



**empatika**

people-centred insights and solutions



# A SMALL CONSULTANCY DEDICATED TO PEOPLE-CENTERED INSIGHTS AND SOLUTIONS



The Empatika core team in 2019 at our team retreat.

*Empatika is an Indonesia-based, internationally-oriented organisation specialising in people-centred approaches to research, training, and programs. We provide innovative and adaptive qualitative and mixed methods studies and custom capacity building to bring policy making closer to people's everyday realities..*

Though Empatika was formally established in 2018, our team has years of experience working together in conducting both large and small-scale participatory studies and community engagement. This includes studies using immersion research and other participatory methods such as digital storytelling and human-centered design, covering topics including: urban and child poverty, migration, governance, frontline service provision, skills and unemployment, education, health and nutrition, rural infrastructure, social protection, market development and justice. Empatika is a registered company in Indonesia with members located in Indonesia, Nepal, and South Africa.

The Empatika team started working together initially as an Australian-funded project, and later on, as a unit, underneath The Palladium Group's Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Practice group from 2014 until 2017.

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number of countries across Asia, Africa and the Middle East where the Empatika team has conducted studies

**Keeping  
you in-touch  
and up-to-date  
with local level  
realities**



Empatika has adapted procedures from this period for our operational management, child protection, safety, security and risk management guidelines which have produced some of the successful collaborations noted below. As an independent organisation, we also have the flexibility to develop our processes in more tailored and efficient ways according to the needs of particular Clients and/or projects.

Empatika's roots lie with the development of the Reality Check Approach (RCA), a qualitative method first used in Bangladesh in 2007 whereby researchers live in people's homes and join in their everyday lives over several days and nights. Globally, Empatika team members have conducted more than 55 immersion, mixed methods, and participatory studies over the last 13 years in over eight countries, including Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Lebanon, Nepal, Pakistan, and Uganda for a range of commissioners including UNICEF, the World Bank, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Save the Children, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), UN Women, and the European Union.

Empatika recognised early in the development of immersion research that this approach is especially appropriate for studies where participants might find it difficult or less inviting to engage in more formal processes such as Key Informant Interviews and Focus Groups (due to access limitations, perceived formality, preoccupation with other work/activities, short times for engagement and fatigue). Empatika's researchers are specially trained to enable them to interact informally and empathetically with study participants, especially on studies focusing on sensitive issues or related to people's behaviours.

Empatika also has extensive multi-country experience of using immersion research to track longitudinal change resulting from interventions and programmes. Core members of the team have taken lead roles in immersion research studies in Bangladesh, Lebanon, Nepal, Pakistan, and Uganda.

Empatika continues to specialise in this experiential approach to research, and over the past few years we have added experience and expertise in facilitating training, people-driven design, and video-based projects/workshops. We have also



# 12

senior researchers who have led or co-led studies in the Middle East, Asia and Africa

***'Big problems rarely have a single cause'***

begun to extend our expertise beyond research and training, using our experiences with people-driven design for solutions development and programming.

Within our research activities, Empatika has also used participatory processes to enhance traditional qualitative tools like focus group discussions and interviews, as well as provide more grounded and sensitive approaches to quantitative surveys. Wherever possible Empatika tries to bring quantitative and qualitative approaches together using mixed methods, with integrated tools which complement each other and joint analysis that further enhances insights. Empatika has also helped programmes to develop 'people's indicators of change' to supplement (sometimes supplant) a programme's own performance indicators. These indicators emerge from careful analysis of insights from participatory qualitative studies, providing relevant and reliable indicators of 'change that matters to people', thereby contributing to putting people at the centre of their own development.

Empatika currently has 12 Senior Researchers who have led or co-led immersion research and other qualitative studies in Asia and Africa. We also have active networks of trained local researchers in many of the countries where we have worked, such as Indonesia, Bangladesh, Lebanon, Pakistan, Nepal and Uganda.



## OUR VISION

Keeping programmers and policymakers in-touch through grounded, people-centred field research and programs.

