

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

Assessment of a Novel Environmental Justice Community- University Partnership

*Sacoby Wilson, PhD, MS, Omega Wilson, MA,
Leah Williams, MPH, DrPH(c), Roy Charles, Med,
Ed.D.(c)*

Strengthening Environmental Justice Research
and Decision Making: A Symposium on the
Science of Disproportionate Environmental Health
Impacts

Washington D.C.

March 18, 2010

Environmental Justice (EJ) Issues in Communities of Color in Mebane, NC

Physical Barriers: **Planning of the 119-bypass/interstate, dead-end and unpaved streets, and landfills.**

Artificial Boundaries: **industrial park zoning, land use planning exclusion, red-lining under Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) statutes.**

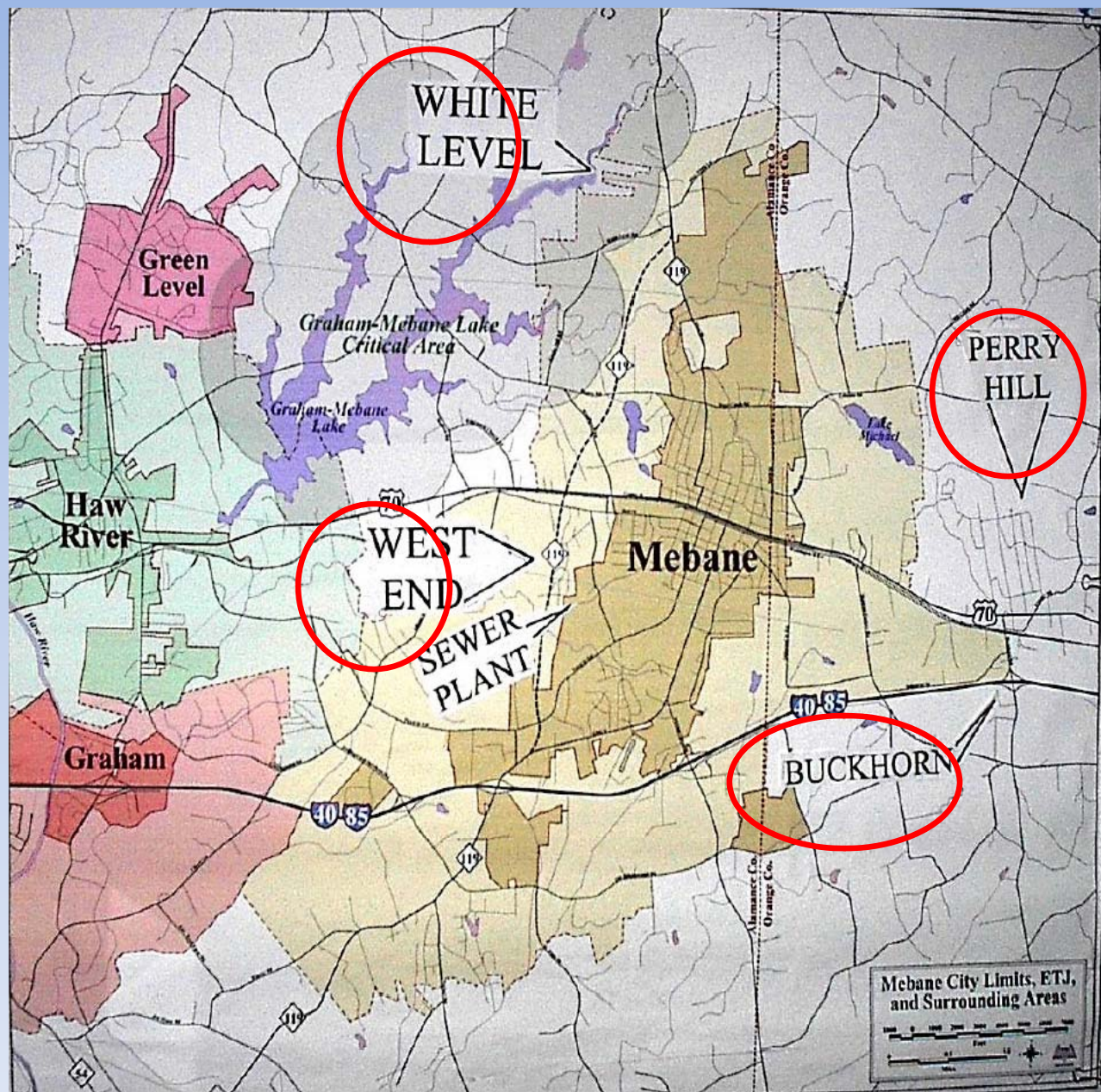
Institutional Limitations: **Economic disparities, racial discrimination (“old south” values in the New South).**

