THE MOVEMENT FOR COMMUNITY-LED DEVELOPMENT

ASSESSING COMMUNITY-LED DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS

A peer or self-review tool

Acknowledgements

DRAFT

Background

The Movement for Community-led Development (MCLD) is a consortium of 70+ INGOs and hundreds of local CSOs advocating for local communities to develop, own, and drive their own development goals. The Movement derives its richness from its heterogeneity. Our members vary in size, geographical spread, reach and thematic focus. Yet, we are bound together by a shared belief in communities' capacity to be the agents of their own development.

While policymakers increasingly recognize the value of community-led development (CLD), its complexity has made it difficult for programs to measure long-term impact. To address this shortcoming, MCLD launched a research project in 2019 to determine what CLD approaches seem to work, where, for whom, and why. The project was collaborative from the start, comprising three different working groups representing staff from MCLD's member organizations. (See the Collaborative Research Brochure to learn more about the research project, its working groups, and their respective objectives).

One of these working groups, the scoping group, set out to determine **what organizations do when they say they do CLD**. To answer this question, the group developed a list of CLD characteristics. While informed by seminal texts and drawing from advisors' feedback, the scoping group's primary source in creating such a list was practitioners' understanding of CLD. The consolidated list of 11 CLD characteristics includes Participation and Inclusion, Voice, Community Assets, Capacity Development, Sustainability, Transformative Capacity, Collective Planning and Action, Accountability, Community Leadership, Adaptability, and Collaboration (both within communities and with local governments).

The list was informative in capturing how CLD practitioners describe their work. But it also became the basis against which the scoping group developed the rubric in this Assessment Tool.

CLD approaches involve a range of practices and activities. The scoping group wanted the tool to reflect this diversity. Drawing on the Evidence Principles and Checklist tool developed by the UK based Bond network, the scoping group devised this rubric for practitioners to understand how the different characteristics manifest in their community-led practices. The scoping group believes organizations can apply the tool to various program scales, but this will require further testing.

To determine the tool's usability, the research lead and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) professionals from various organizations used the tool on CLD program evaluation reports as part of an ongoing collaborative research to map the current state of CLD programming. An MCLD member organization also tested it on its current programs. Additionally, MCLD plans to conduct sense-making workshops to test the tool's applicability and relevance in local, national, and international contexts. We aim to establish, via these workshops, whether the CLD characteristics used in the tool are reflective of practitioners and organizational contexts, globally and locally.

What is the purpose of the CLD Assessment Tool?

Depending on their focus, contexts and facilitation approaches, CLD might look different for different organizations. This rubric is not an evaluative tool designed to adjudicate whether organizations are doing good or bad CLD. Instead, we developed it to capture the approaches of

different organizations. It functions as **a generative, learning focused tool that organizations can use to assess where their internal practices are when set against their overall goals and compared to the collective experience of other community-led practitioners.** With such information, organizations can decide which areas they might want to focus on more when thinking about future interventions. Organizations can also assess and recalibrate their approaches to align with the 11 characteristics of CLD.

Who can use this tool?

Organizations: This tool was designed with small to medium size organizations in mind. Since structured around individual characteristics, the tool requires users to reflect on specific instances of CLD. The tool is best used for individual programs in specific locations. Organizations with larger, diverse, and nested programming might find the tool less effective in describing their interventions.

Advocacy Programs: Advocacy for CLD is very different from regular CLD programming. Programs primarily geared toward advocacy efforts might find the descriptions for each of the characteristics in this tool limiting. We invite organizations interested in adapting this tool for their advocacy programs to contact us.

People: Practitioners, administrators, and evaluators will find this tool helpful to make necessary program adjustments in order to align with their vision of CLD. Groups will be best placed to use this tool if they include individuals who have an in-depth knowledge of the program being assessed and its intended and eventual outcomes. Finally, we believe it is possible to use this tool as part of a participatory exercise with the community leaders and program staff. This would enable organizations to understand the community's perspective and also enable community members to be better informed about different dimensions of the program.