## OUR MISSION

We are an international group of researchers and trainers who deliver and implement complexity-aware research, customised training, and programs which always put people at the centre. Our work inspires people to think differently about development solutions and social change processes and is based on building trust, giving voice and listening to those people for whom development interventions are intended.

## OUR CORE VALUES

1. **Empathy** - The name Empatika comes from the word 'empathy' and we try to carry and promote this value from our research activities to our day-to-day interactions. Our empathetic approach helps us understand development challenges in context and from the standpoint of those they affect. This perspective grounds our research and solutions, providing a true understanding of people's priorities and supporting meaningful change.

2. **Embracing Complexity** - Our flexible approach to research and programs embraces complexity, understanding that 'big problems rarely have a single cause' and embracing multiple voices and perspectives.

3. **People-Driven** - People are at the center of everything we do. Our immersive and participatory approaches aim to empower people to develop solutions and drive change that is important to them through supportive, participatory, and reflexive processes. We believe in reflexive learning

that provides avenues for continuous and creative learning.

4. **Equity and Inclusion** - We prioritize equity and inclusion in everything we do and believe that our diversity enhances our creativity and effectiveness as researchers and problem solvers. This is reflected in our approaches, which are designed to elevate the views of those typically excluded from research and development.

5. **Ethically-minded** - We recognize that qualitative research in particular involves unique ethical considerations which each piece of research needs to take into account. With appropriate standards in place, we believe research can empower study participants through people-centred and participatory processes. Empatika is also committed to valuing, respecting and listening to children by maintaining strong child safeguarding systems and procedures.

Our environment and child safeguarding policies can be requested by emailing : [deborahbong@empatika.org](mailto:deborahbong@empatika.org).

# RESEARCH

We specialise in immersion studies whereby researchers stay in people's homes and join in their everyday lives. We also facilitate video projects and workshops as well as other qualitative approaches. All of Empatika's research adopts a people-centred and participatory approach which involves, wherever possible, handing power from the researcher to study participants. We believe that it is vital that people themselves are also the ones who analyse, reflect on and shape the findings of the research process.



## IMMERSION RESEARCH

Immersion research is a qualitative research approach involving trained researchers living with people in their own homes and sharing in their everyday lives. This relaxed approach of informally 'hanging out' with families and other community members enables easy and open conversations as well as first-hand experience and observation of daily life, providing unique insights into how context shapes the processes, motivations, behaviours and attitudes of people. By building informal relationships and adopting the position of learner, Empatika researchers involve community members in analysis of their own situation so that insights emerge naturally. Immersion research is flexible and opportunistic in its interactions and often employs the use of creative and participatory methods such as visuals and photography. The approach also draws on extensive opportunities for triangulation as researchers use multiple methods (conversation, observation, experience, visuals) over multiple days and nights, interact with a range of people at different locations, and work in small teams but with different host families.

## HUMAN-CENTRED / PEOPLE-DRIVEN DESIGN

Like our immersion research, human-centered design (HCD) revolves around the concept of putting people at the center of ideas, services and products, ensuring that these solutions speak to the needs, priorities and circumstances

of the intended end user. Empatika takes the concept of HCD a step further with people-driven design (PDD) to make explicit that people (the users) are engaged directly in identifying their own challenges, setting goals and developing their own ideas to facilitate positive change in their communities. As part of this process, we link insights from immersion and other qualitative research to co-design processes at the local level with community members, providing a strong basis for developing highly contextualised, practical solutions that can support positive change.

## VIDEO PROJECTS AND WORKSHOPS

Transformative Digital Storytelling processes encourage people to share first-hand experiences and analyse their own situations through the creation of mixed media stories. These stories provide powerful insights into people's reality, their personal experience of change and can provide useful windows on processes from the perspectives of

beneficiaries and frontline service providers. These may provide insights to complement findings from other research or may be analysed as primary research.

## OTHER QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

We also facilitate focus group discussions and undertake in-depth interviews but bring to these our special skills in participatory processes and experience in using empathy and informality to ensure people are enthusiastic to engage and share openly.

