

My Voices are Heard: Participatory Action Research to Community Engagement of the Immigrant Seniors



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Research Problem

The most common risk factors that increase the chances of immigrant elders becoming socially isolated and vulnerable include lack of awareness of or access to resources, physical and mental health issues, linguistic and socio-cultural barriers, and lack of motivation in community engagement activities. Continuous hours of childminding further exacerbate the issue. The social isolation of seniors can cause higher social and financial costs.



Objectives

The goal was to increase the social and community engagement of the elders. Specifically:

- Develop the methodology for scoping pertinent issues and activities.
- Find out the activities that have the potential to reduce the social isolation and vulnerability of the seniors.

Methods and Data



Issues/gap and activities identification

Different age groups to capture diverse perspectives



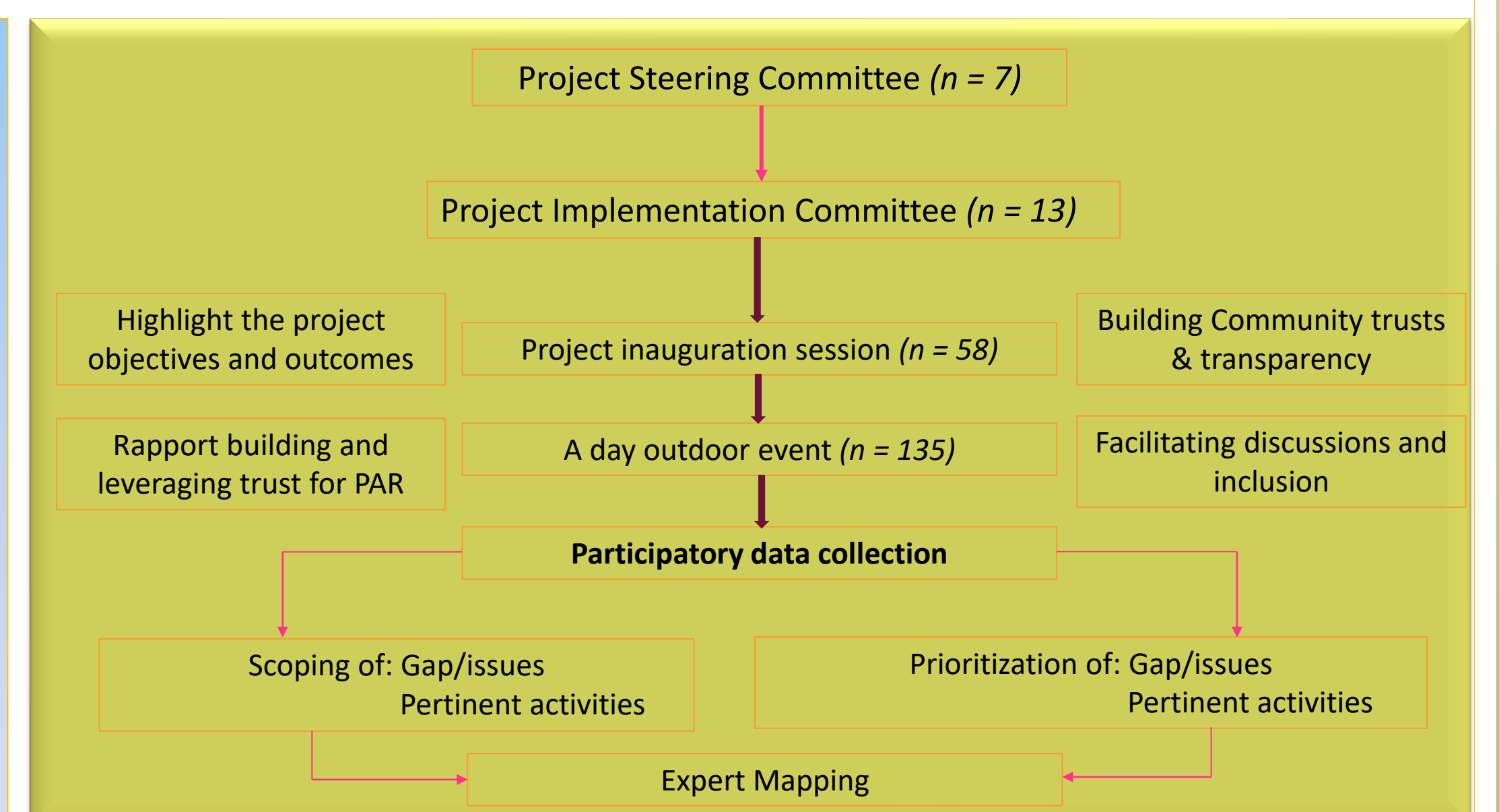
Prioritization of the activities

- Prioritized using a scoring method (1 to 10 scale) with randomly selected elders ($n = 55$)

