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Empowering Community Knowledge: A Qualitative Examination of Knowledge Mobilization Barriers Involving Community-Based Organizations
Une recherche qualitative sur les freins à l'implication des organisations communautaires dans des projets de mobilisation des connaissances avec des chercheurs, dans une visée d'empowerment des organisations communautaires

Hamid Golhasany, Blane Harvey (iD) and Ollivier Prigent

Article abstract

This study investigates the potential of community-based organizations (CBOs) to enhance knowledge mobilization (KMb) through reciprocal and empowering collaborations with academic researchers. Using a constructivist qualitative methodology, the research explored how CBOs perceive and experience KMb relationships and identified challenges in fostering mutually beneficial KMb relationships. Data were gathered via semi-structured interviews with 11 participants from nine Montréal-based CBOs. Findings indicate that CBOs distinguish between direct service beneficiaries and academic collaborators, often prioritizing immediate community needs over KMb objectives. They face resource deficits, siloed practices, and complex decision-making; participants also noted a lack of recognition and ownership of contributions that are frequently undocumented and undervalued. The study advocates a more inclusive, reciprocal KMb framework that fully recognizes CBOs' local knowledge.

Empowering Community Knowledge: A Qualitative Examination of Knowledge Mobilization Barriers Involving Community-Based Organizations

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Abstract

This study investigates the potential of community-based organizations (CBOs) to enhance knowledge mobilization (KMb) through reciprocal and empowering collaborations with academic researchers. Using a constructivist qualitative methodology, the research explored how CBOs perceive and experience KMb relationships and identified challenges in fostering mutually beneficial KMb relationships. Data were gathered via semi-structured interviews with 11 participants from nine Montréal-based CBOs. Findings indicate that CBOs distinguish between direct service beneficiaries and academic collaborators, often prioritizing immediate community needs over KMb objectives. They face resource deficits, siloed practices, and complex decision-making; participants also noted a lack of recognition and ownership of contributions that are frequently undocumented and undervalued. The study advocates a more inclusive, reciprocal KMb framework that fully recognizes CBOs' local knowledge.

Résumé

Cette étude évalue le potentiel d'organisations communautaires à encourager la mobilisation des connaissances (MdC) au moyen de collaborations réciproques et responsabilisantes avec des chercheurs académiques. Cette recherche a utilisé une méthodologie qualitative constructiviste pour explorer comment les organisations communautaires perçoivent et vivent les relations MdC et a identifié les obstacles empêchant des relations MdC réciproquement bénéfiques. Des données ont été recueillies au moyen d'entretiens

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semi-structurés avec onze participants de neuf organisations communautaires à Montréal. Les résultats indiquent que les organisations communautaires font la différence entre les prestataires de services directs et les collaborateurs académiques, priorisant souvent les besoins communautaires immédiats aux dépens des objectifs MdC. Il est à noter que ces organisations doivent faire face à des déficits de ressources, des pratiques compartimentées, et des prises de décision complexes. Les participants ont aussi signalé un manque de reconnaissance et de revendication des contributions faites par les organismes communautaires qui sont souvent non-recensées et sous-évaluées. Cette étude recommande un cadre MdC plus inclusif et réciproque qui reconnaîtrait pleinement les connaissances locales des organisations communautaires.

Introduction

Research is increasingly expected to contribute to policy and practice in improving structures, systems, and practices to create a more equitable and just society by dismantling systemic barriers, promoting social inclusion, and ensuring that all individuals have access to quality education, healthcare, and economic opportunities (Ming & Goldenberg, 2021). To this aim, knowledge mobilization (KMb) is considered a process to encourage connection and collaboration between academic and non-university partners and increase the societal impact of publicly funded research (Phipps, Cummins, Pepler, Craig, & Cardinal, 2016; Williams & Grant, 2018). In Canada, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada exemplifies this mission in its promotion of KMb with the goal of maximizing the socio-economic impact of publicly funded research through a reciprocal flow and uptake of knowledge between researchers, knowledge brokers, and users within and beyond academia (2019).

In this context, local community-based organizations (CBOs) could be pivotal entities for enhancing research impact, given their inherent potential to bridge research findings with local community needs (Gainforth, Latimer-Cheung, Athanasopoulos, & Martin Ginis, 2015; Ramanadhan, Cruz, Weese, Naveed, Kirk, et al., 2023; Ramanadhan, Galbraith-Gyan, Revette, Foti, Rackard James, et al., 2021). Community-based organizations are entities that operate on a not-for-profit basis and provide essential programs and services to people in their local communities who are often in need of assistance or marginalized (Hardwick, Anderson, & Cooper, 2015; Thinyane, Goldkind, & Lam, 2018; Wilson, Lavis, Travers, & Rourke, 2010; Winton & Evans, 2016). Community-based organizations often hold extensive knowledge of local challenges drawn from direct experiences with communities and individuals, which can significantly improve the alignment of research knowledge with local challenges and needs (Gainforth et al., 2015; Jones, Harvey, & Godfrey-Wood, 2016). Additionally, CBOs can foster connections between researchers and decision-makers, leveraging their understanding of local structures and networks

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(Delisle, Roberts, Munro, Jones, & Gyorkos, 2005; Jones et al., 2016; Masefield, Megaw, Barlow, White, Altink, & Grugel, 2020). Collaboration with academic partners could also benefit CBOs, for example, by providing access to academic expertise and joint research funding opportunities (Olivier, Hunt, & Ridde, 2016).