When should an organization use this tool? This tool can be used during design, mid-program reviews, or at the end of a program cycle to inform future programs. It can also be used during organizational reviews to understand programming across areas. When carried out as a participatory exercise with community leaders and program staff, it can also be used to understand how community members perceive the work of the organization and strengthen feedback and accountability loops.

How long will it take to administer the assessment? Organization's time allocation toward this assessment will depend on how they decide to use the tool and also who will complete it. If, for example, program evaluators have all program related documents and information at hand, it would take a few hours. We do however recommend a consultative process when using this tool. A participatory workshop, for example, that involves as many program stakeholders as possible can ensure a variety of inputs on how an organisation's community-led practices compare to the CLD characteristics. Organizations can choose to have different stakeholders complete different sections of the tool. We do however advise against that to promote transparency and collaboration.

Tool Overview

Why a rubric? Rubrics "provide a harness but not a straitjacket for assessing complex change, and they help stakeholders build a shared understanding of what success looks like... Rubrics allow us to think about **membership** rather than measurement."[1] In other words, rubrics allow us to think about a range of characteristics and assess different levels of progress for each of them. It is exactly this kind of flexibility that came in handy during the tool's development, since the scoping group wanted a tool that is less concerned with adjudication than with assisting organizations to assess the extent to which CLD characteristics are present in their programming.

Take note: the rubric was designed with **intent** in mind. When applying it, organizations should consider both the intent of the program and how it is being carried out. This tool is designed to be used at various junctures of a program, including during design, implementation, and at or after the close of a program. Applying the rubric against the program's objectives at different stages of implementation allows users to adjust elements of their programming against the listed CLD characteristics and processes.

What is in the rubric? The rubric, in particular segment 1, is structured around CLD characteristics. These characteristics are descriptions rather than definitions, reflecting documented definitions as well as a practitioner-informed understanding of how CLD characteristics appear in the life-cycle of a program. The rubric also includes a segment focusing on two processes inherent to CLD that the group identified as important: , facilitation and participatory monitoring and evaluation. For more information about the literature reviews, the working definitions and the methodology of creating the rubric, read this Reflections Piece.

The Structure of the Tool:

The tool has <mark>five</mark> sections, located in the spreadsheet under different tabs and a Read me First section.

READ ME FIRST: This contains a summary of instructions for using the tool

TAB 1 - GENERAL INFORMATION - collects basic information on who completed the form, when this took place, and any other descriptors an organization might want for future reference.

TAB 2 - THE RUBRIC - comprises 2 segments.

- Segment 1 collects information on different dimensions as they relate to CLD characteristics. The table below maps these dimensions against the different characteristics of CLD.
- Segment 2 collects information on two processes associated with CLD interventions: monitoring and evaluation, and facilitation

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[1] Thomas Aston (2020), Rubric as a Harness for Complexity, at https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/rubrics-harness-complexity-thomas-aston/

Segment 1	Reflects particular CLD characteristics, categorized into different dimensions	
Dimension	**Characteristic corresponding with the dimensions in Segment 1**	**Description**
Dimension a: Participation, Inclusion, Voice	Participation & Inclusion	All major development activities include a broad range of residents from all neighborhoods, people from all socio-economic groups (the very poor, poor, middle, better off), women, and minorities (i.e. LGBTQ, people with disabilities, youth).
	Voice	Relates to program planning, design, monitoring and implementation, evaluation, and adaptation. Having a voice means to not only be heard during in decision-making processes but also building confidence amongst the poor, women, minorities, anyone typically without a voice, to speak up
	Collective Action and Planning (Statements A2-4)	Related to creating processes for the community to come together to guide needs assessment, program planning, and implementation. The development process is determined and driven by community members.
	Transformative Capacity	The program sets people on a journey to transforming social barriers, overcoming dependency, and resignation.
Dimension b: Local Resources & Knowledge	Community Assets	The program identifies, mobilizes, and celebrates local resources including finances, material goods, and local knowledge and time.
	Transformative Capacity	The program transforms the mindset from clientelism and dependency to strength and vision. Community members believe they can take charge of their own development and contribute time and resources to do so

