

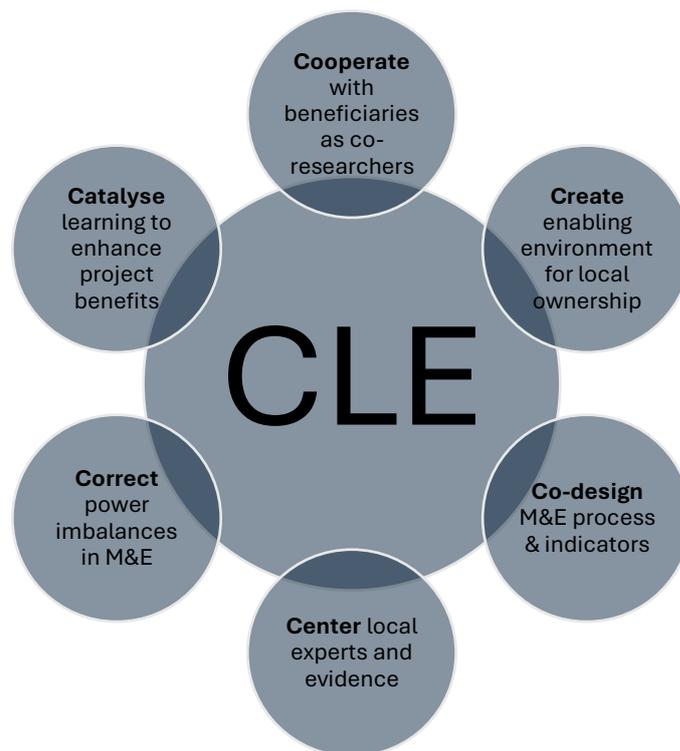


Community-Led Evaluation

Community-led Evaluation (CLE) is an approach to assess achievements of a development or humanitarian project grounded in the community's meaningful and comprehensive participation. Drawing from both the organisation's research on the dimensions of equitable partnerships¹ and the community-led monitoring (CLM) methodology popularised by the Global Fund², the Connective Paths Foundation (CPF) developed a framework for community-led evaluation as one of its flagship programmes.

CLE is concretely put into practice through the **6Cs**³:

- Cooperates with project participants and beneficiaries as co-researchers and co-evaluators
- Creates an environment for the local multisectoral actors' ownership and leadership of the M&E process
- Co-designs indicators and evaluation processes with community members
- Centres local experts and the use of locally relevant and actionable evidence
- Corrects power imbalances in project evaluation
- Catalyses the use of learning to enhance project benefits for communities



¹ Connective Paths Foundation. 2021. *Engaging women's rights organisations in the Global South: One transformative path to the effectiveness and decolonisation of aid.*

² Community-led monitoring (CLM), in the context of the HIV response, refers to "collecting data on community-designed indicators about HIV care and treatment and healthcare facilities. It allows the care recipients to "own" their localized data, identify real-time gaps, generate actionable evidence, and advocate to improve all aspects of HIV-related health services. In February 2020, The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (Global Fund) convened the international meeting "Towards a Common Understanding of Community-based Monitoring and Advocacy" in Geneva, Switzerland. The meeting was a crucial first step in consolidating a vibrant community-led monitoring (CLM) community of practice. Read more at: GFATM https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/13440/crg_2022-community-led-monitoring-meeting_report_en.pdf

³ Connective Paths Foundation. 2024. Community-led evaluation: Guided by evidence-based standards and grassroots experience. In preparation.

CLE and Decolonising Evaluation

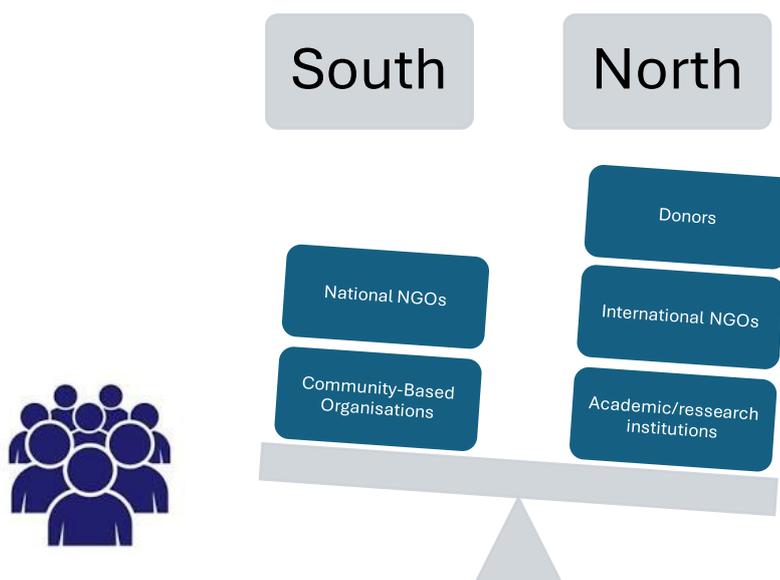
CLE is rooted in the decolonisation efforts of Connective Paths Foundation (CPF). Decolonisation is about reflecting on and transforming power imbalances that favour historically dominant groups (often those in the Global North), and equitably sharing this power to systematically marginalized communities (often those in the Global south). It refers to an ongoing reflection on our practices rather than a final result to be achieved.

