and kill you. Even in Ramallah, you do not know when they will invade or when they will shoot, they can invade at any moment. My family lives in Al Mughayer and in Ramallah, we move between both areas.

On Saturday we will go to pick olives. We will be in danger, especially of settler violence. The other day they [the settlers] beat someone on his head, he was bleeding. They can easily shoot someone, they are armed. Another time they killed someone. Sometimes they shoot the water tanks. They are usually protected by the occupation's soldiers as well. Last Friday at midnight they burned 3 cars and a house. Life in the villages is a lot more difficult. (Adolescent participant, focus group with adolescents, 20/10/2025)

The discussion on how to approach the topic of Palestinian children through research also offers complex and varied perspectives. Some experienced academics interviewed iterated the necessity of rethinking research with children in Palestine to reflect the peculiarities and specifics of the Palestinian context. This would pertain to methodologies, ethical dimensions, and overall research agendas in relation to the settler colonial encounter. This view, was less likely to be iterated among NGO practitioners. This could be a result of the structural effects of NGO methodologies and ethical components as dominant and influential in that context, and less likely to offer critical spaces in the practice-oriented dimensions, an issue explored further in the upcoming sections.

This however, was not the case for all NGO-linked practitioners' interviews. As some NGO staff members offered very rich experiences in critical work with children while being well aware of the effects of colonial violence and how to address it through work with children, including work with child prisoners and the ethical and methodological challenges it entails. These comprehensive and analytical views were rare; however, they were there, and were offered by a few interview partners. This was indeed an aspect that shows some NGOs and practitioners as social actors who present histories of struggles and their continuities. Some interview partners have shown these dimensions in their practices through technical aspects, and the more limited incidence was of those who have showed a comprehensive understanding and its translation toward practice, indicating an analytical understanding of positioning, social history, and how they can become communities of practice and redirect and shape practice. However, the presence of such perspectives is obscured by the growth of a vast terrain of NGOs competing for limited resources which is the dominant narrative in the data. While another strand of critical perspectives seemed more about discourse, and appeared through discursive strategies and rehearsed critique.

6.2 The academic institution in Palestine

The transformations linked to the Oslo process, and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) are discussed in detail in much literature about Palestinian development. Where the global transformation toward NGOization and institutionalization of social movements manifested in Palestine as well, leading to the NGOization of the Palestinian grassroots (Haddad, 2015; Hammami, 2000; Hanieh, 2016; Tabar, 2013).

This is discussed in analyzing the post-Oslo years and the Second Intifada in relation to the intensification of Israeli settler colonialism and the Israeli military occupation. Moreover, the prevalence of neoliberal development, and how these intersections affected the institutional and social landscapes in Palestine became a main theme in analyzing this period. In terms of academia, it is not to say that things have been different. As the same transformations have also linked the Palestinian academic institution to globalized knowledge systems and power relations. Education and higher education became more institutionalized through governance that is also linked to international treaties and institutions through the institutional frameworks. In addition to development interventions within education through various projects supported by international funding, with examples of projects funded by the World Bank, European Union, Ford Foundation, among others (Haddad, 2015; Hanieh, 2016; Qumsiyeh & Isaac, 2012). Meaning, the educational institutional landscape within the globalized system, shares similarities with the governmental and non-governmental one. This however, is only one dimension of these links, there are many other ways that academic institutions are positioned and produced, when analyzing the global academic landscape, which are beyond the scope of this discussion.

The question of the effects of global power relations on knowledge was seen by Palestinian researchers interviewed to be linked to controlling the narrative. This can also be linked to the analysis and critical perspectives on NGOs and NGO work, in how their work is framed in relation to metanarratives of the colonization of Palestine. The issue of academic freedom is a prevalent discourse among academic institutions. However, the question of Palestine challenges the notion of academic freedom. Globally, censorship of events critical of Israel, and attacks of scholars who advocate for the Palestinian cause are plenty, leading up to loss of livelihood and public attacks and defamations. Moreover, free speech is also being suppressed in Palestinian universities (Hamamra & Gould, 2024; Salaita, 2015; Shwaikh & Gould, 2019). One researcher, discussed working in a funded project in a Palestinian university, and having faced critiques by funders for the use of the settler colonial analysis, despite being widely prevalent and normal in academia and beyond for analyzing the Palestinian case. This showcases, the direct attempts to shape Palestinian and even global academic narratives through instruments of funding.

