## Vignettes

Our findings are presented through the following three vignettes, structured according to the common themes that emerged from our discussions in the process detailed in the article.

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| **Reflection 1: on fieldwork in Nigeria**  **Positionality**  My position as an academic researcher coming from the UK was at first misunderstood by Internally Displaced People (IDP) in Nigeria. IDPs gave me examples of how researchers have collected data from them and published wrong stories about them, which led to their distrust.  Although in the first instance, the IDP positioned me as an outsider who might be coming to either exploit their situation or provide generous assistance to them.  However, growing up in Jos, Plateau State, a city that has been engulfed by ethno-religious conflict, I shared my stories with the IDPs. My stories showed how I was also once a victim of conflict. I also drew upon my experience as an assistant professor at a university in North-eastern Nigeria and shared a story of an attempted attack on us during one of our humanitarian assistance projects at one of the IDP camps in the region. Moreover, I explained I was trying to find a solution to how digital technology could improve their lives.  I also made it clear to them I was a Muslim from the Hausa ethnic group; majority of the IDP are Muslims and share with me a similar ethnic group. By drawing upon my ethnicity, religion and previous experience of living and working in war prone areas in Nigeria, I was able to navigate the research process and show my in-betweenness. I position myself not only as a researcher but also a member of communities that have been affected by war.  Also, coming from an upper class family in Nigeria, I attended British-styled private schools in Nigeria and completed my higher education in Cyprus and the UK. I was solely sponsored by my parents. However, it was customary that during the religious holidays, I visited the village to see my grandmother and extended family members who live in the lower class community to celebrate Eid and witness the traditional horse-riding durbars. Despite living temporarily in the global north, I was still surrounded and influenced by family and local practices.  My experience around the ICT4D discipline focused on the assumptions that mobile technologies will ultimately lead to the social inclusion of displaced people. Till date, this outsider assumption has guided the development of ICT policies in Nigeria. However, having done some research with these displaced people in Nigeria, I have tended to challenge this outsider assumption based on the findings of my research. Firstly, although many IDPs have mobile phones which they use to keep in touch with relatives and build new social networks, majority are unable to utilise them for social inclusion purposes due to contextual issues such as the costs of data plans and maintenance, data availability, lack of electricity, poor network connectivity, low levels of literacy, language and culture. In addition, the majority of mobile services available to help displaced people have been developed solely for refugees living in the global north and do not meet the needs of IDP particularly in sub-Saharan Africa where many communities have experienced protracted displacement due to ongoing conflicts for the past 20 years. I believe that contesting this assumption is due to my in-betweenness in navigating the research process to understand the local practices that influence the use of mobile phones for IDPs living in Nigeria.  **Researcher’s relationship to participants**  In trying to access the IDP, I leveraged my parents’ network. I was directed to a country manager of a global NGO who connected me with several profit-based NGOs in the North-eastern region of Nigeria who were working with IDPs. However, all were reluctant to participate in the study due to the lack of financial gains from it.  To overcome this, I used my influence on Twitter to connect with an NGO who aided my access to the IDP. I have a large followership due to the perception people have of me as a young Nigerian that has accomplished a lot and able to work hard to attain a PhD at the age of 24.  With my access to a large network and many Nigerian Twitter influential individuals, I tweeted asking for any NGOs who were working with IDPs. One of the small NGOs reached out and connected me with one of the leaders of an IDP camp that was less than 10 minutes’ drive from the location where I reside, an upper class neighbourhood.  On arrival at the Durumi community, which is inhabited mostly by IDPs from the Muslim-dominated North-eastern region of Nigeria, my Western appearance resulting from wearing a tight t-shirt and skinny fitted jeans gained me unusual attention. Perceived as an outsider, I was approached by some of the IDP and asked my reasons for being in the community and for my ID while I was waiting for my contact to arrive.  Being of Hausa origin and able to speak Hausa fluently helped me to overcome this outsider perception; this led to my acceptability by the IDP. Having revealed my name, the IDP asked if I was a Muslim, which I confirmed. After that, they became more welcoming and called me a brother based on my religious and cultural similarities.  Additionally, since I was from the Northern region that has the highest rate of illiteracy in Nigeria, being a young Western-educated male that has attained a doctorate was an achievement the participants were proud of, and hoping there could be more like me that could be potential leaders to help develop the North of Nigeria.  