Non-compliance to **civil rights and EJ regulations.**

(Wilson OR, Wilson SM, Heaney CD, Cooper J, 2008; Social Justice in Context)

West End Revitalization Association (WERA) Neighborhoods

- Post-slavery communities founded during Reconstruction
- 85-95% Black
- Elderly and retired
- 53% earn < \$20,000



WERA Community Owned and Managed Research (COMR) Model

- Flexible, community-tailored, context-driven
- Funding community-based organizations (CBO) directly as principal investigator (PI) and/or project manager
- CBO leads development of research questions and study design
- CBO and community contextual experts partner with “informed” university experts
- Focus on equity in power distribution and resources
- Data is used for action, empowerment, and change
- Seek compliance with laws and mitigation of health conditions

(Heaney et al 2007, Progress in Community Health Partnerships)

COMR= Science + Community Organizing

- By using COMR, community members who are contextual experts on their local environmental health issues act as community scientists
- COMR allows community residents to collect quantitative data to support their efforts to use civic engagement to solve local environmental justice and health problems
- COMR focuses on achieving social justice

WERA Collaborative Problem-Solving Model

- Collaborative-Problem Solving (CPS) Model was established through EPA funding and built on WERA's Community-Owned and Managed Research (COMR) framework
(Heaney CD, Wilson OR, Wilson SM, Cooper J, 2007; *Progress in Community Health Partnerships*)
- Established a team of multiple stakeholders to use research, resource leveraging/mobilization, and conflict resolution to obtain environmental compliance, infrastructure improvements, and better planning and development
(Wilson SM, Wilson OR, Heaney CD, Cooper J, 2007; *Progress in Community Health Partnerships*)

Results of the COMR Approach

- **Administrative Complaint:** Complaint on the lack of basic amenities and inequitable impact of the 119 Bypass submitted to the Department of Justice and the Environmental Protection Agency; Blocked the building of the highway for almost 10 years
- **Cooperation:** City of Mebane used block grants and city matching funds to install sewer and water lines
- **Long Term Collaboration:** Graduate students / faculty at School of Public Health of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill tested surface water and drinking water samples collected by trained WERA staff and community monitors. UNC-CH's Department of City and Regional Planning assisted in infrastructure research. The partnership has lasted for ten years.
- **National Environmental Justice Advisory Council:** Mr. Omega Wilson was named to participate as a community representative on NEJAC in 2007
- **Environmental Protection Agency EJ Achievement Award:** WERA was one of 12 recipients of the first annual EPA EJ Achievement Awards in 2008

Thursday, March 20, 2003

Burlington, NC
Times-News
Region

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N.C. 119 bypass delayed again

By Brent Lancaster
Times-News

MEBANE — The N.C. 119 bypass project around Mebane has been delayed again, and a Mebane

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Register of Historic Places.

The project, first discussed in the early 1990s, has been put off by an

Ed Hooks, a city councilman who chairs the local board that helps

couple of years ago," Hooks said.

Mebane leaders say they need the new road to take traffic off N.C. 119, which cuts through the heart of Mebane as Fifth Street, taking traffic from as far away through the city's quiet residential district.

An early proposed route through the heart of the notably low-income, minority West End community west of town. That route has since been rejected but the West End Residents Association, a community

group, filed an environmental justice complaint with the U.S. Department

of Justice over the project that hasn't been addressed.