The data shows Palestinian academics to be critical of the institutional landscape, global power relations, and the influence of Western academia, but also policies of local academic organizations that do not see the importance of research, and adopt Western approaches, methods, and ethical dimensions uncritically. In essence, even local ethical committees and review boards are seen to be devoid of constructive elements towards researchers as iterated by some interview partners, viewing them to be copy-paste copies from Western counterparts.

Interview partners from the academic side discussed the injustice in academic publishing practices toward the Global South, but moreover, the better access to resources and funding that academics in the Global North enjoy.

In relation to critiques of the academic institution from the practice-oriented landscape, one interview partner expressed that academic work does not succeed in producing good community work. This is a limitation on the practice-related applications of academic knowledge. This appeared more of an issue in relation to periphery areas and areas outside of Ramallah.

The higher the education, the higher the degree of complexity. The community needs you to speak their language. The intellectual or the academic, who comes and does not speak in the community's language, adds to this complexity.

This is the magic recipe for the continued failure of any social action. Community work must start from the ground, not from the ground in the sense of just speaking with the people, from the ground in the sense of speaking with the people in their language.

Because in order to enter communities, in order for the doors to open for you, you need to speak their language. (Interview, a representative of a community organization in a rural area, 17/9/2025)

Similarly, another interview partner expressed that many research practices are extractive, and take from communities and do not return to them, further increasing the knowledge-practice gaps particularly in relation to how social sciences are practiced. Intellectuals have become neoliberal products seeking promotion rather than organic intellectuals engaged with their communities.

What is also interesting in the data, is that development practitioners have rarely viewed universities and academic institutions as spaces of producing knowledge that can be utilized by practitioners. Moreover, many of them viewed research as a technical component within development projects, even some understanding research only within the NGO jargon (Needs assessment, etc.). Similarly, many of these practice-related NGOs do not have research units, and those that do, operate within the aforementioned NGO research jargon.

Adolescents in the data have not discussed academic institutions much, with some mention of training programs there, and interest in visiting physical spaces of these institutions. However, interviews with academics revealed a distance in the way the topic of research with children was discussed, as if the topic specifics were generally avoided, or discussed on the general level, albeit with some exceptions. Still, showcasing the connection between academic institutions and NGOs within the globalized systems of knowledge, the newer trend of work pertaining to children appears simultaneously in local academic institutions and NGOs with an increase in such projects and interest in both sides. While the narrative of these projects stemming from local needs is dominant, and not to negate such need, however, it is questionable how such need was established independent from international funding. To spell it out, the question is, who sets the priorities for both academic institutions and NGOs?

6.3 The NGO in the Palestinian context

There is a wealth of research about development and NGOs and their roles in depoliticizing communities globally, and how this has manifested in Palestine through the transformation of Palestine social movements to NGOs, but also the growth of an NGO landscape and its influence on Palestinian society and politics. Billions have been spent since Oslo through EU and US funding, while at the same time disregarding the Palestinian reality in facing the Israeli military occupation and settler colonial project, in addition to actually undermining democracy and economic development of Palestinians (Farsakh, 2016; Hammami, 2000).

Research on NGOs in Palestine falls in line with global critique on the role of NGOs in reshaping societies. One study analyzes NGOs in Palestine and Morocco and argues that NGOs have produced forms of patronage and governance through bureaucratization, depoliticization, and have become sites where power is exercised. Power and governance are distributed through relationships of patronage, as local NGOs and their funders form an unequal, yet mutually beneficial relationship. Professionalization and the transformation of the political to the technical is seen as a mode of governance (Atia & Herrold, 2018). These elements are prevalent when analyzing the data, albeit noting specifics of the case and context.

The data shows the aftermath of years of development interventions and development work however, from the perspective of NGO workers. This is presented in how local NGO workers view the NGO in Palestine today, its relationship with international organizations, its relationship with local communities, and its impact. Another important issue analyzed is whether Palestinian NGOs form communities of practice, and how they relate to social action.

There are obvious mixed perspectives by the interviewees toward the local Palestinian NGO. Some view a stark difference between local and international NGOs, viewing local NGOs to have more space for discussion and critical perspectives, a space that is less available in interactions with international organizations. Critiques by interview partners however, focus on the competitiveness of NGOs over funding, with some describing local NGOs as empires. Even instances of collaboration between local NGOs turn out to be acts of necessity in situations where funders require such collaborations as a prerequisite to funding.

