



InCLuDE
Impact of Community-led Development
on Food Security
GUIDANCE FOR IMPLEMENTATION AGENCIES

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The [Movement for Community-led Development \(MCLD\)](#) is a global consortium of 1500+ local civil society organizations and 72 international non-governmental organizations which collectively believes that every person has a fundamental right to voice in the decisions that affect their lives. The Movement pursues five goals: voice and agency for women, youth and all marginalized groups; adequate community finance; good local governance; quality public services; and resilience and risk reduction in the face of disaster. The Hunger Project (THP) serves as the Global Secretariat for MCLD.

The Realist Research Evaluation and Learning Initiative (RREALI) is a research team within the Northern Institute, a Research Institute within Charles Darwin University. RREALI specialises in the use of realist research and evaluation methods, which aim to explain how and why policies and programs work (or do not), and the extent to which and why their outcomes vary for different populations and contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

Community-led development (CLD - also known as Locally Led Development, LLD) is increasingly being recognized as a pathway-of-choice to support communities towards resilience and sustainability of desirable development outcomes. Advocates at USAID and other institutions argue that CLD leads to effective and efficient program implementation, enhances sustainability, facilitates poverty reduction at scale, increases social capital and strengthens governance.

However, there is relatively little understanding of the current practice of CLD – what works, where, why and how? This guidance document is one product from a [multi-phase collaborative research program](#), designed to understand the current practice of CLD and its impacts.

The first phase of this research program produced a [CLD Assessment Tool](#) and a [Quality Appraisal Tool for CLD Evaluations](#) to help donors and their partners improve the next generation of CLD programming. The second phase was a rapid realist review examining how CLD (and in particular, facilitation and community leadership¹) contribute to equity and resilience in relation to food security. This review included 117 documents; 93 were sourced from MCLD member organisations, and 24 from the USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse. No other external literature was included in the review and so findings are limited to this data set.

The review is expected to contribute to two related goals: institutionalizing community-led development as a discipline and a recommended approach for addressing hunger, malnutrition and food security; and assembling an evidence base for the impacts of CLD. In the shorter term, it seeks to strengthen the capacity of Food for Peace (FFP) and MCLD partners to improve the design, implementation, evaluation and effectiveness of emergency and development food and nutrition security activities; and to advise donors of key aspects of funding policy and procedures to best enable food security and nutrition outcomes through CLD programming. Consequently, two guidance documents have been developed on the basis of the review: this one for implementing agencies of CLD programming; and another [for funders](#).

Key findings from the review are presented below, along with implications and recommendations. In each case, the guidance provides the briefest possible summary of the findings². This is followed by a brief look at the implications of the findings. Implications are interpretations of the findings and may apply to different extents for different organisations, or different programs or settings. This section draws on input from an Implications and Recommendations Workshop attended by the research team and members of the Advisory Groups for the project, funders and selected key stakeholders, and on feedback from reviewers and the resources produced through Phase 1 of the research. The implications are followed by recommendations. Recommendations are a step ‘stronger’ than implications and suggest actions that should be taken on the basis of the findings and implications. Some recommendations are not specific to CLD but reflect ‘good practice’ in a range of development approaches (or indeed other programming). They have been included because they were not always evident in the literature reviewed, and CLD should not be exempted from them.

¹Facilitation and community leadership were selected by MCLD as key to all forms of CLD, on the basis of work done in the first phase. Resilience was selected because food security is subject to repeated shocks, and the ability to recover from those shocks in a timely manner is significant for survival and wellbeing. Equity was selected because food insecurity is not equitably distributed. Food security was selected as a critical issue for communities and as the funder’s priority.

²As noted above, the findings are limited to the dataset used for this review

INTERPRETING THE FINDINGS

Realist reviews are designed to test ideas about how, why and in what circumstances types of programs are effective and the conditions in which they are not effective, and why. This has implications for how the findings should be interpreted.

Realist reviews begin by developing “initial rough” theory about how programs are expected to work. In this project, that theory described how community leadership and facilitation were expected to contribute to equity and resilience. Equity and resilience in turn were expected to contribute to food security.

Information is then extracted from the literature to test and refine that initial theory. This review drew on evaluation reports and supplementary documentation provided by MCLD member organisations and FFP funded evaluation reports available on the USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse.

As a result, the findings show how CLD can work, not how it always works, and not how it works on average. The findings also provide evidence about the conditions in which CLD is more likely, and less likely, to work.

We found relatively few descriptions of how and by whom facilitation was undertaken or of how community leadership was implemented. However, the initial theory described mechanisms (underlying causal processes) and intermediate outcomes that were expected if facilitation and community leadership worked as anticipated. Evidence was extracted in relation to all of these elements and the theory was revised in the light of the evidence. The results thus provide some support for how facilitation and community leadership function in CLD, although more direct evidence is required.

Because CLD programs are complex and they operate in real, complex, social worlds, combinations of causes are likely to be necessary for any outcome to be achieved. Similarly, combinations of contextual factors will enable, or prevent, causes from operating. Single factors being present or absent will rarely account for change (or lack of it). Acknowledging this complexity, realist reviews do not provide ‘formulae’ for action (“do this in this way and it will work”). Rather, they provide information to take into account in designing and implementing programs, and adapting them to local and national contexts. The recommendations here therefore aim to seek a balance between providing enough specificity to be useful, without prescribing specific actions for specific contexts.