Dimension c: *Exit Strategy linked to Sustainability*	The working group identified sustainability (specifically sustainability planning) as a characteristic of CLD but also recognized that it is more likely to be seen as an outcome. In future iterations, this tool may add other outcomes like resilience and move this to a separate section	
Dimension d: *Accountability Mechanisms*	Accountability	The program practices multi-directional accountability between various stakeholders including community leaders, program staff, donors. However, the vision set by the community and accountability to it remains central. Other types of accountability include ongoing feedback loops between local leaders and communities, these two groups and the facilitating agencies, and/or the facilitating agency and large public institutions.
Dimension e: *Responsiveness to Context-Specific Dynamics*	Adaptability	The program uses learning, and adapting strategies based on current context and data; the program is open to failure.
Dimension f: *Collaboration within and among communities*	Collaboration	Building horizontal and vertical solidarity within communities and amongst communities.
Dimension g: *CLD linked to Sub-National Governments*	Collaboration	Collaboration with governments, particularly in permissible environments is important both for the sustainability of processes and outcomes and for increased agency.
Segment 2	Pertains to processes that are not restricted to any specific characteristic but integral to the CLD approach:	
Monitoring and Evaluation	CLD characteristics need to be included in all dimensions of programming, including M&E	
Facilitation Investment & Intensity	Capacity Development and Transformative Capacity	The program is rooted in the belief that communities have the capacity and capability to script their own development; hence the program invests

		considerably in facilitators, as well as the capacity development of local groups, including locally elected government (if they are part of the process).
	Participation, Inclusion, and Voice	Quality facilitation is vital to ensure participation and to strengthen people's agency. Therefore, investment in facilitation that is responsive to people's needs is the key.

NOTE: Some CLD characteristics and processes are interwoven throughout the CLD journey. For example, while community leadership is integral to the CLD process, it happens in tandem with characteristics such as participation, transformative capacity, and collaboration. It, therefore, appears across dimensions, often in the "succeeds" section of the rubric.

HOW TO COMPLETE THE RUBRIC:

- Each dimension in the rubric includes different statements and possible responses.
- The response options (and their corresponding points) range from insufficient information to succeeds: *insufficient information (0), doesn't try (1), tries (2), progressed (3), and succeeds (4).* Choose which of these responses best describes your organization's position and progress on the different CLD characteristics, M&E, and facilitation processes. While it is not our intention to judge CLD programs, judgement is inherent to tools that use scales. However, efforts to make a well reasoned and defendable score selection should be made, which is why we recommend the tool foster dialogue among different representatives, use examples to illustrate the scoring choices, etc.
- Enter your score (1 -4) in the GRAY boxes of **column H.**
- Do not enter any scores in the GREEN lines.
- The rubric will auto calculate the total scores of all dimensions and capture these in all the green lines.
- The rubric will use entered responses to populate the graphs located in **TABS 3 - 5**
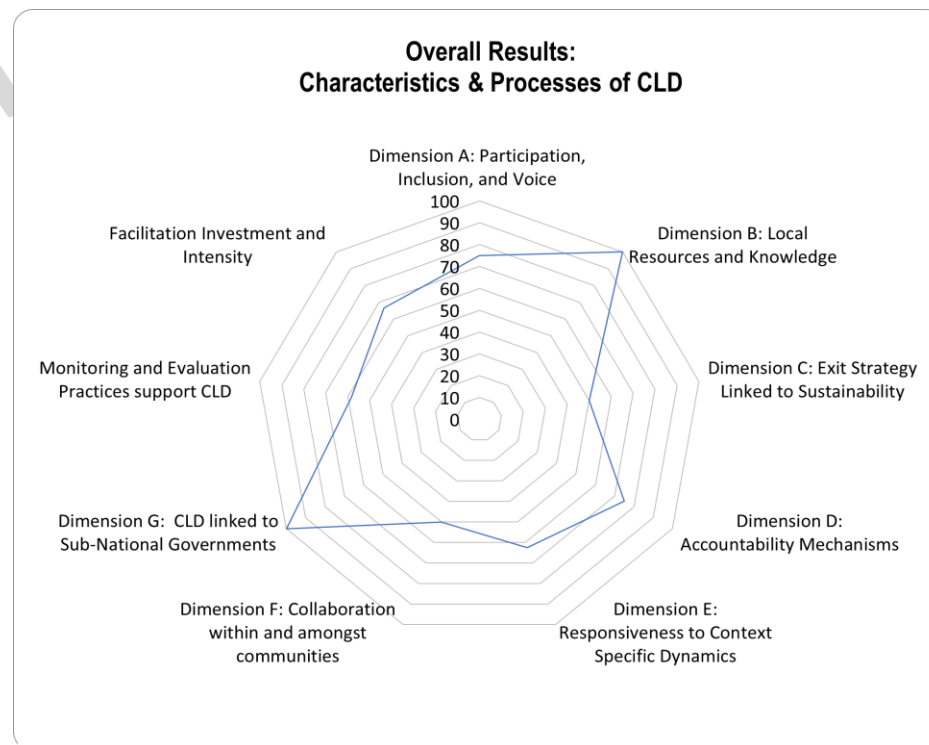
TAB 3 - Overall Results: reflects the outcomes of all of the rubric's segments. The rubric includes further details about segments A - G (of the CLD characteristics) and processes (M&E and Facilitation) that offer more information on how these dimensions might function within a particular organization. These break-downs are included in graph form in **Tab 4 (Seg1_Characteristics)** and **Tab 5 (Seg2_Process).**

