The community-led worldview of systems change: a framework centering local knowledge and aspirations in pursuit of transformational sustainability and resilience. Part 1

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Worldwide, international and domestic development efforts are in a time of deep reckoning. The pandemic, climate crisis, growing inequality, and growing critiques of international 'aid' presumptions, systems, and actual impacts are fueling global dissatisfaction with the status quo, and calls to co-create new ways forward. The lens of decolonization highlights the need to revisit fundamental questions including: What counts as knowledge? How can diverse people, both individually and collectively, choose to embody voice, agency, and dignity? At the Movement for Community-led Development (MCLD), we suggest that each person, community, and culture must answer these questions for themselves. Throughout human history, countless communities have proven capable of transforming their own complex local systems. Today, we see how some communities are still co-creating ways forward to resiliency and well-being. We also see the power of networking these local systems together to enable whole regions and countries to maximize peer learning, efficiency, and sustainability. In this article, we share a framework, the community-led worldview of systems change, that can guide such efforts, beginning with intangibles that can lead to tangible change. The content of both articles in this series were generated from the input of over 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; transformation; locally-led development; localization; resilience

Introduction

For millennia, 'home-grown' efforts produced miracles of human survival and progress in every corner of the earth. The advent of Western colonialism 500 years ago brought a new era marked by global narratives of superiority and inferiority, accompanied by dominance, extraction of wealth, genocide, and mass human enslavement (Dupuis-Rossi, 2021; Khoo,

2020; Sayed 2020). Colonialism–and today's neo-colonialism–have wrought havoc on people, animals, plants, ecosystems, and even the entire planet (Ghosh, 2022). Still, there are reasons for hope. In most places in the world today, colonialism is past history. Diverse actors and institutions–ranging from world leaders to health and education systems to museums to board members to community activists to women, youth, people with disabilities, indigenous people, religious and cultural leaders, and many others–are spotlighting and rooting out neo-colonialism, as we collectively envision new prospects for human coexistence, peace, and dignity. The Movement for Community-led Development (MCLD) is a part of this tide of progress. Looking back to our founding eight years ago, perhaps we assumed we could work in a post-colonial world. After all, the values and principles of community-led development (CLD) are directly counter to top-down imperialism. Alas, there is no escape. We have learned that unless we actively name, deconstruct, and rebuild anew, neo-colonialism and the direct legacy of colonialism infiltrate every meeting, every conversation, and every good deed we imagine.

Today's development context: upheaval, pandemic, climate change, and profound concerns

International development is in upheaval. In question is the record of traditional, top-down international development projects of producing sustainable change. Perhaps the sharpest critiques are coming from so-called 'beneficiaries' of such projects, and 'host country' citizens who have watched innumerable projects come and go in their lifetimes, often in five-year increments, stacking up in the past like so many hazy memories (Wales, 2009; Wall, 2016; Catalyst, 2011).

During the COVID pandemic, many international staff evacuated their posts, and domestic actors stepped up effectively-calling into question the considerable expense and psychological impact of posting expatriate staff to save, rescue, or develop the local people (Green, 2020; Smith and Chadwick, 2020; Nampoothiri and Artuso, 2021). Globally, schoolchildren, youth, women, rural people, and other previously isolated groups found their way onto Zoom, Whatsapp, Facebook, smartphones, and more, expanding their networks, horizons, and consciousnesses. Increasingly, decolonizers highlight links between colonialism, neo-colonialism, capitalism, and the structures and power dynamics of modern international development. Degan Ali characterizes decolonization as the 'a recognition of the political, economic, and financial underpinnings that have caused Global South and former colonies to be in need of aid' (Ali, 2022). Stephanie Kimou describes development as

primarily driven by white power structures who are 'perpetuating the power dynamics of colonialism through their work' (Cheney, 2020). Some put it even more simply: 'development is simply colonialism in disguise' (Escobar *et al,* 2022: unpaginated) Their critiques are being heard, through well-read articles and books, presentations, new courses, and more. Ali recently testified in front of the US Congress (House, 2021).