KEY FINDINGS

KEY FINDING 1: CONTEXT MATTERS: ENVIRONMENTS ENABLE OR LIMIT CLD

Findings: This research identified factors which were, and were not, supportive of CLD overall³. Many of these will also be enabling or limiting for other kinds of development⁴.

Enabling environments included a supportive, effective and transparent policy and legal environment at the national or state level, which allowed for strong support at the local government level. When program goals aligned with government goals or policy, they were able to work alongside government functionaries, potentially strengthening outcomes for both the program and the government.

The existence of local, relevant community-based organizations (CBOs), and coordination across groups and levels of systems enabled mutually beneficial partnerships and gave communities access to more resources and links. This in turn was easier where there was existing social capital, an existing culture of collaboration; and local leadership were effectively engaged.

Accessible funding with transparent processes made it easier for local actors to access funding. Long term programming designed to leverage synergies and build community was more effective than short-term programming; and 'quick wins' could be used to build momentum.

Limiting environments for CLD did not preclude CLD entirely or prevent positive outcomes per se, but made CLD more difficult to implement, and could make outcomes slower to achieve. These included poor quality or lack of infrastructure, government services, policies and qualified technical personnel. These factors made it more difficult for local actors to access resources of various kinds. Similarly, lack of government capacity, support, strategy or interest in supporting community-led goals made access to resources more difficult; so too did high cost of access to legal and government services. Intra-government conflict, political opportunism and corruption made it more difficult for communities to influence government or collaborate with them. High levels of conflict between groups in communities made collaborative planning and action more difficult. Lack of employment or livelihoods contributed to conflict and violence, undermining the social capital required for CLD. Elite capture and corruption resulted in programs and resources being controlled by a few most powerful voices or by traditional leadership. Severe drought, high conflict or other disasters turned attention and resources to those crises and limited the time and resources that community members could commit to CLD activities.

A number of factors affected participation in CLD by particular groups, including low levels of education and literacy, particularly for women. Illiteracy made it more difficult for community members to participate in collective planning, draw up action plans, monitor plans, meet the requirements of implementing NGOs and obtain external funding. Cultural barriers to participation by women and young people, teenage pregnancy and early marriage, migration to cities and distance from the program centre or office also limited participation. Particular programs could be affected if they addressed issues considered taboo.

³This is in addition to identifying particular contexts which affect whether or not specific CLD mechanisms operate.

⁴The review was limited to CLD. It did not examine other approaches of development. It cannot therefore specify which of these elements are specific to CLD.

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There have, however, been successful CLD programs in contexts with limited government resources. 'Low resources' and 'being supportive of CLD' are not necessarily related. It may be that certain types of CLD can be effective in contexts identified here as 'limiting'.

Implications: Participants in the Implications and Recommendations Workshop (IRWS) noted that government support can take many forms, ranging from encouragement through participation in some aspects of CLD to provision of resources. Consultation with government actors may help to identify and negotiate the particular kinds of support that are most feasible and appropriate.

Analysis of the social and political context is important in the design of CLD approaches. Some CLD approaches may be more appropriate and effective in fragile contexts. CLD approaches can be tailored to suit local settings, but it appears that only some agencies do so. Tailoring may include selecting particular models of CLD (see Key finding 2 below) and, by implication, de-selecting others. Alternatively, it may involve adapting aspects of models to suit local political conditions. Social and political analysis should be undertaken in collaboration with communities and other knowledgeable stakeholders.

Recommendations to improve the quality of context analysis⁵ and to adapt programs in response are far from new and a number of tools have been developed to support implementation agencies in doing them. Options include, but are not limited to, Inclusive Development Analysis⁶ and political economy analysis.

Recommendations:

1. Implementation agencies should undertake further research into CLD approaches that have been both safe and effective in fragile contexts.
2. All CLD programs should incorporate analysis of the social and political context at local and higher levels prior to implementation. This should include analysis of who currently participates in which kinds of decisions and who is excluded; who has access to what kinds of resources and who does not; how intersectorality affects vulnerability, and the social and political risks for marginalised groups and for participants in CLD. This analysis should sit alongside analysis of strengths, resources (including social structures) and needs. CLD models should be adapted to suit the results of the analysis. This may imply selecting (or de-selecting) particular approaches or activities, adapting processes or activities to ensure that they are inclusive, building in collaboration with local partners, and building in strategies to address specific barriers to participation (e.g., revising materials so that they do not require literacy, adapting processes so that people with disabilities can participate equitably).
3. Implementation agencies should provide (and/or seek) funding for adequate time and staffing to undertake the analysis, provide evidence of the analysis in designs and in evaluation, and demonstrate how they have adapted models to contexts.
4. Where the political context allows, implementation agencies should work with local governments and seek to align goals.

⁵Some reports in the review provided concise contextual analysis for the region or country overall but few provided detailed analysis of factors likely to affect CLD in the communities in which programs were implemented.