The road may also cut through a critical watershed north of the city,

mid-1999.

The first section of the road would run from the interstate to U.S. 70 near Craftique Furniture Co. The road would go north and go through three alternative routes: the Cates route, the Woodlawn route, and the

the county's fears it because of



"I'm not as optimistic as I was a

early 1990s and had planned to start construction on the four-lane road in

Brent Lancaster can be reached at brent_lancaster@link.freedom.com



Installation of Safe Up-to-code
Water and Sewer Services

Paved Streets and Install Up-to-
code Surface Water Drainage



NIH R03 Grant

Project Title: “Evaluation of a Novel Environmental Justice Community-University Partnership” Specific Aims...

- Evaluate the impact of COMR and research and training core of the community-university partnership
- Evaluate the impact of the collaborative problem-solving model core of WERA’s community-university partnership in helping to increase scientific literacy and communicating research needs
- Assess the impact of the career and pipeline development core of the partnership in improving scientific literacy of local youth and students and their interest in public health research

By meeting the Specific Aims of this pilot project, we believe the evidence gathered will demonstrate that WERA’s community-university partnership can be replicated in other EJ communities with academic and non-academic research partners based upon COMR principles--equity in funding and parity in research management

Methodology

Study Participants

- Self-administered surveys: N=37
- Semi-structured phone interviews: N=26

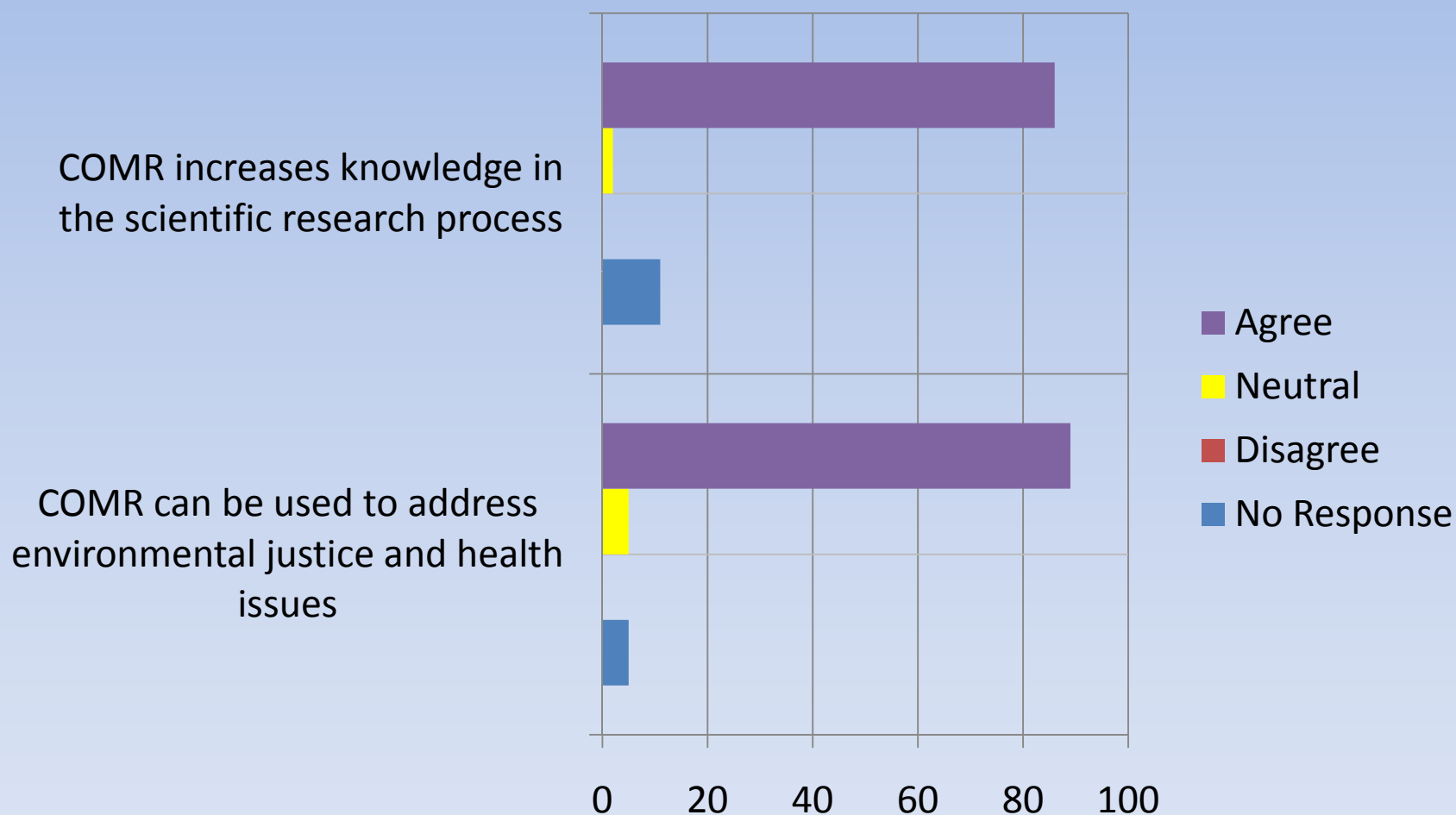
Data Collection

- Pilot Data
- Self-administered surveys
- Semi-structured phone interviews
- Focus groups
- August 2009 — Present
- Qualitative telephone interviews
- All interviews audio-recorded and transcribed
- All participants gave informed consent
- Study approved by USC IRB

