Creating spaces for knowledge decolonization: changing relationships and shifting power dynamics for co-creation across the Movement for Community-led Development. Part 2

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The Movement for Community-led Development (MCLD) envisions alternatives to neo-colonial habits and structures, co-creating new ways to come together as we move away from top-down, expert-driven development. The process of creating our inclusive space has helped movement members nurture trust, experiment, and learn together along the way, with successes, ambiguous results, and valuable failures. In the first article in this series, we introduced the community-led worldview of systems change, a framework that begins with intangibles that can lead to tangible change. This second article offers ten recommendations for taking action to decolonize knowledge and foster authentic community-led development. The recommendations highlight the experiences and wisdom of our movement members and unpack core values of true community-led development, with specific implications for diverse stakeholders. From centering local knowledge to agency to focusing on facilitation and co-creation, the recommendations describe innovations made possible by the perspective of community-led development. The content of both articles in this series were generated from the input of more than 300 movement members, gathered through in-depth interviews, collective and ongoing dialogue and feedback, and an online survey.

Keywords: community-led development; systems change; social movements; knowledge; decolonization of knowledge; transformation; locally-led development; localization; resilience

Introduction

In the first of this two-part series, we briefly recounted the history of community-led development (CLD). The features that make it powerful and effective go back to the dawn of human history, as the way small groups organized themselves and successfully lived all over the planet. The advent of colonialism 500 years ago marked the beginning of widespread oppression of local and indigenous cultures and practices. In the 20th century, CLD saw a

successful resurgence under various names- including independence and social movements, and continues to evolve. Beginning in the 1990s, the First Nations People of Canada launched a new, growing era, linked to specific values and principles, specifically under the title of CLD.

Within the world of international aid and development, the last few years have seen increasing critiques charging the 'industry' with doing harm as well as failure to systematically produce meaningful and sustainable change for so-called beneficiaries. Increasingly, many practices have been labeled 'neo-colonial.' As diverse actors seek to root out colonialism embedded in international and domestic initiatives and systems, CLD has grown in prominence as a promising, values-based way forward.

Within this milieu, the Movement for Community-led Development (MCLD) was launched in 2015, on the same day as the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Since then, our Movement has seen the formation of national networks across many countries, primarily convened and driven by domestic civil society actors in low- and middle-income countries. We have learned that they fill a vital gap by laterally connecting diverse civil society groups who have shared values within and across countries (in the top-down aid systems, they are pitted against each other in competition for sub-awards). Together, we have used a CLD approach to co-create agendas and strategies unique to each context, yet linked across countries in solidarity, as peers, providing technical support on demand as well as other ways to help each other. Our national networks are self-organized, self-governed, and self-directed. We have also convened more than 70 international organizations through a global network, working together to conduct research, co-create tools, and advocate for international systems change in support of CLD.

Methodology

Over the past seven years, the Movement has convened countless gatherings in support of our growing national networks. These country networks are based in more than a dozen countries, driven by more than 1,500 civil society organizations and committed individuals. As our network of networks has grown in vibrancy and depth of dialogue, we have felt the need to reflect from our unique collective point of view. Many of our civil society members have felt invisible, internationally and even within their own countries, where the colonial legacy and modern politics still continue to hamper the development of thriving civil societies. Yet every day, most people in the world benefit more from their families, neighbors and local community structures than from outside efforts.

Across these gatherings, themes and ideas constantly surface. We have been able to take stock here, to coalesce those most pressing through the widespread co-creation of these two articles. We reached across our Movement, and sought input from diverse participants- all ages, genders, educational and socio-economic backgrounds, faiths, and lived experiences, across multiple countries. We conducted, recorded, and transcribed in-depth interviews and group meetings that involved more than 30 people. We conducted a survey with 310 respondents. We discussed the emerging content during regular gatherings, met with global thought leaders, and incorporated the stream of feedback into our evolving content captured here. (For more details and references, see part one of this two-part series.)