⁶https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/additional_help_for_ads_201_inclusive_development_180726_final_r.pdf

KEY FINDINGS

KEY FINDING 2. MANY CURRENT ACTIVITIES FALL SHORT OF CLD PRACTICE

Findings: Seven ‘types’ of CLD activities were identified in the documents reviewed (we use the term ‘type’ to refer to these types, and ‘model’ to refer to agencies’ approaches, which may include several types). Many programs used multiple types (so the proportions below do not total 100%). Moreover, many of the types are not, in themselves, consistent with the definition of CLD developed through this research project:

Community-led Development is a development approach in which local community members work together to identify goals that are important to them, develop and implement plans to achieve those goals, and create collaborative relationships internally and with external actors—all while building on community strengths and local leadership.

Community-led Development (CLD) is characterised by 11 attributes: participation and inclusion, voice, community assets, capacity development, sustainability, transformative capacity, collective planning and action, accountability, community leadership, adaptability, and collaboration.

The types, and the frequency with which they were identified within programs, were:

- *Implementation committees:* Committees (formed by implementing organisation or pre-existing) comprising of community members implement programs (33 programs, 60%). Where programs are pre-determined and pre-designed by implementing agencies, and communities are only involved in small refinements and implementation, they are not truly community led.
- *Community mobilisation:* Activities to gain community attendance and participation; gain support of key community members; encourage contribution of time, labour, and resources (26 programs, 47%). According to the definition (See Appendix 1), these models would be community-led if the activities and programs for which support is mobilised are equitably and inclusively chosen by the community.
- *Self-help groups:* Groups are formed to be mutually supportive and work together towards common and individual goals (19 programs, 35%). Assuming participatory leadership within the group, self-help groups are likely to be consistent with the definition of CLD but may be quite limited in who they involve and/or benefit.
- *Peer sensitisation and behaviour change:* Individuals or committees trained by NGOs to disseminate information or provide skills training with the goal of behaviour change (15 programs, 27%) This peer education strategy may be community-led if it involves community members determining what learning is required and how it is best provided. This appeared to be rare; implementation organisations often had pre-determined curricula.
- *Support or develop local CBOs:* Supporting or forming local CBOs working on similar issues (12 programs, 22%). Supporting existing CBOs whose goals and processes are consistent with CLD goals is likely to be consistent with the definition. Establishing new groups may be, if the goals and processes were equitably and inclusively chosen by the community.

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- *Collective or group leadership*: Needs identification and goal-setting by the community or community groups, high level of dialogue and collaboration, projects initiated and completed by community members (11 programs, 20%) This approach is the most consistent with the definition of CLD.
- *Community advocacy*: Enabling community groups or members to initiate and/or participate in advocacy efforts on their own (4 programs, 7%). This approach may be consistent with the definition, assuming that the community selects the issues on which advocacy will be undertaken and the methods for advocacy. However, facilitation by implementation agencies may tend to restrict choice of topics and/or methods for advocacy.

Implications: The extent to which these types of programming are consistent with the definition of community-led development adopted by this research (see Appendix 1) varies considerably. Participants in the Implementation and Recommendations workshop suggested that this may in part reflect different stages in the development of community leadership within communities, and/or the evolution of the CLD sector over time. The literature used in the review did not reflect or allow analysis of stages of development, and a review of included texts did not find evidence of change in the types of models used over time. It was clear, however, that some implementation agencies use pre-determined models across settings and the extent of true leadership by communities is quite limited. The [CLD Assessment Tool](#) developed by MCLD in a previous stage of this research may be useful for agencies to review their own models and approaches.

Recommendations:

5. Implementation agencies should be explicit about the models they select for particular contexts and justify the choice of the models against the contextual analysis for the location (Recommendation 2 above). A specific theory of change should be developed for each model used. Monitoring and evaluation should assess progress against the theory of change and determine whether, to what extent, and for whom different models are effective (See Key Finding 12 below).
6. CLD looks different at different times in the lifecycle of a program. Yet, whatever the stage of programming, the plans need to be negotiated with the community, justified against the contextual analysis, and adapted if necessary, taking account of the particular strengths, resources and needs of the community. Implementing organizations also need to explicitly document the various stages of a program and how it was developed.

KEY FINDING 3. FACILITATION AND LEADERSHIP NEED EXPLICIT ATTENTION AND RESOURCING

Findings: Facilitation was defined at the beginning of the project⁷. It starts as follows:

Facilitation is a co-creative and adaptive process in which a facilitator enables local actors to set common goals, take ownership of these goals, build on existing strengths, and work towards achieving their goals. Key components of effective facilitation are guiding discussion, asking questions, consensus-building, mediation and ensuring diverse voices are heard, all within a relationship of mutual learning and partnership. ...

In the documents reviewed, the term ‘facilitator’ was used to describe many functions including a purely training or organisational role. Similar terms such as ‘animator,’ ‘mobiliser,’ and ‘volunteer’ were also used. (See key finding 11, below). Very few reports provided any description of either the term or the role.

Critical contributors to good quality facilitation include adequate investment in capacity development for facilitation skills and processes, and for technical skills appropriate to the program. Training should be supported by refresher courses and skilled supervision. Appropriate resources included training materials, manuals, learning aids and participatory tools; logistical support and mobile phone credits; and technology for data collection and record-keeping.