As the connected problems of global inequality and climate change cause harm everywhere, people from all walks of life are calling for social, economic, and environmental justice. Given the long history of colonialism and the enormity of today's threats, what can be done? As one MCLD colleague has noted during an interview, decolonization must begin with lived experience:

> Decolonizing knowledge makes me think real hard, is this even possible? If we look at it in terms of the onset of colonialism, it found a people with customs, beliefs, ways of living and handling issues be it a conflict or a disease etc – knowledge then. With colonization, most if not all were replaced with new knowledge. So is it possible to decolonize knowledge? Can we go back to the knowledge we had then? Maybe, to some extent. Most of the knowledge has been lost along the way. If we do not go as far back, then to me, decolonizing knowledge should lie in the realization that knowledge is not specific to a group of people; that knowledge does not reside only in the North – the colonialists; but even in the South; an equivalent of the 'Shift the Power' so that the poor, the marginalized can have a say in their development issues, and actually they know better – they have the knowledge of what their problems are and what actually works for them. (Daisy N. Owomugasho, Uganda)

The overarching context: colonialism

Western colonialism was about territorial expansion in a violent quest for dominance and wealth (Goldsmith, 2002; Robinson, 2017). Top-down control of knowledge was fundamental (Mburu, 2020). Mahatma Gandhi, Paolo Friere, and many others viewed colonial school systems as repressors of local knowledge in pursuit of ideological domination. (Kumar, 2015; Southard, 1997; Mayo 1995). Diverse colonial policies and their enforcement suppressed traditional practices of creating and curating local knowledge, bringing 'a new economic order in which traditional skills and community organization had no place' (Hawkeye Robertson, 2015: 310).

Even Western science has been weaponized by colonists and neo-colonists to take 'control of what counts as knowledge' (Dreyer 2017: 3). As the botanist and Native American Dr. Robin

Kimmerer, notes, 'Western science makes the claim to pure objectivity and intentionally banishes subjectivity from its explanations in favor of reductionist, strictly materialist approaches" (Kimmerer 2018: unpaginated). To this day, so-called Western objectivity devalues other forms of knowledge, especially those that focus on intangible and unquantifiable aspects of the human experience (Cartier, 2019).

The suppression of traditional knowledge systems has harmed countless social and economic systems, undermined fruitful relationships with the physical environment, and dismantled knowledge systems that enabled communities to survive – and often thrive – for millennia. Typically, colonial administrations only valued 'rationalist interpretations of ecology in the form of land conservation and animal husbandry' (Murombedzi, 2013: 3). They dismissed what Kimmerer calls TEK: Traditional Ecological Knowledge. A TEK example: 9,000 years ago, indigenous people bred the modern corn plant, which has fortified countless generations, both physically and spiritually (Kimmerer, 2018). There is also evidence that this devaluation is continued by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which ignore local knowledge (Cummings *et al*., 2018)

This small recap offers just a whiff of the trauma, suffering, loss, and death inflicted by colonialism on millions, even billions of people. The enormity of what has happened, and still is happening, means that decolonization is a profound and pressing need. We've found the lens of knowledge management is a gift that keeps on giving, as we set about this task of weeding, sorting, and replanting. And as we heed Paolo Friere's call to 'decolonize our minds (Friere, 1985), we don't want to 'throw the baby [science and some history] out with the [colonial] bathwater.' Kimmerer notes that there are many ways of learning and knowing. She writes: 'Science polishes the gift of seeing, Indigenous traditions work with gifts of listening and language' (Kimmerer, 2016: unpaginated). MCLD co-founder, Dr. John Coonrod, calls for 'a more holistic vision embracing diverse values simultaneously that defy Western-style binary prioritizations. Question: Chocolate or Vanilla? Answer: Yes!!' (Personal communication). As we strive for what some say is humanity's most sophisticated trait, the ability to think and act in the 'messy gray' (Devitch, 2021), we must seek wisdom that lies on the other side of villainizing or romanticizing, linear narratives, silver bullets, and pat generalizations.

Community-led development
With no alternatives, community-led was the default system humans used to thrive for millennia. But modern history produced new forms of top-down control: colonialism, elitism, fascism, ultra-capitalism, etc. that diminish and repress local power. While immeasurable

indigenous knowledge has been lost in the process, much is still extant or reclaimable (Kurz, 2022).

Defining community

Although community is most commonly defined by geography, it can also be defined by identity, interests and shared values (now more possible than ever, thanks to the Internet). Communities – particularly those of place – are not static, harmonious or homogenous; instead, they are complex places, where different views play out and where different interests and agendas may compete for power and resources. (Hodgson *et al.,* 2017: 17).

In the 20th Century, social and community development movements in India, South Korea, the USA and elsewhere successfully employed principles congruent with what today could be characterized as CLD. For decades, the World Bank has increasingly employed CLD with a focus on local infrastructure projects (Guggenheim, 2021). Other development projects have successfully used 'community engagement approaches to produce health and other results (Farnsworth, 2014; Underwood, 2013). However, modern use of the term CLD and its full concept emerged in the 1990s from the First Nations Peoples of Canada (Torjman and Makhool, 2012). Since then, the uptake of CLD has steadily expanded, including among indigenous people in New Zealand. Due to its growing recognition, it is increasingly being co-opted by organizations whose CLD rhetoric does not match the practice, often due to a colonialist 'superior mindset' (Hodgson *et al.* 2017; Attygale, 2020).

