EDITORIAL

Employing an Immersive Ethnographic Research Method for Your Next Study

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Editor (VC Research Digest)

Human behaviour is complex, unpredictable, and often indeterministic. Moreover, there is an immense difference between actual and reported behaviours for any given demographic group. People, by and large (including the most honest people) tend to report what they would like to be true, rather than what is true. This is particularly true when researchers ask subjects about their behaviours that have socially acceptable/ unacceptable dichotomies.

While the use of self-reporting – through interviews or questionnaires asking subjects to describe his/her feelings, thoughts, and behaviours – is a common method for collecting qualitative data, it has a significant shortcoming, i.e., you cannot always trust the respondents to speak the truth. For example, if you asked people how many times a day, they washed their hands as part of the COVID-19 hygiene-relevant routine behaviour, it is more likely than not that they will over-report their action (see for example, Hansen, Larsen and Gundersen, 2021). Since this is a socially desirable behaviour and everyone is expected to demonstrate conformity, the tendency to report self-serving behaviour is extremely high. In addition to the 'social desirability effect', there is also the 'herd effect' in which peer influence plays a role in determining one's response. Furthermore, people also respond differently in different contexts. Is there a solution to overcome this shortcoming in reported behaviour data?

Ethnography is a research method that relies on direct observation of subjects in their natural environments. When we are interested in the varied nuances of behaviour, ethnographic approaches can help go very deep into this domain. In other words, such a methodology helps the researcher to go 'under the skin' of the subject and truly understand what is going on. Ethnographic methods can also be invaluable in discovering and exploring previously unknown or unreported issues. This could be a cultural or social phenomenon that is still considered a taboo, therefore not discussed, or reported in the open, or an emergent behavioural peculiarity that has not yet gained the attention of others.

Ethnographic studies, therefore, offer an 'immersive' method in which the researcher spends time with the subjects and observe their behaviour in their natural setting. Ideally, the researcher can be integrated to the group to an extent that the presence of the observer is ignored by the subjects. Such an approach gives access to very rich data and often helps uncover unexpected issues. The in-situ observation of behaviour and interactions opens a window of knowledge for the researcher. As an ethnographer is integrated into a group, familiarity with their way of life is created gradually which would help refine the research ideas.

There are many different considerations that the researcher must have in designing an ethnographic study which can be undertaken in either an open or closed setting, overtly or covertly, and through active or passive observation. It is also essential to consider the time-consuming nature of ethnographic research which might require several weeks or months for the researcher to get access to socially embedded data. Mitigating risks to the researcher and subjects and averting observer bias are other key considerations in designing an ethnographic study.

A Guide to Conducting Research Interviews

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Research Interviews

Interviews are the primary source of collecting data by qualitative researchers across many disciplines. Interviews allows for research participants to directly in conversations with researchers and can generate rich in-depth information concerning participant experiences (Kvale, 2008; Schultze & Avital, 2011). In most cases interviews are building blocks of narratives (Victor, 2009) and unveils layers of participants' lived experiences. Interviews can take on structured, semi structured and unstructured forms, with each holding distinctive advantages suitable to the type of research that is being conducted. Likewise, interviews can be carried out in different modes, such as via telephone, online or face-to-face (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Fontana & Frey, 1994). Additionally, with technology, there are alternatives such as texting and online chat to carrying out conversations. Face-to face interviews are crucial in exploring past events that are impossible to observe (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Hence, interviews are the most common and convenient form of data collection in qualitative research.

Although interviews may seem easy and effortless, there are certain things that a researcher needs to keep in mind when deciding to conduct interviews for research. Below are some important points that needs to be kept in mind when preparing for research interviews while before and after conducting the interviews. Since interviews are vital in qualitative research, it is essential to get the approval of interviewees to converse with the researcher. Thus, maintaining integrity and rapport with the participant is a key component in qualitative research interviews.

Preparing for a research interview

1. Identifying what is the objective of the interview. Check if the objective of the study can be achieved through interviewing.

2. Think about the possible ways of interviewing that will elicit the best responses from the participants. In other words, identifying the potential type of interviewing, for example: structured, semi-structured or unstructured.

3. It is also equally important to identify the participants. For this process, it is vital to revisit the objectives and the research questions to identify the appropriate participants (such as individual participants or a group), length of the interview, and the number of interviews.