In sum my background, upper class status and having in common several socio-cultural elements with the IDP enabled me to access them.  These aspects of my in-betweenness also helped alleviate any barriers in difference that would otherwise restrain Western researchers from conducting research in the Global South.  On the first day of my data collection, I was dressed in skinny jeans and a tight t-shirt which was different from the norms of dressing in native attire.  During one of the interview sessions, it was obvious that two IDP women were reluctant to talk to me.  And the reason for this could be because they were Muslims and my dressing in such a way might be seen as immodest or could cause ungodly attraction from these married women who gave consent to be interviewed. During the session, one of the camp leaders had to talk to them in their local dialect to give me as much co-operation as they could even though one of the women was afraid she had not sought permission from her husband who was out working. He assured her there was no problem, that he knew me already. Consequently, I dressed in my native attire and had a female research assistant with me in my subsequent interview sessions.  Furthermore, on completion of my data collection, I was asked to give some money to the participants for sharing their stories with me, considering their situation. In the past there was a situation when a female researcher came to collect some data in the camp and was assaulted by a male IDP for not giving them some incentive in return. I did not give any money at that point, but on returning to validate my data with them, I brought some food donations.  We spoke of technology with the IDP and they gave examples of technology interventions that have been setup in previous IDP camps they resided in. Examples were e-classrooms for kids that had a projector for learning. But they complained that also the projects have stalled because the computers and projects were stolen and it was of no use to them at that point considering the camps do not have access to electricity and there were no funds for generators to power these technologies. At the moment what they needed was food, jobs, housing and a means of sustainable livelihoods. What this implies is that innovations will need to be contextualised if any meaningful outcome is to be gained.  In trying to understand how mobile phones could be a means to social inclusion, the IDPs acknowledge its importance in terms of job opportunities, keeping in touch with family members and doing much more. They noted that if any meaningful technology intervention was to be considered relevant to them, it should be focused on teaching them how to use their mobile phones in a meaningful way considering many of them had mobile phones with them. |

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| **Reflection 2: conducting research on a Pan-African project**  **Positionality**  I believe that in this research process, I gained legitimacy due to in-between aspects of my positionality. My authority/validity, as perceived by the research participants in the project, stemmed from my association with institutions and places in the global North. This allowed me access to the research participants in the first place. For example, being previously part of an EU project, granted me legitimacy amongst the research participants due to association. Once they also knew my institutional affiliation, they sought to build linkages with me by drawing upon their own ties to various institutions in the UK including mine. This seemed to be important to them, i.e., to make that link, to position themselves as being legitimate representatives of their profession through their association with institutions in the West. I, therefore, became a “leader” of the first phase of this project merely by initiating a conversation on a new mailing list that incorporated the research participants. In my position as a senior lecturer, I was seen as some sort of expert to whom they should now listen.  In the meantime, the EU actors in this network were also expecting me, given my institutional affiliation, to seek funding and cooperation from other influential NGOs in this field. My position, however, as a player in the grander funding landscape, was not that significant. I put this down to (a) not being a professor and (b) not being truly expert in this fledgling research area I was entering into. Thus, I personally did not feel I was part of the “proper” networks to draw upon other more powerful resources and mobilise the funding effort. I was, myself, occupying a grey area of in-betweenness, having the privilege that comes with association, but lacking the power of truly belonging to these privileged networks.  I approached a senior white male academic from my department for some reinforcement in this area, given his background. However, he has no experience in the Global South and could thus only lend his name to project proposals on which I was collaborating with my West African partners to try to source funding for this project. Such efforts were unsuccessful. I required more than just affiliation with these powerful networks to achieve the level of belonging that I believed I needed.  Two issues related to my positionality and the inherent contradictions of in-betweenness were revealed in my reflections. First, there were contradictions related to my researcher identity due to conflicts I was experiencing with the underlying research traditions in this project. Second, there were disciplinary differences which induced an ‘imposter syndrome’-type uncertainty into my developing researcher identity on this project.  