Many describe the problem with funding and NGO projects which come to serve donor agendas rather than local community needs. However, some experienced NGO practitioners did describe imposing their own room for maneuver and iterating themselves as local organizations coming to serve their communities and negotiating and contesting relations with funding bodies on that premise. This falls in line with the analysis of how some social actors do constitute historic struggles in shifting terrains and contexts. This does pertain to work that confronts the effects of settler colonial violence and thus does entail community work serving local needs.

The general perspective, however, is that of a strong competition between NGOs over limited resources, with some NGOs becoming empires, while others are simply profit-oriented. In the analytical workshop held, one participant discussed his view through a transformation of non-profit work into profit. Another important dimension is that there is the unmistakable

recognition of the power relation of funding, and that political stances against the political project of development, will simply lead to losing funding and “closing shop”, leading to loss of income. This is discussed extensively by various interview partners and in the analytical workshop, that the dominant discourse of development is imposed through clear power relations. Resistance to this project seems to be limited, as argued by many interviewees.

The result of this situation is that funders decide which NGOs become more powerful, while others are weakened. This is usually tied to political positions and notions, particularly for those organizations that resist the discourse of international organizations.

As stated, some interview partners within the development landscape did iterate critical perspectives of NGOs showcasing this understanding.

There is clear discrimination and racism in the international institutional structure in the field of development, because Western knowledge and Western frameworks are the basic standard imposed on us. This is due to the Western political and economic dominance, which transformed their vision of development into the dominant model. Development projects are measured and evaluated according to Western standards, not according to the needs of the people.

The global development system is directly related to the political and economic reality governed by the neoliberal capitalist system. In other words, development does not occur in isolation from the interests of this system, but is used as a tool for hegemony and the reproduction of power relations.

Consequently, development projects often turn into a commodity related to the funder’s agenda, and not necessarily the needs of the people. International NGOs, and even the United Nations agencies, are all part of this system, and will directly contribute to the marginalization of local narratives, especially if these narratives challenge the prevailing political and economic structures. (Interview, development practitioner at a local NGO, 9/8/2025)

In terms of adolescents, they depicted some positive dimensions and some critiques of the work of organizations. In general, NGOs appear more in adolescents’ narratives than academic institutions. However, we must take care in terms of generalization. Still, a number of adolescent participants have critiqued the unavailability of many programs in marginalized areas.

I’m talking about, for example, [Institution name anonymized] in Ramallah. There are people, for example, in [A village nearby - anonymized]. How are they going to get to Ramallah? If they want to come to a meeting, they have to travel some distance, and go through Israeli military checkpoints. Basically, they can't come. So why can't there be different activities? Activities in every village and place? Instead of being located only in Ramallah [city], organizations should be in all villages. This would allow everyone to

participate in their activities. (Adolescent, focus group with adolescents, 20/10/2025).

6.4 The relationship between the academic institution and the NGO

The interface of development practitioners and academic researchers is a debated topic in development studies, with academics narrating themselves at many times to be linked to practice and practitioners within development claim their work is evidence-based. This relationship however is subject of discussion, whether through the use of academic knowledge in practice, or through better collaboration in research processes (Aniekwe et al., 2012)

In the analytical workshop conducted within this research, an important theme that arose was the discussion of the relationship between the academic institution and the NGO, as the workshop included representation from both sides, and the research topic itself is placed within this interface. Viewing this research project as participatory, this was part of our discussion among academics and practitioners, many of whom have iterated the need for better collaboration and continued discussions within this framework. One challenge, as argued by some of the NGO practitioners, is how research is communicated by academics and academic institutions, as academic jargon is heavy, and is of limited usefulness for policy makers and practitioners.

Other ways of communicating research are deemed necessary to develop this interface. Moreover, various interview partners and workshop participants have stressed the need for continuing this dialogue involving academics and NGOs, which started within our research project, as a way forward to bridge the gap between research and practice, but also, to discuss these issues directly which can be useful in developing this interface. Other interview partners have stressed that these discussions should also influence policies, be linked to government organizations, and help coordinate efforts towards comprehensive and complementary development research and work.

Many organizations conduct field studies, but how much of this research is actually used in national strategic plans or in instigating Palestinian development or change? Unfortunately, this is rare. Research is usually part of a project—a project written for a funder. So [For example,] I conduct a survey, or I hold a workshop to share [research] results, and [that's it], the study is completed.