- Second stage of prioritization by the members of the Project Steering Committee (PSC), Project Implementation Committee (PIC), and the project staff ($n = 21$)

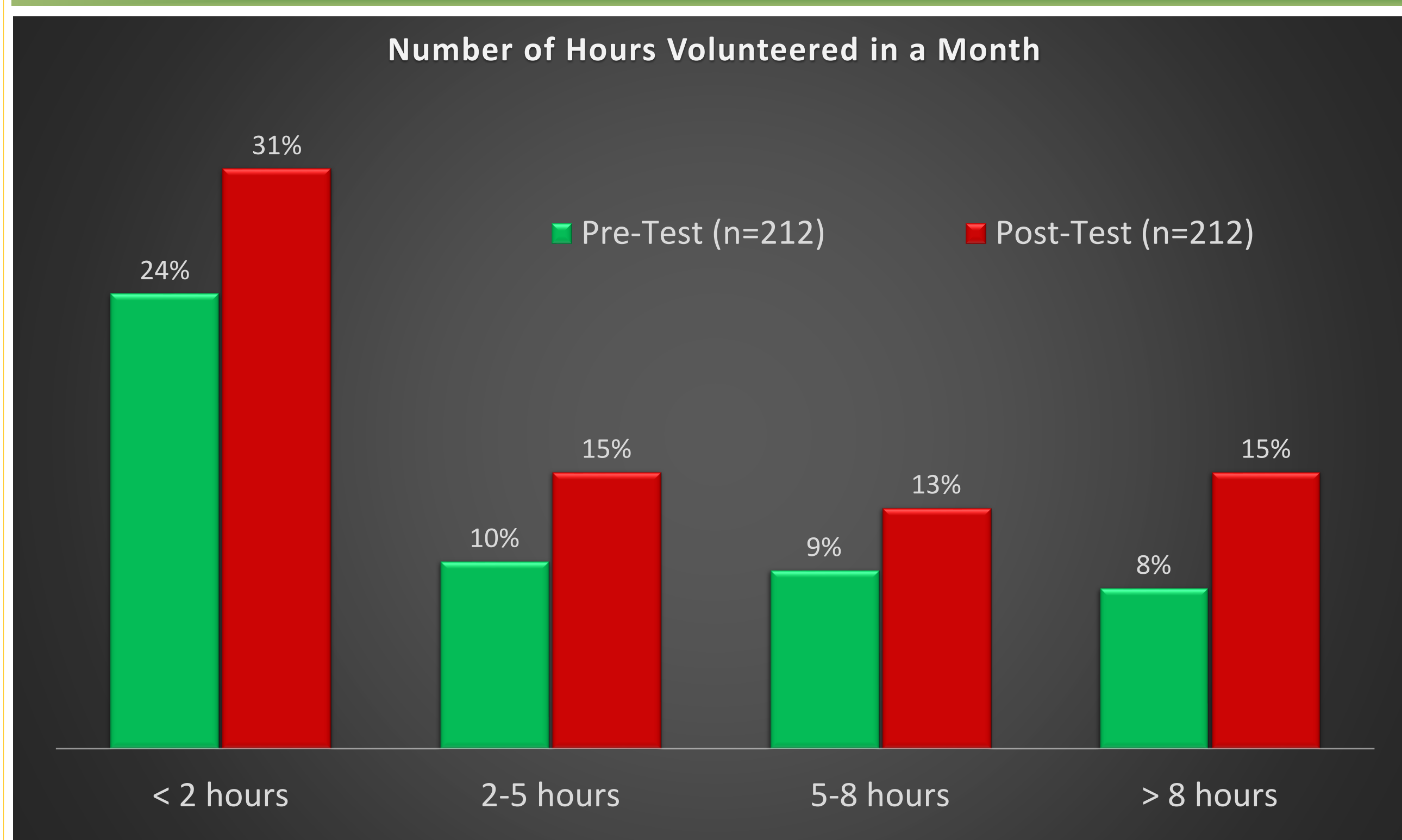
- Weighted average was calculated: $W_{Av} = \sum_{i=1}^n w_i X_i / \sum_{i=1}^n w_i$

- Final expert mapping by the Program Lead based on previous experience and learning