4. Decide on how interviews will be conducted. For example, face to face, or online.

5. A researcher may also want to consider how interviews will be recorded. This depends on the type of interview and the participant. For example; audio recorded, video recorded, fill in answers, or making short hand notes.

Before conducting the interview

1. Introduce oneself and the purpose of conducting the research.

2. Explain the purpose, importance of the participants contribution and the duration of the interview.

3. Explain how the interview will be recorded and how the information will be used.

4. Obtain verbal and written consent, informing participants of their rights to withdraw from the research process and not to answer any questions they choose not to.

5. Ask participants if they have any questions, choice of convenient times and suitable locations for the interview.

Do's in a research interview

1. Prepare ahead of time - interview guide and informed consent should be made available on or before the interview takes place.

2. Check if the questions in the interview guide are aligned with the objectives and the central research question, in other words, are the questions open-ended and allows participants to provide detailed accounts of information

3. Decide on the interview location with the participant and check the setting of the location for comfort, privacy, accessibility, and quietness. Location of the interview is central to the study as

collaboration between the researcher and participant is more likely when a safe and comfortable environment is established, allowing the participant to freely share their personal experiences (Kvale, 2008; Whiting, 2008).

4. Check audio/video device for functionality – Recording the interviews enables the researcher to generate accurate verbatim transcriptions.

5. Practice the interview before conducting – A good way is to conduct a pilot. Pilot interviews enable the researcher to anticipate the kind of issues that the researcher might face during the data collection process and to ensure flow of conversation during the interview. Also, pilot interviews allow the researcher to check for clarity and accuracy of the interview questions, and to recognize own biases and assumptions attached to data collection. Moreover, pilot interviews are conducted to evaluate the extent to which the interview guide and interview questions are focused on the study.

Don'ts in an interview

1. Don't be late for research interviews. As participants are crucial asset to researcher, it is important to be respectful of the participant's time.

2. Do not ask too many information in one question. Clarity is important to elicit participant's lived experiences. Hence, avoid confusing the participant. In other words, questions need to be direct to the point and free from ambiguity.

3. Avoid leading and closed ended questions with "yes" and "No" responses.

4. Do not assume answers, instead it is always better to ask if there is any doubt. One of the advantages of interviews are that the researcher can clarify doubts and probe more if necessary.

5. Avoid making judgements and leading participants to say certain things. It is also important not to interrupt the participant while they are speaking. Let them finish. This ensures free flow and openness.

6. Be mindful of the interview duration-avoid going overtime. In other words, avoid irrelevant discussions and personal talks. Keep the interview short.

After an Interview

1. Thank the interviewee and ask if they have any questions

2. Establish a mechanism on how to share the transcribed interview with the participant or a way to clarify any doubts in the after the interview data analysis process.

3. Check if the interview was recorded and transcribe them as soon as possible.

4. Have the transcribed version of the interview checked for accuracy by the interviewee - A process known as member checking. Member checking is crucial in establishing rigor in the research process (Whiting, 2008).

5. Be careful with the interview data and protect the privacy of the participant. Hence ensuring from the participant that the information that will be used in the research is what the participant feels comfortable in sharing.

6. Begin data analysis process upon receiving participant's approval of the transcript.

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THE BEST RESEARCH YOU CAN DO IS TO TALK TO PEOPLE

TERRY PRATCHETT

Challenges Faced by Youth Entrepreneurs in the Maldives

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Sudden changes in the regulations and lack of transparency in the regulations have been found to be challenges faced by youth entrepreneurs (Uddin, Chowdhury & Ullah, 2015). It also includes lack of ministerial support, high-interest rates and fees associated with loans and advances. Furthermore, lack of collateral securities is one of the prominent obstacles faced by youth that adversely impact their credit rating (Uddin, Chowdhury & Ullah, 2015). Some of the challenges faced for youth entrepreneurial start-ups include short grace period of bank loans, complicated documentation procedures, lack of start-up capital, lack of access to finance, and low support from Government/Financial institutions exist and adversely impact entrepreneurial growth.