Development surveys and studies should involve civil society organizations. These organizations should be linked to the development needs of Palestinian society and connected to strategic plans involving the government, ministries, and [all] institutions. The third, and most crucial, aspect is the need for a stronger relationship between academic institutions and civil society organizations. This helps address community issues, conduct studies, research, and surveys. For example, if we were to quickly review the number of surveys conducted since the beginning of 2025, we'd find 10 surveys conducted on the same topic. There are many other ignored topics, without any input, even though they

require further research. Most importantly, the government seems absent from all of this, almost as if they are not on the same page (Interview, development practitioner at a child's rights organization, 14/8/2025).

Other interview partners however, offered a contradicting view to this analysis. They viewed research within their organizations as justified and purposeful, indicating different perspectives or different work ethics and practices among NGOs in relation to research, but also, that critiques of NGO work are not necessarily adopted by all those within. This is an aspect which we can see clearly in the data. This explanation can be linked to the theoretical framework and the analysis in that there are different communities of practice being produced, those with differing beliefs and work ethics, those produced through the dominant systems that reproduce these mainstream discourses, while at the same time, social actors can produce or “revive” counter discourses within these spaces as well. This basically entails how actors reproduce systems or counter-systems, or something in between, through their roles as social actors and communities of practices within the larger frameworks in which they are constituted.

Every research we conduct is justified and clearly defined within our organization. We analyze the benefits. We then share results with relevant organizations and individuals, including international funding organizations. We ensure that findings and recommendations also reach individual research participants. We also assess their benefit from our work (Interview, local NGO development practitioner, 19/7/2025).

This is not to say that the interview partner is a representation of a trend, rather, that communities of practice are produced in varying degrees, including those by local organizations within the larger development system, which can be linked to the professionalization of the political and a metanarrative of development (Atia & Herrold, 2018). Our question is whether the reflective stance of some practitioners which is politically critical toward coloniality in development and academia can also formulate alternative communities of practice. This is an emergent dimension albeit with limited incidence, and can be questioned on whether it is capable of producing collective action.

6.5 Exploring methodologies

Al-Malki (2011) argues that Palestine presents an anti-research environment, thus being unsuitable to research. Palestine as a sensitive environment, influences how research is conducted and is at many times refused. He further discusses the problem with borrowing methodologies produced in Western institutions and societies and using them uncritically in such a context.

The issue of methodologies appeared in the discussions with interview partners, in relation to producing academic research, but more-so in relation to the practice-related work of NGOs, and research and work with Palestinian children. The academics we interviewed discussed the politics of research on a larger scale, that of the North-South power dynamics, colonial relations, the imposition of colonial concepts and approaches, and the discussion of decolonization. It is clear that they view a necessity for re-examining methodologies and

developing new methodologies in light of Palestinian reality, albeit without discussing specifics. Methodological questions were discussed particularly in relation to the issue of the ethics of work with children as part of the larger question of research in the Palestinian context. In the analytical workshop, it was viewed that there should be a larger discussion on community work in Palestine and the relationship with research. However, the discussion has remained mainly pertaining to ethics rather than methodologies as a whole.

The discussion of methodologies and different methods and tools was more present in discussions with NGO practitioners, particularly technical dimensions and participatory tools and approaches, which are a dominant discourse in development. Various interviewees from NGOs have discussed such approaches, in addition to more traditional research tools such as surveys, needs-assessments, and focus groups.

On work with children, the issue of methodologies was discussed by some interview partners, detailing how they utilize local storytelling and local ways of communication rather than globalized approaches. In terms of more complex work with children, one workshop participant discussed how methodologies are limited in dealing with the complex realities of Palestinian children, particularly those experiences related to colonial violence, where no suitable methodologies exist, leading practitioners to adapt methodologies.

Accordingly, we can see that some academics and practitioners have stressed the need to critically examine Western methodologies, in addition to the need for developing new or adapted methodologies linked to the Palestinian reality, and capable of understanding and addressing it. Such methodologies should also address the larger questions of the politics of knowledge and practice, and how this can tickle down to specific tools and practices that can be utilized to benefit Palestinian communities.

