# Review of: "Community-Led Development: Perspectives and Approaches of Four Member Organizations"

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**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.

**Review of: "Community-Led Development: Perspectives and Approaches of Four Member Organizations"**

**General assessment**

The paper is timely and relevant as it builds on qualitative data to propose a continuous improvement to the framework of the C.L.D. By identifying barriers and enablers it advances from an overview of four case studies to proposing valuable insight and updates to a model that is subject to optimization, with important outcomes in terms of sustainability and community welfare worldwide.

The paper's results can provide multiplicative effects, in that they could be applied to a large array of projects that address the community needs, ranging from (but not limited to)  healthcare to cultural development, and, *mutatis mutandi*, to be applied in various environments of different socio-economic development. The paper balances the desiderate to theoretically propose a synthetic model, with the acknowledgment of the need for the adaptation of ready-made models to lived realities.

**Suggestions and comments**

In which concerns the empirical grounding, the author looks at the practice of four organizations members of the movement. I would suggest that further details about the movement and its analytic framework be provided (maybe not more than a paragraph) in the opening section. Not all readers may be aware of the existence/purpose of the movement, and an unaware reader might get confused regarding the fact that it is a formal movement (not only a mindset/approach), and that the four organizations are actually, and officially, part of it. Details (link) to the official website are included in the references section, yet one would have to take additional steps outside the paper to research the matter.

The author provides a brief explanation for the choice of the four member organizations, with a presentation of each case study. Convenience is one incentive for the selection; there are little to no mentions regarding the selection criteria for the respondents to the study, other than being part of their organizations. Of course, expert opinion deriving from practice is key input when investigating such issues. The paper would additionally benefit from further details regarding the four organizations, and brief references regarding the professional background of the respondents. Deriving from the text, it becomes obvious that the author is very familiar with the issues that the research addresses, and with the work and context of the four organizations/experts that provide the answers, building on the hands-on experience of work in the

field.

From the literature review, one can not conclude if similar research had been conducted, and to which extent the paper fills a gap in current knowledge, also it covers the background about C.L.D.. I suggest that should be clearly stated to which extent the research adds to similar qualitative investigations in the field of C.L.D. (if any) regarding enablers and barriers.

The idea of „phase" (albeit an obvious theoretical model) introduces a temporal succession dimension. It should be emphasized sooner in the paper that this is the term also used by the Movement for Community-led development in its analytical framework (readers may not be acquainted with the model). Since the paper looks at the application of this framework in practice, it is important to stress that the phases are neither neatly separated nor exclusively consequential. In reality, these phases overlap, and are not successive, but are reiterated and/or obliterated as needed or according to external circumstances.

Furthermore, the practitioners and organizations interviewed and analyzed were all Americans and Western NGOs. One additional limitation of the paper, although perfectly understandable in terms of scope constraints, is that it does not address (investigate) as well members of the communities as key stakeholders. Thus, the perspective is unidirectional. Hopefully, a paper giving the members of the communities the voice to address and react to the same issues will be a direction for further research. CLD projects are an arena where organizational culture meets community culture (broadly understood as a "way of doing things"). I appreciated the author`s acknowledgment that data is not fit to be considered representative/relevant for further extrapolation, but may add up to similar studies. Nevertheless, the synthesis provided offers a solid starting point for any further quantitative or qualitative research in the field. Thus, the author is conscious of his premises and the limitations of the knowledge-making processes.

The area investigated by the article is important because it is significant and timely for practitioners. It disseminates the challenges and lessons learned from an array of projects that are deeply involved with community development. It is thus relevant for a community of practice that develops worldwide and needs tools and models to apply in the transition from a traditional (savior/vs/victim) model to a C.L.D. approach.

The conclusions effectively advance the themes that the article sets out to address. Since it is an exploratory, qualitative research, I think the paper would also additionally benefit from including for the reader more insight into its empirical reference points, that is, the answers of those who were interviewed (that is, more quotations).

The author chooses to focus in the article on the relationship between the C.L.D. approach and its applicability in practice, rather than insist to demonstrate or interpret critically alternative or competing perspectives, approaches, and paradigms (although it is obvious that the C.L.D. is considered a preferred model to be followed when addressing the community needs).

The article demonstrates the direct applicability, relevance, and effectiveness of the practice it analyzes, and its implications are practicable and realistic. The author tackles issues such as agency, co-creation, participation, and inclusive approaches. The papers stressed that initiatives must be culturally tailored to fit the approach the communities

think fit, necessary, and opportune. It also addresses the issue of the capacity of an NGO to represent a community and proposes practical ways to bridge the gaps that the traditional, non-participatory models had brought. Indirectly, the paper I think addresses the question of how representative the efforts/vision/understanding of an NGO are, especially when it is internationally based. The author makes the case that the development of local civil society and not-for-profit initiatives should also be tackled, since the interests and focus of communities and international NGOs overlap, but not always consistently enough.

The continuous process of consultation with the communities, not only in the planning (mandatory) but also implementing, monitoring, and controlling initiatives, evaluation, and lessons learned phases, is required. The author also pleads for the need for multiplicative effects of initiatives, so that communities further invest and carry on their own projects, programs, and policies, shifting focus and agency to members of communities (albeit with an exclusive focus on geographically-defined communities). Thus, the paper proves prospects for broader applicability or appreciation, especially in the field of project management. For instance, P.M.I. (Project management Institute, pmi.org) recognizes stakeholder management as a key area of concern when managing projects of any scale.

Regarding the quality of communication, I assess that the standard of writing, including spelling and grammar, is at a proficient level and matches the reading capacities of various audiences. The structure of the paper is very easy to follow, with the structure outlined in the introduction. The focus of the article is clearly stated, including the research question and acknowledgment of limitations. Nevertheless, I would suggest stating the limits of the object of investigation previously in the paper; that way, both the distinct approach of the author and his reflexiveness would become more obvious to the reader, providing a better frame of expectation and a sharper key of understanding of the paper.

**Formal observations**

The caption for Figure 1 should mention the source (Inspiring Communities?).

The annex does not include a section with questions regarding the phase of sustainability.