Launched in 2015, the Movement for Community-Led Development (MCLD) is based on the simple belief that true transformation must come from within, and that communities across all countries are more alike than different, namely being full of potential that can bear beautiful fruit when everyone is included and heard. The MCLD co-creates spaces for emergent systems change, guided by the values and principles of CLD. When we clear the air of colonial fog and come together in solidarity, we have seen that a vibrant civil society can cause amazing things to happen – in partnership with governments and many other stakeholders – to all of us, by all of us, for all of us.

At the heart of authentic CLD is a deference for the all-encompassing power of context. Our nationally-based networks are self-organized, directed, and governed. We respect and celebrate the nuanced differences of every person, community, and place. In MCLD, we co-create as global peers, across physical and theoretical boundaries, social and economic differences, and life experiences. The CLD perspective discerns trends and issues, including the neo-colonialism all around us. Our international reach offers a unique kind of validation,

a wider context for comparing notes, and a useful platform for technical support. From these connections, we find ways to join efforts, learn from each other, and move forward together. MCLD envisions shifting colonial power dynamics a full 180 degrees, from top-down to ground-up, or inside-out. Collectively, we see this as the only true way to foster sustainable, resilient, transformed communities. This may seem theoretical, unrealistic, or reactionary when viewed through a neo-colonial lens. But the CLD point of view compels us to honestly ask: 'What is the role of the outsider?' This simple question is guiding us through a process of decolonization of knowledge. We are beginning with ourselves. For many years and with many organizations, Samuel Mutambo of Zambia has worked across his country. He describes his own decolonization efforts: 'I had to go through it myself. We must first start within ourselves before we can deliver that to the community.'

In our collaborative exploration of outsiders and insiders, we are finding this: there are unique and useful roles for outsiders… *and* insiders...*and* any person who seeks meaningful human collaboration. Human history is replete with stories of positive outsiders, and the opposite. How can we be on the right side of history?

Methodology

To craft the ideas presented in these two articles, the authors reflected on the past four years spent with peers from around the world co-creating National Associations and other elements of the MCLD. We have spent hundreds of hours of virtual and in-person meetings within and across countries, primarily driven by domestic civil society actors in low and middle income countries (LMICs). Our national level efforts ascribe to three principles: our actions match our words; we learn by doing; and we harness the power of peer learning. All content in this paper has been produced based on these principles, over the course of years. Our flexible, consistent belief in the value of co-creating a shared space means that scores of participants and the ideas and energy of thousands of national MCLD network members and civil society leaders have helped us produce these ideas during this recent process of shared reflection.

For this article, we specifically used the framework of *Africa No Filter*'s storyteller handbook (Pointer, 2022) and guide (Mogoatlhe, 2022) to reframing Africa, with special attention to these six principles: use African expert voices; consciously avoid stereotypes; incorporate authentic voices; contextualize your story; mind your language; and protect the subject's dignity. We used the Sprockler storytelling research manual to guide the structure of our interviews and our online survey (Sprockler, 2021). We have adapted John Kania, Mark

Kramer, and Peter Senge's water of systems change model (Kania, *et al.,* 2018) with input from John Kania and materials of the *Collective Change Lab.*

Over the past year we sought to coalesce our emergent themes by conducting, transcribing, and analyzing interviews and group meetings with more than 30 members of the MCLD, known as movement-mates. We intentionally selected a group from active MCLD participants, including diversity of gender, age, socioeconomic and educational status, faith, and lived experience, across many countries. We also discussed the content of this article as part of our monthly civil society leadership meetings. We conducted an online survey with 310 responses from around the world. We cornered colleagues and friends to capture their thoughts in conversations and via email. We have included many direct quotes to enable people to speak for themselves. We recognize our methods for gathering the content and ideas in this article primarily reflect the perspectives of those who have chosen to participate in the MCLD. Nevertheless, this group is mostly populated by a broad-based, self-selected group of civil society actors and community members who represent lived experience and proximate leadership. They are passionate, strategic, and innovative, and not heard enough. For that reason, we consider that these findings represent a unique and valuable addition to the global discourse. At the end of this article, we list our contributors by name, acknowledge survey respondents, and other sources of unattributed quotes. We have written consent of everyone named to quote them. Thanks to all for co-creating these ideas, and for the ongoing dialogue. Decolonization discussions are complex and rapidly changing: inevitably we have made mistakes. We look forward to understanding and addressing them, and continuing to grow in our hearts and minds, together, along the way.

