tafakari
BUSARA YEARBOOK

You are not alone: human behavior under pressure

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What is the **Tafakari** Yearbook?

Busara's **Tafakari** offers an annual summary of who we are, what we do, and where we are going.

Tafakari means **'to reflect, ponder, think about'** in Kiswahili, the language widely spoken in Kenya, where our headquarters are located. The Tafakari Yearbook is an opportunity for different voices from within Busara

- **To reflect:** What have we accomplished in the year gone past? What have we learned about humanity's complex challenges and how behavioral science might help? How is the environment in which we do our work changing?

- **To ponder:** What kind of contribution are we hoping to make with our work? What changes would we like to see within ourselves and around us? What responsibilities must we take on to work towards a better future? What role can we play?

- **To think:** What are our plans, hopes, and dreams for the coming year?

Meet Busara

Busara works with researchers and organizations to advance and apply behavioral science in pursuit of poverty alleviation. As a research and advisory organization, we are boutique, cutting edge and vocal, seeking to push the frontiers of knowledge in behavioral science and development, and putting the Global South at the center of research, policy, and practice. We pursue a future where global human development activities respond to people's lived experience; value knowledge generated in the context in which it is applied; and promote culturally-appropriate and inclusive practices.

To help achieve this, we advance ethical behavioral science and equitable scholarship in the Global South through interdisciplinary research (using qualitative, quantitative and experimental methods) and through personnel policies that support diversity, inclusion and equity in an international Global South organization. As the largest behavioral science lab in the world with 133,000+ lab participants, we join our partners—such as implementing non-profit and private sector partners, academics, governments and multilaterals—on a learning journey to find out how to increase the impact of their programs.

The operationally relevant knowledge we produce tackles complex issues in food security, climate and environment, livelihoods, governance, digital inclusion, education, peace, and health. With our work, we are growing the next generation of researchers through in-house courses, academic teaching, and visiting fellowships.

BUSARA'S CORE VALUES

ACT WITH CURIOSITY

We want to learn. We want to never stop asking the difficult questions in our work. We want to meet each other with openness and interest.

ACT WITH RESPECT

We want our work to be thoughtful and of high quality. We want to fulfill the need that we originally identified in pursuing a piece of work. We are careful about the complex issues we tackle, and mindful of the huge impact they have on people's real lives.

ACT TOGETHER

We are collaborators, seeking to actively share knowledge and perspectives. We seek to communicate and contribute to achieving our shared purpose.

ACT WITH PURPOSE

We want to keep a clear line of sight of why we do what we do. We want to take responsible ownership of our work, and be held accountable to the standards we set for ourselves.

Message from leadership

Chaning Jang is Busara's Chief Executive Officer

Busara is under pressure.

As an organization dedicated to behavioral science in pursuit of poverty alleviation, we feel that pressure from all around us. There is pressure from the outside world: climate change is real; it is here, and it disproportionately affects those experiencing poverty. Conflict, political polarization, and extremism

have become a normal part of life for people. Rapid inflation has forced people to do more with less. The next pandemic seems right around the corner. A wave of misinformation and disinformation makes addressing these challenges even more difficult.

There is also pressure from and on behavioral science. The promise of behavioral science has hit the mainstream. Both the UN[1] and the WHO[2] fully embraced the power of behavioral science to tackle a wide range of areas, from health to the conflict to internal bureaucracy. This puts the pressure at an all-time high for behavioral science to deliver results. At the same time, allegations of academic misconduct[3] and outright data fraud[4] threaten to dismantle the science that underpins our field and add to the broader social science replication crisis.[5] These also invite broader criticism[6]

1 (UN 2020)
2 (World Health Organization Executive Board 2023 (1 February))
3 (Lewis-Kraus 2023)
4 (Nesterak 2023)
5 (Piper 2020 October 14))
6 (Weatherby 2023 (November 30))

of behavioral science's contribution to public policy and whether the newly found importance in the realm of policy is deserved. More fundamentally, behavioral science's narrow focus on individual behavior and overreliance on nudges has created questions about whether the field is truly fit for purpose or better left to the academic domain, or domains where interventions can already be inexpensively and rapidly deployed, or where first-order structural problems have already been solved.

The most pressure on us, however, comes internally. Nine years into our journey, we are embracing what it means to be an international Global South organization.[7] We continue building a hybrid work environment while keeping a hold on our commitment to context. We are defining how diversity, equity, and inclusion shape our identity through our people.[8] We are realizing that to make meaningful and lasting change in development, we need to break from methodological dogma— even redefine the field itself— and embrace a more substantive view

of the problems we hope to solve. No longer can behavioral science be seen as a singular silver bullet (and by the way, it never was that silver bullet in the first place). We must evolve our partnerships, ways of working, and operating model to more readily make an impact.

This pressure focuses, forces, and breaks. But pressure also brings us together.

We are not alone. Behavioral science teams around the world have flourished. This year, we counted nearly 900 teams that practice behavioral science,[9] covering the gamut of boutique consultancies, hundred-person agencies, and embedded groups within governments, multilaterals and non-profits. What once was a handful is now a tidal wave. This year at Busara, we started 88 projects, onboarded 67 new staff and interns, and opened a new office in Latin America to continue our goal of helping foster behavioral science and behavioral science talent worldwide. We have redefined our operating model to center around a dozen issue-based portfolios, such

7 (Aden 2023)
8 (Ngugi and Schomerus 2023)
9 888 Teams as of Dec 14, 2023. https://www.behavioralteams.com/teams/

as food systems, infectious disease, governance, and metascience, to name a few. We are, in turn, bringing multiple portfolios together to tackle farther reaching problems such as climate change or to develop novel multidisciplinary approaches to systems change.

Our work is also not alone. We have embraced our role as a steward and creator of knowledge, not simply a service provider for insights. We owe it to the community of peers, partners, funders, and participants to share our findings to transform thinking. To do that, we have created a team dedicated to finding and amplifying our voice. We have hosted trainings, workshops, conferences, communities of practice, and internal research festivals. We have signed memoranda of understanding, developed new partnerships, seconded staff, and housed new organizations. Our work necessitates and thrives under collaboration, and we have jumped right in.

Tafakari—the Busara Yearbook— reflects our journey in 2023 and an outlook for 2024 through the wide range of perspectives that will shape Busara's journey going forward. I hope reading it will give you a sense

of the pressures of solving problems rigorously and practically, living up to expectations, representing the people and voices in contexts you serve, and running a uniquely international Global South organization. I hope it also shows you our commitment to our context, community, and unique perspective and that you receive and accept an invitation to join us on our journey.

> *This pressure focuses, forces, and breaks. But pressure also brings us together.*

MAP OF COUNTRIES WHERE BUSARA HAS WORKED
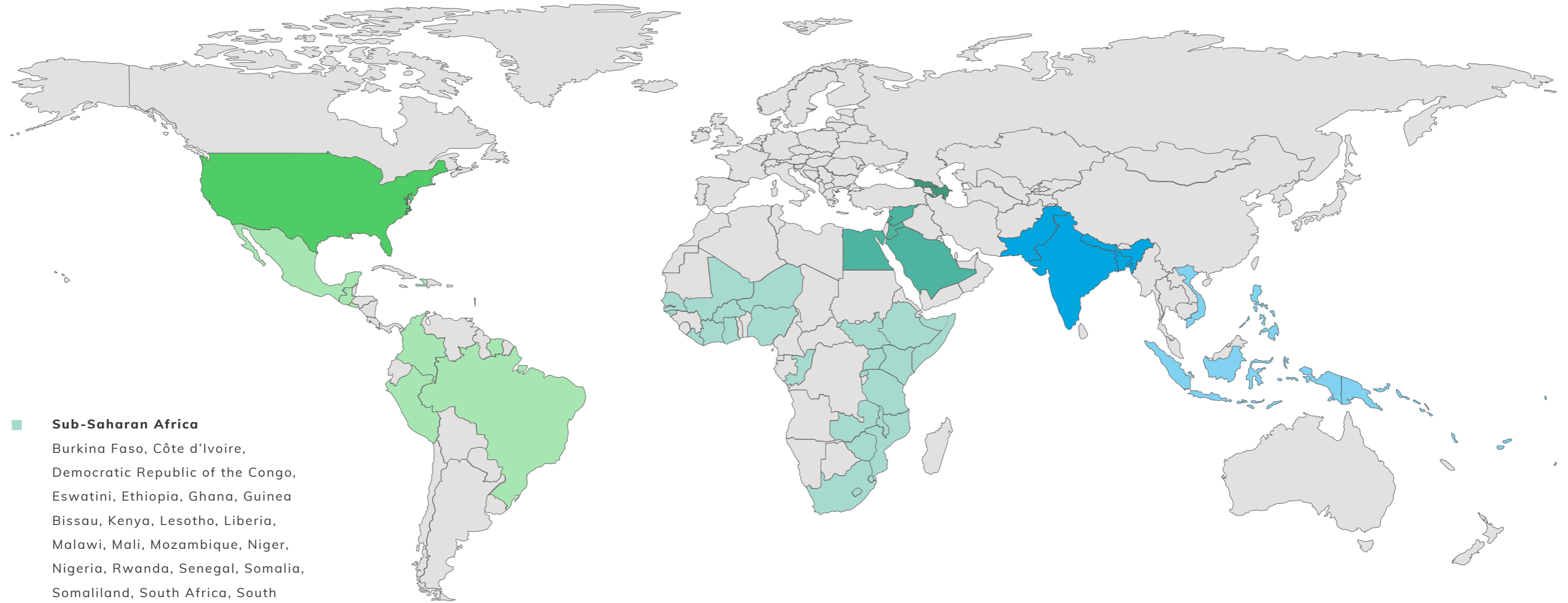
Sub-Saharan Africa

Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire,
Democratic Republic of the Congo,
Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea
Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia,
Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Niger,
Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Somalia,
Somaliland, South Africa, South
Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia,
Zimbabwe

South Asia

Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan

Latin America

Barbados, Brazil, Colombia,
Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras,
Mexico, Peru, Suriname

East Asia & Pacific

Fiji, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea,
Philippines, Samoa, Solomon Islands,
Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Vietnam

Middle East & North Africa

Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria,
Saudi Arabia

Central Asia

Azerbaijan, Georgia

North America

USA

You are not alone:
working with each other

Sharpening our principled approach: the future of research in the Global South

Joel M. Wambua is a Research Specialist based in Kenya

Researchers, we are not alone

When working hard to generate social science knowledge, researchers can sometimes forget who is most important: the people who share their information for our research. It is the dilemma that is at the heart of what Busara does. A main focus for us has been—and continues to be in 2024—to find ways to always put research participants first, particularly in the experimental work we do.

Experiments in the social sciences have taught us an enormous amount in recent decades. For example, they have become important tools for evaluating the efficacy of interventions.[10] However, in recent debates, sharp critiques have been made of the power imbalances of discipline in knowledge production. Critics point out that all research funding, theories, and hypotheses come from the Western world, and as a result, the knowledge produced serves Western academic pursuits rather than actual development policy.[11] The scope of these debates goes well beyond those usually encompassed by the term 'research ethics'.[12] We need to move beyond a

10 (Falk and Heckman 2009; Banerjee and Duflo 2013)
11 (Amarante et al. 2022; Hoffmann 2020; Kaplan, Kuhnt, and Steinert 2020)
12 (Herington and Tanona 2022)

narrow focus on the welfare of individual participants and rather examine the researchers' role in the ecosystem of international development knowledge.[13] Several researchers whose work is on experimentation in the Global South have responded to these criticisms with suggestions for more ethical conduct.[14] However, the responses do not feature the voices of the participants themselves. As a result, while researchers aim to do the right thing, there is a possibility that their methods may not align with the expectations of their participants. Crossing cultural boundaries further complicates the situation, as contrasting views on what constitutes the right thing may exist.

Researchers cannot pursue the uncertain pathway of doing good in the world through research if, at the first hurdle, we harm. Yet widely shared beliefs about 'do no harm' are more difficult to practice than we might think. Many of the ways researchers protect participants have little regard for the actual preferences of those participants and are instead governed by far-off institutional review boards.

How we learned the hard way

At Busara, our research primarily focuses on bridging the gap between the Global North and South, with a significant portion of it taking place in the latter. Over the past decade, our interactions with research participants from different areas in the Global South have often left us with the impression that they are disillusioned by the purpose of research. They often ask about the importance of the research conducted in their communities and the reasoning behind some of the decisions researchers make and repeatedly ask researchers to share results so they can learn something. For instance, in a recent qualitative study that we conducted, a female participant from Kibera, a large slum in Nairobi, said; 'Honestly, I don't know the benefits and risks of participating in research since I have never been told' and another said 'it is important to me so that I can know what went on and what will now. I would like to know what the results were and how it would help someone'.[15] When research is not meaningful to participants, the findings may have limited validity.[16]

Relatedly, the misalignment in expectations between researchers and participants may lead to profound negative consequences. At Busara, we have witnessed firsthand the potential

13 (Camfield and Palmer-Jones 2015)
14 (Humphreys 2014 (Nov 2))
15 (Nyaga et al. 2022)
16 (Schmidt 2022)

harm that can occur when there is a lack of understanding and communication between these different worlds.