Reasonable workloads, geographic distances to cover, and expectations for facilitators were also critical. Positive recognition for facilitators supported motivation to continue. Where facilitators were not paid staff of implementation agencies, appropriate remuneration took account of opportunity costs as well as reasonable pay for time spent. ‘Matching’ of facilitators’ education and capacities with their roles, cultural expectations, and in select cases age or gender was important in some projects.

Implications: The variation in terms and roles, combined with lack of description of those roles, made it difficult to identify who performed what roles and therefore whether or how facilitation was ‘community led’ (or undertaken). It also limited our ability to describe whether and how facilitation contributes to later outcomes. Clear descriptions, at minimum, and preferably greater commonality in terms across the sector, could contribute to learning about ‘what matters about facilitation’.

Recommendations:

7. Implementation agencies should provide clear descriptions of the roles of key actors in their program models; review and demonstrate appropriate workloads, expectations and remuneration for facilitators; and ensure that adequate training, supervision, on-going support and resources are available for all aspects of facilitators’ work.

⁷See Appendix 1 for complete definition

KEY FINDINGS

8. MCLD should facilitate a process for implementation agencies to develop common terminology, guidelines and principles for facilitation in CLD. This should address circumstances in which facilitation by external people (e.g., implementation agency staff) is appropriate, the supports that should be available for local facilitators, and the circumstances in which remuneration should be provided for local facilitators.

Findings: The term community leadership, as defined at the beginning of the project, could refer to leadership by an individual from a given community, or to a process by which a community exercises collective leadership at a grass-roots level (see full definitions in Appendix 1). In the literature we reviewed, what was meant by ‘community leadership’ was almost never described, but it is reasonable to assume that it takes different forms in different ‘types’ of CLD. Program processes were also rarely described, so it was not possible to deduce which aspects of what programs were ‘led’ by communities or how that contributed to program outcomes.

Individuals and/or program committees mobilised community members, garnered support and catalysed action. Leveraging synergies with other programs, NGOs, government policies, and existing community structures contributed to effectiveness. Traditional leaders could support CLD by legitimising CLD goals or activities, and/or by participating directly. Where there were high levels of corruption or elite capture, however, community members were less likely to participate.

CLD is a change process and change often meets resistance. Consequently, conflict resolution and de-escalating tensions between groups with different interests are important roles for leaders.

It was not clear in the literature whether community ‘leadership’ also carried responsibility for either processes or outcomes, or authority to make decisions. Neither were these issues addressed in the initial definition.

Implications: Lack of clarity about what constitutes ‘leadership’ and ‘community leadership’ may contribute to confusion among community members and implementation agencies and decrease the extent to which implementation agencies strengthen community leadership. For instance, supporting traditional leaders is not the same as community leadership. It is likely that this lack of clarity contributes to a range of work not being community-led, even when it is described as such.

Recommendations:

9. Program models should be explicit about the ways in which, and the extent to which, communities (or particular structures within communities) have authority to make decisions. This should include decisions about the priorities to be addressed, resource allocation and staffing.
10. Program models should be explicit about the protections they incorporate to prevent elite capture and corruption.

KEY FINDING 4. PROGRAM DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION ARE CENTRAL TO CLD

Findings: Program design and implementation factors are central to CLD. Leveraging synergies with other programs, NGOs, government policies, and existing community structures contributed to effectiveness. Some report authors argued that projects building human and social capital (e.g., capacity building, empowerment programs, social capital/cohesion programs, self-help groups) were more likely to lead to community-led and collective outcomes than infrastructure projects. Projects that had a broad community impact and/or gave “quick wins”⁸ were argued to be more likely to mobilise community participation and support and increase collective efficacy and motivation for continued action.

Programs that operated over a shorter time-frame were less likely to contribute to attitudinal shifts. Locations that were far away from program centres tended to benefit less from programs.

Implications: Program design needs to elicit community priorities and use a transparent process to align priorities with the funds and resources on offer. This includes identifying whether the program is expected to respond to humanitarian or longer-term development issues. Implementation agencies need to ensure adequate resources (staffing, technical expertise, funding) for implementation. Program duration should be appropriate to the nature of aims and the development process: generally speaking, longer is likely to be better, although it is necessary to guard against building dependence. Targeting smaller geographic areas may reduce the negative impacts of distance and avoid over-extending resources. Collaborating with, and/or building on the work of other actors – community structures and community-based organisations, other NGOs and INGOs, and local governments – can increase effectiveness, but requires investment. Reviewing the findings of past evaluation reports for patterns in recommendations may be useful.

Recommendations:

11. Implementation agencies should examine the extent to which their programs and budgets provide adequate time, a realistic scale and realistic resources for CLD objectives, and increase time or resources, or decrease scale, where appropriate. This is likely to imply negotiations with both funders and communities. It may imply allowing different programs and budgets for different stages of development, and/or multiple programs over time in the same location.
12. Implementation agencies should consider strategies to build confidence and maintain motivation for CLD, while remaining cautious about ‘quick win’ strategies.