INTERPRETING AND USING THE RESULTS:

The tool uses spider diagrams to graphically reflect how a program employs CLD characteristics. Organizations should refrain from seeing the results as an evaluation of their work. Instead they should use the results to determine how, and to what extent their practices align with these co-created CLD standards. While interpreting the results, organizations and individuals need to be cognizant of the context of their programming and the resources available. Not all dimensions represented in the spider will be applicable in all circumstances, for all organizations. We therefore suggest that organizations use the spiders within their own context, and in alignment with their own vision of the project, to improve as much as possible on the characteristics that are lacking. An eventual goal for organizations using CLD approaches should be to **reach the outer rim of the graphs on each characteristic of CLD that applies to their program context, resources, and operations.** For relevant dimensions, the position on the graph can help organizations see where they can push their programming further and enable them to chart a road map for becoming more community-led in their practice. Organizations can also use the tool for peer-review purposes, encouraging discussions across different departments on how and to what extent they are incorporating CLD practices into their work.

Graphs A and B show two examples of how programs can use this tool.

The CommCan (Communities Can) Initiative is an integrated food security program run by an international NGO in the country of Tropicalia where more than 40% of the population lives in extreme poverty. Sarah, an external consultant, used the program reports as well as a half day participatory workshop with community leaders and program staff to fill the rubric. The tool generated Graph A. Sarah conducted a meeting with the program staff to explain that while The CommCan Initiative did wonderfully with building on local resources, accountability and working with sub-national governments, it needed to do better on participation, sustainability planning, collaboration and M&E. She worked with the program staff to take the feedback from the participatory workshop and redesign the program before it was introduced in another community. They added more participatory and listening sessions to the orientation session, including a visioning exercise for what the community wanted to achieve before the facilitation would end. This was posted in the community meeting hall. The team met again with the new community leaders at the mid-point of the program, achieving significant progress on sustainability, collaboration and context
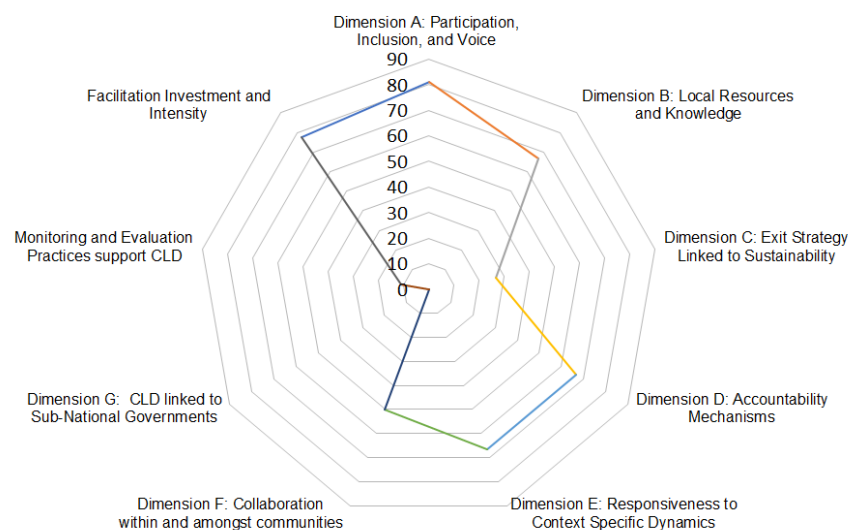