6.6 Children's participation

Children's participation in research and community development planning and activities is a rising topic in Palestine. During this research, the topic has been on the agenda of many organizations, many of whom were working toward forming structures for children's participation such as child councils. We have conducted a focus group with a group of adolescents who have participated in work of a local organization. The experience was generally positive, in that the adolescents expressed positive change in their roles due to their participation, and they were consulted on issues pertaining to children views of community work, community spaces, and child-rights among other issues. Moreover, we found that adolescents participating in these activities came from diverse social and class backgrounds. This however, is a limited experience in that we cannot generalize, rather, it shows prospects for positive dimensions pertaining to children and adolescent participation in the work of organizations and in research.

Utilizing our theoretical framework in relation to children and adolescents. We stress that this is discussed in relation to a sample that is limited to just the focus group with adolescents, who are active participants in a local organization. Still, this can be also linked to discussions of children participation in the broader sample. Some members of the focus group did showcase

elements of being contextualized and historically constituted social actors, iterating complex understanding of their realities as Palestinian adolescents confronted with settler colonialism and military occupation, connecting their participation in organizational spaces to this reality. They did also display critiques towards NGOs in the Palestinian context and in relation to their realities as adolescents. Accordingly, when provided with possibilities for participation, they did showcase capacity of being communities of practice as well. As with discussions within NGOs and academia, these are communities of practice that are produced within spaces of dominant knowledge and practice systems. Another dimension that is important to note, is that children and adolescents, through their participation, are also taught roles within these spaces through interaction, and the question is whether their critical perspectives can produce opposing or alternative communities of practice, a similar question in relation to NGO practitioners and academics. Also, whether they can challenge the limitations on their participation, as imposed by organizations, thereby showcasing transformative capacity.

In interviews with organizations that utilized child-centered approaches, these views toward children were deemed as essential towards understanding and developing research and community interventions, describing limitations from more traditional views, and stressing the need to move towards child participation. Some organizations expressed ethical concerns on the participation of children, mainly the issue of the exploitation of children's voices to legitimate research and intervention. These types of concerns should be addressed in terms of ethical considerations and the weighing of benefits and risks, however, showcasing the necessity of the larger discussions on ethics of research and community work in the Palestinian context, particularly with relation to children's participation.

Based on our research, children's participation in such institutional spaces is becoming a trend. We observed various discussions among organizations over the creation of child councils and various structures of child participation. These discussions did not include participation from children or adolescents. This includes the discussion of central aspects such as the composition of such councils, or their mandate. These discussions also validated organizational practices of selecting council members by organizations themselves. While some organizations did practice some democratic forms of child/adolescent selection that included children's participation in the process. This also shows that ethical questions should also extend toward an analysis of organizational practices toward children. Meaning, is it ethical to limit children's participation to the actual participation itself? Shouldn't participation include participating in discussing the main issue of their participation as well?

6.7 Ethics, research, and development work

It is argued that despite the centrality of research and knowledge production for the Palestinian narrative and for Palestinians in their struggle for liberation and against colonialism, there is a hyper institutionalization of academic spaces of Palestinians, effectively leading to their integration into global academic systems. Research ethics and related procedures in the Palestinian academic institution can play a bigger role than they currently do, as they are currently not fulfilling the needs of producing knowledge for liberation, despite having the capacity to be

tools for liberation (Abu Moghli, 2023). This is related to thinking of research ethics beyond the institutionalized and global frameworks towards those of the Palestinian reality in confrontation with settler-colonialism, imperialism, and the frameworks of international development intervention. The analytical workshop carried out within our research project, had the central aim of producing a framework for Palestinian research ethics and ethics for the practice of development work, particularly focusing on the topic of children. This however, turned out to be an impossible task. Workshop participants have stressed the need for a larger and a national-level comprehensive discussion involving academics, academic institutions, and development organizations, respectively, developing a general outlook on the roles of knowledge production and development work in the Palestinian context, while analyzing these complex realities that define the context today.

There is agreement on the challenges of research ethics in academic institutions, in that even critical and anti-colonial methodologies and guidelines are adopted uncritically and according to global trends. Moreover, ethical procedures in universities remain technical and limited as discussed by interview partners. The issue of community benefit appears as a slogan used by academics rather than translating into serious efforts to link research to practice, an aspect that was discussed in the analytical workshop.

