SEL Research Engagement Network: Our approach, partnerships & impact

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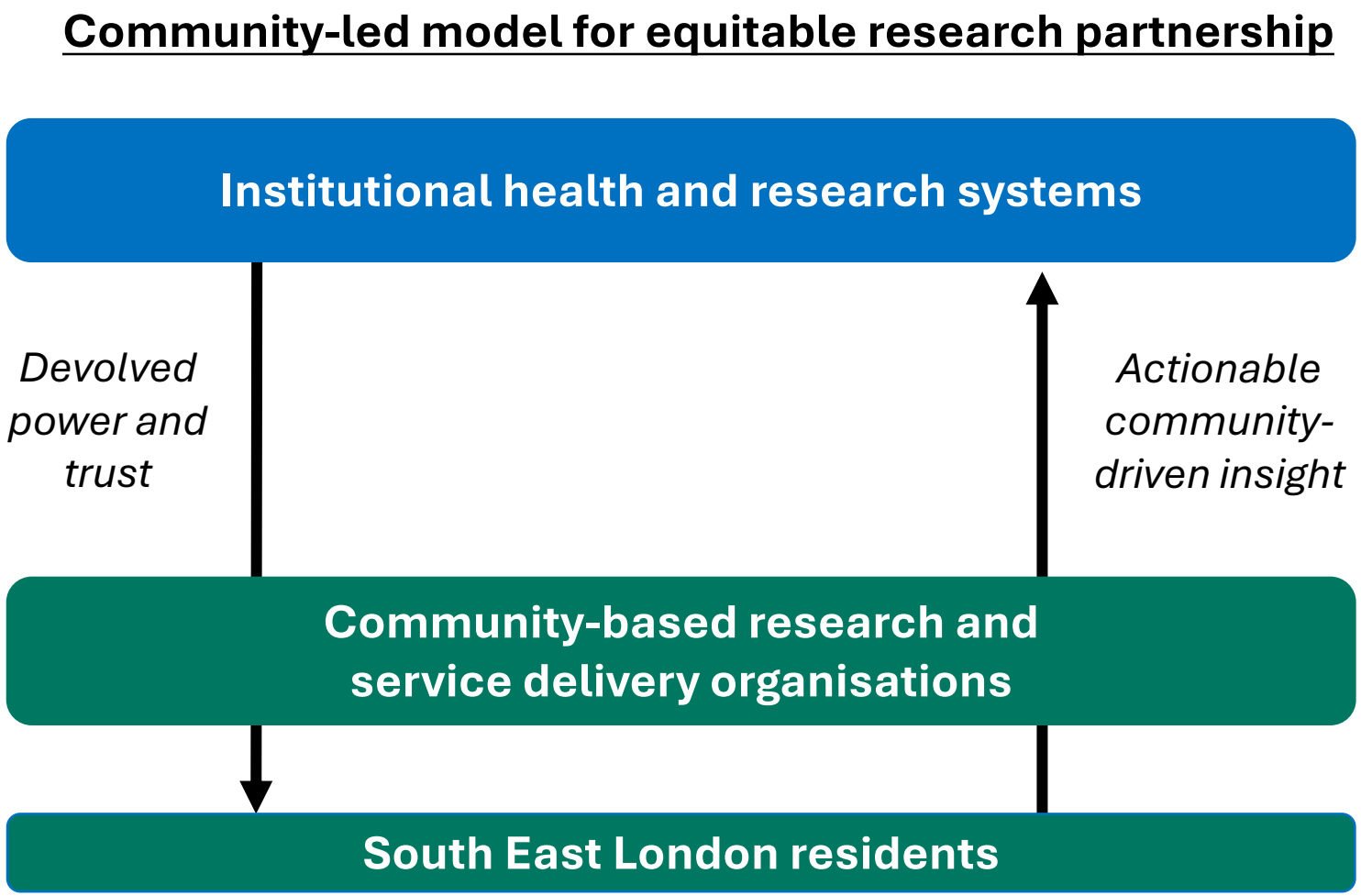
Our SEL REN model