Despite the significant potential, a major challenge in CBOs' participation in KMb is their limited representation and inclusion in the research process, particularly during the planning phases (Abma, Cook, Rämgård, Kleba, Harris, & Wallerstein, 2017). Most KMb collaborations with non-academic partners have traditionally focused on using their access to reach community members and minority groups for data collection or disseminating research findings (Cooper, 2018; Doudaki & Carpentier, 2021). However, encouraging active participation from non-academic stakeholders early in the research process to plan research design and co-produce knowledge can significantly enhance research outcomes' relevance, applicability, and community-specific tailoring (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2015). Such an approach enables deeper integration of research findings into local contexts by ensuring that these findings are well-suited for adoption, considering community perspectives in research design and interpretation (Powell, Davies, & Nutley, 2018). However, CBOs face significant challenges when it comes to engaging in KMb, such as the lack of necessary research skills, interest alignment, and funding (Ramanadhan et al., 2023; Shields, Preston, Richmond, Sorano, Gasse-Gates, et al., 2015).

This study aims to examine the potential of CBOs to participate in KMb and local knowledge sharing from a critical perspective. Framed within the critical KMb perspective of Grenier, Gontcharov, Kobayashi, and Burke. (2021), this approach questions the underlying assumptions and boundaries within which academics work, generate knowledge, and practice KMb. Grenier et al. (2021) define critical KMb as the contextual and reflexive involvement in generating and disseminating knowledge that questions the division of science and society and establishes an inclusive research environment where stakeholders can participate as creators and contributors of knowledge. This perspective is complemented by a set of eight questions to critically examine existing approaches, such as what constitutes knowledge and KMb in a specific field, the policy priorities and conceptual frameworks adopted by different actors, the degree of involvement of stakeholders at various stages of the research process, and the impact of power dynamics on project decisions within a given context (Grenier et al., 2021).

The existing literature regarding the role of CBOs as partners in the KMb process remains limited and while the existing studies have explored the use of research evidence by CBOs (Gainforth et al., 2015; Hardwick et al., 2015; Winton & Evans, 2016), there is less evidence available on CBO experiences of producing and sharing knowledge about community needs and structures, or collaborating with academics, especially at the initial stages of research and KMb planning. Community-based organizations' knowledge and insights have the potential to facilitate KMb and foster change by contributing to enhance the alignment of academic research projects to the authentic needs and realities of communities and, at the same time, amplify the voices of communities in knowledge production (Abma et al., 2017; Hidayat &

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Stoecker, 2021; Tseng, Easton, & Supplee, 2017). Accordingly, this study poses the following pivotal questions: 1) How do CBO professionals perceive and experience participation in KMb by local knowledge sharing with academics? 2) What challenges or enabling factors do the CBO professionals identify in the KMb processes?

KMb and community empowerment: Knowledge, power, and reciprocity

Increasingly, KMb literature is recognizing the power dynamics inherent in the production and dissemination of knowledge, moving toward concepts of reciprocity and co-production, and departing from traditional linear models such as the producer-push and user-pull models (Beckett, Farr, Kothari, Wye, & le May, 2018). Campbell, Pollock, Briscoe, Carr-Harris, and Tuters (2017) highlight that earlier KMb models were linear, assuming knowledge had to be either moved by researchers or accessed by users (Best & Holmes, 2010; Godin, 2006), with implicit assumptions of higher credibility for academic knowledge and a passive role for other stakeholders (Özdemir, 2018).

In this new orientation, the concept of reciprocity signifies a profound ontological and epistemological shift (Grenier et al., 2021). Reciprocity, in simple terms, refers to a relationship in research or KMb projects that acknowledges the voice, agency, and ownership of everyone involved, including researchers and their non-academic stakeholders. It aims to bring more equal power relationships and value attribution to different types of knowledge, including experiential and tacit knowledge, and benefit allocation to academics and community partners. However, when it comes to putting the reciprocal orientation of KMb into practice, there exists a disconnect between the theory and the actual research and KMb practices, even in collaborative and participatory research that involves KMb components (Grenier et al., 2021; Nugus, Greenfield, Travaglia, & Braithwaite, 2012; Spencer & Taylor, 2010; Weir, Morgain, Moon, & Moggridge, 2024).

Often in KMb practices, knowledge is treated as reified and codified, and an often-implicit view is held that it ought to be interpreted and mobilized into practice through a unidirectional flow from knowledge-rich academic contexts to "knowledge-poor" practice contexts, a process initiated by scientists that lack reciprocity in its inception. Such a view reinforces a one-way knowledge transfer from scientists to community partners and discredits the pools of knowledge held by communities and practice-based organizations (Fischer, Dopson, Fitzgerald, Bennett, Ferlie, et al., 2017). This is problematic given the intertwined nature of power and knowledge (Spencer & Taylor, 2010) and the risk of marginalization in knowledge production and exchange (Ferguson & Taminiau, 2014). The dynamic produces unequal power relationships, positioning researchers as active agents who conceptualize or prescribe the social problem to be addressed, prescribe the participation of others, and then lead research while community partners with the lived experience remain passive tokens to be used when it provides support for the agenda (Flynn & Ford, 2020; Grenier et al., 2021; Johnstone, 2021; Medina, 2013). Researchers have emphasized the close links between this model of prescriptive, one-dimensional research and evidence use and colonial relations that have long positioned Indigenous and global South communities and na-

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tions as passive beneficiaries of knowledge and holders of lower-order "traditional," "folkloric," or "lay" knowledge (Mignolo & Escobar, 2010; Weir et al., 2024).