Issues/Gaps	Weighted Average
Lack of motivation to attend program/services	71
Lack of seniors' database	69
Mental and physical health issues	58
Intergenerational gap	57
Lack of cross-cultural awareness	56
Mobility problems	53
Lack of technical knowledge (documentation)	52
Lack of awareness on senior resources and services	51
Childminding-a type of silent abuse of seniors	50
Linguistic problems	40
Lack of cooperation among organizations	39
Loss of Nepalese culture and heritage	23
Lack of space for cultural program	23

Results



- **Socio-cultural activities** stood to be a top priority to:
 - effectively engage seniors
 - help relieve their physical and mental stress
 - pacify their craving for back home
 - potential for intergenerational learning

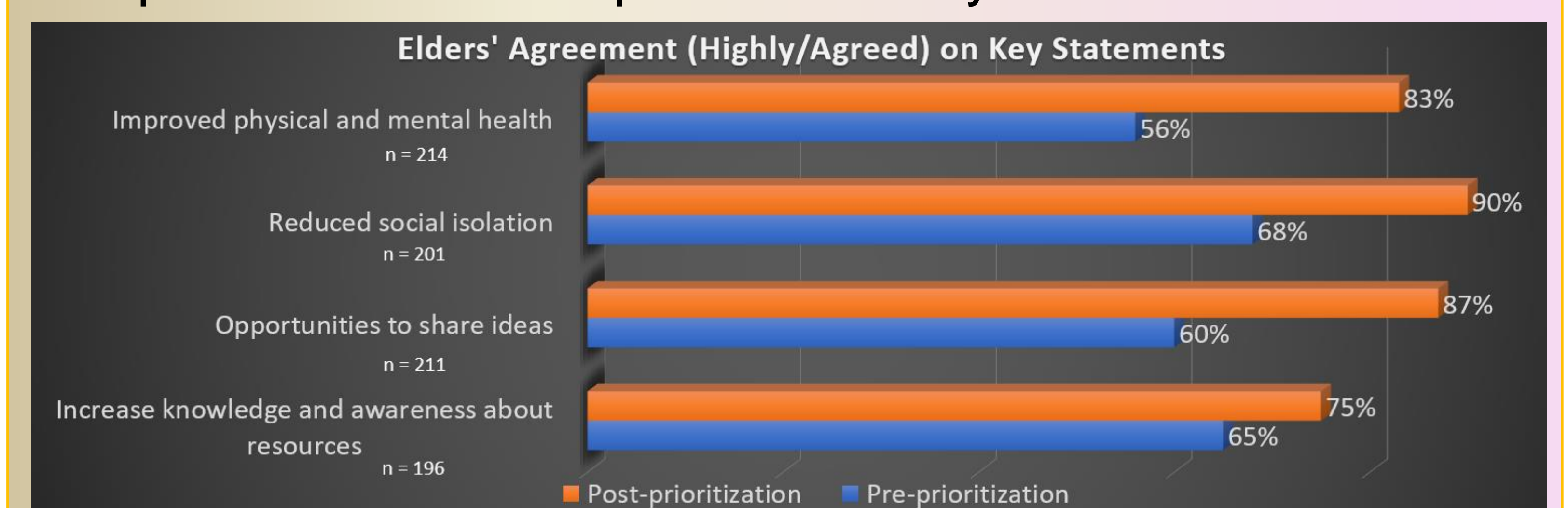


- **Backyard gardening and engagement** to:
 - mimic their lives back home
 - make them engaged with nature
 - transfer the culture via agriculture

- The results from the participatory action research were an eye-opener for the community to start implementing a **bottom-up approach** while defining and refining engagement activities for the seniors.

- The degree of uptake in earlier activities (pre-prioritization) was poor while there has been a consistently higher rate of participation afterwards.

Pre-prioritization versus Post-prioritization Survey Results



Top 10 issues/gaps and activities identified and prioritized through Participatory Sessions

Motivation to attend seniors' activities	Socio-cultural events
Lack of seniors' database	Backyard gardening & engagement
Mental and physical health issues	Seniors database
Intergenerational gap	Awareness sessions
Lack of cross-cultural awareness	Cross-cultural tours
Mobility problems	Hearing test campaign
Documentation problem	Indoor activities during winter
Lack of awareness on available resources	Meet and greet
Childminding	Celebration of special days
Linguistic issue	Support to seniors in need

Conclusions

- ✓ Participatory exercises for scoping and prioritization of engagement activities make the participants feel valued and increase community buy-in.
- ✓ The bottom-up approach values the voices of the vulnerable community members, provides optimal benefits, and meets the project outcomes with less effort.
- ✓ Social inclusion and reduction of social isolation could be accomplished by implementing activities that interest the target group and that has a higher potential for participation.

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