Consider an example from our early days. We conducted a study investigating whether transferring a large sum of money – USD 500 – to lower-income Kenyans would improve people's economic and psychological well-being. We implemented the study in villages where most villagers earned less than USD 200 monthly. The transfer of money was unconditional—from ours and the perspectives of our Global North research partners. The study participants could do whatever they wished with it. However, despite our good intentions, the study caused some unintended negative consequences, such as feelings of anger, envy, fear, and jealousy among villagers, and in some cases, tensions across the villages threatened to escalate into inter-household conflict. We therefore, halted

our activities and spent time engaging community members to understand what had gone wrong and what we could have done to prevent it. What went wrong? The study was a randomized experiment with a pure control group. This meant that half the villagers did not receive the cash transfer. The problem was that these control villagers did not know why, which led to a perception that their friends, rivals, and relatives suddenly received a windfall worth two and a half times their monthly earnings for reasons they did not understand. When doing the risk assessment for the project, we did not involve the participants. Had we done that, we would have known about the social structures of the village and explained the study procedure to the broader community instead of focussing on selected participants only.

Our story of this study has a positive ending. After we learned about our

Busara at the Africa Evidence Summit 2023

mistakes, we spent time talking to community members about the study procedures, and we completed the study without incident. Taking time to speak to community members about a potential study and brainstorming about potential threats and ways to mitigate them has allowed us also successfully to conduct better studies in other regions. Because we learned that to show respect toward the communities we aim to serve is crucial, we became better researchers.

As researchers, we need to think more critically about approaching research in the Global South. We must decolonize the purpose of research and build a knowledge infrastructure that reflects the voices of those being researched, and communicates to policy practitioners in the Global South. This means spending more time thinking through the values and principles of the people we hope to serve, doing research for actual development rather than career advancement, and recognizing that research participants are the experts of their own lives, and to involve them in decisions that affect them is critical.

Building better relationships: we are working on it

Social research is an ongoing relationship between the researcher and the researched. These are not empty words; they are very real to us. When researchers and the researched communicate about expectations, and researchers try to understand the context of the research, this relationship gets easier to manage. But it never gets easy. And the greater the chasm between the experience of the researchers and the researched, the more thoughtful management of that relationship is required.

Heading into 2024, one of our aims is to sharpen our tools for that kind of thoughtful relationship management. In 2023, we enhanced our thinking on what it takes to strengthen the ethics of all of our research, but even more so when working with vulnerable populations. We articulated new commitments to diversify and protect our staff, partners, and research participants. We hope that as our tools and relationships continue to get better, the effect will become cumulative from research project to research project: maybe each step will allow us to make a contribution towards a more just research ecosystem in which knowledge creators and research participants work together and, in doing so, create better evidence that can be used for better policies and programs. It will be for everyone's benefit.

How I becomes we: why voice is the link between us and the world

Michael Onsando is Busara's Manager Voice and Impact, based in Kenya

What makes us

If you go far back enough in history, communication and community become the same word. They both start out as *communis*, an old Latin word that means common, public, general or shared by all. Who 'I' am may be the territory of the individual, but everyone has a stake in who 'we' are.

When we speak, we participate in this act of community building. We begin to carve out a space for 'I' in the shared 'we'. But when does I become we? And how does it happen?

Busara is a collective of individuals, each with their own perspective on the world.

17 (Aden 2023)
18 (Singh 2023)
19 (Jagati, Korur and Schomerus 2023)

Busara sits within a larger ecosystem of development organizations in the Global South. Which each sit within a larger ecosystem of development organizations.

Through our voice, we seek to make ourselves known to the world and thus make the world known to us. To build Busara's voice, we have, in the past year, created online and offline avenues where individuals and organizations can express their views and hear the views of others. In doing this, we hope to create a future that is truly *communis*.

What we have asked this past year and what was asked of us

Understanding what is shared by all involves asking questions about the elements involved and exploring their relations. At Voice and Impact, we have facilitated asking questions like 'What does it mean to be a Global South organization?'.[17] We have created frameworks for navigating contexts when all researchers are often one (sometimes more than one) step removed from their research environment.[18] We even mapped out our experiences applying behavioral science in India.[19] While these publications offer a contribution to knowledge, these are all areas in which we don't expect anything we put out to be final. If anything, by putting work like this out, we invite the world to interact with the work and perspectives of an

individual or group of individuals within the organization and allow us to learn together.

This process is not always roses and butterflies. Sometimes the resistance is external. Something we put out is challenged, and we need to explain ourselves further and listen to the critiques. Sometimes we are afraid to speak up, or our partners are afraid. Afraid of the repercussions of putting something out. That in trying to build ourselves the communities we seek (around peace, justice, and progress), we might isolate ourselves from the communities we need (funding and partnerships).

Busara's Tafakari room also known as the library opened in 2023

20 (Singh and Ngugi 2023)

Still, there are good days. Like when we hold Tara Mistari, our research and learning festival that Mareike Schomerus writes about in this Yearbook, and as a result, the cross pollination of information across the organization skyrockets. Or when a Twitter space creates an environment to navigate complicated organizational conversations publicly on things like gender pay gaps (which Stanley Ngugi elaborates on more in this Yearbook).[20]

Two tasks for Voice and Impact: consistency and awareness

This past year, Busara's voice strategy consisted of two words: consistency and awareness. By making sure we are consistently putting work out to the world, we were looking to get its attention. Now more people are looking. The discipline needed for consistency is always a challenge, which is why we had to grow awareness within Busara of how important it is to interact with the world through the knowledge we create. Researchers at Busara are running randomized controlled trials (RCTs) or qualitative surveys; they analyze data and prepare reports. Many times asking them to then work on packaging this information for different people may seem like an added step too far. Especially when the next project beckons and time is tight.

2024: everything again, but better

But precious time cannot mean that we do not do it, or that we do not do it well. This is why in 2024, we are simply adding one more word to our strategy - quality. We will spend the year defining quality standards across the organization while still keeping up a consistent, steady pace for continual awareness. This, we hope, will continue to carve out a space for Busara as a voice in the larger landscape that has something of value to offer. A space where we are all together creating the rules and policies that govern what is shared by all.

SPOTLIGHT: SOCIAL MEDIA

As we reflect on the past year, our journey through the digital landscape has been nothing short of remarkable. With an average growth rate of 28%, our social media presence has flourished, connecting us with a diverse and engaged audience.

Groundwork chronicles and beyond

Our Groundwork publications found a special place on the professional landscape, capturing the attention of thought leaders on LinkedIn.

Busarians at Tara Mistari 2023

28%

average
growth rate
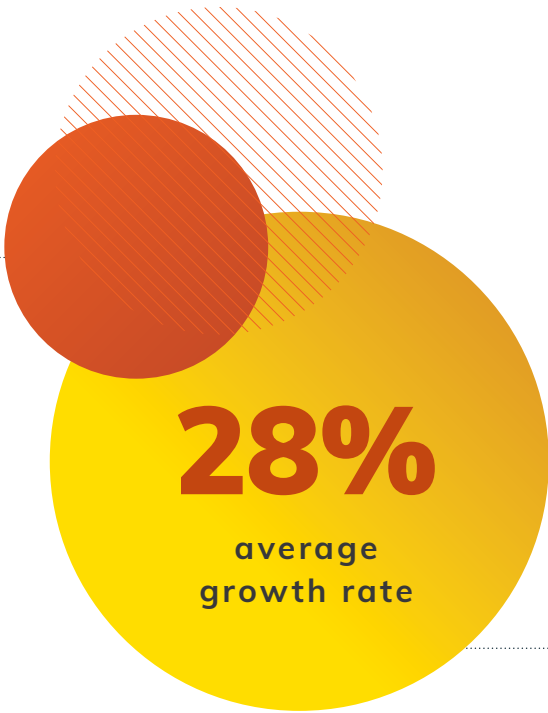
Closer to the **MILLION-MOMENT** milestone

Our collective impact reverberated across the digital realm, with our posts receiving nearly **1 million impressions** across various social media platforms. This milestone signifies not just numbers, but a community that values and engages with the content we create and share.

The buzz around contextualization

Salim Kombo's blog post on "Contextualizing Moral Foundations Theory"[21] attracted the attention of academics and sparked a heated debate on X.

Blog coverage

Our digital footprint expanded with the release of over 20 insightful blog posts on our website and LinkedIn. These posts spanned diverse sectors such as health, experimentation, climate change, agriculture, and more.

GAMING CAPTIVATES OUR PARTICIPANTS

Our participants, the heartbeat of our community, expressed a keen interest in learning how we incorporate gaming into our research work.

21 (Kombo 2023)

Catalyzing impact: Busara's approach to global development and partnerships

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Francis Meyo is Vice President (Research and Advisory), based in Kenya

Things are changing

2023 marked my seventh year with Busara. I spent much time in those seven years working on understanding the prevention and management of HIV infections and how behavioral science can be helpful here.

During that time, I also saw a significant shift in the trajectory of HIV prevention programming (which becomes even more apparent in the past three decades). Strategies for prevention and management were initially predominantly influenced by Social and Behavior Change Communication (SBCC), notably centered around the messaging of what came to be known as ABCs—'Abstain, Be faithful, use a Condom.'

However, despite the SBCC approach and the ABC messaging, HIV infections remained devastatingly high. It became clear that communicating about ABC was not having the desired impact. The medical community responded by developing and deploying various biomedical products. Concurrently, SBCC strategies evolved, aligning with the UNAIDS 90-90-90 targets, which highlighted knowing one's status, receiving antiretroviral therapy, and achieving viral suppression.[22] Awareness of one's HIV status and preventive products became widespread. Yet somehow, this knowledge and these products were not really used: the desired impact remained elusive.

Working together

In the past five years, a pivotal shift has occurred, and it has nothing to do with new medical insights, but everything with community: Collaboration, at the foundational level, between the biomedical and behavioral sciences

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22 The UNAIDS 90-90-90 strategy (which concluded in 2020) aimed to have 90% of all people living with HIV know their HIV status, 90% of all diagnosed people receive sustained antiretroviral therapy, and 90% of those receiving antiretroviral therapy having viral suppression. (UNAIDS not dated)

communities increased. This collaboration aims to finalize clinical studies that innovate on desired HIV prevention technologies, such as long-acting PrEP. Simultaneously, efforts are being made to explore the behavioral segments, messaging, and positioning necessary for the successful awareness, adoption, utilization, and advocacy of these products once they receive regulatory approval and come to market. The work that has kept me busy in Busara for the past seven years has become a lot more centered on people working together.

This concerted effort is evident in the journey of a five-year Busara study that involves numerous stakeholders such as biomedical and behavioral science researchers, study participants and respondents, enumerators, regulators, product sponsors, advocacy groups, government agencies, and creative agencies. True partnerships, as evidenced by the diverse group of stakeholders involved here, are instrumental in achieving true impact.

Achieving more with partners

When Busara started, our genesis was one of disruption, stemming from the inquiry of '**what** works or doesn't by randomistas. But in the following years, we understood that our mission—which is to shed light on the intricacies of **why** specific programs, policies, or products influence development outcomes—is not served well simply by disrupting others. Anchoring our work are the core principles of decision making, action, and behavior, and still require us to pay attention to people, whether at an individual, community, or global level. We learned that paying attention to people also means building better partnerships so Busara now actively cultivates and maintains partnerships at these various levels. This effort is driven by a shared pursuit of a more equitable and sustainable future for everyone.

Busarians Morgan Kabeer and Shalmali Ghaisas at a learning event

YOU ARE NOT ALONE: HUMAN BEHAVIOR UNDER PRESSURE

In the global development landscape, our research, design, and advisory services hold significant value for implementing partners, policymakers, and product designers. Simultaneously, Busara recognizes the importance of identifying the individuals and groups to **whom** our understanding of behaviors is grounded, applies to, and ultimately impacts. While we persistently strive to bridge the gap between intention and action, we also focus on closing potential disparities within the research/design to policy/practice (R/D - P/P) spectrum.

This involves fortifying our connections with respondents, enumerators, and beneficiaries, as well as engaging with creatives, advocates, and sponsors. Such efforts ensure alignment of collective agendas on development and minimize the risk of knowledge and actions being lost along the R/D - P/P spectrum.

None of that is particularly effective if done in isolation. So, in navigating the complexities of the global development system, Busara's commitment to fostering meaningful partnerships and bridging critical gaps remains unwavering, paving the way for more effective and sustainable interventions that have the impact that they want to achieve.

Did you catch that? The making of a learning organization

Mareike Schomerus is Vice President (Voice and Impact), based in Kenya

Lockdown pushed us over the edge.

Everyone looked so tired on Zoom calls coming out of the winter of 2020/21. With Busara staff worldwide having gone through different experiences of lockdown, Covid waves, and trying to keep our organization going, I realized that I was more familiar with what the walls looked like in everyone's homes than with their work: the hour-long slots of engaging with each other just did not allow for meaningful exchange and learning. We missed the one thing we wanted to do: communally advance knowledge.

Busara's journey

Busara was born out of a service need: to deliver data collection to academics requiring behavioral lab experimentation. While the longevity of Busara is a testament to the need for this service, virulent debates have shifted the organization's interests: debates about the applicability and reach of randomized controlled trials; experiments; the need for interdisciplinary knowledge creation; localisation; and the gaping Global South data gap. Busara could go on forever being a service delivery organization for others—or we could learn to take a stance on some of these issues ourselves.

The ethics of research are different and more acute when you live where the research is conducted. The articulation of what the data gap really means for our policy understanding is much sharper when you are one of the people not represented by that data. And the global need for a comprehensive, data-informed debate is becoming clearer as the need for collective action is more urgent than ever, and the willingness to be together diminishes since the international institutions that ought to shape this togetherness are losing power because many, if not most, cannot see their benefit.

How does this shape our interest? It highlights that we can use the substantial amount of effort that has already gone into building an organization (and keeping it funded and mission-driven is no picnic) and build it out to become more of a think tank than a consultancy, more of a knowledge contributor than a service deliverer.

Who is Busara, the learning organization?