To address these structural issues and improve the inclusion of CBOs' knowledge in KMb (reciprocity), especially at the beginning of KMb research projects, a critical approach to KMb is advocated in this research. Recognizing that power is dynamic and a source of both opposition and opportunity, KMb must move beyond simplistic rhetoric to enable inclusion and active involvement of non-academic stakeholders to amplify their voices in knowledge production (Nugus et al., 2012; Spencer & Taylor, 2010). In other words, engaging non-academic partners or stakeholders is not simply ticking a box or having people present but empowering them to produce community and local knowledge and embed it into KMb processes (Grenier et al., 2021; Hall, 2013; Ray, 2007). Consequently, the concept of reciprocity serves to inform this study's approach to KMb, framing CBOs as essential producers of invaluable local knowledge that can substantially enhance KMb. Furthermore, by recognizing CBOs as significant contributors of valuable knowledge within KMb relationships, the study seeks to underscore the potential intellectual and financial benefits that may be associated with the generation of knowledge.

In this context, knowledge is considered neither neutral nor objective but intrinsically linked to power (Foucault, 1975). Through a reciprocal KMb approach, CBOs will find more empowering opportunities to actively participate in knowledge production and build their capacity to address their immediate community issues. It can also empower them to carry out their future knowledge-production activities that truly follow their goals for change (Hidayat & Stoecker, 2021; Spencer & Taylor, 2010).

Methodology

Consistent with the study's objective of obtaining an in-depth picture of CBOs' challenges and experiences in KMb, this study adopted a qualitative methodology grounded in the constructivist paradigm. This paradigm describes reality as socially and experientially based (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), aiming to describe and interpret the shared patterns of values, behaviours, and beliefs within a culture-sharing group (Creswell, 2007; Zhao, Ross, Li, & Dennis, 2021).

The data collection phase started in June 2023 and ended at the end of the data analysis period in March 2024. The study employed semi-structured interviews, allowing flexibility and follow-up questions to gather comprehensive insights from participants despite having prepared questions. The first author conducted the interviews via Microsoft Teams (except in one case) and recorded them for transcription and analysis (see Appendix 1). Interviews typically spanned 45-60 minutes. One interview was held in person in the margins of a local community event. All participants received formal invitations to take part in the study and provided their consent for data collection and analysis.

Eleven participants were interviewed (Table 1), 10 of whom were full-time employees of nine different organizations in Montréal, Québec, Canada. Establishing connections with community partners for research purposes, particularly from minority groups, presents a significant challenge for researchers. To facilitate this process, convenience sampling and snowball sampling were employed to initiate connections

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and recruit participants for the interviews. These methods have demonstrated their effectiveness as strategies for accessing participants in community-engaged research as snowball sampling utilizes existing social networks, while convenience sampling capitalizes on readily accessible locations for recruitment and advertising participation opportunities (Valerio et al., 2016). To address the potential biases inherent in these approaches, such as overrepresentation and homogeneity, we made efforts to diversify our sample by incorporating a variety of roles, organizational fields, and sizes. Furthermore, we aimed to recognize this limitation, reflect on our positionality as authors, and ensure a high level of transparency in our data sampling procedures to enhance the transferability of our findings to other contexts (Nungsari, 2023).

Accordingly, for recruiting participants, the primary author began by participating in in-person networking sessions at three local community events and conferences. This allowed for inviting participants to take part in the interviews, except for four that were suggested by other participants, who were then invited via email. In the discussions regarding the study and the email invitations, the authors emphasized the goal of documenting and amplifying the experiences and voices of community groups in KMb literature and academic publications. This message was intended to encourage their participation, as the belief in the potential positive change for all stakeholders is a crucial factor in motivating community partners to engage in research partnerships (Wentworth, Mazzeo, & Connolly, 2017). Additionally, during the networking sessions and initial discussions with participants about the study, participants were asked about the research and KMb activities within their organizations. This information helped us connect with and recruit staff who were most engaged with research and KMb in their organizations.

Table 1. Participants in the study

No.	Professional role	Organizational field	Staff
1	Employment coordinator	Employability support	10
2	Program manager	Literacy and education	6
3	Project coordinator	Literacy and education	7
4	Policy analyst	Literacy and education	8
5	Director	Minority rights	12
6	Research analyst	Youth support (employability and mental health)	9
7	Director	Health Services Minority	14
8	Executive Director	Immigration Rights and Services	6
9	Executive Director	Senior Citizens Support	4
10	Policy Analyst	Minority Rights	12
11	Researcher	N/A	-

Note: The table presents the total number of participants, their roles in organizations, and their organizations' fields of activity.

Among the participants, nine had university degrees, including two who held PhDs, two who held master's degrees, and five who held bachelor's degrees. During a separate local community event, the primary author had the opportunity to interview the eleventh participant in the study, an expert and researcher on issues related to non-profit organizations. As a criterion for inviting the staff of the CBOs, the CBOs

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were required to have at least one experience of collaborating in KMb with researchers in the last two years. This could involve conducting joint research or developing and implementing community programs. This criterion for KMb experience was established after participants initially approved their involvement in the study. Then, data were collected from community organizations' websites regarding their work focus and the number of staff. The number of staff of the participating CBOs is extracted from their websites with an average of 8.8 (Table 1).