Ten ways to decolonize knowledge for better community-led development

Across our Movement's National Chapters, our first principle is 'Our Actions Match Our Words.' We know talk is cheap, and that we need to find ways to take meaningful action.

> When you can meet the complex challenge of creating and sustaining spaces where decolonized collaboration and knowledge can emerge… that's where magic can happen. (Barry Shelley, USA)

As we gathered in dialogue to create these articles, we did not know that our Community-led Worldview of Systems Change would emerge, nor did we specifically plan to craft ten recommendations. As our deep dialogues continued, these two elements naturally emerged. We heard calls for a cohesive vision that was centered on the community perspective, and the ten recommendations were more or less ten ideas (in various forms) we have heard over and over, across countries and diverse collaborators.

We believe that the platform of community-led development, based on core values and their associated principles made all of this possible. Authentic CLD can always trace back to truly inclusive individual and collective voice, agency, and dignity. To keep our actions aligned with our ideas, we take as much time and creativity as needed for creating spaces where everyone has the inclination and invitation to contribute their own ideas and experiences and to ask questions and for help. Where they can find kindness and growing friendship and inspiration and even a good laugh. Each of us involved has felt increasingly comfortable with each other, as we have co-created a space to form and articulate what is on our minds, guided by a shared vision. With that, the rest falls into place. We hope these recommendations are mostly self-explanatory, and we flesh them out with brief explanations and direct quotes from Movement participants.

1. *Start with the heart: fall in love with what is happening*

> Here is my secret. It is very simple: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.
> (from *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry)

Community-led development is not another technocratic methodology; rather, it is a profoundly emotional undertaking. Each participant must undergo a constant awakening - to the brilliance of people from all walks of life, to their moving ways of expressing themselves, to their dreams, to injustices, and also to colonial legacies that are blocking progress. Community-led development is centered on trust, one of the most powerful (and fragile) forms of human connection. Recognizing that power dynamics imbue every interaction, trust needs to be built intentionally and constantly: 'When there is coaching and emotions are taken seriously, trust is built. This is a learning process' (Sophie Kange, Uganda). Driven by the values of community-led development, each interaction has a human face and a very real emotional side.

When members of MCLD - from civil society organizations, working at various levels within their societies - outline how their CLD vocations emerged, they often share moving family and childhood stories. Their families, friends, and geographic communities have shaped their devotion to careers in domestic civil society (jobs that are often unpaid). In CLD, we cannot separate the very real emotions from the work. Matte Jockas (Uganda) says that in order to build a strong foundation in CLD work, 'You must identify the person who inspires you. I am inspired by the people around me and those who I meet on a daily basis. I learn something new from every person that I meet.' Matte starts with the heart and builds each person that he meets into his worldview. When it comes to engaging with local communities whose lived experiences provide some of the most valuable knowledge, there is an emotional response from all actors, as 'a lot of emotion comes with empowerment as people become knowledgeable that they can undertake change' (Sophie Kange, Uganda).

For 30 years, Dr. Rebecca Dali's organization, the Center for Caring Empowerment, and Peace Initiatives, has cared for hundreds of thousands of Nigerians affected by conflict. Despite the scale, Dr. Dali and her staff ascribe to the belief that each individual person they come into contact with is a unique individual, to be welcomed with love, and listened to carefully. They *start with the heart* every day, with every new person. And *starting with the heart* is also essential for creating a space for decolonization. When you fall in love with what is happening, the process of nurturing CLD becomes essentially people-centered - on

both individual and collective levels. Engaging with communities with compassion and a belief in equal partnership lays the most authentic groundwork for sharing and co-creating knowledge.