Development practitioners have also described the complexity of any unifying effort for development organizations competing over limited funding. Where even collaborative discussions are linked to prospects of funding and donor requirements. Ethical guidelines are at many times linked to donor requirements, with some organizations developing their own standards, but local ethical considerations at many times remain unwritten and in need of iteration. More importantly, there is need to address the ethical question of the role of NGOs in the Palestinian context, their relationship with funders, and how this influences policy and shapes Palestinian communities. This was also discussed in the analytical workshop as a central aspect defining ethical considerations before moving to the technical dimensions.

Depictions of ethical considerations when working with children were varied in the data, but with a dominant technical approach, as with research and development work in general. However, ethical considerations for development work appear more when working with children than with other groups. However, there is a general feeling of either acceptance of dominant procedures, or the desire for deeper engagement with ethical issues. Dominant procedures include anonymizations, consent forms, safeguarding and just assessment procedures, among others. Which are mainly linked to globalized protocols in working with children. Some institutions as stated, have specific procedures that do consider the Palestinian context as well. This includes for instance, working with child prisoners, and how to ethically engage with such complex interventions and topics. One interview partner has expressed that his organization's areas of focus in development work do stem for real community needs, particularly when working with Palestinian children, but also developing the best ways to do such work ethically. This discussion was taken further in the analytical workshop, as both academics and practitioners stressed the need to rethink ethical considerations in the Palestinian context on a deeper level.

I believe that a researcher's identity is inseparable from their Palestinian identity. I always use the concept of "deficit" to analyze

the West's role in dealing with us. They view us as helpless, incapable of making decisions, and we wait for their definitions and concepts of morality. I agree that ethical measures are important, but they must be built from our culture. How can we expect the West, which supports genocide against us and sends us bombs, to dictate our ethical standards for dealing with children? This means we must build our ethical standards from our identity and the ethics inherent in our culture.

The local community should be the one to build and define ethics, not just in the academic sphere. In a conversation with [name anonymized] from an orphanage in the Gaza Strip, we discussed the need to focus on the local community's capacity to act and define ethics, and to reject having UNICEF and UN concepts imposed upon us. In reality, authority doesn't create vision, and we shouldn't wait for funders to build our ethical vision and shape our identity.

Academics, professors, school teachers, and anyone working with children in local institutions. We must work together. We should build ethics from our culture. We shouldn't simply read those coming from the West, copy them, or wait for funders to define what's ethical and what's not. We must engage with Western funding for research and development projects in a way that preserves our local culture. (Interview, a Palestinian academic, 18/7/2025)

6.8 Engagement with funding

As the previous interview partner has stated, a view that was iterated by others, albeit in a limited sense, was how to develop a strategy toward dealing with funding, whether in the academic, or at the development practice level, even with issues such as ethics, or specific issues such as work with children in the Palestinian context.

It is argued, that NGOs have been essentially driven by neoliberal rationalities toward transforming societies away from collective national liberation toward ideas of enterprise, which can really be seen here (Merz, 2012). The deepening effects of the securitization of international aid and its link to Israeli settler colonialism and the targeting of Palestinian civil society create further challenges (Zorob & Paluszek, 2025), in that individual or enterprise thinking and responses that have become dominant, are more likely to be reproduced.

Overly critical views of international funding and the need to develop self-funded activities have been discussed by some interview partners. While others have not discussed any overt critique or ways forward to deal with the challenges of funding and doing real community work and development that is directed toward liberation. There is a view however, that appears more pragmatic, in that it holds some prospects for addressing the problem of competition between NGOs. This is the view that NGOs should develop unified standards in dealing with funding and how it interacts with local organizations, their policies, and programs. This is similar to what was

being said by the interview partner above, albeit more limited, and appeared mainly in relation to the NGO realm, where funding has been a central topic. In practice however, these initiatives were discussed in the data and seen to be constantly undermined by the competitiveness of local organizations over funding. This is the central challenge toward better developing local development organizations and practitioners as contextualized communities of practice.

This seems less pronounced within academic institutions, in that they do have more capacity to frame their own policies. However, this influence is complex and viewed by academics interviewed to be experienced on an increasing level in their interaction with local academic systems and international funding as well, thus being also an issue in academia and the academic institution. As with NGOs, international funding has also shaped different models of academic institutions also pertaining to metanarratives of development, or how the Palestinian condition is narrated. Thus, the coloniality of international funding, while less apparent in academia, is still persevering. Interview partners have indicated that even the critical views in academia are at many times linked to global trends and discussions, sometimes emanating from the Global North, where even critical discourse and narrative is being shaped and appropriated in various ways.