Additionally, absence of an explicit legal framework to prevent unhealthy competition led small firms to compete with large firms and find it challenging to build up supplier connections and find strategic partners to expand the business (Uddin, Chowdhury & Ullah, 2015; Muthuraman & Al Haziazi, 2019). Youth entrepreneurs face discrimination from suppliers and customers regarding trust and confidence, especially during the early stage of operations. They do not have a centralized mechanism to forecast demand and plan accordingly as there is a lack of information transparency. They are facing issues with internet connectivity in terms of accessibility and affordability due to its high cost, which disable them from setting up e-commerce businesses (Lawrence & Tar, 2020). The e-government services related to business registration and related services are also accounted to be very poor due to the insufficient investment by the respective departments (Edmiston, 2003). Youth entrepreneurs are very IT-friendly, but their old and senior employees are reluctant to get updated with the technological tools and reluctant to participate in the training as well. Thus, this study examines the factors challenging youth entrepreneurial start-ups in the Maldives, and also depicts the difficulty of entrepreneurs in obtaining technical software and other applications which are essential for business functions.

The findings of this study will help concerned departments devise better strategies to boost the entrepreneurial start-ups in the Maldives and make it a more start-up friendly business environment.

Methodology and Instrument for Data Collection

The quantitative methodology has been effective in exploring what is previously known rather than the unknown (Burall and Gross, 2017). The non-probability sampling method was executed to get a suitable sample for the study (Showkat and Parveen, 2017). Using a purposive selection helps the researcher select the samples that best fit the research requirement (Kothari, 2004). It is found out to have a structured, pre-tested and closed-ended questionnaire to best suit this study's objectives (Canals, 2017). Questionnaire eases data collection from a large population and sample size, such as 310 samples in this study (Kothari, 2004). The questionnaire used in this research is adapted from Sitoula (2015), which is validated by Fatoki and Chindoga (2011); Uddin et al., (2015); Okirigiti and Raffey (2015); Katrodia and Sibanda (2018); D. S. Muthuraman and Al Haziazi (2019). The questionnaire has been pre-tested to check the reliability and validity of the Instrument (Reierson et al., 2008) and distributed through Viber communities and other social media platforms where the target respondents have their own cults. Raosoft software was used to determine the sample size of the respondents. 310 participants with 18 - 34 age range out of a total of 1,333 registered owners/employers (Demmke, 2017; Statisticsmaldives, 2014) were selected as sample for the study. The sample size was calculated with the confidence level of 95%, and margin of error as 5%.

Participants Age and Gender Cross Tabulation		
Age	Gender (number)	
	Male	Female
18 – 23 Years old	22	58
24 – 29 Years old	50	101
30 – 34 Years old	26	53
Total	98	212

Participants Education Level	
Education Level	Percentage Response
Postgraduate degree	18.06%
Undergraduate degree	30.32%
Diploma	20.65%
A' level	14.52%
O' level	16.13%
No formal education	0.32%

Most of the participants (30.32%) were undergraduate degree holders. 18.06% PG holders, 20.65% diploma holders, 14.25% A' level and 16.13% O level holders constituted the rest of the respondents.

Participants entrepreneurship experience	
Number of years	Number of Response
Less than a year	142
1-3 Years	98
3 – 5 Years	29
5+ Years	41

Most of the respondents have their early stages of operation, and 98 of them are between 1 and 3 years of business. 29 respondents stated they have worked/ been operating in business for 3-5 years, and only 41 respondents run the business for a reasonable long period of time.

Findings and Discussions

The research highlights factors such as Entrepreneurship Education and Training, Finance, Market dynamics, Information and Communication Technology and Policies and Regulations challenge youth entrepreneurship in the Maldives in several ways. Lack of entrepreneurial training, mentoring and support, inadequate previous entrepreneurial experience and exposure required to run a business, insufficient knowledge, understanding and awareness about business support services, and lack of entrepreneurial background knowledge and skills to exploit the available financing avenues are existing challenges related to youth entrepreneurial start-ups in the Maldives.

