Community-led Development (CLD) is a multi-sectoral, human-centered strategy for collaboration to achieve locally created and owned visions and goals. A developmental approach, it focuses on systemic change to foster stable, resilient, prosperous, inclusive, and self-reliant communities. The Movement for Community-led Development (the Movement), including a global chapter and 11 national chapters, comprises 64 international non-governmental organizations and 100+ local civil society groups, universities, government partners and other stakeholders. In addition to other goals, The Movement’s members are committed to producing an evidence base specifically about CLD.

Purpose.

Through a collaborative evidence synthesis, we seek to understand current CLD practices, and the complex relationship between CLD and various development outcomes. This expansive effort encompasses approximately 325 evaluations spanning 50+ countries, submitted by 60 organizations.

The study seeks to answer:

1. Where has community-led development worked and how?
2. What is the theorized impact of CLD on developmental outcomes including self-reliance, resilience, gender equity, sustainability, and citizen’s engagement?
3. Is the present lack of evidence on the impact of CLD due to gaps related to theory of change, implementation, measurement, or a combination of all three?
4. Do current evaluation frameworks capture the multi-dimensional impact of CLD? What adapted/emergent frameworks are most congruent with the complexity of CLD?
The Study.

This multi-phase research is a collaborative learning-by-doing study. Over 30 Program and Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning professionals from 20 organizations are working with the study lead (on a voluntary basis) to create tools to understand the current practice of CLD through three subgroups: Scoping, Impact, and Evaluation.

A global advisory council of academic, practitioner and methodology experts is guiding the research and ensuring its rigor.

The next phase of the study will entail a realist synthesis to unpack the “how” of CLD. This will enable us to understand how the different elements of CLD programming interact with various elements of the context to produce the impacts that are visible—be they intended or unintended, positive or negative.

Sub-groups.

Scoping Sub-group

The scoping subgroup has identified 11 characteristics of CLD based on a literature review coupled with consultation and an iterative process of discussion and debate. These characteristics have been used to create a scanning tool that is enabling the group to create a landscape of current CLD practice based on 300+ evaluation reports from 50+ countries. This tool will also enable organizations to understand where their programs are in their journey of CLD and what more can be done to strengthen them. The beta version of this tool is now available for feedback.

Impact Sub-group

Based on the theories of change of different programs and a survey of Movement partners, the impact subgroup has tabulated the intended and unintended impacts of CLD through a sustainability-time lens. It is currently working on a visual representation of this impact to illustrate the non-linear, non-monotonic nature of CLD outcomes, their interdependence as well as their constant interaction with context.

Evaluation Sub-group

The Evaluation Sub-group ensures the rigor of the study methodology. After a survey of various available tools and instruments, it has simplified and adapted a USAID tool on the quality of program evaluations in the education sector. This quality appraisal tool comprises of two kinds of questions— one that deal with the general quality of evaluation (be they qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods) and the other, that looks specifically at the characteristics of evaluation for a CLD program. This tool is currently being applied to the 300+ evaluation reports that were submitted for this study and will be used to determine a robust and methodologically rigorous sample for the deep dive. Going forward, the Evaluation Sub-group will examine the various evaluation methodologies currently being used and seek to adapt them to the complexity of CLD.
About the Meta-synthesis.
The meta-synthesis is a multi-year phased initiative that will drive a better understanding of the implementation and impact of CLD at the household, population and systems level, in various contexts. It will also lead to a peer-reviewed co-creation of evaluation frameworks that capture the contributory impact of CLD. In the first phase of this research, we are plotting the current practice of CLD through a review of the 300+ programs that have been self-reported as CLD. This will generate a broad understanding of the nature of CLD programming and its impact and provide rich insights for program design through a series of tools and guidelines that will be available by April 2020.

In Phase 2, the meta-synthesis will move from the “what works” to the “how it works” question, unpacking causal mechanisms to create an understanding of how context influences the nature and impact of CLD programming. At the same time, we will develop participatory tools that are congruent with the complexity of CLD and will enable us to capture its impact on outcomes like citizen’s engagement and resilience.

Join.
To join the meta-synthesis effort or for further information on the study, the tools that have been developed and the next phase of our research, write to gunjan.veda@thp.org

About the Movement.
In 2015, a group of global non-profit organizations, led by The Hunger Project, came together to create the Movement for Community Led Development. For the last four years, this group has worked tirelessly to ensure that communities take charge of their own development. In addition to its global work, the Movement has launched national chapters in 12 countries where it actively works with governments to support devolution of power. For further information, visit communityleddev.org