6.9 Communities of practice

The theoretical discussions of social practice and communities of practice are of particular importance despite of the complex realities depicted in the data. While the idea of communities of practice is linked to situated processes of knowledge generation and learning, they are still situated within larger cultural and historic frameworks. With some defining these as emergent systems of relationships between actors, activities, and the world, which are developing (Amin & Roberts, 2008). This is of central importance to our analysis, as viewing the development sector in the data, one can see the different perspectives, but some aspects of a developing community of practice, albeit slowly developing, or one which has the basis for developing but has not developed yet. The development sector is depicted as heavily individualized and competitive, where collective reflection and discussion is limited, and even when it does appear, it appears within limited and questionable spaces. Even practice-based reflection that is of technical nature is depicted as limited. The variance in how development practitioners and knowledge producers view themselves as political actors is where prospects for social and community practice is seen, one that is historically and culturally embedded. This necessity is articulated by interview partners on various ends of the spectrum, however action and practice within these arenas does not appear extensively in the data. In our intervention, we saw that our research in itself fosters this critical reflection, even if it is a miniscule effect, however, it has the capacity in instigate further discussions and reflections that are deemed necessary by various individualized actors operating within similar positions in the development or academic terrain, and in the rising topic of work with children as well, when contextualized accordingly.

The data also shows a structural effect towards producing communities of practice that carry the technical discourse of development. These are effectively NGO-ized spaces. In addition, the reproduction of Western knowledge systems in the academic sphere is also noted. A similar effect and subject formation influences on children and adolescents participating in these spaces

can also be noted. This effect is not uniform, as we can clearly observe various critical perspectives on these political grand-structures shaping knowledge and practice as well. However, the reality of communities of practice in the data show difficulty in producing practice outside the spaces in which they are produced. Moreover, the NGOization of the traditional grassroots, decades later, has significantly reduced capacity of NGOs to turn critique into action, as observed in the data.

7. Conclusion

The research explored and analyzed the practices and power dynamics of knowledge production, research, and development practice in the Palestinian context, in addition to ethics and methodologies, while focusing on how these questions shape work with Palestinian children.

The larger frameworks of international funding and NGOization have, over the years, produced institutions, infrastructures, practices, and dominant discourses that shape the practice and knowledge surrounding development in Palestine. This includes the production of institutional contexts, professions, and actors which produce and reproduce these discourses and institutions, and benefit from their continued perseverance.

The academic context is also linked to similar institutional frameworks and structures of the international system, whether through governance, international funding, and international organizations, or through direct interaction within the academic institutions in the North and South, the power politics of academic knowledge production, or the prevalence of Western academic education and the metanarratives within it.

On the structural level, the systems that shape applied and academic knowledge systems appear heavily linked, further contributing to the analysis of whether different knowledges and practices exist, or whether they constitute narratives and epistemological outlooks that shape how they manifest.

At the same time, the prevalence of these narratives and discourses can be seen as natural as the contexts and frameworks that produced them expanded over the years, however, their expansion has also allowed actors to reconstitute themselves as social actors with histories in person and with enduring struggles that have productive capacity to influence and reshape this dominant discourse. The varying degrees of agentic influence are seen, ranging from critique within spaces provided within these systems, toward formulating new meanings and spaces within these spaces, or toward the production of new approaches that seek to challenge this hegemony. This is not a general trend, but shows rising constitutions of identities that can produce new communities of practice that can challenge and resist development.

This is important as an overreaching analytical principle that has appeared in different ways in this research, particularly through discussions on the control over narrative. Where international funding, the globalized academic world, and the local structures they produce, are all understood to be targeting Palestinian knowledge systems and narratives in light of colonial realities. This understanding is crucial as we see it developing and can be a stop towards producing praxis that is able to challenge dominant power relations. Moreover, this is important in how

solidarities across such spaces are produced globally, as such critique of development, knowledge systems, and praxis, is also linked to global counter-discourses which are also producing structures that are shaping how new communities of practice can emerge as well.

Ethical Statement

All interview data linked to this paper has been anonymized and for which informed consent has been obtained. Focus group consent was gained through the partner organization that coordinated the focus group. Ethical approval was gained from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the Center for Development Studies, with approval reference number 1-2025.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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