> When I have the opportunity to speak to any audience- be they Movement members or staff or anybody out there- I always tell them that this can only be fostered if you feel it from the heart. If you don't feel it, genuinely, then you will not be able to do this. So you have to be honest with yourself. If you don't feel it, you won't be able to do it, or even support it. That's what I believe. *(*Joanna Mbakulo, Uganda)

> When you talk with the community, if you listen with your heart, it is easier to understand. When the mind comes in, you start comparing with what you know. You start judging. *(*Teshome Shibru Lemma, Ethiopia)

2. *Power dynamics are often broken: fix them constantly, intentionally, artfully*

> There is little to no chance that a person from the Global North could engage with a poor community in the Global South without initially triggering unequal power dynamics. Similar dynamics can also arise from the engagement of national NGOs or other institutional representatives coming from outside the local community. Finally, there will almost always be unequal power dynamics among the residents within communities. (Barry Shelley, USA)

Power dynamics are implicit in all human interaction; the legacy of centuries of colonialism still fuels harmful and complex power dynamics, even within communities - which may also be perpetuating harmful traditional power dynamics. CLD-related partnership development calls for unceasing attention to fostering fresh and balanced dynamics with the aim of including every single person. The greater the disparity between the parties, the greater the effort called for.

No one-size-fits-all method can fix troubled power dynamics. But a group shift to balance individualism with the power of the collective is a productive starting point. ombining the wealth of knowledge in a community is a powerful method toward equalization:

> Power dynamics is key and can only be resolved if the local knowledge is inculcated across the community, by and for every single member of that community. Even within a local community, some have authority- those who are better off or have some kind of control over others. If knowledge from each and every person in the

community is used to sort out and resolve challenges, power inequities in the community will be reduced. (Samuel Mutambo, Zambia)

Among other strategies, power dynamics can also be fixed when people are informed and enabled to realize that everybody is important, useful, and capable in one way or the other. Respect is key. And this is handled from within. (Joanna Mbakulo, Uganda)

Joanna connects efforts to balance power dynamics with the concept of mindset, using an asset-based approach. A shift to a growth mindset that recognizes that everyone has something to offer:

Each and every member in the community has some kind of knowledge - and the difference in power dynamics will be reduced when we all take this viewpoint. (Samuel Mutambo, Zambia)

Given how deep-seated problematic power dynamics are, establishing relationships of mutual respect requires hard work. It is essential that everyone recognizes the value of other people:

Power dynamics usually are ingrained into our imagination, where people think that they are above or far below the other. Power is influenced by the way that we believe in our traditions, not only at the national or international level but also within communities. (Joanna Mbakulo, Uganda)

Other Movement-mates offer other key considerations related to power dynamics:

Because of the funding, it is not always a reality we will be on equal footing. Often the funder determines what outputs they want and what they want from the community, in a top-down relationship. It's sensitive, but important to note. (Marion Sandra, Uganda)

Common beliefs are that "outsiders know, have the money, and the tools. Even community partners that recognize their own tools and resources need to think about the language that we use. (Sylvia Hernandez, Mexico)

When you are working in the community, you never stop being an outsider. (Diana Delgadillo Ramírez, Mexico)

3.   *Foster growth mindsets (and root out 'learned helplessness')*

> The development space has been overshadowed by the thought that to create change, you need to wait for someone to come help you. (Nixon Ochatre, Uganda)

> It is time for a shift from the norm where the North has positioned itself as the knowledge-creating hub and the South is the knowledge-receiving hub. *(*Sophie Kange, Uganda)

> Photos are telling - hungry, emaciated people with the equivalent of palms open. It does a great injustice and feeds the mindset we are trying to get away from. It's not just privileged folks in the North imposing this perspective on 'clients', or those they are supposed to serve. Even worse is when people in areas of need believe that this 'learned helplessness' approach is how to get funds raised. This is colonization perpetuating itself. (Annette Scarpitta, USA & DR Congo)

Samuel Mutambo (Zambia) states simply, 'Mindset change begins with oneself.' In CLD, creating a true and equitable partnership requires a growth mindset that believes in the power of a community. 'You can only drive the agenda of mindset change if you as an individual are also a believer in CLD' (Samuel Mutambo). A growth mindset is about developing an environment of selflessness (Joanna Mbakulo).

