Building data from the bottom up

Working with peer researchers from vulnerable groups in Africa to understand their [qualitative] mobility experiences and needs
Starting at the grass-roots

• Journeys are embedded in social, political and economic structures

• Quantitative data can tell us a lot about mobility IF we know what key information to collect

• But how do we discover what these data need to encompass - especially if we are working with the most vulnerable in society?
Who are we talking about?

Common vulnerable groups - Women; Children; Older people [especially if infirm]; People with disabilities; Minority disadvantaged ethnic groups; Unemployed

Often hidden from view BUT uneven power relationships affect who goes where, when, by what mode + engagement with wider structures
Current mobilities: embodied, gendered and socially coded!
How do we reach them?

- Working to understand the barriers and opportunities for improved mobility/access of vulnerable groups requires deep knowledge of their circumstances, experiences, needs and aspirations.

- How can we achieve this? In Africa I argue that peer-research offers a powerful base as a precursor to more conventional/remote methods of qualitative and quantitative data collection.

Qualitative Research 2016 v.16 no. 3 293-304.
Building peer research to promote mobility justice

- Participants selected from the vulnerable group; one week training (e.g. in-depth interviewing; mobile interviews)
- Peer researchers conduct research with their peers for an agreed time period – regular support from RAs
- Peer researchers identify key questions and context for subsequent academic qualitative and quantitative research phases
- Peer researchers engage effectively with external stakeholders at project Consultative Group meetings because they have collected evidence themselves
Field practice

- Used with in-country academic and practitioner collaborators, 2006-, in a series of mobility/transport studies with vulnerable groups

- Children 9-18y, 2006- [Ghana, Malawi, South Africa]
  www.dur.ac.uk/child.mobility/
  www.dur.ac.uk/child.phones/

- Older people 60+, 2011- [Tanzania]

- Young unemployed women, 2019- [Tunis, Abuja, Cape Town]: https://transportandyouthemploymentinafrica.com
Learning to do peer research with children

- 70 ‘child’ researchers, 11-19 years [Ghana, Malawi, South Africa]
- 1-week training workshop [2 per country]
- Young people select methods, location, time-scale for physical + virtual mobility studies
- Field support from RAs and collaborators
- Findings feed into larger adult academic research study – identifies key questions
Training with HelpAge
Our peer researchers use their own evidence to tell Tanzania’s Chief Medical Officer for Health why he needs to pay more attention to transport issues.
Our peer research team at work in Tunis
Our peer research team at work in Abuja
Concluding reflections on the peer research method for data production

- Needs intensive time inputs from support staff
- Ethical considerations – e.g. remuneration, field hazards
- Disappointment if no positive impacts/outputs
- Identifies hidden problems, hidden opportunities
- Community confidence to tackle experts
- Ensures key questions/issues embedded in subsequent qual/quant research

OVERALL, STRONGER CONFIDENCE THAT WE ARE ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS THAT CAN HELP IMPROVE THE LIVES OF VULNERABLE GROUPS AND THAT COMMUNITIES FEEL OWNERSHIP AS ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN THE DATA COLLECTION AND REVIEW PROCESS