Decolonising Evaluation, thus, requires a systematic approach to centre the needs, priorities and capacities of the communities and community-based organisations in the methodologies and practices within evaluation processes.

Participatory evaluations are not new, however, CLE entails going beyond engaging only the CSO partners in the project countries/sites by consulting the community members the project aimed to serve. However, it is not just about **who** are engaged in a program evaluation, but also **when** they are engaged in the process and **what** role or contribution they are given the space to make.

This is because decolonising evaluation is about addressing power imbalances that exist at all levels:

- between donors and NGOs;
- between international NGOs and national NGOs;
- between national NGOs and grassroots community-based organisations (youth associations, homeowners/community watch groups, unions, village council members, etc.); **AND**
- between community-based organisations and community members.



COMMUNITY MEMBERS ARE OFTEN LEFT OUT WHEN IT COMES TO DECIDING ABOUT THE PROJECT EVALUATION'S DESIGN AND APPROACH.

CLE Methodology Overview

1. Cooperates with project participants and beneficiaries as co-researchers and co-evaluators

The CLE methodology begins with dismantling the power imbalance inherent in evaluations through more equitable sharing of roles and responsibilities. Community members are not treated as mere “subjects” to be researched, and trust and respectful relationships are valued throughout the evaluation process. CPF incorporates practical tools to assign, track and adjust roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in the evaluation process, wherein community members are co-researchers, also capable of producing knowledge, while evaluators are facilitators and co-learners.

2. Creates an environment for the local multisectoral actors' ownership and leadership of the M&E process

On top of consultative processes, the CLE methodology incorporates capacity strengthening for stakeholders to be able to meaningfully participate throughout the different stages of the evaluation process. This includes de-mystifying evaluation jargon, building data collection and analysis skills, and providing space for community members to lead different components of the evaluation. An enabling environment for community leadership will also be created through the creation of 'evaluation circles' comprising of multisectoral actors to advise on various components and at different stages in the evaluation.

3. Co-designs evaluation approach and benchmarks for effectiveness with community members

While a project's intended results and indicators of success of a project are typically already developed as part of the project's design and results framework (or logical framework), CLE integrates a process of providing space for community members and the community-based organisations to co-design the evaluation approach and participate in the definition of what makes a project effective. This includes a review and validation of the theory and evidence that informed the project's theory of change and gathers inputs and recommendations for strengthening the pathways to change.

4. Centres local experts and the use of locally relevant and actionable evidence

CLE prioritises evaluation methodologies that centres the knowledge and expertise of local actors participating as co-researchers in the evaluation. This involves the emphasis on gathering information that reflect the community's lived experiences. Methodologies such as storytelling and narrative approaches have been increasingly used in evaluations, and the CLE methodology will harness promising practices and accelerate the participation of communities in gathering stories as well as in collecting locally available quantitative data, including through the use of digital technologies. Clear measures to integrate both evidence-based standards and grassroots experience in the evaluation will be developed.

5. Corrects power imbalances in project M&E

The evaluation process itself should aim to correct power imbalances. CLE prioritizes ethical interactions and the prevention of exploitation throughout the evaluation process. On top of well-known practices regarding informed consent, safeguarding and ethical evaluation and research guidelines are developed and tailored to the specific contexts of the communities participating in the evaluation. Advancing cultural sensitivity, ethical interviewing methods and prioritising safety are key to ensure marginalised groups are not further disadvantaged by the process.

6. Catalyses the use of learning to enhance project benefits for communities

While evaluations are part of accountability to donors, CPF recognises the need to enhance how evaluations need to benefit the communities that the projects aim to serve in the first place. The evaluation, just as with the project, should make a positive impact on people's lives. Ultimately, the evaluation process and results should facilitate learning that can increase the benefits of development for the communities, address inequities, and increase the sustainability of project gains. Thus, a clear plan for how the evaluation will generate and use learning for the community's benefit is integrated in the CLE approach.