Findings shows that there is a delay in obtaining approvals and utility assistance from the Government authorities, which delays the entire process. Delay in the business registration process, sanctioning permits for a business-like construction or opening new restaurants will adversely affect the small business performance (Katrodia & Sibanda, 2018), and it, in turn, makes the entrepreneurs pessimistic (Uddin, Chowdhury, & Ullah, 2015). There are emerging policies and practices to support youth start-ups, for example, regional business centres where they can go for advice. The findings of this study can help public authorities and independent bodies recognize the flaws of existing policies and practices and identify the areas that require sudden government intervention to enhance youth entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

Reducing secretarial hurdles and simplifying the necessary documentation procedures to acquire services from authorities will ease the access to loans provided by government organizations and banks. Competitive policies could be amended to ease the operations of small businesses. In many cases, youth entrepreneurs lack the financial capacity to enlist accountants/consultants, and consequently, they may find it challenging to follow sudden changes in guidelines and regulations. Hence, reducing the frequent change in business regulations will allow businesses to implement plans consistently without affecting them. It undermines the need for transparent regulatory arrangements that will encourage fair practice among youth entrepreneurs. Therefore, it is fundamental to include youth in policy revision and implementation for prospective youth entrepreneurship development in the country. To enhance Youth's entrepreneurial skills and abilities, training institutions need to develop training and educational programs that help to invigorate an

innovative and entrepreneurial mind-set among youngsters. The educational programs could include youth-led training and resources, enterprise education, and a youth council setting. Overall, this research helps government and respective departments recognize and feed on the requirement of a vibrant youth pioneering economy.

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Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) in Research: Three Generations (Part 2)

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After Vygotsky's death, his colleagues Leont'ev and Luria expanded his core thesis; however, the second generation of CHAT follows the development of Leont'ev rather than Luria. The work considered the second-generation CHAT was published by Leont'ev expanding in his two major works: the Problems of the Development of Mind (Leont'ev, 1981), originally published in 1959 and translated into English in 1981, and Activity, Consciousness, and Personality (Leont'ev, 1978) originally published in 1975 and translated into English in 1978.

Leont'ev's major contribution that distinguishes first generation of activity theory to the second generation, was to shift the unit of analysis from tools of mediation to the activity system itself, and adopted the term 'activity'; thus, 'cultural historical activity theory', or simply 'activity theory' (Davydov & Radzikhovskii, 1985). For Leont'ev, object-oriented practical activity is the fundamental unit of analysis that explains the human mind. On this basis, the wholeness of the development of a person is encompassed in the context of activities

Leont'ev initially studied the psychology of animals, which brought him to the conclusion that Pavlov's reflexionism was not a sufficient explanation of animal behaviour and their mental process. In expanding his investigations into human behaviour, he explained that people engage in 'actions' that only contribute to satisfying an eventual need, thus differentiating, 'operations', 'actions' and 'activity'. According to Jonassen, Tessmer, Hannum, and Rohrer-Murphy (1999) the aim of the activity system is the pursuit of some object.

Leont'ev's orientation was, however, based on activities of individuals, even though they are carried out collectively. Consequently, the potential for applying this framework in disciplines beyond the individual was not fully realized. Inspired by Leont'ev's work, Engeström (1987) expanded on the notion of individual action to incorporate the importance of collective activity. Engeström's expansion of CHAT argues that activities conducted at a collective level are carried out by those communities based on a shared understanding. In order to demonstrate this, Engeström expanded Leont'ev's theory of activity to include an additional component, 'community', in the analysis of collective human activity, guided not only by tools but by rules (i.e., cultural norms) and divisions of labour (Engeström, 1987). This was fully explored by Engeström in an attempt to expand the scope of application of CHAT. This was a major leap forward in the sensitivity of activity theory toward cultural diversity.

Second generation activity system

In this system, the subject is the individual or group working towards achieving an object leading to an outcome. Tools are the instruments that a subject uses to work on specific objects. The rules are norms of the society or group, and the division of labour is the roles each member fulfills in order to achieve the object (Liaw, Huang, & Chen, 2007). There is a mutual relationship between subject, object, and community; in turn, tools

mediate the relationship between subject and object; rules mediate the relationship between subject and community; and the division of labour mediates the relationship between object and community (Issroff & Scanlon, 2002). This system addresses the complexity of human labour in a broader social context by emphasizing both its individual aspects and their interrelations (Roth, 2012).

In conclusion, the second generation of activity systems is most commonly used in research. The initial mediated triangle of individual actions was shifted from tool mediation to activity as a system. This was further expanded by Engeström (1987) to add community, rules, and division of labour. The second generation of activity theory is attributed to Leont'ev's work that emphasized the collective nature of human activity, along with Engeström's which developed the activity systems model. CHAT continues to evolve and meet the changing nature of human activity. This will be further discussed in the next issue of the Research Digest.

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IF WE KNEW WHAT WE WERE DOING, IT WOULD NOT BE CALLED RESEARCH, WOULD IT?