MCLD's National Chapters are fueled primarily by domestic civil society organizations that are actively addressing individual and collective mindsets and rooting out learned helplessness. Samuel Mutambo (Zambia) outlines why this starting point is necessary:

> I would advise people in communities first to understand and believe in CLD. Colonization happens when a foreign person or organization comes to a community with certain knowledge to inculcate so they can have full control of that community. When that happens, communities feel they can't solve any problem without going back for help. With CLD, people will know how to use their own resources and materials to move forward.

As we create space for decolonization, development workers need to stop starting with 'problem-solving' and bringing outside 'solutions' because 'in the development space, people have learned to think that anything that is local may not be good enough' (Nixon Ochatre, Uganda). Communities should not feel they need to wait for donors or outside resources: 'the outsider can facilitate a process where people go through a psychological change, and begin

asking themselves, How do I use the abilities and resources I have to make something better? 'An excellent example is William Kamkwamba, a boy in Malawi who built a windmill using local materials to provide electricity to his community. He got the idea from a book he found in a library' (Arthur Nkosi, Malawi). As others have noted:

> Many organizations - including those on crowdsourcing platforms - want to attract funders by presenting stories and descriptions of 'helpless, victims' who need people's donations, but I like to remind folks of the strength and resilience of people as well the power of people's own perspectives. (Annette Scarpitta, USA & DR Congo)

> Mindset change helps people to understand they can stand on their own, abandoning beliefs they've had for a long time, they will always be poor and they may not do better until other people have come to help, the government or an NGO. They see they can do things within their means. (Samuel Mutambo, Zambia)

> We also need to address the mindset of government workers, which is a problem due to reliance on donor funds. (Arthur Nkosi, Malawi)

4. *Process, Process, Process, built on adept facilitation*

> Systems Change is a process. And without it, transformation can't happen. (John Kania, USA)

> The key is for facilitators to let an idea grow into fruition, naturally, with time. The facilitator cannot go in and say, 'I am here to change the community and see that you all have a growth mindset.' That would not go well. Facilitators should aim for the 'lightbulb effect'...the moments when community members realize: 'Aha! Through conversations, we were able to come up with an idea that has helped us in many different ways.' Where the community says, 'We thought about this, and thought outside the box. We've taken ownership, and are very happy with it.' (Arthur Nkosi, Malawi)

> The current standard of international development has created an environment of giving that is not sustainable and does not promote the empowerment of local knowledge. (Joanna Mbakulo, Uganda)

Skilled facilitators are at the heart of the complex systems-change processes that drive CLD. Facilitators are leaders of transformation, enabling a series of shifts: from mindset growth to a shared vision to action to producing impact, and back again. Facilitators are not teachers or trainers, but co-learners and sometimes neutral third parties who focus on the process so that communities and their partners can focus on the content. Leadership through facilitating rich dialogue is essential: 'In leadership, you learn by doing. A good leader enables and gives space to people to operate with them. Share ideas and be able to mobilize and work together' (Aiah Marrah, Sierra Leone). Within this role, facilitators should engage in continuous learning and decolonization of their own mindsets to ensure that inclusion is deep and meaningful.

> Facilitation is not about doing the work but enabling the work to be done. (Nixon Ochatre, Uganda)

> Facilitators need to learn to understand each and every participant within the group: their characteristics and temperament because that helps the facilitator learn to handle each and every person. I've seen some groups disintegrate because the facilitator becomes too attached to each thing he himself believes in. The best facilitators incorporate each and every person whether he wants to or not. He needs to fall in love with what is happening. *(*Samuel Mutambo, Zambia)

> At times, first meetings include people who do not understand CLD, or question everything, and cause controversy. A bad facilitator will think, 'I don't like you' and say 'Tomorrow, don't come.' But if you know how to handle them, to bring them near, not throw them away–at the end of it, they will end up loving the process too. Sometimes these become the best leaders. (Samuel Mutambo, Zambia)

5. *Co-create a shared space where everyone has a part to play*

Community-led development centers around co-creation which is both an art and a science. When diverse actors effectively collaborate to deconstruct colonial ideologies and co-create a new space, the group is empowered, takes ownership, and confidence grows. Co-creation and co-learning go hand in hand and are necessary to understand culture and context, as well as making room for new ideas (Yazejian et al, 2019). MCLD is a space of co-creation where our visionary members come together to share their wisdom, listen, be heard, and exchange ideas. This specific form of collaboration is empowering for brainstorming solutions, shares Sophie Kange (Uganda). To others in this space, Sophie recommends, 'Embrace more aspects of co-

creation and design thinking. Sit with me and I'll tell you what I think may be a solution, and together we'll design something that works for both of us.'