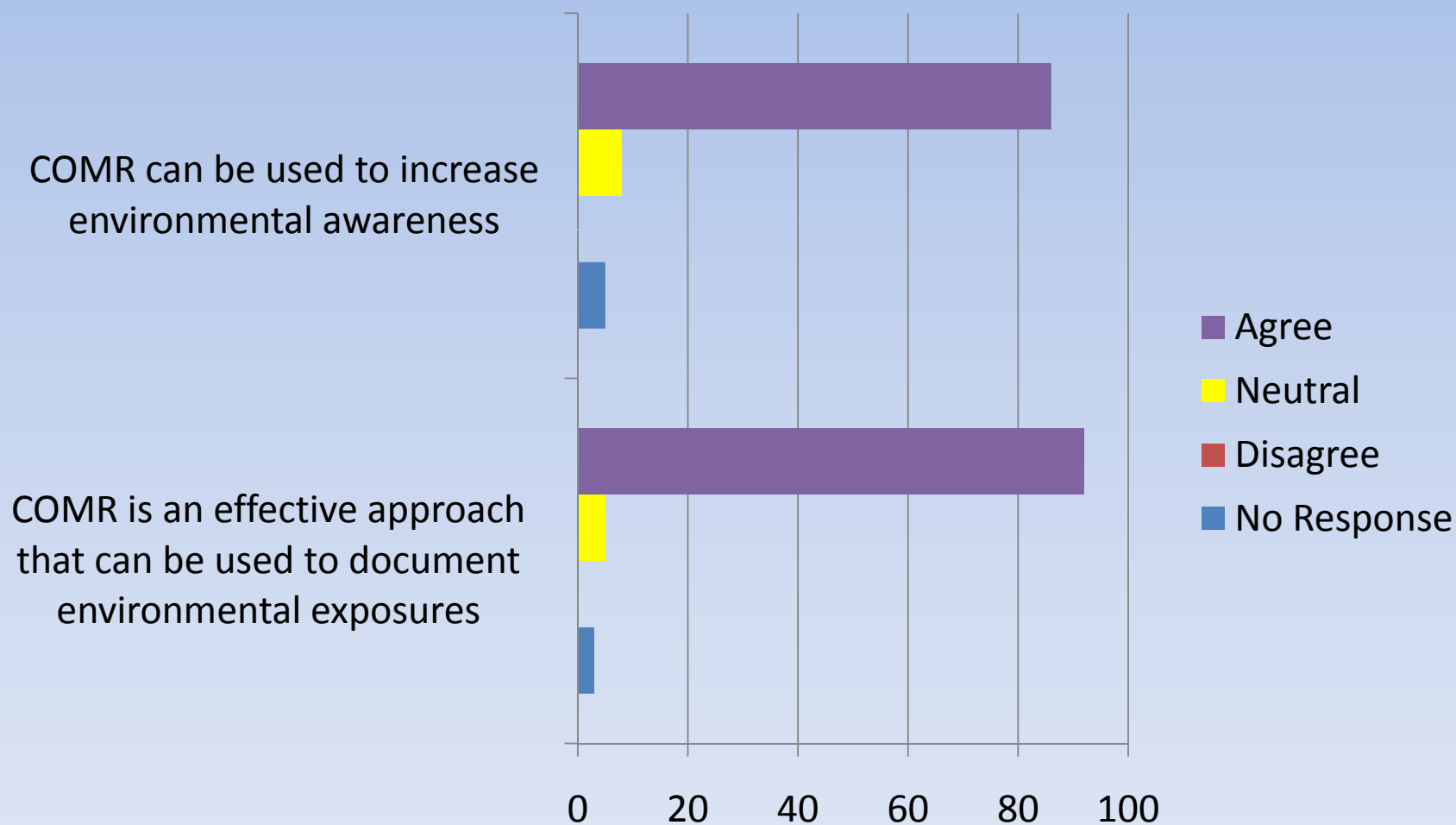
Data Analysis

- Survey results analyzed using SPSS v. 17.0

Results: Survey



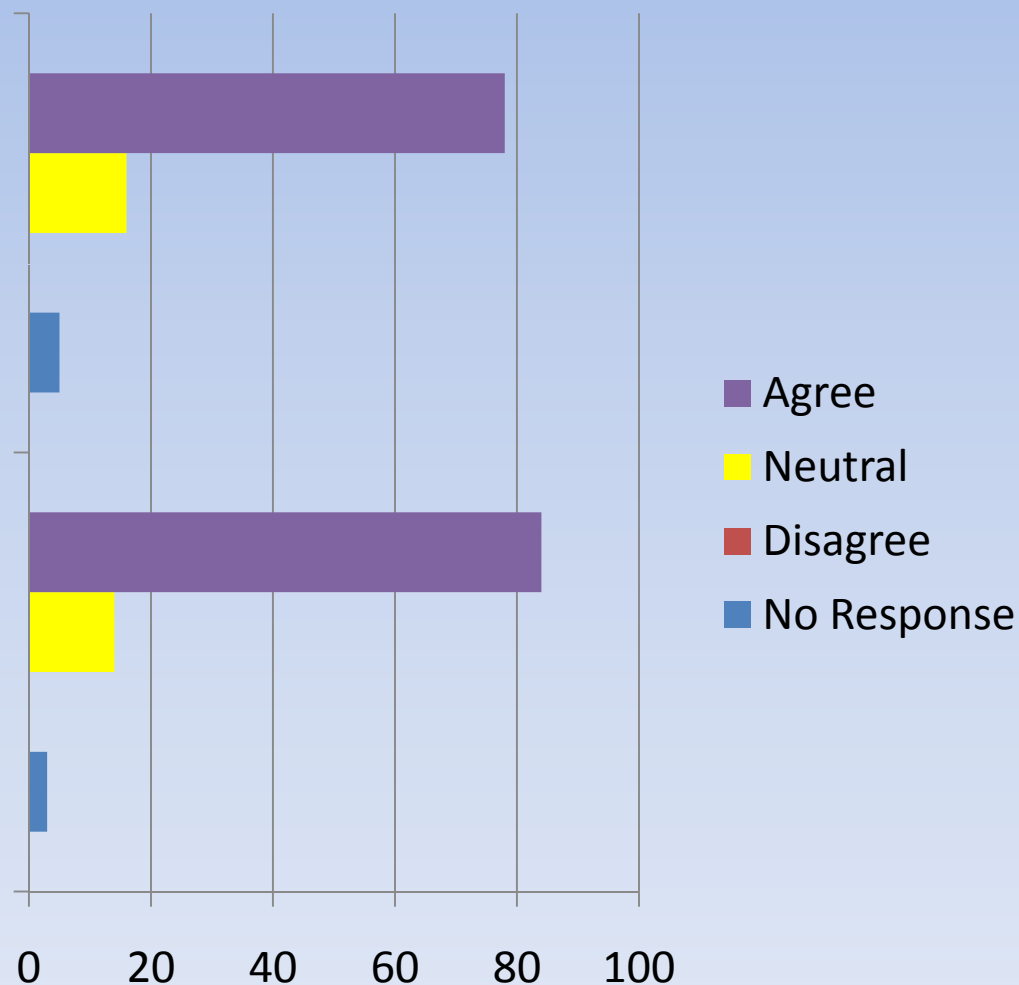
Results: Survey



Results: Survey

Collaborative problem solving model can be used to increase trust between community members and their partners including academic partners

The WERA community-university partnership should be replicated by other environmental justice communities.



Results: Interviews

Selected Interview Quotations

Increase in Knowledge of the Scientific Process through COMR

- Knowledge is power, and if it's again (pause) community's own research then the community would ...probably be in on the planning of the research from the beginning...they could get to ask questions and get a better knowledge of the scientific data that's probably going to be collected. I think it is important for the community to be able to ask questions up front...(Community Stakeholder)
- I think that's the main thrust of COMR, to actually being not only a means to identify partners without losing control of the research process, but also through partnering with researchers, it trained community members in the scientific research process... I think COMR is a very powerful tool in equipping the residents to become trained in many of the procedures that before they entered into COMR could've potentially been used to intimidate them or used to marginalize them further...(Non-Community Stakeholder)

Increase in Knowledge of the Scientific Process through COMR