⁸There is external evidence to suggest that the ‘quick wins’ are not always sustainable and caution is advised

KEY FINDING 5: FIVE FORMS OF CAPITAL ARE NECESSARY FOR CLD FOR FOOD SECURITY

Findings: Social capital was demonstrated to be both an intermediate outcome from some successful CLD programs⁹, and a mechanism through which CLD generates other development outcomes. CLD could increase bonding, bridging and linking social capital, but was also more likely to be effective when starting from a positive social capital base. Intra-community conflict and violence undermined the collaboration and negotiation required for CLD.

Many of the programs had a significant focus on development of human capital (especially knowledge and skills), and some on social capital. Fewer directly addressed development of community-controlled material and financial capital. Communities could be enabled to identify, build and use their own resources, but access to funding and other resources were regularly argued to be necessary during and beyond programs. This may be particularly true for the poorest communities. Environmental capital was necessary for improved food production, as a contribution to food security outcomes, but was sometimes taken for granted in reports.

Taken together the findings imply that all five forms of capital - human, social, material, financial and environmental are necessary for CLD for food security outcomes - although the importance of each may vary with the particular model and objectives.

Implications: CLD models and approaches should be designed to take into account the pre-existing stocks of those capitals relevant to the program, the intended use of those capitals within the program, and the intended effects of the program on those capitals. Evaluation should then assess (and measure, where appropriate) the effects of the program on those types of capital.

Recommendations:

13. MCLD member agencies should use and share tools for assessing stocks of the five capitals (human, social, material, financial and environmental). Pre-program assessments on existing capital should inform program design and later assessments should inform evaluation of CLD effects.

⁹ Other studies, not reviewed here, have found different results. For example, White, H; Menon, R; Waddington, H; (2018) Community-driven development: does it build social cohesion or infrastructure? A mixed-method evidence synthesis. Technical Report. International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), New Delhi.

KEY FINDING 6. CLD NEEDS A GREATER FOCUS ON EQUITY

Findings: Marginalised groups are less likely to participate in, or benefit from, CLD unless particular strategies address their specific needs, issues and opportunities. Groups identified in the literature included women, children, youth,¹⁰ the very poor, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities (including caste, tribal, and indigenous groups), refugees and internally displaced people, people living with HIV/AIDS, people who were illiterate or faced language barriers, those who were particularly time poor, and groups in ethnic/religious conflict. However, adequate evidence about their levels of participation, and the equity of outcomes obtained, was only available in relation to women and youth. Barriers to participation included literacy, cultural barriers, teenage pregnancy and early marriage, migration to cities and distance.

Where laws and policies were supportive, gender equity was actively pursued and skilled facilitation challenged gender inequality, women developed confidence and voice, and were included in decision-making. Women developed new roles at home and in the community, including increased capacity to earn and control income. This was less likely where gender equity was perceived as an 'imposed norm', where cultural norms precluded women from speaking in front of men, or there was fear of gender-based violence for challenging norms. Equity gains for marginalised women depended on their participation in programs. There was also evidence that CLD could increase demands on women and vulnerable groups, in part through its reliance on voluntary work.

Implications: To improve equity, programs should be designed to address the particular barriers to participation by marginalised groups, including marginalised women, in the specific context. Setting gender quotas alone is not enough to promote equity. Monitoring and evaluation systems should be designed to collect evidence that marginalised groups are indeed participating and benefiting, and that benefits outweigh the costs to individuals (including opportunity costs) of their participation. Opportunity costs may refer to lost income (for example if participation is unpaid and takes away time from income generating activities), lost opportunity to participate in paid work, or lost time for other activities: these costs should be identified in consultation with communities. Benefits will depend on the nature of the program.

Recommendations:

14. Implementing agencies should include identification of marginalised groups and the particular barriers that affect them in context analysis, and design specific strategies to address them, before CLD programs are implemented.

¹⁰Note that age groups for 'youth' vary significantly – in some cultures, people up to 35 years old were regarded as youth.

KEY FINDINGS

15. Implementing agencies should examine the design of their programs to ensure equity in the burdens placed on participants, including inequitable burdens on women; and ensure that benefits outweigh costs to individuals (including opportunity costs) of their participation.
16. Implementing agencies should ensure monitoring systems and evaluations collect data about participation of, and outcomes for, marginalised groups. This requires collecting and storing data in ways that enable disaggregation of outcomes for different groups.¹¹

¹¹ This should be done in compliance with local laws. For example, in at least one country it is illegal to collect data on ethnicity.

KEY FINDING 7: CLD CAN CONTRIBUTE TO RESILIENCE BY BUILDING VARIOUS KINDS OF CAPITAL

Findings: CLD can contribute to resilience, in part by building human and social capital. Positive feedback loops built a sense of collective efficacy and contributed to the ability to respond to emerging challenges. This was less likely where resources were inadequate; where failures or significant difficulties reduced motivation; or where the opportunity costs were too high. For those who participated directly in workshops that directly addressed self-reliance, a change in mindset towards self-reliance¹², and development of a sense of common cause, contributed to collective action. This was less likely where communities had an unmet expectation of tangible resources being provided by the NGO. Groups being representative of the community, truly voluntary participation, and lesser influence by the facilitating agency were necessary. Savings groups were generally successful in contributing to resilience. Elite capture, corruption and undue agency influence all undermined resilience. Where targeting of specific groups was seen as excluding other groups, programs could contribute to increased tension and conflict. Programs were sometimes inaccessible due to distance and/or poverty.