Community leadership that is intentional and focused on co-creation has the potential of removing barriers to progress. On the topic of transformational leadership, Lansana Kondeh (Sierra Leone) recommends, 'When you want to help change people's lives, make sure that there is ownership and self-independence. Always relate to them, be on the same level, and intentionally do things together.' The process of co-creation is conscious of power dynamics - a core function of it is to 'develop an evolving "collective view" or "shared understanding," rather than pushing for superficial consensus which perpetuates power structures' (Yazejian et al, 2019: 342):

> We need local knowledge because especially when we have a lot of colonized knowledge that is working within the community, it is hard to empower each and every person. (Samuel Mutambo, Zambia)

> There is no such thing as a leadership position. People have positions of authority. However, leadership is a way that can be accessible to anyone given the right circumstances. (Survey Respondent)

> Often, government agencies, NGOs, and especially international NGOs, come into a situation where they facilitate what they would call a shared space but it is not a co-created shared space. It is a space that they have created and then invited others into. (Barry Shelley, USA)

6. *Communities are experts: look within*

> We should stop engaging communities as participants but as leaders: they understand the challenges. Communities have a lot of resources and a lot of expertise. (Nixon Ochatre, Uganda)

> Experienced leaders and communities evolve their knowledge every day, as a reflection of the changing world around them. (Dr. Saidu Abdullahi Amaza, Nigeria)

> Decolonization and CLD are based on the same shift in values - from looking outside oneself or one's community for direction and answers - to having confidence in one's own wisdom and the wisdom of one's own community. (John Coonrod, USA)

We all need to shift how we perceive 'expertise.' Communities - indeed all of us - are the experts of our own lives. In colonial settings, knowledge has been systematically oppressed by colonial and neo-colonial powers who have systematically imposed their own definitions of knowledge and expertise for centuries. Context is everything and is wildly variable, which means there is no recipe for CLD. 'Awakening is constant' (Sylvia Hernandez, Mexico), and 'Community members must directly take the lead - not as participants, but as the frontline in the action' (Nixon Ochatre, Uganda). Key to this awakening is recognizing that 'engaging deeply in context is essential - there are good practices leading to good CLD, but no cookie cutters. So contextuality (its skills set, its tools, its priority as a mentality) must drive CLD' (Survey Respondent). Community members hold the expertise, and their voices and knowledge lie at the heart of CLD.

No-one knows context better than those who live it: communities are experts of both assets and problems and must be the leaders in formulating solutions. 'He who faces a challenge and goes through a process to solve it is better placed to tell their own story. In CLD, if we are focusing on human dignity, then we see the aspect of respecting the capacity of communities to generate their own knowledge' (Sophie Kange, Uganda). Samuel Mutambo values global knowledge but notes that 'foreign knowledge should just be a supplement' to the local knowledge that leads the process. How can we ensure that this shift happens?

> The ideas of decolonizing knowledge are basic, but actually doing it is not simple. Local knowledge is not always scientific, and sometimes it is intangible. How can we preserve it? (Diana Delgadillo Ramírez, Mexico)

> What I've learned from quite a few African and Asian leaders is that a key step is to recover and own strengths from pre-colonial times - not bringing forward dehumanizing practices from the past but a deeper spiritual and humanizing characteristic of the past. Every society seems to have these strengths that were beaten down by colonizers, like the peace-making practices of the Navajo or the spirit of Naam in Burkina Faso. (John Coonrod, USA)

> We need to develop and nurture processes by which actors who are not from a local community provide support and knowledge that can complement indigenous knowledge without giving precedence to 'their own' outside knowledge and without undermining the self-determination of the community members. At the same time, it's vital that such actors not romanticize indigenous knowledge. (Barry Shelley, USA)