- I've observed in the communities where I've worked with people who are really involved, they learn so much from the researchers. The researchers were so willing to share with them...each step of the process and so they ...got knowledge and information not just from the researchers and other people from the community but also from other people who are involved in similar situations or who were (pause) interested in helping to resolve the problem in some way...(Community Stakeholder)

Advantages of COMR's Use in Addressing Environmental Issues

- I think it's (COMR) an approach that can be very applicable for communities that have been facing a history of environmental or disproportionate burdens of environmental contamination or environmental pollution in their communities...I think the environmental contamination problem that communities face lend themselves to being approached with COMR because who is a better judge of community contamination than the people who live in that situation...(Non-Community Stake holder)
- We could look at our water and see that it didn't smell right, it didn't look right, it didn't taste right, so it could not be right for us to drink. But we didn't have ...data to substantiate what we were saying. But with scientific data, the research, it was made possible...(Community Stakeholder)

Advantages of COMR's Use in Addressing Environmental Issues

- We've been having a battle with landfill and water, soil and air pollution and contamination...in our neighborhood living close to a landfill and for years we've not been able to produce...any hard facts that we can take to a bargaining table until WERA came about and we looked at what they had done...they're successes and failures and we took that and applied it to what we needed to do and as a result we had a lot fewer failures and a lot more successes in our battle in trying to get everything accomplished... (Community Stakeholder)
- It gives the community a more direct stake in the problem and in finding a solution. I think it keeps them directly involved, and it helps to educate people in the community about what the problem really is and best ways to solve it. And how to reach out to other people who can help, as far as research, resources, and maybe legal help, and contacts with people in positions in government who can bring some relief. (Community Stakeholder)

Increase in Environmental Awareness in EJ Communities through COMR

- ...the community has first hand awareness and knowledge about what their problems are and what they're experiencing and they can provide that information to the researchers so the researchers can take it and do what they do best...I just think the...community feels like they have some ownership so they're more willing to participate and...be cooperative. (Community Stakeholder)
- I think the community members that are involved can learn about how those samples are taken, and what information you can get from that—how you quantify that information, and what can be done with that information afterwards. I think those are important and powerful tools to know. I think it is good for folks in the community to be aware of that – gives it more of a hands-on experience and have more of an understanding of what is going on, rather than waiting to hear what is going to happen from somebody else. (Community Stakeholder)