We talk a lot about diversity, inclusion, equity, and the need to contextualize research. We also want to understand what it means to be an organization that is rooted in the Global South yet fiercely international. With a voice that can be heard in many different international settings that deal with applied research— without simply bending to conventions, but by also developing our own. But how to do that? How do you take completely different educational experiences, different knowledge cultures, different—to be Bourdieu about it—*habitus*? How do you set up your institution so that it supports its researchers in growing their careers, finding their voice, and making a

> *The ethics of research are different and more acute when you live where the research is conducted.*

contribution? What steps does it take to develop a learning organization culture that does not simply replicate what other organizations do?

Learning to walk

One step is to realize that learning is practice. Learning is culture. Declaring interests and seeking to contribute to knowledge and learning can be tough to do in a business model that also sometimes simply requires us to fill financial holes. But the stark realization of the learning vacuum that lockdown brought put us on the track that in 2023 saw our learning culture become more rooted as a natural part of who Busara is. An integral part of this is our learning festival *Tara Mistari.*

⊞ Tara Mistari

Tara Mistari was born as an idea in that dark lockdown winter of 2020/21. A humble team of two—Shriyam Gupta (now University of Maryland) and myself— identified that the lockdown had made it harder for all of us to make connections between what we knew and between each other. *Tara Mistari* connects: in a nod to two languages widely spoken in Busara (Hindi and Kiswahili), *Tara*

Mistari describes the imaginary lines that connect the stars to build a constellation. It is entirely possible to look at a beautiful night sky and see the glittering dots of stars *(tara)*— information—without ever drawing lines *(mistari)* between them to frame them as a constellation that becomes recognizable knowledge (such as the constellation Orion: very easy to point out, very hard to describe it without referring to the imaginary lines). *Tara Mistari* is designed to help us draw the connections to move what we learn from dots of information to patterns of knowledge.

Busarian Brenda Ogutu at Tara Mistari 2023

The first *Tara Mistari* in September 2021 was largely conducted online with small decentralized staff gatherings. *Tara Mistari* 2022 was a humble get-together held inside a well-ventilated office. In 2023, *Tara Mistari* was a joyful celebration with about 120 people meeting in our garden and around the campfire, cherishing debate, companionship, and seeking insights on the question of where Busara fits in in the research ecosystem. *Tara Mistari* is now part of Busara's lexicon to describe this particular learning and connecting experience. Convening and bringing people together to learn is an increased focus for us, also evident in our convening

of India's behavioral science gathering Disha ColLab' 23–about which <u>Kriti Chouhan writes more in this yearbook.</u>

Another identified need was to systematically share our knowledge with the world. Thus, 2023 also saw the launch of Busara's publication series *Groundwork. Groundwork* embodies our move toward intentionally working on building Busara's voice in the way we know best: by acknowledging all the actual groundwork an organization like Busara does. *Groundwork* celebrates the work that often stays in the background— the thinking on research approaches, literature reviews, lessons learned, or fundamental discussions about how we do our work.

What does Busara speak?

During our *Tara Mistari* research festival, we dicovered the diversity of languages spoken in Busara that day —

English, Swahili, Hindi, Kikuyu, Kamba, Luhya, Sheng, Pidgin, Teso, Maragoli, Lutsotso, Marathi, Meru, Kikuyu, Punjabi, Lang'e, Wanga, Kalenjin, Luganda, Hausa, Nupe, Kisii, Acholi, Nyore, Afrikaans, Spanish, Italian, French, Portuguese, Kannada, Sign language, German, Tamil, Bengali, Hinglish, Runyoro, Runywakole, Luo, Amharic, Rukiga, Lusoga, Gujarati, Alur, Nepali, Mandarin, Vietnamese

A third part of the move towards being a learning organization is the change

in structures: we have structured our research and advisory work around championing expertise in <u>subject areas.</u> Had we remained generalists, we would likely be working towards someone else's research agenda.

All of that combined created another crucial shift. Busara's beginnings as a behavioral lab working mainly for behavioral economists were aptly reflected in its long original name: Busara Center for Behavioral Economics. Heading into 2024, this is no longer who we are. Our lab has moved from being a data collector to being a research partner as <u>Engy Saleh writes in this yearbook.</u> The issues we tackle with a behavioral lens in our portfolios are complex, requiring a commitment to diverse methods and disciplines beyond psychology and economics. To better reflect this, we now refer to ourselves simply as *Busara* (meaning wisdom in Kiswahili), which describes our ambition much better than the disciplinary qualifier.

2024: learning to talk

A learning organization is not built by decree: learning needs to occur with intention, commitment, and consistency. Once we articulated the changes we wanted to see, we granted ourselves the time to learn from each other—and continue to do so.

We start 2024 with the ambition to invite the outside world to soon join us for Tara Mistari, to share much more of our groundwork through *Groundwork*, and to acknowledge that learning nourishes us. For all of this, time is of the essence— but time is expensive. Staying committed to learning and connecting can feel like climbing a mountain covered in slippery ice if, at the same time, you have to deliver on project work to keep food on the table.

Yet, a crucial consequence of realizing that this is a joint, slow and steady effort is that we are committed to not slip up: we will take a day for *Tara Mistari,* even if finances are tight and deadlines looming. We will celebrate the unglamorous but crucial work that goes on in the background. We will continue to learn.

Busarians celebrating Tara Mistari 2023

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Working at Busara, what was an important thing
you learned in 2023?

Gladys Muange, Project Operations Coordinator, Nairobi

I learned the value of collaborative teamwork and the power of diverse perspectives in driving innovation.

Ayo Adeloye, Talent Officer, Lagos

I learnt to think of feedback as a bold recipe suggestion – it may seem unfamiliar and challenging initially, but opening up to it allows me unravel new flavors that enhance the overall taste of my dish (work).

Shalin Desai, Senior Analyst, Mumbai

Working at Busara has helped me realise the potential for both collective and individual contributions to critical issues that matter.

Samantha Wanjiku, Senior Officer People Operations, Nairobi

Your role at Busara, whatever its nature, carries the potential to create considerable impact.

Welcoming the moneyed visitor: funding challenges and opportunities for a Global South organization

Sam Bastian is Busara's Chief Operating Officer; Wilson Mburu is Director of Finance; Mareike Schomerus is Vice President (Voice and Impact), based in Kenya
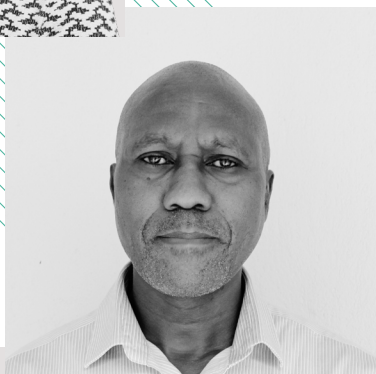
We don't want to work alone. Frankly, Busara can't afford to. We need moneyed visitors. In 2023, we learned that with money, context also matters: under what conditions and with what understanding money arrives determines whether Busara can be a good host.

Moneyed visitors

Money visits Busara in different shapes. It might be attached with exact instructions on how to spend it on the design of a study or the precise shape of the output.

Or money might announce its arrival by simply stating: I am here. I trust you to spend me with intent, in a principled way that is best suited to the changing needs of your work.

We need both, and we have been fortunate and honored to have welcomed a variety of moneyed visitors (sometimes the same year after year), who deeply believe in our ability to help solve big global development challenges.

Busara is a complex organization with big ambitions to improve how research in global development is conducted, and to consistently refine the quality of the knowledge we produce. Money with exact instructions brings us partners with skin in the game. These partners bring us their problems and ask: can you help me solve this? Can we learn together?

It allows us to focus and prioritize our efforts where there is momentum and demand for research. Those types of moneyed visitors allow us to learn about the ambitions of others who also want to see a change. Conditions and expectations are good if they are part of a healthy mix in our money flows.

On the other hand, the money that comes without exact instructions allows us to flourish and grow while taking risks. We need those types of visitors. We cannot use flexible funding to subsidize defined project work: we would see that as violating the trust placed in us to be a sustainable organization that is creating its own room to grow. This unrestricted money we can spend on being a learning organization, strengthening our voice, working on our approach to diversity and inclusion, and investing in developing

substantive areas with Global South researchers.

We are not in the business of making profit, but we do have to be sustainable, and we are mandated to make a difference in global development; both are impossible to achieve without money. We need to make sure our feet are firmly planted in the ground while pursuing the freedom to fly, which a combination of specific and flexible funding allows us to do.

Grappling with the challenges

Certain moneyed visitors, however, challenge us. Sometimes, a challenging moneyed visitor intentionally or unintentionally tries to get more out of the collaboration than we can realistically afford. Assuming that working in the Global South would be cheaper is a long-standing misconception. We are building our collective muscle to assert our power in these situations.

At times, money can be offered with conditions to fundamentally change the way we work. Being offered money also then becomes a soul-searching moment for us, as we ask ourselves: are we accepting money because we need it or because it helps us advance our mission?

Sharing our impact story in terms of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and metrics is one of our biggest challenges. Because we prioritize knowledge creation, we think of impact more like researchers or academics, rather than implementers. Yes, we want to know how many people we reached with our outputs, of course, but we do not think that countable metrics along the lines of 'number of papers published' are an honest measurement of the long-term impact we have on the ecosystem.

How to better measure our desired impact is a work in progress for 2024: how will we measure the relationship between resources spent and the impact we seek to have on the ecosystem of knowledge creation? Measuring increased skills and improved relationships—which is what we cherish in our role as responsible hosts— is much trickier than counting the number of likes on a post (even if such a way of counting might make it easier to access funding).

What it means to localize funding

Like any other organization working in research and global development, we need to consistently adjust to funding realities that change due to political trends or current events. For an organization deeply invested and present in the contexts in which we work, the

localization agenda of many international funders sounded like good news. Yet, 2023 taught us that localization requires funders to better understand localized networks and what a local organization needs to be able to do to access such localized funding. Government dynamics are often invisible to international funders but can create hurdles and contradictions, for example, regulations in a country on receiving money or taxation incentivize an organization to be registered in the Global North, but that often then excludes it from being considered local by an international funder. Compliance issues are extremely complicated for a local organization that receives international funding. From a banking perspective, for example, we are encouraged to have a

Busarian Edith Mwaniki at Tara Mistari 2023

US-based headquarter; from an ideology and sustainability perspective, we are committed to having our leadership and teams hosted where we work.
And then there are tough budget conversations. Localization is often implicitly expected to make things cheaper. This might not be said out loud, but funders often tend to expect an organization headquartered in Kenya to operate with less money than one headquartered in, for example, Washington, D.C. But compliance, skill building, equity and simply being a Global South organization cost as much as anywhere else in the world, as we are working against the way the system has been set up. Genuinely supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion is also expensive. Our equity-based approach to salaries has implications that are tough to talk about; paying people equally no matter what passport they hold means that sometimes we are not considered competitive.

Heading—sustainably—into 2024

At the start of 2024, Busara is in a unique moment in our journey of dealing with money.

We will continue to improve our systems as well as our financial and substantive discipline. Part of the journey is also exploring how to share confidently and

honestly what is required to do our work and to say no if the resources won't allow us to do it in the right way.

But crucially, we do want to be a good, principled, and constructive host to all types of money and learning. We have many ambitions to use resources wisely to do quality work, seek ways to work more efficiently, and cautiously allocate funds between competing and often complex demands. And along the way, we humbly try to make knowledge production more equitable, and research in global development more diverse and inclusive. This is tough to do. We can't afford to do this alone.

BUSARA PORTFOLIOS

- BeGov (Governance and Accountability)

- BRACE (Behavioral Research and Academic Engagements)

- CREME (Culture, Research Ethics and MEthods)

- Education, Labour, and Youth Employment

- Environment and Climate Change

- FaRM (Food System, Resilience, and Climate

- Risk Management)

- Health

- Inclusive Finance

- Infectious Diseases

- LATAM (Latin America)

- Social Inclusion
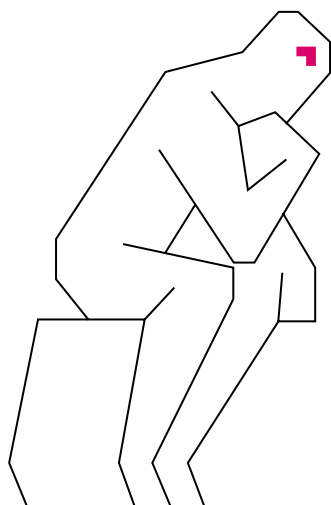
You are not alone:
working on ideas

Can individuals trust health advice? Public health and preparing for the next pandemic

Moh' M. Alhaji, PhD, is an Engagement Director based in Nigeria
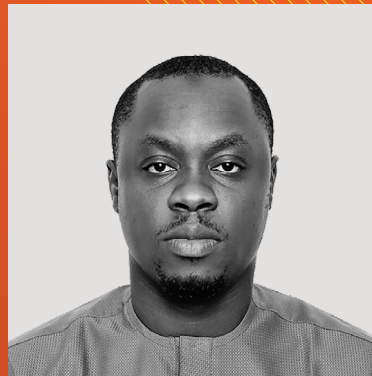
Our COVID-19 journey

It now seems like a while ago, but of course the events of 2019 shaped very much what our 2023 looked like. First identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019, COVID-19 was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on January 30, 2020, and escalated to a pandemic on March 11, 2020. This rapid global transmission triggered a surge of emotions and uncertainties, overwhelming health systems. Governments worldwide responded with measures like travel restrictions, mask mandates, and lockdowns. While deemed essential to contain the virus, these actions came at a substantial cost, disrupting economies, reducing earnings, inciting social upheaval, and exacerbating poverty.