From an epistemic perspective, these reflections were related to clashes between dominant epistemologies of Information Systems (IS) and Computer Science (CS) scholars. My research tradition, in which I was trained, had strong roots in the social sciences where research is usually guided by a research question. In the CS tradition, outcomes drive the research, outcomes that develop new artefacts, hence “the project” is a key vehicle for their research outputs. Because I was not producing a “hard” artefact for the project, I was consistently seen as key to developing a direction for the “softer” aspects of these projects.  However, even though I identify with the IS field as a scholar, I had not engaged with some of these “softer topics” for which I was expected to be an expert. In this case, the “softer” aspects were about a new field: library and information sciences (LIS). Translating my own knowledge into this new field was thus difficult for me. I experienced some new epistemic challenges to my identity as a researcher. I felt in-between the traditions of these fields: between IS and CS, between IS and LIS. I also personally struggled to make sense of how I could frame any of the project activities as legitimate research in my field.  From a personal perspective, I am accustomed to dialogue and consensus rather than putting myself forward as an expert. Thus, constantly being associated with an LIS identity as an expert was uncomfortable to me. In this project, this discomfort was even more poignant, since I really did not have much expertise in the LIS knowledge base and even worse, how this plays out in the Global South. Ultimately, I believe that these experiences influenced my research process. I knew how to do research and to kick-start a project but, given my lack of LIS knowledge, and level of personal discomfort, I decided to approach the project in a very participatory way. This again reinforced an in-between researcher identity. I was learning from the research participants and from this situation, yet, at the same time I had to project an image of knowing what I was about and being a “leader”.  This led to a sense of fracturing of my researcher identity, not really occupying fully a position, but having to perform as an actor from that position.  **Researcher’s relationship to participants**  From my viewpoint, the international NGOs on this project, in their respective communities with influence in many quarters, were “bigger” players than myself. I was, by association and due to my experience on EU projects, perceived to be an influential actor. However, I believed myself outpaced by these bigger players. Once they were involved, the “softer” aspects of the project, which I represented, became subordinated to the wider objectives of developing a Pan-African techno-rational solution. My approach, due to my own researcher identity dilemmas, drove me to adopt very participatory and consensus-building data-gathering methods with the research participants. The approach of the “bigger” players was to impose existing models and standards that they believed would help in the physical development of workable infrastructure solutions. Uptake, usage and sustainability were not really considered. I felt that if the underlying institutional barriers were ignored, then the infrastructure development would also stall. I was once again occupying an in-between position: both on the “inside” through my perceived alignment with the “bigger” players and on the “outside” through my own misalignment with their project ethos.  The bigger players had their own positionality in this project as external experts bringing internationally sanctioned knowledge to bear on this problem. My emergent and “grassroots” approach, however, sought to engage at the local level with local problems. Although I didn't plan it, my involvement in the regional workshops and surveys eventually ended up helping to create a vibrant “community”, which was demonstrated by the now quite regular postings to the mailing list set up for the community about activities and opinions on the topic area. This frequent communication was not present before, giving a voice to a group who considered themselves professionally marginalised and obsolete. They came together and were able to talk to each other about what was holding their profession back. The infrastructure development was the backdrop to this conversation, but the foreground was how difficult it was to function within a constantly challenging environment. Solutions to their issues were emerging from the research participants themselves. They were given voice because of my “grassroots” actions. Those actions were motivated by the in-betweenness I felt as an outsider when associated with the EU/NGO community but as an insider trying to better align and work with the participant community.  My ethnicity is of mixed race Caribbean heritage. I’m very familiar with colonial societies, and have some knowledge of Africa, but from a very distorted Eurocentric perspective. I could identify easily with my African counterparts and colleagues in this project. I never felt myself superior to them, even though with my position as a scholar in a global North institution, I could have succumbed to such a belief. They respected me for not “othering” them and worked well with me. For example, I became a guest speaker at locally hosted advocacy and awareness workshops. I, therefore felt some kinship and camaraderie with the research participants. I felt this more acutely when my apparent lack of belonging in the global North context led to failed grant proposals in the UK. It was though I was occupying two different worlds.  