Implications: Implementation agencies should acknowledge that CLD programs are likely to be more effective for those who participate directly. Evaluation reports should be explicit about the relationship between direct participation and outcomes. Outcomes should not be claimed for whole communities (except in the rare circumstances where all members are affected relatively equally). Agencies should seek to maximise community control and minimise their own influence wherever possible, in particular, avoiding 'induced participation' (participation in return for rewards).

Recommendations:

17. Implementation agencies should develop explicit program theory for resilience: that is, review the design of their programs to strengthen factors that have been found to contribute to resilience and include specific mitigation strategies in response to risks to resilience. Where aspects of program design and/or contextual factors are likely to (or are found through monitoring to) undermine resilience, further strategies to address those factors should be introduced.

¹²Self-reliance does not imply self-sufficiency or that no external links are necessary. Rather, it describes a process and outcome whereby communities are increasingly able to take control of their own development and mobilise required resources, networks and capacity themselves.

KEY FINDING 8: MULTI-SECTORAL APPROACHES CAN CONTRIBUTE TO FOOD SECURITY OUTCOMES

Findings: Severe drought affected many of the food security focused programs included in the review, changing their focus. There were examples of capacity development, social capital and collective action contributing to resilience, but it was not possible to assess how widespread they were.

Programs which demonstrated food security outcomes all had evidence of equity outcomes and intermediate resilience outcomes; these programs all used multi-sectoral approaches. Programs which demonstrated partial food security outcomes (that is, positive outcomes that did not reach statistical significance, or positive outcomes for only some of the objectives) also demonstrated partial or no equity outcomes, and partial or no resilience outcomes. Short term food aid could keep people alive but sometimes at the expense of nutritional diversity and did not result in food security, equity or resilience outcomes. Programs to support agricultural productivity required skilled support: train the trainer models (where the original trainers had high levels of skill but the 'recipient' trainers only knew what had been covered in the programs) could mean that local trainers did not have the range of technical skills required to resolve agricultural productivity problems. Capacity development for women in agriculture could contribute to nutrition. The poorest households sometimes had the lowest increases in agricultural productivity.

Reliance on women's volunteerism in nutrition and WASH¹³ activities is likely to have created opportunity costs for women's economic empowerment, which is crucial to increasing gender equality. Women were often targeted 'instrumentally' in food security and nutrition programs (that is, as a pathway to child or family nutrition). Including functional literacy as a component of food security programs can improve nutrition and WASH outcomes.

Implications: Participants in the Innovation and Recommendations workshop noted that many food security programs are not appropriately designed to benefit women.

Recommendations:

18. Implementation agencies should review the designs of CLD programs which intend to achieve food security outcomes to ensure that they are multi-sectoral, equitable, culturally appropriate, contribute to resilience, and do not impose unfair burdens on women.
19. Subject to context assessments (Recommendation 2), implementation agencies should consider whether and how functional literacy components can be integrated into food security programs.

¹³ WASH programs were sometimes designed to contribute to food security by providing water for agriculture.

KEY FINDING 9: FORMALISED STRUCTURES SUPPORT CLD

Findings: Formalised structures enable local governance of community-led development. They can be structured to ensure processes for consultation with wider community and transparency and accountability to the wider community. Formalised groups are more likely to be viewed positively by authority holders and may therefore be more successful in engagement with and/or advocacy to local government and external bodies. Low levels of literacy and high levels of volunteer turnover in these structures undermined participation in administration and could exclude the most marginalised.

Implications: CLD programs which include or develop formalised structures have greater legitimacy and may be more able to engage with a range of actors within and external to the local community. These programs may also be more successful in advocacy efforts. Implementation agencies should encourage and support groups to formalise structures as early as possible in the development process. Care should be taken to ensure that structures are inclusive, representative of the whole community, and accountable to the community. Instead of imposing externally defined structures, implementation agencies should support communities to develop their own formalised structures. Capacity development for formal roles and responsibilities is likely to be necessary. Groups may require support in relation to developing constitutions, clarifying roles, training, engaging with traditional and faith-based leaders, establishing facilitated processes as 'spaces for engagement' between the group and authority holders, and enhancing good governance including transparency in budgeting and use of resources.

Recommendation:

20. Implementation agencies should support and equip CLD groups to formalise their structures early in the development process, including developing constitutions, formalising roles, and ensuring processes for inclusion and accountability.
21. Implementation agencies should assess the implications of formalisation for project processes, capacity development, timelines and resource requirements, ensuring that adequate time and resources are available.

KEY FINDING 10: STRUCTURED ADVOCACY PROCESSES CAN INCREASE COMMUNITIES' POWER

Findings: Where facilitation supported development of formalised organisations and leadership structures, community groups could develop a sense of collective voice and increase their capacity for advocacy. Structured advocacy processes, facilitated by agencies but involving community members, could increase communities' power, bringing communities into decision-making they had previously been excluded from, and increase agency. However, responses from authority holders were contingent on the political context, and on the awareness and knowledge of authority holders with respect to advocacy claims. There was less evidence to support the effectiveness of community-led (as distinct from agency-facilitated) advocacy. (This does not mean that community led advocacy is less effective: it means there was less evidence about it and so a judgement about its effectiveness could not be made.) Capacity development and advocacy at local level does not necessarily generate change at higher levels of systems. There was insufficient evidence to suggest that power dynamics shifted beyond the specific focus of the project or local examples of change.