During this turbulent time, the scientific community played a pivotal role in shaping responses, although urgency sometimes led to rushed decisions. The rapid spread of the virus consistently outpaced informed reactions. Vaccine introduction further complicated matters, with wealthier nations monopolizing supplies, intensifying global disparities and sparking tensions between richer and poorer nations, creating strife at all levels.

Fast forward to May 5, 2023. After 765 million confirmed cases, seven million deaths, and 13.3 billion COVID-19 vaccine doses administered globally, the WHO declared COVID-19 no longer a public health emergency. As we normalize COVID as a common ailment, this experience prompts valuable self-reflection. The WHO acknowledges past mistakes, citing a 'lack of coordination, equity, and solidarity' that left 'deep scars on the world'.[23] These insights are vital for learning from our errors, improving preparedness, and better coordinating our response to future epidemics and pandemics.

Individuals and community: the many levels of our learning

2023 also highlighted that it was necessary to explore the intricate relationship between individual behavior and community welfare which, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, has emerged as a critical concern that needs to be appreciated. The enduring goal is to nurture thriving communities where members grasp the broader impact of their choices—for example how much individual vaccination has a communal benefit. To achieve this, health initiatives must shift from individual approaches to holistic ecological models.[24] In these ecological models, health status and behaviors are the outcomes of interest and are influenced by interconnected factors across levels, such as public policy, community, institutions, interpersonal dynamics, and intrapersonal factors. What does this mean? It means that it is deeply acknowledged that all elements work together, just like they do in ecology, which describes how organisms relate to each other in addition to their physical surroundings.

23 (World Health Organization 2023 (May 5))
24 (McLeroy, Steckler, and Bibeau 1988)

Public policy in a health ecological model

Government policies, regulations, and funding at international, national, and subnational levels significantly shape how the elements interact and, thus, ecological health. It is therefore essential to establish, periodically assess, and communicate these policies well in advance of any public health crisis. This proactive approach minimizes the urgency of creating policies during emergencies, leaving insufficient time for effective public communication and adherence.

The COVID-19 pandemic offers a valuable opportunity to evaluate existing policies and introduce new ones for future reference. For instance, critical inquiries that need addressing include: Did the International Health Regulations (IHR) 2005 effectively fulfill its role during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially when some have suggested that it constrained rather than facilitated action against COVID-19?[25] Where did our international port health systems exhibit shortcomings? What difficulties emerged in implementing pandemic preparedness plans amid the COVID-19 crisis at national levels? To what degree does public health emergency preparedness and coordination exist at subnational, national, and international tiers?

Community level

The dynamic interplay of elements, entities, and resources within a community shapes its social norms, impacting community behavior and health. This level is pivotal, necessitating the engagement of trusted community members in co-creating strategies. Key actions involve human-centered outreach design, bolstering existing support networks, and establishing community-based surveillance systems, with a focus on inclusivity for vulnerable populations. Some pertinent questions that can help us determine the state of community-wide emergency coordination systems include evaluating the number of communities with such systems, gaps observed during the COVID-19 pandemic in communities with such systems, and strategies for strengthening or developing these systems for future emergencies.

25 (Aavistland 2021)

Institutional level

Health and medical institutions reflect a community and government's commitment to residents' health. To establish trust and accessibility, these facilities must be adequately equipped, well-staffed, and consistently supplied with medical resources. Improving coordination across primary, secondary, and tertiary healthcare is vital. Evaluating their pandemic-era coordination helps pinpoint and rectify existing gaps, enhancing readiness for future public health crises.

Interpersonal processes and primary groups level

At this foundational level where community members first engage and exchange ideas, it is imperative to ensure a consistent stream of accurate information, actively countering and dispelling misinformation. The establishment, reinforcement, and dissemination of reliable information sources are essential, along with the promotion of community-minded behavior to foster a shared sense of public health responsibility. Moreover, fostering both implicit and explicit social accountability and offering support to community members and leaders are crucial. Immediate areas of inquiry involve assessing the sources of health information within the community and evaluating their effectiveness during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Intrapersonal factors level

Our individual choices are shaped by various factors like personal experiences, values, preferences, and motivation. These choices have far-reaching effects on both others and their communities. For instance, following COVID-19 health guidelines, such as vaccination, goes beyond personal protection. It also safeguards the community by reducing the risk of virus transmission, illustrating the same holds true for non-compliance. Therefore, it is crucial to enhance health literacy with reliable information, bolster self-efficacy, offer healthier choices, and

provide incentives. These actions are essential for empowering individuals to be responsible community members.

Bringing back health for all after COVID-19

It is on these many levels that our work needs to happen. Behavioral science has, maybe somewhat surprisingly, a role to play in all of them. No longer reduced to simply focusing solely on the individual, a broader behavioral perspective even on institutions or communal adherence can help us to get, after all, the best out of the COVID-19 pandemic: a future in which we are better prepared, better connected and more knowledgeable on how humans need to navigate the next public health emergency.

Behavioral science and systems analysis

Steve Wendel is Vice President (Research and Advisory), based in Costa Rica

Behavioral science has often been blind to the communities and societies in which it works. Our field's shared blueprint for applying behavioral science, while called by various names by various organizations, follows the same pattern. This pattern both expresses and reinforces our blind spot: we identify a 'behavioral problem' among a group of people, we select an intervention, and we measure the impact. We look to change individual behaviors with our interventions. As a result, we are critiqued for only being able to tackle small, individual-level problems: we can nudge a consumer to recycle an aluminum can, but we have little to say about how to create a circular economy.

At Busara, we have sought to contextualize our work through qualitative research and participatory design: to understand the specific people with whom we are working, their environment, and their priorities. This is a vital step towards seeing the communities we engage with. Tools such as the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC's) socio-ecological model also help us map how individual decisions and behavior are shaped by communal factors.[26] In applied behavioral science, however, we often use these tools in a particular way: to help us do better individual-level work.

Has the thrill gone? Next steps for behavioral science

The field is grappling with how to tackle communal and societal problems head on: from racism to environmental degradation to gender-based violence. Authors such as Thaler, Chater, Lowenstein and Hallsworth have each called for new tools and methods to better 'see the systems' in which we work.[27] Busara is working on new tools for behavioral science to do just that.

In an ongoing project in Guatemala, we are working with local stakeholders to understand the horrific system of gender-based violence in the country: how ineffective policy, a culture of impunity, and the decisions of individual victims/survivors interact. We have generated a set of causal loop diagrams showing how well-meaning efforts to increase the reporting of GBV could actually make things worse through a pernicious feedback loop. In partnership with the team, we are starting to identify leverage points—nodes, interactions, and unwritten rules of the system—that offer opportunities for systemic change using targeted techniques from behavioral science.

In our environmental and agricultural work, we are analyzing how seemingly effective behavioral interventions to encourage climate-resilient crops can be deeply misleading: because they lose sight of the broader economic and political system in which they are embedded. The more effective an individual nudge is at encouraging better crop selection, the lower the incentive is for all other farmers to do so. As with our gender-based violence work, the goal is to find new interventions, and new applications of behavioral science, that can drive change across a society and its web of interdependencies.

26 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention not dated)
27 (Thaler 2020) (Chater and Loewenstein 2022); (Hallsworth 2023)

Connecting to understand the system

In doing so, we are seeking to learn from the long traditions of systems analysis that already exist in many other fields, while remaining true to the unique perspective and empirical base of behavioral science. The simulation modeling approach called System Dynamics provides an impressive set of computational tools to analyze communal and societal interactions. Systems Thinking, a qualitative offshoot of System Dynamics, goes further and helps make these tools more accessible to a broader audience. Agent-based models (a means to model the bottoms-up emergence of complex adaptive systems) provide another tool to combine individual decision making and behavioral insights with systemic analyses.

This work is new, and still being defined. But it is exciting. At Busara and at other organizations, we are pushing against the limits of our field to learn from the traditions and expertise of other disciplines, while remaining true to our evidence base and approach. Behavioral science can and should be able to deeply understand the communities in which we work, and change our perspective from people as isolated, lonely individuals to one in which people are embedded in a context that shapes and is shaped by their behavior.

Behavioral science for systemic issues:
working with FAO on reducing food waste

Working on behavioral approaches to reducing food waste in key food supplies, we conducted a behavior-infused analysis of the dynamics between actors in the food value chain to identify causes of food loss, specifically for potatoes in Georgia and onions in Azerbaijan. The work, conducted in partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), aims to design targeted interventions addressing key behavioral factors for reducing food waste.

We are *intentionally* much more than an experimentation lab in the Global South

Engy Saleh is Director of BRACE (Behavioral Research and Academic Engagements)

On September 28th of this year, Busara held the third round of its internal research festival, Tara Mistari. We hosted as a keynote speaker Adam Fejerskov, Senior Researcher at the Danish Institute of International Studies and author of the book *The Global Lab: Inequality, Technology, and the New Experimental Movement*. A core theme of the book is around the emergence of the experimentation movement, specifically in low- and middle-income countries and among low- and low/middle-income populations. In particular, the book "aims to explore the oft-hidden geometry of power relations

28 (Fejerskov 2022, 3)

between those who aim to help and those who receive, sometimes wilfully and at other times forcefully" and how treating the world as a lab can exacerbate inequalities.[28]

Now hold that thought.

In the same spirit, Busara's BRACE team (which stands for Behavioral Research and Academic Engagements) held a session to discuss some of the controversial questions that we grapple with on a daily basis in our work: how and when are participant incentives perceived as a tool of compensation versus a tool of coercion into taking part in research? How much should we rely on contextual knowledge in setting inclusion criteria for targeting benefits? And why should Global North researchers seek more than data collection contributions from their research partners on the ground in the Global South? There are many other questions, unified by the insight that improving research done for development purposes should be in the direction of making research more beneficial and relevant to the researched communities.

That's another thought to hold on to.

We at Busara pride ourselves on the fact that the way we do our work intentionally aims at changing the reality that most of

what we know about human behavior and psychology is actually derived from what Henrich et al. call the W.E.I.R.D populations: People from Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic countries.[29] This overall motivation for our work to close this data gap made its way into our discussion of what constitutes quality. A core element of quality is credibility.

That's the third thought.

Now please put those three thoughts together and reflect on the following extracts from *The Global Lab:*

West Africa, French Indochina, or Tunisia formed colonial theatres of proof as experimental medicines were tested for their efficacy, the results compared and confirmed before being brought back to Europe where there was no guarantee they would be published or used scientifically. Local communities were seen as 'reservoirs of disease' with ample subjects from which to extrapolate scientific findings.[30]

29 (Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010)
30 (Fejerskov 2022, 12)

In employing the Global South as a laboratory of experimentation today, no matter whether the aim is commercial or to directly inform policy and practice, fundamental notions of race, bodies, and ethics take center stage.

This extract reminds us that to this day, research can turn into a colonial undertaking.

The problem of distance and how we want to change it

There is no way we can claim that research is credible and relevant if the following continues: researchers who are hundreds of miles away are solely the ones who come up with the research design. They decide what questions to ask and how to ask them. They analyze the data and only disseminate the findings through elite academic journals. There is minimal to no involvement of local or on-the-ground voices in this whole process. Locals are of course conveniently employed in data collection—after all, they speak the local language.

This is not the kind of research setup we want to be involved in 2024 and beyond. Rather, we are going to dedicate as much effort and time into thinking about ways we can make our standard operating practices more reflective of why we do research. This requires us to continuously

invest in our research capacity and capabilities. It means we have to innovate to empower local voices, not by speaking for others, but by giving the people whom the research is about opportunities to be part of the research process at its different stages. Local voices include our local research teams, local Principal Investigators (PIs), enumerators, and of course participants.

BRACE yourself? What we are working on

We changed our lab team's name from Busara Lab to Behavioral Research and Academic Engagements (BRACE). The change is not only because it is a better reflection of who we are and what we do, it is also a reflection of what we're moving away from.

We still operate as a largely independent unit within Busara, but our concerted interest in making research better for everyone also means bringing some changes.

Externally, BRACE already partners with a wonderful set of academics and researchers who believe wholeheartedly in empowering local voices for the betterment of the whole research process. We will continue these partnerships and will also seek others with those who would like to validate common measures of human behavior that were designed in the Global North but need to be tested and validated in Global South settings.

Internally, we will partner with other Busara teams who seek ways to conduct our research in better, more equitable and thus also more effective ways. Joel Wambua in this yearbook has written about the ambitions of the team working on research ethics, on needing to examine the current rules of the game and questioning standard research ethics measures that were developed in a specific context and under certain assumptions of existing infrastructure and basic knowledge of one's rights.

The contexts where we work are characterized by inequality in power, education, and in knowledge. In these situations, the notion of knowing one's rights is far removed, not only because knowing how to query a researcher asking for consent is very tough to do in situations where there are inequalities of knowing and nobody obvious there to protect one's rights, should a research respondent query the researcher's intention. But BRACE will seek to be right there, to facilitate people speaking and to allow them to do so in the way they choose. Bracing yourself is not just what happens in a situation of threat. Braces give support where it is needed.

We are embracing that role with the open arms and minds that we aim to bring to our profession.