7. *Recognize that the power that fuels progress is intangible*

> We need to be careful of how we build valid truths. (Diana Delgadillo Ramírez, Mexico)

> What is often overlooked is how much time, commitment, care, and resources are needed to build sustainable, CLD initiatives. (Survey respondent)

'We treasure what we measure' is a common refrain across international development. We measure everything: wells drilled, trees planted, reductions in mortality, behaviors changed, latrines built, water quality, crop yields, incomes, and numbers of people trained or mobilized or 'reached'. Manifestations in the physical world that indeed are important to human quality of life, even survival itself. But we increasingly recognize that when these so-called deliverables are deposited into communities, seemingly out of the blue, the benefits they offer often do not last long. Across the MCLD, we have shared many stories of disappearing gains and even community resentments: the pump breaks and no one knows how to fix it, the 'behaviors' revert, the agricultural dip tank is not used, the latrines are boycotted, the trainings stop, the new farms lie fallow the following season, and the school building is populated only by goats.

As described in Part 1 of this series, Western ways of valuing knowledge are quite narrow. Local knowledge is typically invisible to conventional science, academia, or donors' 'monitoring & evaluation' indicators. As Diana Delgadillo Ramírez (Mexico) notes: 'Be humble. A Master's degree does not mean that you know everything, be curious, be aware that you can learn from every community and every process.' In contrast to physically measurable deliverables, nearly every aspect of CLD cited in this paper is intangible: falling in love, power dynamics, listening, collective vision, inclusion, commitment, confidence, social cohesion, process, facilitation, mindset, experience, time. Indeed, even knowledge itself is intangible when not written down, when defined as 'one's worldly view' (Teshome Shibru Lemma, Ethiopia).

One survey respondent commented, 'Not sure "mindset" is actually a thing. Can you show me one?' Such intangibles are impossible to see, and therefore difficult to measure quantitatively, yet they represent the foundation upon which CLD's sustainable, transformative change is built. Clearly, communities and their partners will need to use qualitative methods to learn, monitor, adapt, and report on intangible changes. Luckily, many rigorous and accessible tools and methodologies already exist for these purposes.

8. *Plan for decades, act in the present*

> In today's development space, we want 'silver bullets' that quickly create change for tens or hundreds of thousands of people at one time. If we want to invest in community-led change, we expect them to be sustainable in a couple of years. We need to find a middle ground. (Survey respondent)

Communities develop over days, months, years, decades, centuries- even millennia. At MCLD, we recently learned of a policy change effort in Tanzania that radically expanded legal aid services for local people nationwide. The process of conceiving and getting the policy passed took seven years, and only then did the rollout begin. Many international development projects are five, three, or even two years long. In recognition of this, development actors need to partner with the people that are there before, during, and after any given project term, to ensure sustainability as well as effectiveness.

One survey respondent noted: 'In terms of leadership, recognize the dimensions of the long view and the big picture - only available from experience, and from good midwifing of local wisdom, and from a leader who is able to balance the local present, with the possible horizon.' Samuel Mutambo (Zambia) cautions that 'when you go to the community, you have to take your time, beginning with vision, commitment, and action. Then, you may be ready to take the next steps…in six months, or a year, if you are meeting regularly.'

9. *See that we are all interconnected: partner and collaborate inclusively*

> Systems change is inherently a collective effort. It can't be done by one organization alone. - John Kania, USA

> To me, the whole concept of decolonization comes back to a quote by Lilla Watson: 'If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.' 'Help' comes from Northern partners, but they are not bound by our issues. If you come so that we can go through this together, with a shared purpose, we are moving this journey together, then we work together to generate new solutions. (Sophie Kange, Uganda)
> How can we create a 'perfect storm' of CLD? (Annette Scarpitta, USA & DR Congo)

Community-led development is based on the holistic nature of each person's and community's world, one of interdependence and shared purpose. Every person brings their

whole self: their nature, their lived experiences, their culture, to the table. Sustainable change ideally results in creative partnerships among three aspects of society: civil society, private sector, and government, especially local government. International actors, including neighboring countries, multi-laterals, global donors, international civil society in its many forms, and foreign governments all potentially have roles to play. All sectors - including health, education, livelihoods, food systems, infrastructure, and more- may come into play, depending on community-led priorities and aspirations.