ALBERT EINSTEIN
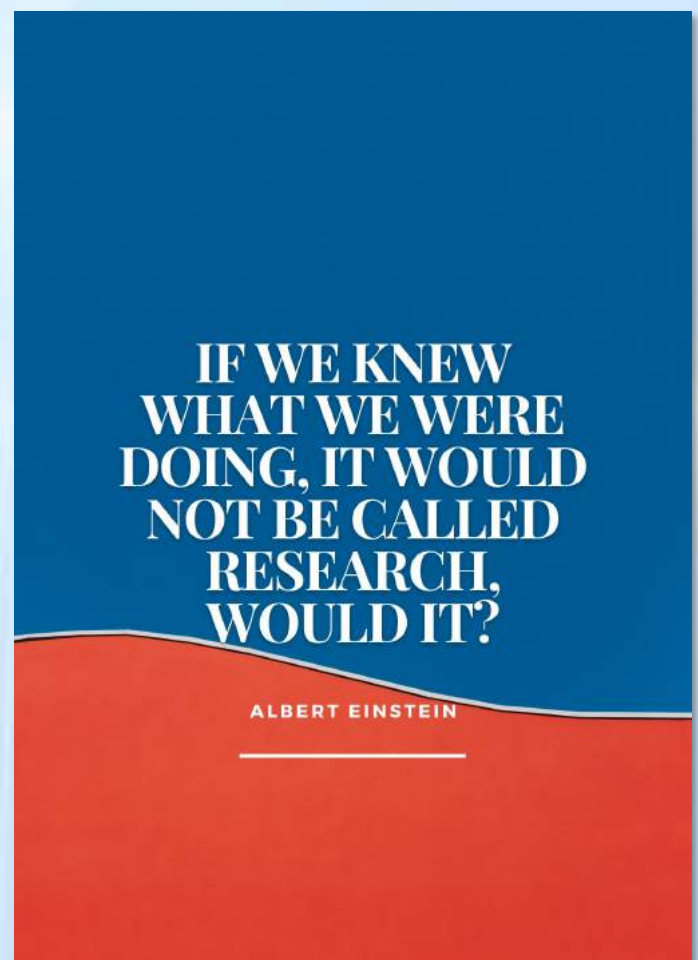
Collaborative Writing: Practical Preparation

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Co-authored papers are the norm in many disciplines, but collaborative writing is not always an easy process. Sometimes one person is primarily responsible for the writing, with others contributing ideas in the planning and development stages. In other cases, multiple authors must work together to get words on the page. Negotiating edits, modifications, the organization of the paper, and the flow of the discussion can be challenging when multiple authors are involved. This article offers some helpful advice for streamlining the collaborative writing process.

Before you begin writing, it is a good idea to plan and set the following instructions so you do not have to modify your collaboration afterwards.

Division of Labour

Collaborating authors need to be honest with each other about their skills and shortcomings to help build a stronger working relationship. Consider your own writing and the elements of the process you excel at (Frassl et al., 2018). Do not volunteer to do the editing if you are not skilled at proofreading and editing. For the relationship to be positive, it is essential to make sure that your expectations of one another are reasonable (Enago Academy, 2020). A clear division of labor clarifies each team member's responsibility for the project while also addressing expectations. This will make authorship discussions easier.

Decide on a writing strategy

Consider your sharing strategy for drafts and revisions. It is recommended to share a folder in Google Drive (or Dropbox, or One Drive, etc.), but make sure to label the files so that everyone can tell which is the most recent version. Another method is to attach drafts to emails. If you use shared files, be careful to either plan who will work on them when and on what schedule, or have a system in place for tracking changes (The Writing Center, 2015). It is also a good idea to combine the two methods.

Planning and scheduling

Planning is essential. Specify due dates for both drafts and responses. Everyone is busy, and each one will have different priorities, especially in a big project with many authors. The principle author is usually in charge of reminding everyone else about deadlines (Frassl et al., 2018). Get a few synchronous meetings scheduled at the beginning of your project well in advance of your deadlines to ensure that you can maintain open lines of communication while writing (The Writing Center, 2015). The ability to lead is essential for the timely and successful completion of a multi-authored work.