Advancing behavioral science in the Global South

Will a study that has been conducted in the Global North be generalizable to the Global South? Building on the SCORE project, which is trying to develop methods to predict the replicability of behavioral science research, we sought to find out. Partnering with the University of Melbourne (who developed a structured group discussion protocol called IDEA and tested it in a sub-project of SCORE called repliCATS), we used the same protocol with Busara staff and master's-level behavioral science students in Nairobi. Our aim is to compare our predictions to the predictions generated in the original repliCATS project, which mostly involved forecasters from the global north. More on this project here.[31]

31 (Singh Anisha, Forscher Patrick, Wambua Joel, and Fidler Fiona. Can we predict which behavioral science claims will generalize to East Africa? 2023) https://ces-transformationfund.org/our-projects/is-generalizability-to-the-global-south-predictable/

We can't do this alone: behavioral science and change in India

Kriti Chouhan is Busara's Country Representative in India

Walk along the street—any street—in India and you are bombarded with the very definition of humanity: human beings collectively. The rich tapestry of just so much commonality and difference in cultures, traditions and ways of living in the country that in 2023 became the world's most populous one is a jolting reminder of just how fascinating the study of human behavior is.

And how necessary.

This necessity is acknowledged in the burgeoning interest in behavioral science here, with the fledgling research and practice community offering insights into the intricacies of decision making, societal dynamics, and policy implications.

We are with you: supporting a fledgling community in India

Busara is proud to be on the forefront of this fledgling community in India. Over the past couple of years, the India team working on applying behavioral science has been spoiled with insights. Our biggest learning, however, is also our most obvious one: context is everything. That is not a line that can be said flippantly or to please a funder. Context is what makes India and its people.

India's cultural diversity provides a unique setting for behavioral scientists. The vast array of languages, traditions, and social norms across different states and regions creates a complex but invaluable challenge for studying human behavior. Thus, to apply behavioral science in India, one must acknowledge the importance of cultural and contextual nuances in shaping decision-making processes and social interactions.

The acknowledgement of this fact is growing: in the recent years, India has seen a surge in the application of behavioral science with more research organisations dedicated to behavioral science being established in the country. *Niti Aayog* (the public policy think tank of the Indian government) saw the institutionalisation of a behavioral insights unit.

Busara contributed, too: we convened—
supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates
Foundation, *Disha ColLab'23*. Sizzling
with excitement and interest, *Disha Col-
Lab'23*, was a two-day conference that
served as a platform for stakeholders in
the Indian behavioral science ecosystem
to come together in-person and discuss
present and future perspectives on be-
havioral science in India with experts
from all over the world. Launching the
Busara book *beScIGHTS: Experiences
from three years of applied behavioral
science in India allowed us to collectively
share our learning with the community.*[32]
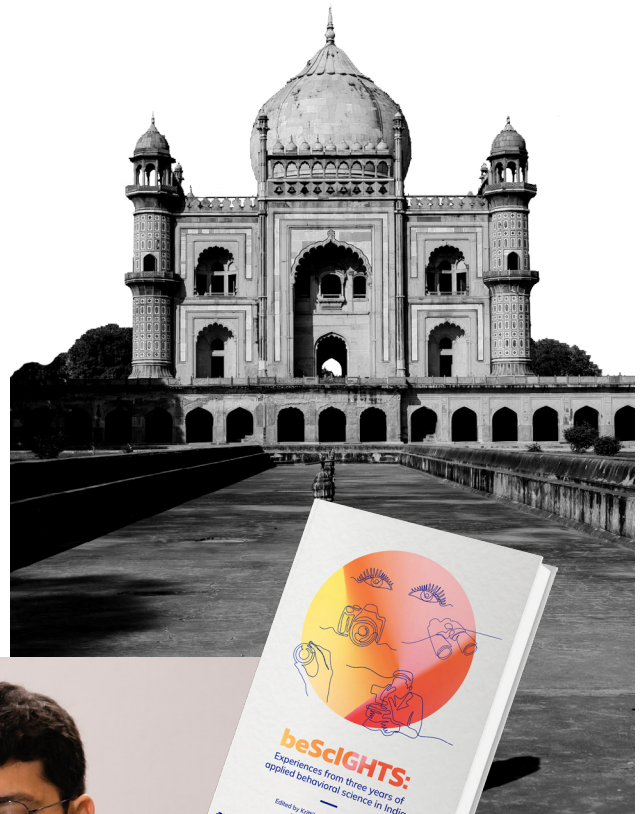
Busarians Krittika Gorur and Jaspreet Singh at Disha ColLab'23

32 (Gorur, Jagati, and Schomerus 2023)

The road ahead: bringing behavioral science into the Indian context

However, India still has a long way to go in bringing behavioral science to the center of policy making, and is yet to catch up to its global peers in applying behavioral science to policy. One of the major aspects missing from the behavioral science ecosystem in India is a strong and dynamic coalition of behavioral science practitioners that can come together and build a behavioral science community in the country. A behavioral science community can play a crucial role in advancing the field and contributing to positive societal outcomes while fostering collaborations among the community to generate more comprehensive and nuanced insights into human behavior, and give the push needed to bring behavioral science centre stage for policy design.

Furthermore, we have learnt that—while many of the behavioral insights' applications from developed economies may well be relevant—there is also a larger set of more complex problems that may require a revised and more deeply-contextualised approach (including a more systemic view on behavioral science, as the one advocated by Steve Wendel in this Yearbook). 'Nudges'—the backbone of behavioral science for policy and conceptualised in developed economies by Sunstein and Thaler—often aim to encourage recipi-

ents to follow through on a clearly stated intention or desire (such as completing a complex student aid form to increase the likelihood of college attendance).[33] At the same time, many of the behavioral challenges in Global South economies like India involve complex social dynamics, and may require additional focus on creating intention (for example encouraging exclusive breastfeeding for new mothers, encouraging vaccine uptake, and so forth). Thus India also needs a different approach to research, as well as a different ethical framework to govern these interventions. Joel Wambua's insights in this Yearbook on what it means to conduct participatory ethical research are hugely relevant for India.

Behavioral science cannot do it alone

Behavioral science needs doing: ethical, contextualised research is a really difficult thing to do and requires a lot of different skills. Supporting researchers in developing those skills remains the need of the hour for a behavioral approach to really influence policy making. However, such deep learning can only happen with commitment, collaboration and capital; all of these are required to nurture a robust behavioral science ecosystem in India. Further, sustained support is needed to equip participants with novel behavioral science approaches. This is not covered by one-off training: we need to continue to learn by doing also.

33 (Thaler and Sunstein 2008)

It is exciting to think about the possibilities that behavioral science brings for better societal outcomes. And while the field is garnering more attention, one must understand that behavioral science should be approached as a useful lens to view problems: it can help us deeply understand human challenges. What it is not is a standalone solution. Using behavioral science as a silver bullet for the most pressing social issues can result in ill-conceived solutions that fail to take context seriously enough.

It is thus critical to approach behavioral science as a useful tool amongst many others in the toolkit of problem-solving, rather than a solution; and learning when not to use behavioral science becomes as important. With this insight in India, we think of the motto of this Yearbook as *'you cannot do it alone'*.

Using behavioral science for public engagement

Working with Spark Microgrants to support better participation in community-driven development groups, we sought to understand the context and behavioral factors (such as local norms/ customs, specifically in Uganda and Rwanda) that might influence decision making that might in turn influence participation in Community-Driven Development interventions such as Spark's Facilitated Collective Action Process (FCAP).

YOU ARE NOT ALONE: HUMAN BEHAVIOR UNDER PRESSURE

Co-designing: finding structured ways of working together

Robert G. Nyaga is the Technical Director of Qualitative Research and Design; Araika Mkulo is the former Behavioral Design Specialist; Prithika Mohan is the Senior Behavioral Design Specialist. All authors are based in Kenya

Working together sounds so easy—and yet, we know how challenging it can be to figure out what this means when conducting research or designing programs that are supposed to make people's lives better. In an earlier version of this article in *Tafakari*, we talked about co-designing, its benefits, and contribution to international development. And yet, we neglected the contributions of others: we used figures that we called our own. But they were not ours: they were citations of diagrams developed by Dalberg. The mistake prompted us to review not only our processes (and issue this new edition of *Tafakari* with the correct attribution), but also highlighted the need to think deeply about our own original contribution to the established processes of co-designing in international development.

What is human-centered design?

Human-centered design (HCD) is an approach to problem solving that focuses on user needs and designing for those needs.[34] HCD involves starting with inspiration (understanding the people and challenge you are designing for), proceeding to ideation (creating ideas and solutions based on what you learnt in the previous phase and testing and refining these ideas), and ending with implementation (launching your refined solution

34 Landry, L. (2020, December 15). What is human centered design? Harvard Business School Online's Business Insights Blog. https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/what-is-human-centered-design

into the world).[35] Whilst HCD methodologies have evolved over the decades, the steps involved in the design process are very similar across most organizations focusing on social impact.

Busara's approach to design

At Busara, we integrate behavioral design, which includes HCD, into our behavioral science methodology to help bridge the intention-action gap, be iterative, and to build empathy for the people we serve.[36] We use evidence-based methods for data collection with HCD, and add behavioral science principles to understand why people behave the way they do.

Overview of co-designing

Co-designing, also known as participatory or collaborative design, describes a creative process in which all stakeholders, including local communities, get involved in designing and developing solutions for their own challenges.[37] Dalberg offers a good example of the co-design process as is described in figure 1 below.

Facilitation

Explore & share
Get participants to explore and share their ideas and perspectives

Prioritize & refine
Take the inputs from earlier sessions and begin to narrow down on ideas and priorities (either during the workshop or after for a FGD)

Kick-off
Help participants warm up, understand the context and generally set the stage for the session

Wrap-up & next steps
Conclude the session with participants, agreeing to a set of actionable next steps

Adjust
Reading the room can be hard during a remote workhsop. Make adjustments to the activities and the agenda based on the flow, timing and level of engagement of your participants through regular dialogue with them and the facilitators
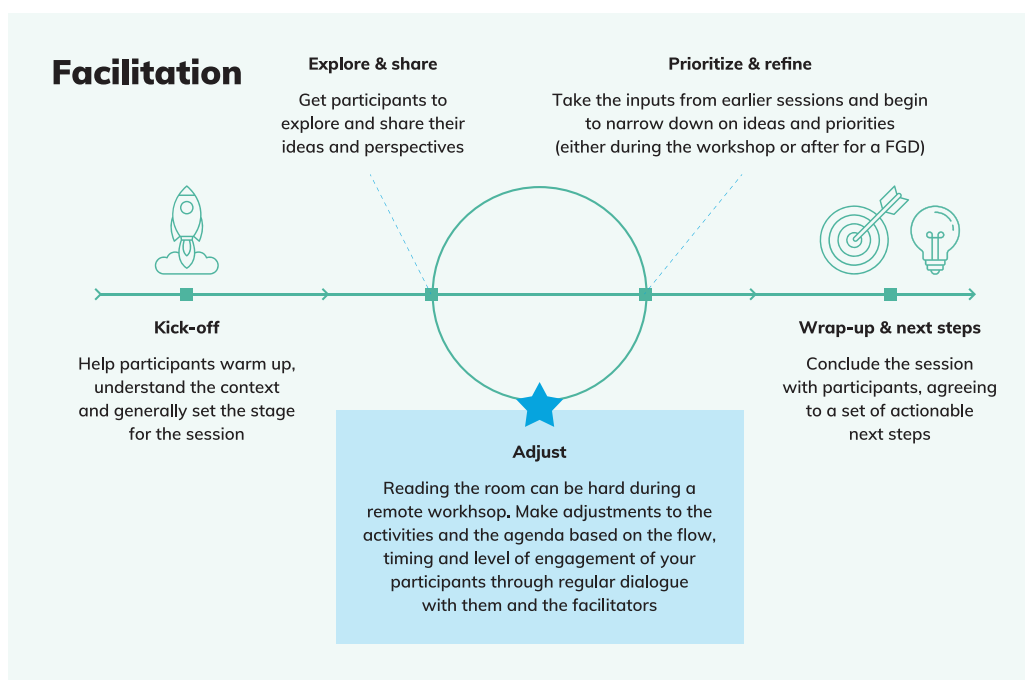
Figure 1: Facilitation of a co-design process (A previous version of the graphics in this article were erroneously attributed to Busara. The process described in the graphics are recreated from the Dalberg Design Creative Facilitation Toolkit).[38] Source: Dalberg Design (redrawn by Busara)

35 IDEO (2015). The field guide to human-centered design. https://www.ideo.com/journal/design-kit-the-human-centered-design-toolkit
36 Intention-action gap definition: "also known as the value-action gap or knowledge-attitudes-practice gap, occurs when one's values, attitudes, or intentions don't match their actions. Sometimes, the gap results from behavioral bias favoring immediate gratification" United Nations Environment Programme. (2017). *Consuming differently, consuming sustainably: Behavioural insights for policymaking.* http://www.ideas42.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/UNEP_consuming_sustainably_Behavioral_Insights.pdf
37 Man, M., Abrams, T., & McLeod, R. (2019, July). Implementing and evaluating co-design A step-by-step toolkit. https://www.thinknpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Co-design-guidance-July-2019.pdf
38 Dalberg Design. (n.d.). *Creative facilitation toolkit.* https://www.dalbergdesign.com/approach

Why do we need to co-design?

Working in international development, we learned that co-designing is particularly important for:

■ Ensuring that solutions are culturally relevant and contextually appropriate, and address the needs of the people they are meant to serve: For example, when we worked on a multi- country rollout strategy for a new HIV prevention method, we carried out co-design sessions in a number of locations within each of the countries, rather than using findings and intervention ideas from one country and carrying it over to the next. This was critical, as the motivations for using this method varied by country and even regions within countries.[39] We found that women in Zimbabwe, for instance, tended to make decisions around their sexual and reproductive health with their partners, and as a result wanted their partners to be supportive in their use of this method. Based on this, we designed interventions that demonstrated and encouraged male-partner support, including visual materials that depicted couples, conversation guides, and tools that couples could use such as couple testimonials. However, these interventions would likely have backfired

in other locations such as Uganda and South Africa, where the discrete nature of the method and its ability to be hidden from male sexual partners was its biggest appeal.