Implications: Capacity development for authority holders is a key aspect of community advocacy, especially in respect to their responsibilities to citizens, legal and policy environments, and available resources. Capacity development for community members may be required in relation to rights, responsibilities and effective strategies for advocacy. Formalised structures may be more successful than informal structures in advocacy. Where the intent is to influence regional or national policies, standards or resourcing, specific strategies will be required at those levels: local outcomes will not necessarily 'trickle up'.

Recommendations:

22. CLD programs with an advocacy focus should include capacity development for authority holders, as well as communities, as key program strategies.
23. CLD advocacy programs should enable forums for interaction between community groups/organisations and authority holders.

KEY FINDING 11. CLEAR TERMINOLOGY AND PROGRAM THEORY ARE REQUIRED

Finding: There are significant differences in the terminology used by organizations that do CLD work, which appear to reflect differences in understanding about core ideas in CLD. Key terms include but are not limited to those defined in this research (See Appendix 1).

Clarifying key terms can also contribute to clarifying program theory. Explicit use of program theory was relatively uncommon in the reports reviewed.

Implications: Defining key terms in important documents such as funding proposals, program descriptions and evaluation reports increases understanding of the documents and enables discussion of them. Adopting common terminology across organisations, and/or making it clear when terms are used differently, could also strengthen the sector, facilitating learning and enabling further research. It may also support scaling of CLD with major funders.

Clear program theory can support program design, selection of monitoring indicators and choices of evaluation methods. Used as the basis for evaluation, program theory can support learning, and some (but not all) types of program theory can support adaptation of programs to context.

Recommendations:

24. CLD implementation agencies should consider whether the definitions of key terms provided in the Appendix of this document provide an accurate summary of their work and adopt the definitions if appropriate. Where the definitions do not accurately describe current work, agencies consider whether their models of work should be updated or whether the definitions should be adapted. The CLD Assessment Tool developed by MCLD may be useful in this regard.
25. CLD implementation agencies should include definitions of key terms (as adopted or adapted) in funding proposals, program descriptions and evaluation reports.
26. CLD implementation agencies should develop explicit theories of change for their programs, and draw on those theories in monitoring and evaluation (see next item).

KEY FINDING 12: STRONGER EVALUATION AND REPORTING COULD STRENGTHEN CLD

Findings: The quality and nature of evaluation reports varied significantly. Rigorous outcomes evaluation was relatively uncommon in the sample reviewed¹⁴, as was disaggregation of participation and outcomes data to identify program contributions to equity. Causal analysis (that is, how interventions cause outcomes, rather than simply ‘whether’ or ‘that’ they do) was uncommon in the sample. Rigorous description of the processes used in implementation, which can contribute to causal analysis, was also relatively uncommon¹⁵. There were also issues with attribution of outcomes to programs in some reports, because other programs were working on similar issues in the same locations.

Implications: The extent to which agencies and, importantly, communities and their respective governments can learn from evaluation depends on the evaluation methods that are used. This has flow-on effects for the extent to which funders and the CLD sector as a whole can learn from evaluations. Evaluation methods in turn are in part determined by the purposes that evaluations are designed to serve and the evaluation questions that are expected to be answered. Participants in the Implementation and Recommendations Workshop made several observations. Some types of mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) evaluations are more likely to be able to combine accountability and learning purposes than some other designs. Involving communities and implementers in learning through concurrent monitoring and evaluation has the potential to contribute to positive outcomes from CLD. Better evaluation across the CLD sector has the potential to strengthen understanding of the CLD approaches that are most appropriate for particular purposes and contexts, and to strengthen advocacy for CLD. [The Quality Appraisal Tool for CLD Evaluations](#) may be a useful starting point for assessing the quality of evaluation reports.

Recommendations:

27. All evaluation reports should include a description of the program model(s) as it was implemented in the specific context being evaluated. Descriptions of program implementation should enable an assessment of the scope and the intensity of interventions (e.g., the frequency and duration of capacity development processes).
28. The purposes of, and therefore methods to be used in, the evaluation should be negotiated between funders, implementation agencies and communities early in the process of implementation.¹⁶ This should include consideration of theory based evaluation approaches and participatory evaluation approaches.

¹⁴This may in part be a function of the selection criteria for inclusion, which included rich qualitative data: it is possible that there were additional rigorous evaluations which did not include rich qualitative data.

¹⁵A participant in the Implications and Recommendations workshop suggested that agencies have descriptions in other types of documents. Apart from USAID reports from the Development Clearinghouse, all agencies that submitted evaluation reports were requested to submit any additional program documentation to enable understanding of processes or models.