When we reconsider partnerships from the perspective of communities themselves, the potential impact of partner programs, projects, and cross-sector collaboration grows exponentially (Albrectson, 2017). Partnership can take two forms in terms of solidarity, with return not expected. And a partnership may be based on *mutual accountability,* for example, between a community and the government, including local, middle, and national governments.

> In international development, outside organizations need to be very careful about the decision-making processes in their partnerships with local organizations and community members. [International] NGOs often have an imposing presence, but this does not mean that there is no space for their presence. The willingness to decolonize aid needs to be both on paper and in action. (Sophie Kange, Uganda)

> As CLD organizations, we need to do a lot of work to work hand-in-hand with the government and change the mindset of those working in the ministries. Due to reliance on donor support, the government's voice has been undermined. (Arthur Nkosi, Malawi)

> You need to question the place that you take in an ecosystem of development actors. (Diana Delgadillo Ramírez, Mexico)

10. *Aim strongly for authentic, literal transformation- a truly changed local system*

> To create an authentic transformation, outside actors must question the privileges that we have as individuals. We must continuously ask ourselves questions, like 'do we want to know the community's answers or do we want to impose our answers on them?' (Sylvia Hernandez, Mexico)

The term 'transformation' is often used casually in the world of development, but within the world of systems change, it has a literal meaning. For example, in chemistry, a transformed

solution is chemically changed in its very composition, not to revert back to its previous formula. Many projects only produce temporary change, because once a project ends, the local system snaps back to its previous configuration. Changes produced were surface level, not truly embedded. CLD aims for permanent and iterative transformative change. Any sector-specific activities, while an end in themselves, are actually in service to the larger transformation of the whole ecosystem, and create momentum for future, ongoing transformation.

It takes a rich network of tangible and intangible local knowledge to envision and then realize this true transformation, not just once, but as a trajectory. To create such deeply meaningful changes, at the MCLD and beyond, we must all push for the decolonization of knowledge and a shift in how local communities are supported. As the basis for social transformation, knowledge has power (Kehdinga, 2017).

> Are we at a juncture where we are seeing humanity once again beginning to lose the real issue about 'shifting-the-power' (which among others is aimed at delivering an irreversible transformation of systems in order to deliver Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and many more)? As much as I love talking about the decolonization topic/shift the power topic/2nd decolonization movement/share the power (whatever we choose to call it), if it does not lead to a focused permanent transformation of a system that actually halts exclusion, inequalities, undiversified cultures/practices, then all we are doing is romance. It will just be a matter of time before this wind goes, and another starts blowing. (Rowlands Kaotcha, Malawi)

Implications and recommendations

> Community-led development is exciting. We have seen firsthand how CLD approaches build collective social cohesion and the transformative willpower which empowers rural communities to plan, identify challenges, design, and implement interventions together for the wellbeing of everyone. Community-led development builds synergy among rural communities to utilize their diversity for the benefit of their members. (Survey respondent)

A powerful colonial legacy is this: top-down good, lateral bad. Colonial authorities did not want local actors banding together, nor do modern authoritarians. This has produced development structures that silo, fragment, and actively disconnect elements of local systems. Community-led development, in its true and loving sense, offers holistic ways forward that

are inclusive, practical, and sustainable. Co-creating these articles has shown us that knowledge management for decolonization is also a powerful and practical lens. Since colonialism (and neo-colonialism) have suppressed local knowledge and practices, knowledge management lights a way to regather and assess indigenous, local, and emerging knowledge; to keep what is empowering and worthwhile, and unlearn whatever undermines dignity and supports inertia. Ultimately, CLD plus knowledge management can help communities weave themself together so they can lead the way toward their own transformations.