I believe that the ability to retrospectively reflect on this project reveals other dimensions that I was not aware of at that point in time. I now question my right to be doing this research in the first place due to my in-betweenness. I am not African and I do not truly understand the African culture, yet I was involved in a pan-African project, which at points I felt was following a techno-rational logic, which as an IS researcher I knew was not the right direction for it. I also felt fragmented with respect to my researcher identity. I constantly questioned if I was the right person to be doing this job – did I fit? I brought with me my Western sense of values. For example, it seemed to me that some participants were more or less coerced to attend the workshops through being paid to do so. I felt that they were obliged to offer comments during the workshop precisely due to the fact that they were being paid to do so and they would not be demonstrating their gratitude if they didn’t. Many depended on the per diems being paid to fund their attendance. At times, I was privy to arguments from those who attended but did not receive per diems who then felt slighted. Upon reflection, though, I realised that this is how “business” is done in this context. It is the only way to do it and the outcome may have been the ethical issue I thought I was witnessing. My experience of in-betweenness with regard to my researcher identity and positionality seemed to revolve around tensions like this that I was constantly confronting. |

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| **Reflection 3: fieldwork in Peru**  **Positionality**  My research process was influenced by how I was welcomed by both groups of participants in the project: the academics who responded to my emails agreeing to do an interview, and the NGO agreeing to the collaboration. There seemed to have been some factor involving the institution I represent, since a top UK university brings elements of prestige that may have influenced the initial openness of both groups.  When interviewing the academics, even though I am Peruvian and have done a PhD in the subject of the research investigation, I sensed that I was perceived by them to lack the relevant knowledge and expertise around the subject of innovation, and lack understanding of the context. I believe there are at least two parts to this. One is around my intersectional positionality, the first aspect of which is that I am relatively young to have a PhD since Peruvian academics tend to do their PhDs after spending a considerable amount of years working and teaching. This aspect of my positionality, I believe, had already caused a perception of being an outsider which may have been difficult for them to accept.  The second aspect is in relation to the focus of my research. For some of the academics, I believe I represented a threat to how they have positioned themselves in the local academic sector, where their careers have been built by adopting Western, euro-centric knowledge as core to their research and teaching, while my focus on indigenous knowledge would challenge their own beliefs and work throughout the years. These perceptions influenced in me a sense of imposter syndrome which meant that my conversations with the academics were perhaps a bit shy, where I found myself having to perform like an ‘academic’ to feel that my questions were legitimate.  In contrast, my experience with the Peruvian academics was one of subordination. I felt that they were not comfortable with my presence and what I was proposing. It was my age and gender which I felt were the most prominent aspects that negatively affected this relationship. It is not common for a young female to have a PhD in Peru, and these academics have spent decades building up their research and expertise. I felt like I was considered a threat, or maybe that I was not respectful enough for them.  Aspects of my gender, nationality and age influence both how I navigate the research process, as well as how I am perceived by my research participants. More specifically, I perceived that when conducting research with the indigenous communities, I was more welcomed and I also felt more comfortable with them, like I didn’t have to perform. It is important to note though that I may have some blind spots about this, as I don’t actually know how they perceived me.  My experience around discipline is focused more around how being educated in the Global South, and moving to the global North, challenged my assumptions around my discipline. The discipline, that once opened doors of knowledge, started to be perceived by me as oppressive, teaching me a Western way of looking at the world, translated into a Universal language. During my bachelor’s degree on communication for development, I was educated to believe that Peru, a developing country, was in serious need of becoming developed by adopting measures found in countries in the global North. We learned about other examples and lifestyles where poverty was not at your doorstep. Therefore, I was trained to believe in the importance of promoting a modernisation development discourse and developed a saviour complex. I believed this very powerful idea and looked at living somewhere in the global North, where I could continue with my education and see what being developed looks like.  The in-betweenness for me is in relation to the epistemic worlds I see myself adopting and the embodiment (how I am perceived) that also shapes the world around me. Having started my education in Peru, where I was taught a form of modernistic development discourse, to adopting a more critical view of this, I found myself returning to my country to challenge the assumption that Western knowledge is always better than other knowledge systems.  