The participating organizations are all formally registered as non-profits, and five specify providing services to the English speaking community, a minority community in the French speaking province of Canada. According to the 2021 census, Québec's English speaking minority represents 13 percent of the province's population (Auclair, Frigon, & St-Amant, 2023). It is difficult to determine the precise number of CBOs in Canada due to various statuses such as incorporated/unincorporated, registered charity, non-registered, and provincial, or federal status. Many provinces do not report the exact number of CBOs in Canada, resulting in limited or non-existent data (Barr, 2021). However, it is estimated that there are 170,000+ registered charities and non-profits in Canada (Imagine Canada, 2021). Additionally, it is crucial to note the substantial impact of COVID-19 on CBOs. A study and survey by Imagine Canada revealed that nearly half of the organizations surveyed experienced a rise in demand for their services and support. At the same time, only seven percent noted a significant increase in their capacity to meet this demand. Furthermore, 70 percent anticipated a further increase in demand in the future, yet only about a quarter expected their capacity to grow accordingly (Lasby & Barr, 2021). Additionally, 82 percent reported a loss in revenue (Lasby & Barr, 2021).

Two authors, one a francophone and the other a non-native English speaker, were international students in Canada during the time of the study. The third author was born and raised in Canada and is a bilingual (French/English) full-time faculty member. The authors all had significant experience of developing community-university collaborations in Québec and abroad prior to this study but had no prior relationship with the nine participating CBOs in this study before it began.

The qualitative interviews were analyzed using the methods and techniques proposed by Merriam and Tisdell (2015). During the data analysis phase, authors strongly emphasized simultaneous data processing, thoroughly engaging with the information, and employing an inductive and comparative approach to analysis and report writing. The process involved identifying relevant data segments in response to our research questions, constructing categories, sorting those categories, and interpreting the relationships between them (Babchuk, 2019). Furthermore, the authors were recognizant of data saturation throughout the iterative coding process when no new themes were emerging, indicating that the core patterns and variations in participant experiences were sufficiently captured. One researcher gathered the data, and two authors collaborated on the data analysis. Although independent analysis was not utilized in this study, we aimed to reduce individual bias by discussing and validating emerging themes together and resolving disagreements and discrepancies by consulting the third author. All authors contributed to the article's conceptual analysis, writing, and preparation. The authors aimed to improve the trustworthiness of their

results by using member checking, providing detailed explanations of the data collection process and analysis, and offering thorough descriptions in the findings section. The quotes included in the findings are in the participants' language, but any sensitive information was replaced with more general information enclosed in square brackets to maintain confidentiality. These quotes offer context and support interpretations derived from the data (Eldh, Årestedt, & Berterö, 2020).

Findings

This study investigated how CBO professionals perceive and experience KMb processes in collaboration with researchers, and the challenges they identify during KMb processes. Its findings are divided into three sections. These sections cover the concepts related to the core mission of CBOs, internal challenges, and resource deficits, as well as the challenging nature of current KMb structures and mechanisms that collectively limit the participation of CBOs in KMb and sharing community knowledge with academics. The findings shed light on the intricate landscape of KMb collaboration between CBOs and researchers or students. Firstly, the findings highlight the inherent distinction made by CBOs between academic collaborators and the direct beneficiaries of their initiatives, a differentiation that often guides their operational priorities. The second theme discusses the operational and logistical challenges that complicate and further limit KMb collaboration with academics, such as lack of resources, skills, and connections. Finally, this section presents the third theme that demonstrates participants' perspectives on how their knowledge contribution is valued or treated, which acts as a barrier to KMb collaboration between researchers and CBOs.

Core mission and service seekers

All participants in this study highlighted or indirectly implied the distinction that CBOs make between researchers and students on the one hand and the direct beneficiaries of their programs and activities on the other hand. In the current context, where CBOs receive more support requests than ever, this difference indicates a priority that might not always be clear for researchers and academics. One participant mentioned that "there's this line we think about often in these situations, trying to consider them [KMb collaborations] without stepping too far from the core of what we do in the organization" (P3).

During the discussion, participants delved into crucial concepts related to this contrast, such as the CBOs' main reason and mission being to serve its primary audience, the connection between serving the primary audience and performance metrics and evaluations, CBOs typically receiving funding prioritization for program development and service offerings rather than research and KMb, the extended time frames required for collaboration with researchers and students to provide practical value for CBOs, the more intricate or abstract needs researchers have for collaboration, compared with CBOs' proximity to their primary audiences.

Participants also highlighted the differentiation in the interests and expectations involved in KMb collaborations. They noted that in joint KMb or engaged research projects, CBOs may prioritize practical benefits and client-driven needs, such as advocacy enhancement, program evaluation, and program quality improvement, as

their primary goals for KMb and research. However, these objectives may not always align with the purely academic goals of academics, such as collecting data for producing high-quality research papers. First, the resources needed for achieving these differing goals might be different, and second, CBOs might require different outputs, such as composing policy briefs, having joint presentations in practice-oriented environments, and co-applying to community development grants that might be inconsistent with the pure academic interests of researchers and students. All these challenges add to the complexity of interaction between researchers and CBOs.

> Every single grant I've written or helped to write, there's usually a lot of space there to talk about the state of the community, why is this kind of project necessary, some background information … especially why is this project needed. So, you can see the expectations for the outputs are different. (P9)

Another factor contributing to these differing interests is the reluctance that some participants believe exists within the academic community to engage deeply with politically sensitive or non-mainstream topics. Additionally, researchers may hesitate to incorporate local perspectives and experiences due to concerns about credibility.