■ Empowering local communities by giving them a voice and allowing them to actively participate in decision-making: this creates a sense of ownership, which is needed to maintain and sustain implemented solutions in the long term. For example, during the co-design sessions we did in collaboration with ThinkPlace Kenya, for a project aimed at increasing awareness and uptake of Oral PrEP (oral anti-retroviral medication), we had peer educators present as they would be both the recipients and implementers of the interventions that were designed.[40] The aim behind this decision was to empower them to have a voice in the design of the interventions, so they could feel both qualified and comfortable to implement interventions and give peer educators a sense of ownership and pride in the interventions.

What does an effective co-design preparation entail?

In running co-design workshops, we have learnt a few key principles for an effec-

39 Kembero, D., Mohan, P. & Nyaga, R. (2021). Market research insights and recommendations. Workshop insights and recommendations. Internal Busara report: unpublished

40 Mahiaini, F., & Njavika, S. (2018). Oral PrEP final report. Internal report for work done by Busara and ThinkPlace: unpublished

tive co-design process for sustainable and contextually-relevant solutions:

1 **Context matters**
Individuals do not make decisions in isolation; our community, local governments, environment, behavioral heuristics, and much more, affect the way we behave. We often co-design with key influencers to our participants, for example mothers-in-law and partners when working on sexual reproductive health, or leaders of community-based organizations when working on food systems projects. Similarly, we need to consider how an intervention will be implemented and received within a specific context, which is why we bring in stakeholders, including community members, local leaders, NGOs, government representatives, grassroots movements to be allies in the process and support systems change. These entities are more informed about the target community and can help to ensure that there is buy-in of the prioritized solutions by creating a sense of ownership in the process.

2 **Cultural sensitivity and respect**
One of the most important principles of effective co-designing is respecting local cultures, traditions, and beliefs of the community. We usually begin with desk research and conduct key informant interviews to help inform our approach to carrying out research in a contextually-grounded manner. This can be critical in informing how you should engage with participants during co-design sessions, who should be in the room during the sessions, and how the sessions should be structured. Generally, cultural sensitivity enhances the experience of participants as they feel respected and valued, and this is even more crucial when dealing with marginalized groups who lack voice.[41]

3 **Good facilitation and mediation**
The success of the co-design process depends on good facilitators. By conducting qualitative research, we have learned that the success of drawing out accurate and in-depth responses relies on the interviewer/ researcher's skills.

We have found that participation and developing good ideas is largely influenced by the ability of the facilitator to connect and engage with participants. This was very apparent at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic when we struggled with the limited amount of engagement during our remote co-design sessions, until we made facilitation adjustments.

41 Rodriguez, K., Schwartz, J.L., Lahman, M., & Geist, M.R. (2011). Culturally responsive focus groups: Reframing the research experience to focus on participants. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 10(4),* 400- 417

But even when you are fortunate to be in the same room as your participants, it can be hard for the facilitator to connect with the group for a number of reasons including language barrier between the participants and moderator(s), gender, poor facilitation skills, appearances, age or generally not reading the mood in the room. We will often deliberately have more than one facilitator and will switch roles if we notice one person is not connecting as well with the participants.

4   **Iterative and adaptive approach**
    Co-design is iterative, meaning developed solutions are prototyped quickly using limited resources, tested with community members, and then refined based on feedback from stakeholders. Good designers are flexible and willing to adapt the solutions based on changing circumstances and new insights gained during the process. When developing solutions we will usually test low-fidelity prototypes to see if they resonate with the audience.[42] We deliberately do this so that we are not tied to the idea and can quickly adapt it if needed, in order to improve its efficacy. Figure 2 below from Dalberg can help with thinking through the different steps needed for planning a co-design workshop.

Planning

Align on goals
Get everyone, from the clients to the members of the core team, to agree to the goals of the remote facilitation session

Prepare an agenda
Divide the session into smaller presentations, activities and discussions that make effective use of the available time

Form & prepare your team
Assign clear roles and responsibilities to every team member

Design activities & tools
Create the tools and materials that you will need for the session

Do a dry run
Get your team together for a final test run through all the various sessions planned

Get your participants ready
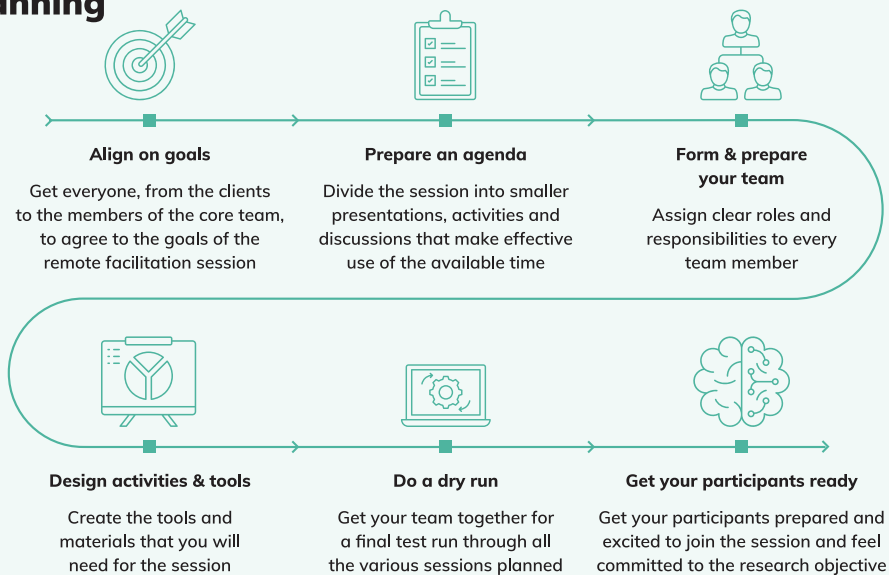Get your participants prepared and excited to join the session and feel committed to the research objective

Figure 2: The steps of preparing a co-design workshop(A previous version of the graphics in this article were erroneously attributed to Busara. The process described in the graphics are recreated from the Dalberg Design Creative Facilitation Toolkit).[43] Source: Dalberg Design (redrawn by Busara)

42 Low-fidelity refers to the minimal amount of design required to convey what a design should look like in order for users to understand a given concept. Dam, R. F., & Siang, T. Y. (2024, February 15). What kind of prototype should you create? *The Interaction Design Foundation.* https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/what-kind-of-prototype-should-you-create
43 Dalberg Design. (n.d.). *Creative facilitation toolkit.* https://www.dalbergdesign.com/approach

How could co-designing become a non-negotiable part of every program?

Seeing that effective co-designing can lead to the creation of sustainable and contextually relevant solutions, it is more important than ever to embed the co-design process in all development programs, which is what we strive to do at Busara. By integrating these strategies into organizational practices and sector-wide initiatives, co-designing can become a non-negotiable part of every program, ensuring that development efforts are more inclusive, effective, and empowering for the communities they aim to support.

Editorial note: A previous version of the graphics in this article were erroneously attributed to Busara. The process described in the graphics are recreated verbatim from the Dalberg Design Creative facilitation toolkit (https://dalbergdesign.com/approach). The graphics you see in this article are recreated by Busara.
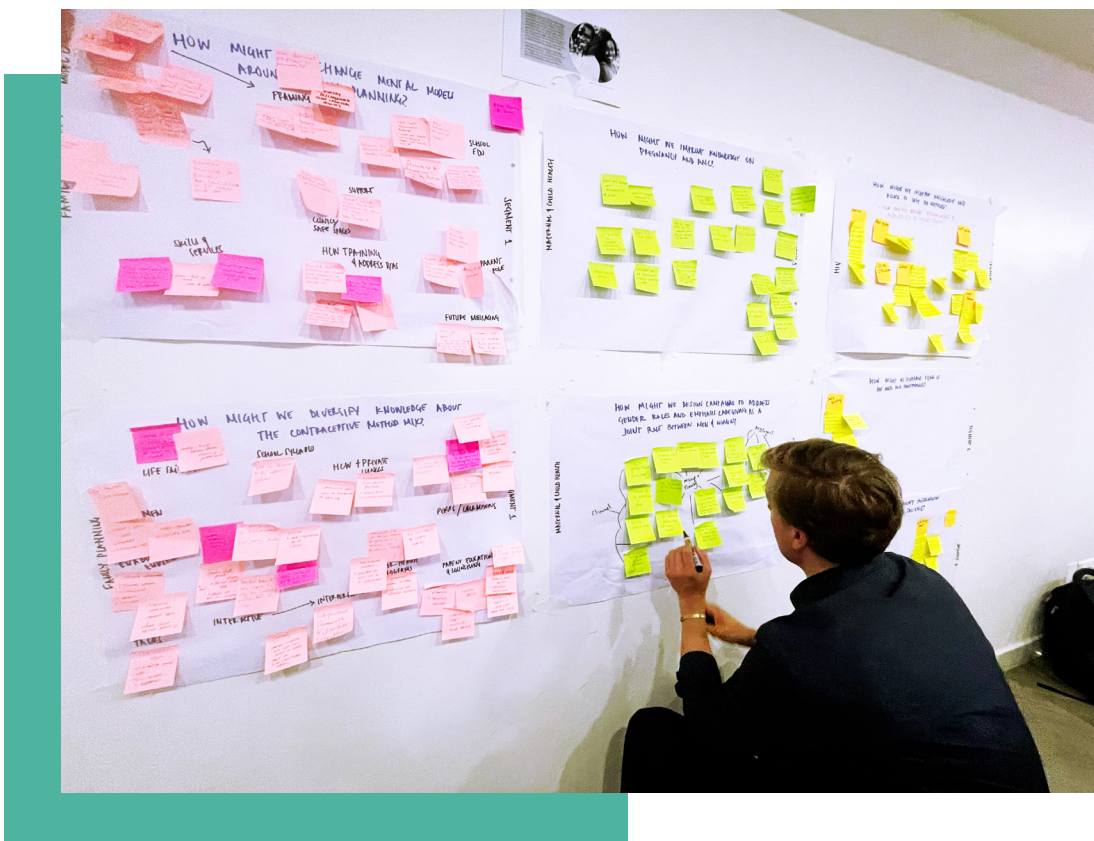
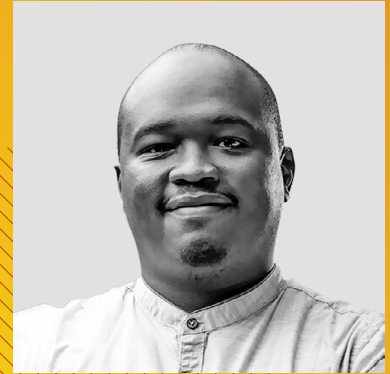*Busarians Jonathan Karl at Social Behaviour Change Action (SBCA) co-design workshop in Uganda*

YOU ARE NOT ALONE: HUMAN BEHAVIOR UNDER PRESSURE

You are not alone:
the role of people

The human element: an approach to meaningful collaboration

Stanley Ngugi is Vice President (People and Community), based in Kenya

In a time when 'collaboration' often becomes a hollow catchphrase, overshadowed by an emphasis on technical toolkits, the fundamental ingredient for true teamwork is sometimes lost. This is especially true in the Global South, where distinct challenges intensify this oversight. At Busara, we have opted for a different course, anchored in a belief that is both simple and profound: meaningful collaboration is rooted in individuals feeling genuinely respected and valued.

Throughout my career, I have been dedicated to nurturing spaces where individuals thrive. A persistent curiosity of mine has been: what catalyzes effective teamwork? Organizations, particularly in the

Global South and within the development sector, pour resources into systems and tools meant to enable collaboration but often miss the mark on the human aspect. It is not merely about the tools or systems in place (even though as Robert Nyaga, Araika Mkulo and Prithika Mohan write elsewhere in this Yearbook, knowing the tools can help). But at its heart, collaboration is about cultivating an atmosphere where people are honored and valued, empowering them to contribute significantly.

Busara operates amidst the unique complexities of the Global South, from varied educational backgrounds and languages to entrenched power structures and eco-

nomic disparities. These challenges do not just complicate: they present us with a chance to reconceptualize the essence of collaboration and its execution.

Are we there yet?

Our strategy has been to prioritize principles over tools. We have placed our foundational values at the forefront, rather than leading with systems and checklists. This pivot has significantly influenced team engagement and collaboration, establishing our core principles as the cornerstone for all other facets of our organization.

The results of this values-centric approach have been promising. Busara has emerged as a beacon of collaboration within the development sector. Yet, we do not see this as a cause for complacency. I was recently in a meeting with another similar organization to exchange learning on personnel policies. I argued that for Busara, equal pay was a broader, principle-driven effort to make sure that all members of our team are valued and respected, with the underlying thought being that paying people differently for the same job makes one group feel undervalued. I was both delighted and a little concerned when I heard from my colleagues that they saw this approach as innovative. We view it as simply doing what is necessary. This is why we hold

transparency in high regard. By openly sharing our experiences, complete with their imperfections, we not only maintain our accountability but also extend an invitation for collective progress.

As we look ahead to 2024, Busara is dedicated to reinforcing environments that prioritize the human element. For us, especially within the context of the Global South, integrating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is not just a policy—it is a fundamental practice that acknowledges and values the diverse human experiences within our teams. It is this focus on the human aspect that enables us to connect more authentically with the communities with whom we work, and to address the challenges we face more effectively.