I then moved into the UK academia, in particular the development field, and quickly became more inclined to post-development and decolonial discourses on development. Teachers challenged me on my assumption that the UK did not need development, and that the path the UK has taken to become developed was one that could be followed by other countries. It seemed to me that it made more sense to understand the historical contingencies that led to uneven conditions in different countries, such as colonialism and imperialism. Moreover, I became increasingly aware of the hegemonic production of knowledge of the global North, where most theories, concepts and authors come from.  **Researcher’s relationship to participants**  My experience researching both contexts of my research project was very different. In the indigenous-led initiative I seemed to occupy a supportive role. In our conversations they talked about the lack of recognition at the national level. Since I identified myself as a Peruvian living abroad, it enabled me to get access to them and have honest conversations about how they felt in Peruvian society in which they also felt alienated. I also felt more comfortable in this space, and my intention was to listen and learn from them.  In contrast, my conversations with the Peruvian academics and research experts in Peruvian innovation policy were characterised somewhat by animadversion and lack of trust. The interviews revealed some tensions around my line of questioning, as well as my research focus. For example, during one interview, the interviewee said that my research aim was biased because I was advocating for the myth of the noble savage. From her experience, indigenous people were the ones who polluted the most in the country. Instead, she argued that innovation in Peru should focus on following the scientific method.  Another senior academic spent a significant amount of time telling me it was unethical that I had asked for a consent form where her name could be anonymous. She explained that if I did that, I would be taking her ideas and making them my own, and that this was problematic. During the interview I felt like I was being told off and ‘lectured’.  There is an element of privilege (power) that I held in working with indigenous communities. Several indigenous communities perceive lack of national support, for which they tend to adopt what is called ‘the boomerang effect’, whereby they make connections with international organisations elsewhere to gain recognition and legitimacy. My contact with indigenous communities through the NGO Andes was conducive and open, and this comes from a level of trust they have developed with the NGO throughout the years. This made me think that, in this particular space, it is my Western affiliation that has enabled me the access to these communities. This is a side of me I tend to want to ignore, as it reminds me of a privilege I’m not entirely comfortable with. But nonetheless it does reflect a part of my in-betweenness that is worth considering.  My in-betweenness involves me occupying a privileged position due to my Western educated position, which opens the possibility for indigenous people to want to welcome me into their context and meet them. This in itself can be quite problematic, as it could also reflect an element of power and privilege that I experience (for instance, would I be able to get the access if I was a scholar from Peru?). It could also lead to some potential blind spots, where I may not be aware of how my actions and words could inevitably lead to some form of oppression or injustice. Constant self-reflection is the tool I use to navigate this.  At the same time, it is exactly that ‘Western’ educated position (aka outsider) that meant that local academics found me problematic. It seemed to me they did not like the fact that I was challenging existing assumptions of innovation embedded in Eurocentric epistemology, given that this is the form of knowledge they have based their careers on. Moving forward, rather than trying to ignore the privilege I hold given the Western education I have received (and the position I currently hold) I would like to explore instead my responsibility to use this privilege for something that I can consider better or more just.  It could be argued that the label ‘innovation’ or ‘technology’ could be perceived as external tools or resources, and could potentially be perceived as external impositions; the indigenous people in the park talked about these with confidence. So they somehow embraced the notions of innovation and technology, but they explained to me what these two look like from their perspective. I think there is something here around technology being something that can be adopted by our research participants, but attention needs to be paid to how they use them, what matters to them rather than what I (or the project) thinks the technology can do.  Here I would like to add a part of my project that I didn’t mention before. When I met the NGO, I asked what was the most important thing we should work on. They said that the most valuable thing for them would be to have a conversation with policy makers, to suggest changes to the legislation. This meant that all the ideas I had around the research we could do, had to change and the project focused solely on making this happen. We organised a policy panel in an international conference, and instead of using the funding to fly me there to be in the panel, the funding was used to fly 12 indigenous representatives of the park so they could attend the panel and their voice could be heard (instead of mine). |