¹⁶See also Guidance for Funders

KEY FINDINGS

29. Evaluations should normally include evaluation of the attributes of CLD most central to the model(s) implemented (the attributes of CLD as defined for this project are participation and inclusion, voice, community assets, capacity development, sustainability, transformative capacity, collective planning and action, accountability, community leadership, adaptability, and collaboration.)
30. Evaluations should disaggregate participation and outcomes data to enable consideration of equity.
31. MCLD should further processes to strengthen monitoring, evaluation and learning in the CLD sector, using strategies which involve implementation agencies, funders, and communities.

¹⁰Note that age groups for 'youth' vary significantly – in some cultures, people up to 35 years old were regarded as youth.

APPENDIX 1: DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

The following definitions of key terms were developed for this research project. A document showing the literature that underpin each definition is available on request. The definition and the attributes stemmed from Phase 1 of the research project (see Introduction).

Community-led Development is a development approach in which local community members work together to identify goals that are important to them, develop and implement plans to achieve those goals, and create collaborative relationships internally and with external actors—all while building on community strengths and local leadership.

Community-led Development (CLD) is characterised by 11 attributes: participation and inclusion, voice, community assets, capacity development, sustainability, transformative capacity, collective planning and action, accountability, community leadership, adaptability, and collaboration.

All the following definitions should be understood as operating within the framework of Community-led Development.

Community Leadership can refer to either a type of leadership by an individual from a given community, or to a process by which a community exercises collective leadership at a grass-roots level.

In the case of an individual, a community leader is a person from a specific community (usually geographically-defined) who uses their knowledge of and influence in the community to mobilise people and resources to meet a common goal—by building on strong relationships and social capital to generate community collaboration, creating alliances and connections with external actors, acting as a mouthpiece and intermediary for the community, and being a catalyst for change. Leaders may act as participants in multi-stakeholder decision-making processes, usually on the basis of consultation with other community members. Leaders may or may not hold formal leadership positions in communities.

In the collective sense, community leadership refers to a broader process whereby members of a community come together to solve a problem or achieve a goal through collaboration. In this case, leadership is distributed and shared across the community. It involves similar activities as above, and is marked by dialogue; collective processes to make decisions about priorities, plans and activities; and the harnessing of various skills, roles, talents and assets to contribute to community gain and spark positive change. Different people may act as leaders at different times or in different aspects of the process.

Facilitation is a co-creative and adaptive process in which a facilitator enables local actors to set common goals, take ownership of these goals, build on existing strengths, and work towards achieving their goals. Key components of effective facilitation are guiding discussion, asking questions, consensus-building, mediation and ensuring diverse voices are heard, all within a relationship of mutual learning and partnership. Facilitation can also support social learning processes in which stakeholders learn from one another, often by managing group dynamics and processes. Facilitators may be internal to or external to the local community, and different people may be facilitators in different aspects or stages of a process. Facilitation functions can be shared across group members, particularly in high functioning groups.

APPENDIX 1: DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

Resilience is the active ability to positively manage, learn from, and adapt to adversity and change without compromising current or future wellbeing, identity and goals. In social terms, resilience is generally described by three capacities: absorptive, adaptive, and transformative (see below). Various types of capital (natural, human, social, cultural, political, financial and built) contribute to resilience, and resilience operates at many levels, from the individual and the household to the system. Resilience is characterised by agency and positive adaptation in the face of unpredictability. Resilience is also a feature of natural systems, and communities dependent on their natural environments require resilience in both social and environmental systems.

Absorptive Capacity: Coping skills to ensure stability, maintain current way of life and “bounce back” from shocks

Adaptive Capacity: Making proactive, informed adjustments to increase flexibility in the face of unpredictability and change

Transformative Capacity: Systemic change to reduce vulnerability to shocks and more equitably share risk, creating whole new systems when conditions require it

Equity is the fundamental principle that all people are morally equal, and as a result should enjoy equal life outcomes in terms of wellbeing, agency and voice, and the ability to participate in an inclusive society. Any differences in these outcomes should not depend on characteristics for which a person cannot be held accountable, such as gender, ethnicity, class, nationality, etc. Achieving equity requires differential treatment according to one’s circumstances—a systematic leveling of the playing field between groups, and greater benefits for the most disadvantaged. Working towards equity usually requires processes of empowerment for those who are marginalized within a community or society.

Empowerment is both a process and an outcome, whereby an individual or community increases their agency and power such that they have active control over and engagement in their own lives and/or community. This requires both an expansion of opportunities in material, social and institutional structures, as well as a change in or challenging of asymmetric power relationships. Empowerment can be psychological (internal) and social (in relation to others), and it can be individual and collective. Empowerment is not a fixed end state, and one can be more or less empowered in relation to X and not Y.

Friedmann’s (1992)¹⁶ empowerment model describes the following constructs as necessary for empowerment: ‘defensible life space’, surplus time over subsistence requirements, appropriate information, knowledge and skills, financial resources, ‘instruments of work and livelihood’, social networks and social organisation.

Agency is the capacity to take purposeful action in pursuit of one’s own goals and values. It implies self-efficacy (a belief that one can produce a desired effect), assessment of one’s goals, and the existence of choice. Agency may be individual, by proxy (i.e. through convincing others to wield influence or act on one’s behalf), or collective.

¹⁶Note that age groups for ‘youth’ vary significantly – in some cultures, people up to 35 years old were regarded as youth.