Marginalised and minoritised communities' participation in research is framed around questions of TRUST

- Negative feelings about research conducted into 'us', by 'others'.
- Concerns about extraction and exploitation
- Request for greater involvement of community-based organisations / VCSEs



1 | REN programme partnership with lived experience

- Governance model initially involved SEL institutional partners only (ICB, KHP, NIHR)
- Moved to integrating **lived experience participants** – co-design of all activities, equity in decision-making
- Lived experience participants provided **critical challenge** to frame REN ambitions around community voices and needs:

> *"It feels like we're talking about improved inclusion, but not necessarily improved participation. Are we just saying that [researchers] are just getting access to community members they don't typically get access to? Or are we looking at a system differently? It feels very much like just being a conduit."* – **REN programme lived experience participant**

What opportunities exist to address structural inequities alongside improved research participation?

2 | Principles of equitable research partnership

- Co-design workshops to develop model for **equitable partnership in research**
- Key principles:
  - Compensation for community expertise
  - Decision-making authority for communities
  - Research in trusted community spaces
  - Two-way accountability for acting on insights

"It was clear from the workshop that creating an equitable model for research requires a deeper level of self-reflection than the highest calibre EDI training scheme has reached to date. I heard people say that the workshop was a step-change deeper than anything they'd previously experienced." – **REN programme institutional partner**

How can research teams and institutions surface and build upon these co-developed principles for equitable research partnership with communties?

3 | Engagement and community priority-setting

- SEL REN engaged over **300 community and researcher contacts** since 2022
- Black African / Caribbean and Asian communities, people living in economic deprivation / with mental health conditions
- Synthesised community priorities:
  - **health areas**
  - **research types**
- Implemented **community-owned research prioritisation processes** and **criteria for appraising studies**, ahead of partnership

What activities can continue to move decision-making authority for research prioritisation from institutions to communities?

4 | Training and capacity building

- Gap analysis (via SEL REN partners) revealed **limited training with community focus**
- We separately developed and piloted ***Mabadiliko Academy*** training programmes:

Community-powered Health Research

"This course significantly enhanced my motivation by affirming that my lived experience and professional background are genuine assets in research, not peripheral to it." – **Community participant**

Cultural Humility for Health Researchers

"It made it so clear to me that it isn't just good enough to 'not be racist'. I need to be proactive in my endeavours to be anti-racist. Speak up, create opportunities and be active." – **Research participant**

How are researchers being prepared for power-adjusted and relational work?

How are communities having their capacity built for long-term sustainability?

5 | Community-research partnership activities

- Brought communities and research teams together in **facilitated dialogue**
- Produced **tangible commitments** to more equitable research practice, across **15 partnerships**, spanning range of health areas and research stages
- Key elements that supported conversations around **meaningful partnership**:
  - established sense of shared purpose and common values
  - created safe spaces for addressing structural and systemic barriers
  - valued community networks, infrastructure and trusted relationships
  - recognised that co-design operates as a spectrum

"I've seen talks and I've seen people talking about PPI… but I've never actually seen it implemented in a way like this before. If there are more resources we can get, we will fight for it." – **Research participant**

"There are a lot of uncomfortable conversations and challenges that we face. But I don't feel that it's 'us and them'. It's very important we to work together to support each other." – **Community participant**

How can we build equitable partnership that moves beyond mere 'participation'?

What comes next?

- SEL REN set out to go **beyond the status quo** / **current research norms**
- We purposefully acknowledged and amplified voices of those **'seldom listened to'**
- Our model has been refined through **4 years of co-design and co-delivery** with local residents, community organisations, research teams and institutions
- Acting on insights from SEL REN work is a question of **epidemiological justice** – whose knowledge counts, and who has the power to effect change?

We'll now hear from a current SEL REN partner, to note what lies ahead for 2026-27