Learning means to admit when things go wrong

Our commitment to transparency is about being real—sharing the successes and the setbacks—because that is where true learning happens (and as <u>Mareike Schomerus writes</u>, being a learning organization is one of our great practices). It is about showing that the heart of collaboration is human connection and trust. By sharing our experiences openly, we not only hold ourselves accountable but also demonstrate the power of putting people first in the collaborative process.

Looking forward, Busara continues to invite other organizations, especially those in the Global South, to join us in this human-centered journey. We believe that by sharing our practices and learning from each other, we can all improve our collective ability to collaborate. After all, it is the human connections and shared values that make teamwork effective, not just the tools we use.
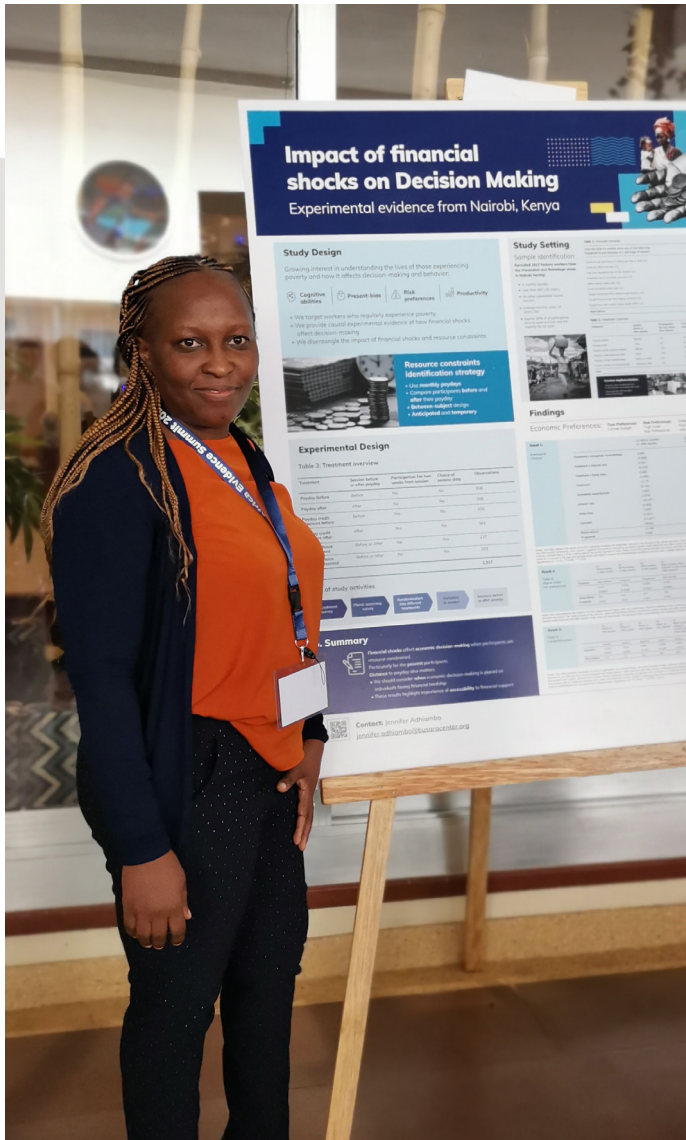
Busarian Jennifer Adhiambo at the Africa Evidence Summit 2023

Bringing people and behavior into climate programs

Wendy Chamberlin is Vice President (Research and Advisory), based in Kenya
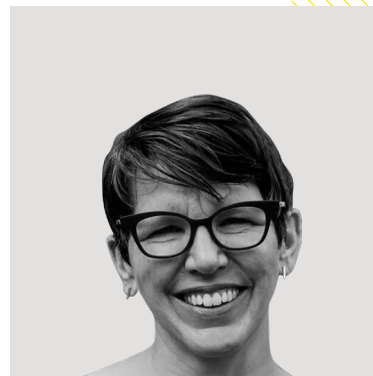
Climate change is sectorally agnostic. It does not care about funding strategies that are tied to specific domains such as health, finance, agriculture, sanitation, and gender. Its effects break down these arbitrary silos and perhaps in doing so provide a better mirror on how people are impacted by climate shocks and stresses than development initiatives themselves. Why does it matter to understand this? Many existing approaches to addressing the risks presented by climate change are derived from sectoral areas of focus that solely look at the problems presented by climate risks from the vantage point of that sector, and in doing so look at the threats these risks present in isolation. Taken to an extreme view we are asking bankers, doctors, agronomists, teachers,

and so on to solve the effects of climate change from their domain. This does not make sense. Those most impacted by climate shocks and stresses do not experience the risks in tidy sectoral categories, rather these risks are often overlapping and compounding.

People matter, individually and together

The poorest are the most susceptible to climate risks by virtue of where they live, what they do for a living, their economic status, their age, their physical capability, and their gender, to name a few demographic criteria. These criteria determine how they perceive climate risks as a starting point, how they choose to adapt, and what informs the types of solutions they need. The solutions are not uniform. They reflect the experiences, values, the needs of individuals and they cut across sectoral lines. A drought in Mali may cause a husband to look for a loan to replace lost income, while the same event may cause his wife to look for a loan to pay for school fees.[44] Anticipation of off-cycle rainfall (and the knock-on effects this may have on local infrastructure) may cause a petty trader in rural Bangladesh to put his money into buying surplus food stores in case he and

44 (Djoudi and Brockhaus 2011)
45 (Shariff 2020)

his family cannot access markets during rainfall.

This kind of response does not just happen at the individual level. Communities that sit on the front lines of the climate crisis also have distinct ways of responding to climate shocks and stresses based on long-standing relationships, ongoing exposure to risk, and also given their overall relationship to land. In semi-arid land areas of northern Kenya, pastoralists engage in a complex and robust form of social resilience that both works to protect their livestock assets, but also leverages existing and longstanding social ties, even over generations.[45] Indigenous people from local communities protect and reside in 80% of the world's most ecologically-fragile areas. Locally-led efforts such as those conducted by Indigenous persons and local communities (IPLC) demonstrate the importance of community strategic planning, and it informs an approach to collective action that can ultimately potentially be a bridge to political advocacy.

Listen up: why we need the wisdom of others

Individual and community approaches to address individual and community needs often run the risk of appearing unscalable or too small to be impactful, but what they, in fact, show us is that they often

are the bridge to sustainable, impactful solutions. Think about it: if sectoral solutions to the climate crisis are designed without input from those most impacted, we run the risk of misusing resources to offer products that perhaps people do not want or need. We design products in isolation from one another and from the communities we hope will use them, which creates the kind of problems that Robert Nyaga, Araika Mkulo and Prithika Mohan highlight in this yearbook. For example, if there is a drought, while insurance is a viable solution, is it the only one we should offer? What if it is not what people are looking for to begin with? What if, like in the case above, a mother is looking to pay for school fees? Livestock insurance does not seem like a way

to solve that very real problem, and as a result she may not take up that solution as it is not relevant to her needs at that moment.

The problem is not the products. The problem is not listening and acknowledging the priorities, needs, and existing practices of resilience undertaken by those most impacted—sometimes because as Engy Saleh and Joel Wambua write, the inherent power relations get in the way.

The solution to the climate crisis does not begin with product design. It begins with listening to those most impacted first to understand what they want to be addressed.

Working with people for better nutrition

In Ethiopia, we worked with UNICEF to encourage the uptake of maternal micronutrients among pregnant and lactating women in Ethiopia. In Kenya, we worked with GDP, USDEC and FAO to assess what facilitates school milk feeding programs within a larger context of school feeding programs. We aimed to identify how to promote sustainability in such programs through community engagement/involvement.

Emotional scaffolding: behavioral science and civic engagement under political pressure

Gideon Too is Engagement Director and head of the Governance and Civic Engagement (BeGov) Team, based in Kenya

Busara's most impactful work is done when we bridge the gap between behavioral science research and practitioner work. In our mission, we talk about the need to advance and apply behavioral science in the Global South, and this moment between research and practice sits right in the middle of this. Within our Governance & Civic Engagement portfolio (BeGov), this has largely meant closely working with our Civil Society Organization (CSO) partners to enhance citizen participation for increased government transparency, accountability, responsiveness, equality and representativeness. Underpinning Busara's approach is the

Theory of Change that amplifying citizen voices will make a government more responsive to citizens' needs and demands and therefore more accountable. According to Menocal & Sharma (2008), this combination of amplifying citizen voices and increased accountability contributes directly to progress towards broader development outcomes, including poverty reduction, human development, and changes in policy, practice, behaviors, and power relations.[46]

How do you get people to engage?

This is, however, a lot easier said than done. Busara's CSO partners across East Africa frequently cite as one of their key challenges (besides sustainability and difficult political/operating environments) the fact that the communities they serve can sometimes be complacent and disengaged from the issues that affect them, and that organizing and mobilizing action to demand accountability and address these issues is an ongoing, evolving challenge. This experience has questioned our (and our partners') assumption that citizens naturally want to be involved in politics, but that many lack the motivation to engage in civic life generally and politics specifically, and that if the right conditions are created, many more people would participate.

46 (Rocha Menocal and Sharma 2008)

Busara has over the years, collaborated with CSO partners to develop a portfolio of behavioral science research and advisory projects that seek to generate behavioral evidence and insights that can be used to strengthen CSO programs and strategies with a view to inspiring and mobilizing action among their target audiences. Through this work, we have become increasingly impressed by how powerful behavioral science can be for our partners' work. This is largely because behavioral science encourages us to view citizens, governments, and civil society actors through a behavioral lens in order to look beyond basic assumptions of rational choice where actors rationally seek to maximize their self-interest.

Busarian Salim Kombo at the CSO week 2023

What does behavioral science offer for civic engagement?

Behavioral science is a tool that naturally supports creating clarity. This is almost an inevitable byproduct of applying behavioral science because behavior change requires a careful definition of the exact behavior you are seeking to change. It also allows us to test the relevance of interventions that address specific behavioral barriers that often influence a target audience's preferences, decision making and behaviors on the pathway to a desired set of outcomes. Lastly, behavioral science provides evidence of what works and what does not, and why. Because measurement through research methods, such as lab experiments, field surveys, ethnographic research, action research, etc. is the gold standard of behavioral science.

What have we learned from working with CSOs?

Through carefully applying a behavioral lens, governance practitioners such as our CSO partners have begun to unwrap and build an evidence base of the precise behavioral mechanisms that underpin their Theories of Change. They are increasingly using this to inform program design, delivery, and evaluation efforts toward motivating and better mobilizing the communities they serve. Below are

highlights from some of our work with CSOs over the years:

- Some CSOs have better understood how formal and informal structures (as much informed by culture as they are by constitutional/legal frameworks) that citizens use to hold their leaders accountable, ultimately shape government responsiveness and quality of public services rendered to its citizens.

- Some CSOs have better defined the selection criteria and training curricula for community-based monitoring programs through a better understanding of how direct selection of community leaders by the community can apply important social pressure and instill a powerful sense of responsibility and reciprocity among members of a particular community.

- Some CSOs have increased knowledge of how information and social norms interact to influence citizens' political attitudes, preferences, and activities. They have learned how these insights can be used to strengthen group identity, provide clear pathways of change, as well as boost the self- and collective efficacy among target communities needed to affect/solve issues facing their community.

- On the other hand, some CSOs can now describe how stories and narratives can be leveraged to inspire attitude change and mobilize citizen engagement behavior, and how these stories diffuse within particular social networks

- Some CSOs have, through research and various iterations, designed and run effective community meetings/engagements around particular issues of interest. They have learned who is more likely to attend such meetings (and why), and have been able to use an understanding of demographic and psychographic phenomena (such as differing risk preferences) to create safer spaces for community members, particularly the marginalized, to voice issues.

- Busara has also worked with a couple of CSOs on framing techniques as a tool for behavior change. This has involved changing the context, alternatives, sequence of presentation, or the relevant information presented. We are currently working to assist these CSOs to integrate moral values, social norms theory, rhetorical styles, and narratives - to overcome barriers and effectively organize, connect with others, and develop compelling narratives that promote trust, understanding, and

engagement with the causes they are passionate about.

In conclusion, through our collaborations with CSOs across East Africa, we have learned that successful organizations are those that can effectively link together individuals' understanding that their self-interest is tied to their community's interests (and farther down the line to the political process). When used correctly, behavioral science can be a powerful tool to do this. It can inspire and mobilize substantial change in our communities.

Interdisciplinary and multi-method research

To shift narratives in order to better value unpaid care and domestic work, we sought to challenge and transform prevailing attitudes and perceptions that undervalue unpaid care and domestic work by identifying existing narratives and testing new, transformative ones. This qualitative research in three areas in Kenya (Kakamega, Kilifi and Nairobi) was augmented with a nation-wide quantitative experiment via SurveyCTO in collaboration with Oxfam Kenya & Oxfam UK.

(Re)establishing credibility in behavioral perspectives: journeying through Latin America

Emiliano del Valle is Engagement Director in Mexico

In the ever-evolving realm of behavioral sciences, growth has been anything but steady. Over the years, various influential governments worldwide have championed the infusion of behavioral science principles and tools into their policymaking and social programs. This year, the call for a broader application of these insights has reached new heights, with even the Secretary-General of the United Nations endorsing their potential for transformative impact.[47] In unison, both the public and private sectors have recognized the pivotal role of behavioral science in fostering innovation and enhancing public services.

47 (UN 2023 (September))

Amid this backdrop of global recognition, Busara has embarked on a captivating journey. Having expanded its footprint into Latin America in the past two years, Busara aims to complement its already well-established presence in Africa and Asia. The expansion into Latin America signifies a concerted effort to gain holistic profound insights from the whole of the Global South, encompassing its people, contexts, and behavioral patterns. This endeavor stems from a profound aspiration to confront developmental challenges through the lens of behavioral science, amplifying the effectiveness of economic and social initiatives throughout the region.