COMR as an Effective Way for EJ communities to Document their Environmental Exposures

- We're able through using their procedures to go through and do our test ourselves, having our own labs. We had three labs to do our analyzing and results...we're able to take them to the table and challenge what they said...they're analyses [analysis]... And many times they were very different but our tests were a lot more conclusive and a lot more thorough. (Community Stakeholder)
- When we go to our policymakers with issues we were concerned about, the thing they always say is "Can you prove it" So that requires documentation over a period of time. So I believe that if the community is able to get the necessary documentation and take it back to the policymakers, that they have the evidence the policymakers are looking for, and that way we can push for change (Community Stakeholder)

Collaborative Problem Solving Model

- I think that from what I have seen, it might work in some situations. I think there are other situations where, from what I have seen, it is not very – it hasn't been helpful. I think that the difference between situations where it has been more helpful, or less helpful has to do with the scale of the problems that the community is trying to solve. In a situation where the focus is about local issues involving say a town or a city, there may be more prospects for this collaboration to work. Than in a situation involving state-wide, national, or global forces that are arrayed against the interests of a local community. (Non-Community Stakeholder)

Collaborative Problem Solving Model

- I think it was very effective to have the mixture of support from a broad diverse group..of partners representing a lot of different sectors and interests...to show...that people really from all over were having this kind of commitment to show up for the workshops and then to get the word out through their organizations and to bring their resources back to WERA and I think that documented and demonstrated that this was a real and valid initiative ...it wasn't just one person complaining that could be ignored it really gave a lot of strength to the community and to the overall effort. (Non-Community Stakeholder)
- After so many years of just not being able to get anywhere then suddenly you're able to produce facts, concrete evidence on things that you've been arguing with, arguing about for so long and suddenly you can prove it, people at the table, sit up and take notice. (Community Stakeholder)

Key Findings & Conclusions

- Survey respondents generally agree that WERA's COMR approach can be used to help build the community's trust in the scientific research process and also can be used to effectively address local environmental justice and health issues.
- Preliminary analyses of interview data reveal that WERA's community-university partnership has been effective at addressing local EJ and health issues.
- There is more disagreement among survey respondents about the utility of the CPS approach in addressing local EJ and health issues.

Key Findings & Conclusions

- Interviewees think COMR is a great way for communities to address their local EJ and health issues.
- Study participants generally agreed that the COMR approach can be adopted by other communities to address local EJ and health issues.
- Working within enclaves or close-knit communities on sensitive community issues presents challenges when collecting evaluation data.

Limitations

- Limited participation from community members.
- The use of phone interviews may not have gathered as much useful information as in-person interviews.
- Item construction may have introduced bias in some of the survey questions.

Next Steps

Focus Group

- Listening Session

Data Analysis

- Data will be analyzed using NVivo 8
- Thematic Coding
- Emergent Themes

Resources

Wilson SM, Wilson OR, Heaney CD, Cooper J. Community-Driven Environmental Protection: Reducing the P.A.I.N. of the Built Environment in Low-Income African-American Communities in North Carolina. *Social Justice in Context* 3: 41-58 (2007-2008).

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Wilson OR, Bumpass NG, Wilson OM, Snipes MH. The West End Revitalization Association (WERA)'s Right to Basic Amenities Movement: Voice and Language of Ownership and Management of Public Health Solutions in Mebane, North Carolina. *Progress in Community Health Partnerships: Research, Education and Action*, 2(3): 237-243 (2008). (2007).

Contact Information

Dr. Sacoby Wilson, Research Assistant Professor
Institute for Families in Society
University of South Carolina
wilsons2@mailbox.sc.edu

Omega Wilson, President
West End Revitalization Association
vera1usa@earthlink.net

Leah Williams, MPH, DrPH(c), Graduate Assistant
Institute for Families in Society
University of South Carolina
will2428@mailbox.sc.edu

Roy Charles, MEd, Ed.D.(c), Graduate Assistant
School of Education
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
rac@email.unc.edu

THANK YOU!