Internal challenges and resource deficits for knowledge mobilization

This theme of findings reflects the factors that CBOs believe stem from their own current capacities, which collectively impede their ability to engage effectively in KMb collaborations.

Lack of resources and skills

Community-based organizations face limitations in resources and skills that hinder their ability to collaborate with researchers. Participants stated they are increasingly asked to meet more demand and provide more diverse services. During the interviews, participants indicated that societal challenges are becoming more complicated. At the same time, they felt that they have to provide increasingly more services to meet these demands. Knowledge mobilization might be one way for them to aggregate their resources and develop appropriate programs and responses to these new demands. However, these potential collaboration opportunities need resources and skills to become practical. The primary resources and skills identified in this study for KMb included time, research skills, previous experiences, dedicated staff, and physical space. The terms "space" and "slack" were used in the interviews to refer to the resources or capacities needed to engage in KMb with academics.

> So if you're an academic coming to an organization saying I'm going to do this innovation with you or research this topic and you're talking about design and implementation but you're not talking about the rest of it, right? Skills. And those skills need regular use or regular training. The number of times I've been in an organization where it's like, here's this new software, we're going to train everyone for a week, no one talks about it again. Anyone who's hired after that first week doesn't get trained on any software. It boggles my mind. (P11)

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The limited resources challenge particularly affects small CBOs, especially those working with minority groups. Small CBOs struggle with limited team sizes and cannot afford to hire staff with higher academic qualifications, affecting their ability to engage in activities such as networking and event participation that are conducive to KMb opportunities. In many instances, participants highlighted the point that CBOs working with certain minorities, such as immigrants, usually receive even less funding because their target population is smaller, and they are less able to receive donations. This is a complicated issue related to the limited resources challenge that disproportionately affects the abilities of CBOs to engage in KMb and publish their community's content.

> I think the problem with the research collaboration is the people in the community [sector] do not have time to do research. They don't even have time to read reports relevant to what they do. As an example for [their organization], I'm supposed to keep records of every time I have a meeting with the people. It's impossible. I just don't have the time. (P1)

Participants also highlighted specific examples of limited skills and how it affects the readiness of CBOs to participate in KMb with researchers. They mentioned that when researchers reach out to them for help making local connections or reaching members of a specific community to collect data, they are unsure about their and their communities' rights, data privacy issues, handling sensitive information, and research ethics, especially when considering minority groups. The lack of in-house expertise to navigate the legal and ethical aspects of data sharing was a recurring concern for them.

Siloed practices and lack of connections

Participants stated that they often struggle to identify potential collaboration opportunities with researchers and CBOs looking to develop research-based programs and KMb projects. They emphasized the importance of awareness of relevant programs, opportunities, and expertise in academic and non-academic settings as the first step in initiating KMb collaboration. Limited resources and a lack of connecting initiatives and platforms, such as communities of practice, often make it difficult for them to determine if relevant programs exist in local universities or CBOs. Even if they become aware, it is typically in the late stages of those research projects or programs. They believed this siloed practice affects their ability to participate in KMb by losing opportunities for collaboration, gathering resources, accessing best practices, and larger funding opportunities.

> Growth [in the community sector] is about demonstrating the importance and the value of that collective effort. I think we've seen those incidents where you have information in kind of isolated areas and then as you reinforce the connections between them, then you have the value emerges. And I think that's something that we see in our collective work. I think it's very difficult to talk about a gap when you're only speaking from the viewpoint of one organization,

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but when you have many who are subject to the same trends, that becomes a much more powerful narrative for change. (P6)

My idea is that we need someone like a head-hunter type person, where it's like a community organization could call that person or email them … More like a facilitator of connectivity. (P1)

Cumbersome internal decision-making processes

Another challenge participants identified is the collective nature of community work typically found in CBOs. Participants noted that CBO staff often play various roles in day-to-day operations. This diversity of roles can be found among staff members at different levels of seniority and experience within the organization. For instance, a staff member might organize events, write policy briefs, or prepare grant applications.

At community organizations usually somebody who shouldn't be working on knowledge production is tasked with knowledge pro-duction. The people who should be working on it don't have time and the people who have the knowledge don't have the capacity to share their knowledge. (P11)

This reality often manifests in small- to medium-sized organizations, potentially limiting the KMb practices of CBOs by dispersing opportunities for collaboration among different people and potentially losing necessary and interested contacts.

There can be a huge gap between the people who are at the top of the organizations, and the people working at the bottom, some-times conversation is a little hard because we don't understand each other. (P10)

Another aspect of this challenge was highlighted in contexts where no designated individual is responsible for external partnerships and collaboration within CBOs. This absence creates an undefined process for identifying opportunities and forming partnerships, which can be quite complex. Moreover, even when opportunities for collaboration emerge, balancing immediate collaboration needs with the potential long-term benefits of research and KMb partnerships often leads to and necessitates lengthy and intricate decision-making processes. In such cases, opportunities iden-tified or proposed by higher management roles are more likely to be pursued, even if the organization does not fully know the risk of failure or resource wastage of this potential collaboration.

Lack of capacity-building support in the social sector

Interviewees expressed their concerns about the need for more capacity-building initiatives in this sector to help them adopt innovative practices and explore KMb opportunities. They emphasized the need for government programs to provide fund-ing and skill development opportunities focused on long-term development in this sector. They believed there should be more opportunities for CBOs to inform the government about their capacity needs. Additionally, they expressed their inability to plan or implement bottom-up capacity-building approaches due to heavy work-loads and limited resources and staff.