Three key areas in Latin America

In Latin America we are strategically targeting three key areas:

- **Gender-Based Violence:** Busara is working on using behavioral science to tackle gender-based violence, employing a systemic behavioral approach that Steve Wendel writes about in this Yearbook.

- **Financial Inclusion and Education:** In Latin America, we are continuing deeply-established areas of Busara's expertise in promoting financial inclusion and education, particularly among small micro-, and medium-sized enterprises.

- **Migration and its Impact:** Busara delves into the economic and social consequences of migration in both Central and South America, aiming to shed light on its far-reaching effects.

Ongoing projects embrace pioneering methodologies, encompassing systemic analysis, community-centric approaches, and strategic design thinking. Building on Busara's long history in Africa and Asia, the core focus in Latin America is on unraveling the intricacies of individuals' cognitive processes and decision-making, employing a rigorous and pragmatic experimental methodology.

Indigenous Arhuaco men in discussion (Source: Envato Elements)

These initiatives have yielded remarkable outcomes. In Brazil, Busara provides enhanced psychological support to victims and survivors of gender-based violence, while in Guatemala, we are navigating the complex landscape of gender-based violence, linking it to the challenges of policy implementation. This exploration paves the way for empathetic, context-aware strategies for transformation.

Simultaneously, Busara actively collaborates on enhancing inclusion and financial education programs for a neo-bank in Brazil. Moreover, the organization endeavors to infuse behavioral improvements into diverse areas, including environmental impact, migration, education, family planning, medical service adoption, governance, and policy implementation.

Behavioral approaches in Latin America and beyond

The experiences and discoveries thus far underscore a universal truth: human-centered approaches possess global relevance. The key to designing superior products, government initiatives, and private endeavors lies in a profound understanding of users and the obstacles they face when interacting with products, services, and public strategies.

As we look ahead to 2024, Busara is poised to elevate its work methodolog-

ically by integrating state-of-the-art methods and tools that will amplify its understanding and solution design capabilities. The organization is also prepared to broaden its horizons to address increasingly intricate issues. This unwavering commitment underscores Busara's dedication to driving positive change, utilizing behavioral perspectives to mold a more inclusive, empathetic, and innovative future for all.

Busara's journey in Latin America embodies an unwavering commitment to the principles of behavioral science. It serves as a testament to the transformative power of these insights, transcending geographical boundaries to impact the world on a global scale. As we navigate the complexities of 2024, Busara stands ready to make a lasting impact through innovation and human-centric design thinking.

Embracing the tapestry of knowledge: a reflection on the significance and intersectionality of endogenous knowledge

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Wairimu Muthike is Engagement Director in Kenya and heads the FARM (Food, Agriculture and Resilience) portfolio

Endogenous knowledge, a captivating blend of traditional wisdom interwoven with external insights,[48] has long held a special fascination for me. I have come to realize that there is a dynamic synergy between these systems, where they learn, grow, and adapt together, forming a shared ecosystem. It is akin to weaving a rich tapestry of understanding from threads borrowed from various sourc-

48 (UNESCO not dated)
49 (Global Center on Adaptation 2022)
50 (Bhatt, Labanya, and Joshi 2019) (Chandini, Kumar, and Prakash 2019)
51 (Pahalvi et al. 2021)

es. This incredible perspective has been nurtured by the experiences and wisdom shared by those I have had the privilege to meet and listen to (and really listen, in the sense that Wendy Chamberlin highlights in this Yearbook).

Why endogenous knowledge is needed

Sub-Saharan Africa's predominantly rainfed agricultural systems have been acutely affected by the severe and unprecedented impacts of climate change – including increased temperature, intense droughts and flooding, and extreme weather events– reducing crop yields and threatening food security.[49] The negative impacts of climate change in the region are due in part to the application of external knowledge to sub-Saharan agricultural systems.

Despite producing short-term gains, external knowledge, and agricultural practices can lead to negative environmental ramifications. For instance, the prolonged use of inorganic fertilizers can cause numerous environmental ramifications, including soil degradation and environmental pollution, water pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and heavy metal pollution.[50] These consequences contribute to climate change and pollution, threaten soil health and fertility, and pose health risks to humans further down the food chain.[51] In the quest for sustainable alter-

natives, researchers have explored the efficiency of different fertilization methods, including the synergy between organic and inorganic fertilizers.

Feeding the soil (and mind) in different ways

Organic fertilizers, such as manure, have long been a staple of indigenous farming practices. Researchers have documented the benefits of integrating organic and inorganic fertilizers. For instance, research conducted in the Vihiga and Siaya Counties in Kenya found that utilizing a balanced approach of organic and inorganic fertilizers helped control Striga—a parasitic plant that destroys maize crops— and improve maize yields.[52]

Research such as the above is emblematic of an approach that integrates endogenous knowledge, which is rooted in nature-based solutions and sustainability. Endogenous knowledge uplifts and respects the sovereignty of indigenous knowledge, and by extension, cultural values and local environments. Facilitating bottom-up approaches and local participation seek to mitigate the inherent power dynamics by encouraging the flow of knowledge from both cultures. The rapid evolution of the agricultural landscape in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly

52 (Sibusisiwe 2013)

in the face of unprecedented and unpredictable climate shocks, demonstrates the growing need to balance innovation with traditional knowledge systems.

During a series of thought-provoking conversations with farmers, food scientists, agri-entrepreneurs, researchers, and behavioral scientists that spanned across this year, it became evident to me that there is an intersection in our pursuit of understanding the reach and utilization of endogenous knowledge. A re-emergence of interest in integrating existing knowledge systems into programs, services, and policies was noted in the 2023 Africa Climate Summit where the topic featured prominently in the African leaders' Nairobi declaration on climate change and call to action.

Talking about the future by talking about the past

During one of the above-mentioned thought-provoking conversation sessions

African maize (Source: Envato Elements)

with Associate Professor Dr. Jen Evans, during our preparation for Tara Mistari 2023 (the research festival Mareike Schomerus writes about in this Yearbook and that also had Adam Fejerskov as another keynote speaker, as Engy Saleh recounts), it became evident that there is an intersection in our pursuit of understanding the reach and utilization of endogenous knowledge. This intersectionality is driven by a common motivation – the recognition that in our rapidly globalizing world, we risk losing something profoundly valuable: the timeless wisdom of Indigenous peoples, refined over millennia. For Jen, this realization dawned as they pondered the relentless march of progress, while for me, it surfaced as I placed my MSc thesis alongside countless others on a library shelf. These reflections led us to a shared question: how can we ensure this invaluable knowledge endures the test of time?

Our conversations refined my thinking. Indigenous knowledge is not a relic of the past; for stakeholders in the agriculture development and implementation sectors in sub-Saharan Africa effects of understanding and integration of these knowledge systems are evident. Various emerging applications of endogenous knowledge across food value chains, from production with the case of the use of the Baobab tree flowering as an indicator of planting times in Kenya to the use of communal seed banks that leverage communal trust systems in Malawi and more upstream as indicated in the CoAmana case in the markets points to evolution with a growing need to balance innovation and traditional knowledge systems.[53] By understanding how indigenous or traditional knowledge interfaces with external knowledge, we can unlock insights crucial for sustainable agriculture and climate-resilient practices.

We cannot forget what has been there for a long time

Collectively, these conversations reveal that the world has yet to unlock the full potential of Indigenous knowledge. In the context of climate change, the indigenous perspective offers solutions deeply rooted in nature that could reshape our response to this global crisis. Collaboration is the path forward, but it must be founded on principles of respect and equality that are sensitive to underpinned power dynamics. Indigenous knowledge holders should have the power and authority when it comes to sharing their wisdom, and equity is not negotiable. I have come to understand that embracing indigenous wisdom in our fast-paced, globalized world is about honoring the enduring legacy— which in turn makes a future possible.

53 (CoAmana not dated)

You won't be alone: looking into the crystal ball

Sam Bastian is Busara's Chief Operating Officer, based in Kenya

At Busara, we are unified but not uniform. As I delve into the rich tapestry of articles within our Yearbook, I am struck by the remarkable diversity of voices and ideas that harmoniously unite under the banner of Busara. We each contribute our unique experiences, learnings, and impact stories, all converging on a common belief: we, as researchers, hold the power to enable change and improve global development through the science of human behavior.

When Busara first embarked on its journey, our perspective was singular, and our approach was similar to having a hammer that made every problem look like a nail- like many organizations, maybe. But over time, while retaining our focus on human behavior, we have evolved into a multidisciplinary organization. With this perspective, we are bringing everyone together as a community to learn and solve the complex problems with which we are faced. Our diverse perspectives make us greater than the sum of our parts.

In 2024, we stand on the threshold of concluding a transformative three-year strategy. This strategy has been instrumental in positioning us as advisors, advocates, and pioneers in the field, and it has been guided by three core principles that define our ethos.

Principle 1: the power of human behavior
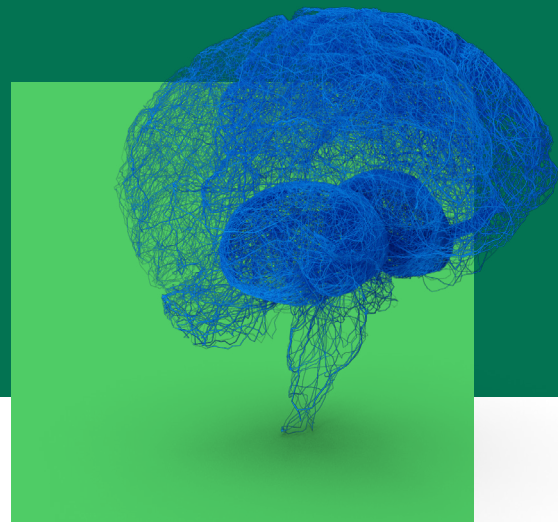
Our first belief is simple yet profound: the science of human behavior can change the world. We have embraced the idea that behavior is deeply influenced by context – individual behavior is an integral part of the larger communities we live in. In a world where enormous collective challenges often make individuals feel powerless, we believe it is impossible to change the world without changing human behavior at various levels (as Moh' Alhaji and Gideon Too discuss in this Yearbook with respect to health and governance challenges.)

But, behavioral science, though powerful, has faced a credibility crisis at a time when it is most needed. At Busara, we are called to stay true to our values, sharpen our tools, and create new approaches. Whether that's in creating thoughtful relationship management between researchers and the researched or creating new approaches to appreciate the interdependencies of individual behavior with the context and system. We learn this from Robert Nyaga, Araika Mkulo and Prithika Mohan in their contribution on the co-creation of research and from Steve Wendel and his reflections on

behavioral systems. Joel Mumo also discusses this in his impassioned call for a profoundly ethical approach to research, which is backed further by Engy Saleh. Through our continual learning in the science of human behavior, we are getting closer to conducting research that can be readily implemented and scaled.

Principle 2: fostering a culture of learning

Our second principle centers on fostering a culture of continuous learning. Busara is not just an organization; we are building a vibrant community of lifelong learners and problem solvers, always seeking to listen, connect, collaborate, and solve complex problems, as Wendy Chamberlin

or <u>Wairimu Muthike</u> elaborate. In 2023, to make learning an integral part of our identity, we aligned our organizational structure and operating model, creating portfolio teams with explicit learning agendas, to get closer to this very goal. We have also thoughtfully created spaces, like *Tara Mistari*, to create sparks that keep the debate and reflection going through the year–an experience that Mareike Schomerus describes in her piece.

In 2024, we remain committed to nurturing this culture of learning within and across teams, pushing the boundaries of behavioral science for global development, for example by putting people first in our organization, as <u>Stanley Ngugi</u> argues in his article.

Principle 3: partnering for greater impact

Our third principle underscores the fact that we can't – no one can – tackle global challenges in isolation. Just as individuals are part of communities, organizations are an integral part of the larger ecosystems. Busara's most impactful work is done when we bridge the gaps in the ecosystem, share our learnings, and work with partners to take the value of behavioral science to greater heights, as in the examples provided by <u>Gideon Too</u> or <u>Francis Meyo</u>.

Acknowledging this reality, in 2023, we have invested in speaking up consistently. We also decided to share our groundwork (by launching our publication series appropriately called *Groundwork*, on which <u>Mareike Schomerus</u> elaborates) and learnings so that we can all be on the journey to greater impact together. However, taking time to speak up, build a community, and learn together can often come at a tradeoff to running projects in a resource-constrained environment, which is a challenge that <u>Michael Onsando</u> elaborates on.

As we embark on 2024, we hold on to the belief that we are part of a community

and ecosystem that needs nurturing, and we continue to find creative ways to resource this important community-building work in our impact story.

Underlying these principles is our dogged practice of being an international Global South organization (which has grown into Latin America, as Emiliano del Valle shares). To truly leverage the power of behavioral science, learning and listening, and partnering with the entire ecosystem, being in the context and plugged into the international global development ecosystem is critical. It's not an easy practice and we are often tempted to soften the edges (particularly in moments when money is tight, as my co-authors Wilson Mburu and Mareike Schomerus and I reflect on). However, being an international Global South organization is central to our values.

In 2024, we are determined to continue on our journey to build a community of learners and problem solvers that leverages behavioral science for global development. I do not expect it to be easy – but together we can embrace the complexities to drive transformative change.

If you find that your principles align with ours, I invite you to join our ever-evolving community of researchers, practitioners, and learners.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE: HUMAN BEHAVIOR UNDER PRESSURE

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Busara