In addition to the ten recommendations - which apply to all of us, everywhere - our Movement-mates articulated themes for specific audiences:

International NGOs need to make real changes, beyond rhetoric
The current intense focus on 'locally-led development' is causing many INGOs to adopt new verbiage and explore internal changes. However, true commitment to CLD values and principles is still not clear in many organizations:

> Has this topic now started being used for some Westerners to view themselves as standing for the oppressed, such that what matters now is not the result but the public posture which such a conversation offers? Is it now becoming just a sexy word and a progressive posture conversation, where we see romanticizing with the words/terminologies rather than the transformation it causes. Will we be able to look behind and not regret this opportunity that we lost such a great window for a real global human transformation? (Rowlands Kaotcha, Malawi)

> There is space for this. It is something that is evolving. We seek the willingness of INGOs to have honest conversations, to look at the realities. The challenge I see is INGOs practices can feel a bit contrary: is the willingness on paper or also in action? (Sophie Kange, Uganda)

Western donors and the public must cease perpetuating colonized knowledge
Much global portrayal of local communities still relies on tropes, stereotypes and old habits of speaking for them, often for the purposes of fundraising:

> We've been told that to get people to donate, we have to tell a sad story about a real need, and describe how magical their donation will be. There needs to be more space for sustainability and CLD. We shouldn't have to sacrifice our values to successfully fundraise. (Annette Scarpitta, USA & DR Congo)

We need to ask ourselves, while we may not think it is much, what power do we have? Can we influence who is invited to meetings, conferences, to present, or be on a panel? And then to consider, really, how are we sharing that space? Addressing these questions involves a deep commitment and time investment but it is a more inclusive and ethical way to engage our larger community. (Megan Nykyforchyn-Clark, USA)

In addition to communities, domestic civil societies and governments also need to decolonize

Too often, domestic civil society organizations and local structures mirror problematic international structures and models:

In Zambia, the CLD approach is helping our own civil society organizations- and even our government partners- change their mindsets. Increasingly when we go to a community to do a 'project,' we are shifting from top-down to ground-up. We are ensuring people are at the center, so the work will have true meaning to the people we claim to be supporting. (Samuel Mutambo, Zambia)

We know that we have 'local masters' (so to speak) in our communities who can be worse than our former 'colonial masters,'...including upholding the very practices which colonize knowledge. For example, tribalism is used in Africa as a weapon favoring some to acquire knowledge over others. (Rowlands Kaotcha, Malawi)

To decolonize knowledge, we must document in local languages. We translate things to English for government decision-makers, and in the process, we lose the original meaning. So to localize knowledge, local documentation for local people is also very important to inform policy change. (Marion Sandra, Uganda)

We call for expanded dialogue - and concrete actions

Much of the global discourse on 'localization' and on 'measurable outputs' includes few authentic voices from civil society, government, and private sector actors based in low- and middle-income countries:

Community-led development needs to become more involved in the global dialog on decolonizing and localizing aid. Right now the conversations in the north are missing the voices in the south, and the conversations in the south are missing the connections and funding from the north. We need to bring the two together. (Survey respondent)

We need to do better with learning and sharing. There are quite some self-sustainable communities, but we don't know who they are, what they are doing, or how they are becoming sustainable. The challenge in Malawi - and everywhere - is we don't get these success stories out. - Arthur Nkosi, Malawi

In sum

Across the MCLD, we see an urgent need for broad-based partnerships and genuine commitments in service to authentic and widespread locally-led development. We need to break the habit of cycling through trendy 'solutions' and parachuting projects into communities. This entails supporting domestic civil society in its many home-grown forms. And fostering civil society connections, at many levels with government, private sector, academia, media, social artists, INGOs, international stakeholders, and more.

All those who aim for true progress can ensure our efforts *begin with local knowledge*, and from there, foster agency of everyday people and communities, accompanied by diverse partners. We must build bridges between intention, speech, and action. If we do this, we can, all together - and will - make real the shared visions of transformed, resilient communities, anywhere in the world.

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