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> That is a huge issue, I think, in funding because they [the policy-makers with the ability to make capacity building investments] are very afraid of their constituents saying, 'Why are you putting money into prevention? Why do we need funding for this?' Because where is the problem? We don't see the problem, but the organizations are actually stopping the problem to get to that crisis point. It's crisis-based funding. Usually, we're giving millions of dollars here in reaction. (P6)

The difficult nature of knowledge mobilization

This section delves more specifically into the dynamics and existing framework of KMb and its capacity to value the knowledge and contribution of CBOs and provide them with tangible benefits.

Longer timeframe to receive value

Most participants mentioned that an important challenge for CBOs in participating in KMb is the extended timeframe required to realize expected benefits, compared with other activities such as providing services to citizens, campaigning, fundraising, and pursuing smaller grants that do not involve research components. Participants expressed that research and KMb collaborations typically involve a lengthy coordination and planning process. Without an externally dedicated program or internally dedicated staff to lead the project and manage the risks, it can be difficult for CBOs to keep track of the program's potential value and receive its benefits.

> Compare this [KMb] process with other activities that we do … you know for example it's very important to know that the community organizations, on their websites and their reports, everything is geared toward getting more grants as well as, you know, recruiting people to their program. (P10)

Lack of recognition and documentation

Participants expressed concern that their contributions to research and KMb projects often go unrecognized and undocumented, which limits their potential future value. First, it was argued that if CBOs do not have research expertise or a research expert staff in their team, their contribution could usually involve making connections, providing local knowledge and insight, and helping researchers and students organize KMb activities. Contributions such as these, although beneficiary in nature, are not often recorded or rewarded and do not provide any real and immediate benefit to the resources, quality of programs or opportunities for CBOs.

> The way that we engage in knowledge mobilization is more like storytelling. We share the narratives and stories of people, places and events and this allows everyone to create connections, introductions, or access participants. But if this is going to be published in an academic article, where we can share it? (P2)

Additionally, participants mentioned that CBOs and their staff often contribute valuable knowledge about community realities, needs, existing experiences, and pro-

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grams to research and KMb projects, yet their contributions are seldom recorded or acknowledged in ways similar to how academic researchers are recognized and rewarded for academic publications. This disparity in the processing and valuation between academic knowledge and the local knowledge of CBOs is evident in how new academic knowledge is produced, documented, protected, and rewarded. This discrepancy highlights the need for a distinct recognition system in the theoretical and practical frameworks of KMb to acknowledge and incentivize the participation of CBOs and their staff. Unless a CBO engages in a KMb project with their own research-trained staff, there is inadequate documentation or recognition of their involvement and contributions.

> The problem is it's very difficult to track that [contribution to KMb]. You could be doing some incredible work, but how do you prove that that you contribution has stopped 10 youth going into the youth system? Or how does the work anyone does in mental health? How do you say it? Well, we stopped this many people going into the emergency room or employment, we've stopped this many people going on to social welfare. It's really difficult because you can't prove that you've stopped it. You can assume that you have. (P6)

Lack of data ownership and knowledge ownership mechanisms

Another critical issue identified was the absence of data and knowledge ownership. Participants reported that researchers frequently engage CBOs to collect local data and knowledge, typically at stages when research and KMb projects are already strategically outlined. This approach significantly undermines the intellectual and practical rights of CBOs over their contributions, leaving them with little to no influence over the project's direction, research goals, or data collection methodologies. Furthermore, it was noted that CBOs commonly encounter situations where their role is reduced to merely providing data without further involvement in the subsequent phases of analyzing and presenting the findings. This practice not only marginalizes their contributions but also excludes them from critical discussions on the interpretation of the data.

Moreover, concerns were raised about the transparency of data usage. Despite assisting researchers in connecting with research subjects, CBOs frequently find themselves in the dark regarding how the information is utilized or potentially reused for future research or program development. The absence of more rewarding mechanisms for local knowledge sharing was highlighted, emphasizing the need for procedures to ensure the sustained and authentic ownership of data and knowledge by the research participants and the CBOs that offer local knowledge or facilitate access to informants. Furthermore, participants mentioned that ensuring data and knowledge ownership for CBOs would significantly enhance the immediate benefits of their knowledge contributions to KMb projects. This includes maintaining continued ownership, elevating the visibility of their knowledge contributions, and ensuring their efforts are recognized and utilized in performance evaluations, grant applications, and the acquisition of future collaboration opportunities.

> When you're doing community development, you're working at enabling the community, but you're also empowering the community

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so that they take ownership. So the community themselves have to feel part of the project. They have to own it as much as whoever is holding it [project]. (P8)

Discussion

Knowledge mobilization has the potential to enhance the impact and inclusivity of research, and it is increasingly being promoted in higher education systems worldwide (MacGregor & Phipps, 2020). However, for KMb to truly achieve its objectives of fostering socially relevant research, more reciprocal research and KMb practices are necessary to ensure equitable distribution of power, agency, voice, and research benefits, therefore contributing to the knowledge empowerment of the community (Grenier et al., 2021). This study took a critical KMb perspective and interviewed CBOs to understand their perspectives and challenges in sharing knowledge with researchers and students, particularly at the initial stages of the KMb process, where it holds the greatest potential to bring relevance to academic projects (Delisle et al., 2005). The organizations studied varied in terms of their organizational size, beneficiary groups, and resources. Similar to previous research on community involvement in KMb, this qualitative approach aimed to bring the voices of CBOs into academic literature and connect them with theoretical positioning related to KMb, agency, power, and value attribution (Flynn & Ford, 2020).