We also support communities and people to develop their own indicators of change which reflect the direction and pace of change they want to see. These may be regularly monitored by them or reviewed by other externally supported means periodically.



# TRAINING

Our training courses are grounded in our own experiences as researchers and emphasis on participation, informality, and connecting with participants. All our training courses are developed by Empatika researchers and trainers, drawing on our learning and reflections, as well as international participatory practices.

## IMMERSION RESEARCH

- » Our Immersion Research Level 1 training is for anyone with an interest in immersion research techniques (as a practitioner or commissioner), including core qualitative research skills and respectful ways of undertaking research with people. The training includes around four days of sessions, combined with field practicum or a two-night pilot immersion. This training is currently available both offline and online. **(4 days)**

## TRANSFORMATIVE DIGITAL STORYTELLING

- » This training is for anyone who wants to develop an understanding of participatory storytelling approaches and concrete skills to apply them. The training uses storytelling tools and techniques to create complex personal stories that can complement research to provide a powerful and





transformative personal element. Participants build these skills by carrying out this process themselves using a range of creative techniques, including drawings, photography, and first-person narration they develop into short multimedia videos. **(4 days)**

- » Empatika also offers training on Transformative Storytelling for facilitators.

## **BETTER QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

- » A training for anyone who wants to improve their skills as a qualitative researcher using participatory and people-centered techniques. This training focuses on building attitudes and behaviours important for research, enhancing interpersonal communication skills and interview techniques, the importance of elements like rigour and research ethics, and their role in successful research outcomes. **(1-2 days)**

## **MIXED METHODS RESEARCH (3 DAYS)**

- » This training is for researchers who want to better understand and employ fully mixed methods research designs. It covers study design, implementation, analysis and documentation of integrated qualitative and quantitative methods. The training is facilitated in cooperation with international quantitative research experts with whom Empatika has refined these approaches. **(3 days)**
- » Empatika also offers training for commissioners and users of research and evaluation as a way of building their confidence in commissioning, interpreting and assessing the quality of mixed methods research.

## RCA within mixed methods

To collect and interpret quantitative findings

- Identify bias: Examiner behaviour and attitude  
direct units of measurement
- Mid-low RCA will inform the mid-low quantitative survey
- Other examples: Success and Justice in the Firm



# MANAGEMENT CAPACITY

In developing our financial and management systems, Empatika aims to be transparent, practical, and efficient with the goal of ensuring that our systems and operating principles best serve the type of work that we do. We have also used our team's previous experiences working as a project funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2014-2017) and as part of The Palladium Group to help develop many of these processes and guidelines. Empatika adopts a zero-tolerance approach to fraud and has systems in place for managing internal grievances. In 2020 we revamped our accounting systems to improve efficiency, ensure compliance with Indonesian accounting standards, and as part of undergoing our first external audit in early 2021. Empatika undertakes risk assessments for all studies to mitigate any risks to staff, delivery or sound financial management. All staff are trained in child safeguarding procedures and we have developed a full module on Child Protection as part of our Immersion Research Level 1 training which all Empatika researchers undergo prior to joining fieldwork.

Our core team includes 3 fixed term staff and 12 long-term consultants. Empatika's management team consists of an Indonesia-based Executive Director supported by departmental directors for Operations, Research, Training, and Programs. Our operations team also includes a Finance Coordinator, Finance Assistant, and Communications and Knowledge Hub Officer. Empatika has developed customised standard operational guidance notes that outline the quality standards for conducting field work, financial procedures, logistical arrangements, and security and risk mitigation in the often challenging contexts encountered while conducting participatory studies. We review our operational standards during our yearly company gathering and as part of our six-month management reviews to ensure they remain relevant and as part of identifying areas where we can improve.

In 2022, we established a foundation in Indonesia as a sister organization to allow us more flexibility in pursuing projects and programs beyond pure research.





[www.empatika.org](http://www.empatika.org)

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