Managing references

Determine your referencing strategy. Many citation management programs, including Endnote, Mendeley, and Zotero, feature collaboration tools. Sharing your sources with a library can help you manage your writing's citations, as well as your argument and thoughts. You can save time compiling and finding references by using reference management software, which also enhances consistency and accuracy (Jesper, 2022). It does not, however, take the role of verifying the veracity of the references you use or understanding the format in which your references must be written in order to adhere to rules (Frassl et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important that references are managed in common platform so that there all sources are verified and included.

Use of text-matching tools

Make sure everyone is in agreement before utilizing a text-matching program like iThenticate. It does not imply that you do not trust your teammates when you suggest scanning a document. Anyone can make mistakes, especially when several individuals

are editing and making changes. You can avoid difficult talks if you plan to do this from the beginning, perhaps at frequent intervals throughout the process and/or on the final document (Enago Academy, 2020). In particular, it is your responsibility that the data you submit or the findings you present are accurate. All coauthors may face repercussions if an author is found guilty of scientific misconduct (Frassl et al., 2018). Keep in mind that iThenticate can assist with both proofreading and checking for referencing mistakes.

Communication is key

Plan your communication strategy. However, you may also need some time to reflect on your own. Face-to-face or virtual conversations can be a good way to work through difficult issues and negotiations (Graduate Connections, 2015). Cloud-based tools like Asana can be used to encourage collaboration. It is also important to have a note-taker for meetings to record the conversations and decisions made by the group in the meeting notes. This will assist coauthors who were unable to attend the meeting, as well as the group as a whole, in later decision-making (Frassl et al., 2018). As long as you maintain the lines of communication open with all of your coworkers, it doesn't really matter how you communicate.

Dealing with disagreements

Recognize that not everyone will agree with you. Just because you think a point is clearly written and should not be edited does not necessarily mean you are correct – especially if you wrote it (Oliver et al., 2018). Correspondingly, if someone is initially not contributing, it can be simple to write them off, but this mindset can be toxic to a cooperative group spirit (The Writing Center, 2015). Pay attention when your colleagues express worries about what you have written, since you are writing for other people to read and comprehend.

Conclusion

It is important to work on all of these aspects alongside your collaborators, but your mindset as an individual is equally crucial. Keep in mind the primary reason you are working with others. They are adding knowledge and abilities to the project that you lack in order to complete it (Oliver et al., 2018).

Respect your collaborators contributions and efforts even if you do not always agree with their opinions. Working together is the goal of a partnership, which necessitates negotiation and compromise from all parties. While working together on a research project can be demanding and stressful, it can also be incredibly rewarding with careful planning and a positive outlook!

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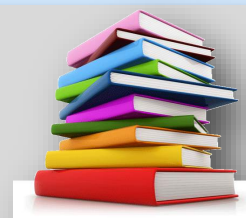
FROM THE WORLD OF RESEARCH

Small Island Developing States in a post-pandemic world: Challenges and opportunities for climate action

Aideen M. Foley, Stefano Moncada, Michelle Mycoo, Patrick Nunn, Verena Tandrayen-Ragoobur, and Christopher Evans

ABSTRACT

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) have been impacted by and responded to COVID-19 in ways that give us clues about vulnerabilities under climate change, as well as pathways to resilience. Here, we reflect on some of these experiences drawing on case study examples from the Caribbean, Pacific, and Indian Ocean SIDS, exploring how SIDS have responded to COVID-19 and considering the potential for coping mechanisms enacted for the pandemic to support long-term resilience to climate change. Island responses to the pandemic highlight both new directions, like tourist schemes that capitalize on the rise of remote working in Barbados and Mauritius, and reliance on tried and tested coping mechanisms, like bartering in Fiji. Some of the actions undertaken to respond to the pressures of the pandemic, such as visa schemes promoting "digital nomadism" and efforts to grow domestic food production, have climate resilience and equity dimensions that must be unpacked if their potential to contribute to more sustainable island futures is to be realized. Importantly, the diversity of contexts and experiences described here illustrates that there is no single "best" pathway to climate-resilient post-pandemic futures for SIDS. While the emerging rhetoric of COVID-19 recovery often speaks of "roadmaps," we argue that the journey towards a climate-resilient COVID-19 recovery for SIDS is likely to involve detours, as solutions emerge through innovation and experiment, and knowledge-sharing across the wider SIDS community.

Keywords: climate resilience, COVID-19, food security, Small Island Developing States, tourism

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