The present study's findings demonstrate that for CBOs to engage in a reciprocal KMb practice with academics, a suite of interrelated and multi-actor factors is involved, reflecting the complex and dynamic collaborative processes (Abma et al., 2017; Campbell et al., 2017). Some of these factors relate to the CBOs' capacities and contexts, such as limited skills, resources, and complex internal decision-making processes, and others relate to current established KMb frameworks, whether in theory or practice (Ramanadhan et al., 2023). This study especially identified the challenges that CBOs consider to have a limiting effect on their KMb engagement. These challenges include the inconsistency of KMb projects with their interests, the lack of documentation and recognition of their contributions, and the inability to track their data and knowledge usage. However, as interviews in this study did not identify any specific solutions, further studies and examinations are needed to determine how these challenges should be addressed in KMb theory and practice.

One of the key findings from our interviews was the stark inconsistency between CBOs' expectations and interests in engaging in KMb with researchers and academics. This disparity was evident in discussions about KMb interests and the perceived separation that CBOs maintain between their immediate support seekers and researchers. Our study showed that this separation is also a mechanism of preserving existing capacities for CBOs, as they stated that not engaging in new and less relevant projects is also an act of capacity building. Flynn and Ford (2020) stress a similar point, arguing that researchers should consider how and why they engage with community partners. They argue that the community's capacity to provide input on research projects is already stretched, requiring a significant burden, while the impact of their contributions on final decisions is uncertain (Flynn & Ford, 2020; Hidayat & Stoecker, 2021).

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This inconsistency underscores a critical tension between defining the value of KMb and its more immediate outputs and longer-term outcomes for CBOs and academics (Abma et al., 2017; Ginis et al., 2012; Hardwick et al., 2015; Spencer & Taylor, 2010; Tseng et al., 2017). In practice, this contrast might be demonstrated in the defined KMb interests of researchers and CBOs for KMb collaboration. For instance, Ramanadhan et al.'s (2023) study revealed a contrast in KMb interests between CBO practitioners focusing on improving service delivery and academics dedicated to advancing knowledge and integrating research evidence into standard healthcare practices. Furthermore, the study also highlighted discrepancies in perspectives between CBO practitioners and researchers regarding essential skills for engaging in KMb (Ramanadhan et al., 2023).

Addressing this challenge of making KMb more relevant to the immediate needs of CBOs is an essential step for encouraging CBOs' participation in knowledge sharing with researchers, and therefore, making KMb more reciprocal (Shields et al., 2015). Many studies propose solutions that focus on individual-level strategies, particularly on behalf of researchers. For instance, researchers are asked to engage in introspection regarding identity and the power dynamics at play when proposing collaborations and taking necessary actions to establish mutual trust (Abma et al., 2017; Flynn & Ford, 2020; Tseng et al., 2017). However, beyond individual-level transformation, the KMb field urgently requires more empowering KMb frameworks, especially at the practical level.

Additionally, this study differed from other studies in that it primarily focused on knowledge production and dissemination rather than the utilization of research knowledge by CBOs, a point that is less addressed in the literature (Delisle et al., 2005; Shields et al., 2015). Nevertheless, it corroborates previous findings that capacity building is urgently needed in this sector to enable CBOs to engage in KMb (Flynn & Ford, 2020; Ramanadhan et al., 2023; Reed et al., 2014). The viewpoints from the interviews highlight the importance of time, skills, and connections as essential capacities that CBOs need to engage in KMb fully. Hidayat and Stoecker (2021) argue that capacity building is crucial for CBOs since higher capacities enable them to identify collaboration opportunities and influence researchers' decisions to partner with CBOs. Researchers often prioritize partnering with CBOs that have the capacity to fulfill their research agenda rather than considering which CBO and community would benefit the most from a collaborative project (Hidayat & Stoecker, 2021). Investments in strengthening CBOs' capacities to engage in KMb with research partners could have significant positive effects on the long-term effectiveness of their programming.

Regarding capacity development, this research identified connection-making and moving away from siloed practices as important challenges that negatively affect the engagement of CBOs in KMb. However, it did not address whether it is the responsibility of universities and researchers to create better connection-making opportunities or the government's task to enhance the capacities of CBOs in this section. Some participants suggested the potential role of dedicated knowledge brokers and KMb intermediaries and the potential uses of online web-based technologies. Indeed, knowledge brokers can play a significant role in connecting diverse communities to

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facilitate KMb opportunities. However, it is essential to consider how intermediary knowledge brokers, such as universities' community engagement offices, government service quality agencies, and philanthropic foundations, filter, verify, and disseminate information within their networks to enhance reciprocity in KMb (Durrant, Havers, Downe, & Martin, 2023; Shewchuk & Farley-Ripple, 2023).