Graph A: The CommCan Initiative

responsiveness and doing marginally better on participation and voice. Program staff were amazed to see how much their programming had changed in just three years. They now plan to focus on improving monitoring and evaluation and facilitation.

The Bosdom Youth Collective (BYC) is a small civil society organization that works with youth and internally displaced people in North-east MountainView, an active conflict zone. Their program officer used the CLD Assessment tool to assess their organization's work. After filling out the rubric, the officer asked a community youth leader who worked as a facilitator for the program to do the same. The results were very different when it came to local resources, M&E practices, sustainability planning and facilitation. On further discussion the program officer realized that even though they had an exit strategy, the community was not aware of it. Similarly, the community leaders did not have any information on the monitoring and evaluation carried out by the organization even though they participated in data collection. Finally, while the program believed that communities were actively contributing resources because they owned the program, community leaders felt that if they did not contribute resources, the program would stop. As a result of the discussion, the community youth representative recognized how BYC had planned the facilitation schedule and intensity around changing community needs. Together they arrived at a common agreement on the scores represented in Graph B. The BYC program staff then worked with community leaders for better information sharing and to ensure that community members were involved in exit planning. They recognized that collaboration with sub-national governments was not possible for them given the civil war, but agreed to work towards improving M&E practices and sustainability planning in the short run.

Overall Results: Characteristics & Processes of CLD

Graph B: The Bosdom Youth Collective

These examples clearly show that while the outer rim of the spider is the ideal, not all organizations are the same. Contexts differ, and therefore reaching the outer rim might not always be possible or even desirable. Furthermore, no organization can improve on all characteristics and processes at once or be in an ideal state, at all times. The way organizations choose to move forward will depend on their priorities. Using the spiders, as in the two examples above, organizations can set new targets to work towards. Those elements where programs score the lowest might provide insight into areas where organizations can reflect on its practices and how they might want to consider potential modifications to the lowest scoring processes. The graphs can also be used for organizations to see how their work has changed over time.

LIMITATIONS

As this is the first effort in drafting standards for CLD programs, some limitations exist:

1. **Objectivity.** The tool can be used as a self-assessment instrument for organizations to determine where they are in their CLD work at a given point in time. In such a scenario, the accuracy of results fully relies on the assessors being as objective as possible in their evaluation of characteristics within a particular program. To mitigate this limitation, we recommend that the tool be filled by more than one person, ideally reaching a common score through discussion; this discussion process would also enable organizations to unpack and clarify their own foundational concepts. This tool can also be used as part of a training or a participatory exercise with community members or for periodic program reviews with multiple stakeholders.

2. **Accuracy.** When organizations use the rubric on existing programs (i.e., those that started prior to the first time the rubric is used), responses may depend on the information available in pre-existing documents. Those documents might not capture the eleven CLD characteristics; not because the characteristics were not present but because they were not known or described at the time the documents were prepared. In such a case, the results generated with the rubric may underestimate the actual CLD characteristics of a program. We recommend that, where possible, organizations consult program staff, volunteers and community members in addition to documents to mitigate this limitation.

3. **Presence of elements versus impact of efforts.** The tool helps to measure the presence of CLD characteristics in a program at a given time, but it does not measure the impact of these characteristics. Thus, the tool enriches and complements future monitoring and evaluation efforts but does not replace them.