Another challenging aspect of the CBOs' participation in KMb is the structural and established knowledge generation and dissemination processes. Previous research has already discussed the specific challenges and concerns of both stakeholders, including researchers or CBOs, of how the other side values or discounts different kinds of knowledge and what evidence "counts" in KMb (Owczarzak, 2012; Ramanadhan et al., 2023). During KMb engagements, CBOs and their non-academic collaborators may emphasize incorporating localized and firsthand insights about community needs and problems, employing strategies such as case studies, promoting best practices, or specialist assessments (Hardwick et al., 2015). Despite the prevalent advocacy for the early inclusion of community knowledge in the KMb process, the interviews showed that knowledge inclusion processes are needed at all stages of local knowledge usage, including at the end, in order for CBOs and community partners to benefit. Durrant et al. (2023) highlight the existing gap in the literature and argue that there is a need to gain a better understanding and description of this necessary knowledge-processing process rather than ignoring or resisting it.

Additionally, interviews revealed CBOs' sentiments that their intellectual contributions go unrecognized and unrecorded in academic findings, alongside a lack of capability to oversee how their data is utilized. In this case, further studies are required to determine specific measures for providing CBOs and other community stakeholders with rightful and ethical ownership and recognition of their contributions. For instance, in the current literature on KMb and co-production, ownership may refer to the cultivation of a culture, interest, or commitment to increasing the utilization of research evidence rather than specific measures for providing intellectual or financial benefits for the contributions of CBOs' or non-academic partners to KMb, a point also highlighted by Durrant et al. (2023). These observations question the epistemological foundations regarding the type of knowledge suitable for KMb's objectives, planning, and evaluation and the handling, use, and ownership of knowledge throughout KMb (Beckett et al., 2018). Addressing the true ownership challenges in knowledge processing is crucial for a more empowering KMb approach for CBOs, as power operates subtly through language and texts and is shaped by specific systems of reasoning and truth claims. Utilizing this power through KMb could offer opportunities for CBOs to build research skills, deepen social and political analysis, receive financial support, and build local credibility (Spencer & Taylor, 2010; Thinyane et al., 2018).

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings and implications. First, the sample size and scope of the research were limited to 11 participants from nine CBOs in Montréal, Québec. This small and geographically constrained sample may not fully represent the diverse experiences and

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challenges CBOs face across different regions and contexts. Additionally, the selection criteria focused on organizations with recent KMb experiences, potentially excluding CBOs with less recent but still relevant insights. This selection criterion facilitated our access to knowledgeable community professionals; however, it may have introduced a selection bias, favouring organizations with higher resource levels or more proactive approaches to partnering with researchers. Although generalizability was not a primary goal of this study, future research should expand the sample size and include CBOs from various regions and backgrounds.

Another limitation lies in the reliance on self-reported data collected through semi-structured interviews. While this method provides in-depth insights into participants' perceptions and experiences, it is subject to biases such as social desirability and recall bias. Participants may have presented their organizations' experiences in a more favorable light or not accurately recalled specific details of their KMb collaborations. Future research could incorporate additional data collection methods, such as participant observation or document analysis, to triangulate the findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the barriers to KMb involving CBOs.

Future research

Future research on KMb frameworks should adopt diverse methodologies to capture different perspectives of CBOs, including those that have not yet engaged in KMb activities, in order to better understand the factors that influence these trends. While qualitative methods can highlight barriers, challenges, and contextual realities, incorporating quantitative surveys or mixed methods can better amplify CBO voices across different regions and capacities. Such research must also move beyond theory-building and conceptual debates to actively test the effectiveness and reciprocity of proposed KMb frameworks in practice. Moreover, the investigation of digital infrastructure—online platforms and virtual communities of practice—is essential to assess how technological innovations might not only facilitate knowledge co-creation but also yield intellectual and financial benefits that were emphasized in this research for participating CBOs. By integrating more diverse methods and practical evaluations of critically aligned KMb frameworks, future studies can inform policy- and decision-making in ways that better align research processes with the immediate and long-term priorities of community organizations.

Conclusion

This study critically examines the barriers to knowledge mobilization (KMb) faced by community-based organizations (CBOs) in their collaborations with academic researchers. By adopting a constructivist qualitative methodology and conducting semi-structured interviews with participants from nine different CBOs in Montréal, the research uncovers significant challenges that hinder effective KMb relationships. Key findings indicate that CBOs prioritize immediate community needs over academic research goals, complicating collaborations. Resource and skill deficits, siloed practices, and cumbersome decision-making processes further impede these partnerships. A notable disparity in the recognition and ownership of CBOs' contributions to KMb projects also emerged, highlighting the need for a more inclusive and reciprocal KMb framework. The study underscores the importance of moving beyond traditional lin-

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ear models of KMb toward a more critical, reciprocal approach that deeply involves CBOs in the research process. This approach should recognize and value the unique local knowledge and practical insights of CBOs, addressing the identified structural issues and capacity challenges.

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Empowering Community Knowledge: A Qualitative Examination of Knowledge Mobilization Barriers Involving Community-Based Organizations

Interview questions:

1. What is your position in your organization?

2. Could you briefly describe the main fields or areas of activity your organization focuses on?

3. What does knowledge mobilization mean to you in the context of your work?

4. How do you see knowledge mobilization as relevant—or not—to the goals and day-to-day practices of your organization?

5. Can you describe any recent experiences or examples of how you have engaged in knowledge mobilization activities with researchers or students?

6. In your view, what are the key challenges or barriers that make it difficult for you or your organization to engage effectively in knowledge mobilization collaborations with researchers?

7. Are there any existing supports that help you engage in knowledge mobilization activities?

8. What supports should exist to facilitate your engagement in knowledge mobilization?

    a. What skills, supports, and incentives are critical for your involvement in knowledge mobilization?