Findings: our shared understanding

From this work has emerged a shared understanding of how we collectively define knowledge, a new framework as presented in this article, and ten recommendations for taking action to decolonize knowledge and foster authentic CLD. These recommendations are unpacked in the second article of this two-part series.

Knowledge and worldviews: the building blocks of the human experience

> Knowledge is what the community uses and does to be able to survive. (Nixon Ochatre, Uganda)

> Colonized knowledge is taking many countries in Africa backward. (Samuel Mutambo, Zambia)

Community-led development posits communities as the critical source of knowledge that has, can, and will produce sustainable well-being. Therefore, knowledge must be the starting point of our decolonization efforts, and keeping it going is the continuous work of community-led development. Given the long history of colonization, we glimpsed, in interview after interview, the breadth and depth of many communities' feelings of inferiority, and what is characterized in psychology as learned helplessness (Dale-Harris, 2013). The process of rooting out the imposed colonial harm, like an invasive species of weed, takes time and a range of skills that are brought, applied, and continually adapted by many participants, both insiders, and outsiders.

We asked many movement-mates how they define knowledge, and the answers, below, were strikingly congruent.

> Knowledge is total awareness of your environment and what is happening. Knowledge comes from not just looking at your environment, but developing an in-depth consciousness of what is truly happening around you. With self-awareness, recognition, and communication with others, you decide what knowledge is valuable, and how to master it. (Amy Gaman, Nigeria)

> Knowledge comes from each person's perspective; it is the ability to understand who you are, within the environment around you. To curate valuable knowledge, we need the stimulation of new information, as individuals and communities. Working among friends and colleagues, together we add value as we create new knowledge. (Jude Nwachukwu, Liberia)

> Our knowledge resources are lived and observed, gathered from family, clan, community, schools, workplaces, and online. (Marion Sandra, Uganda)

> Knowledge is power with information and being in a position to utilize it. (Joanna Mbakulo, Uganda)

> Knowledge is how one interprets a situation from a personal point of view. (Francis Oyat Otoo, Uganda)

> Knowledge is basic understanding of human values. (Gnanasekar Dhanapal, India)

> Knowledge is the experiences that we gather…day-to-day interaction, traditions, culture. From knowledge, we address societal issues. (Steve Ogutu, Kenya)

These human-centered definitions offer a stark contrast to the common Western framing of knowledge which often characterizes knowledge not by what it is, but it comes from: books, academia, scientific research (including randomized control trials), economic theory, pulpits, Greek philosophers, technical experts, formally educated people, rich people, and the like. Or knowledge is clinically described as a means to a tangible end. For example, the World Bank clinically reduces knowledge in this way: 'Increased importance of knowledge provides great potential for countries to strengthen their economic and social development by providing more efficient ways of producing goods and services and delivering them more effectively and at lower costs to a greater number of people' (World Bank, 2022: unpaginated).

While many Western-generated internet definitions of knowledge reference facts and reason, there is also a basic common thread aligned with what Nixon, Amy, and others describe above. Most definitions include something like this: 'All that has been perceived or grasped by the mind; learning; enlightenment' and most cite the source of knowledge as simply this: 'human experience and thought' (Yourdictionary, 2022: unpaginated). This is explained by Dr. Rebecca Dali (Nigeria):

> When the donors come, they bring all their theories, and the rules that come with the money. And I discover with all their theories, that you do the work, and the donors just take the information you provide and say thank you and leave. I told my professor…I see there are a lot of books written and I said, 'All these theories in books are not all true. You cannot take that knowledge and say ok, it will affect everyone and this is the way. That's wrong. You have to go and be with the people and listen to them.'

From the CLD point of view, knowledge is most usefully understood as simply defined by Teshome Shibru Lemma of Ethiopia: 'Knowledge is our worldly view.' Thus, each person brings their own unique, legitimate knowledge–and the process of each person embodying this knowledge is fundamental both to every human's experience and any progress we collectively seek in transforming our worlds (Miranda-Garlaza, 2013). For hundreds of years, colonialism has written off the worldly views of countless peoples, communities, and society as ignorant, irrational, and even dangerous. It has characterized non-Western people as

primitive, poor, helpless, and dependent. Indeed, many fundraising appeals by Western NGOs perpetuate these colonial stereotypes to this day. These advertisements represent the tip of the iceberg of decolonization that needs to take place, beginning with decolonizing the very definition of knowledge.

Taking a fresh look at knowledge from community-led and decolonization perspectives
Perspective 1: CLD values local knowledge and worldviews as the heart of human empowerment

We can leverage this unsettled time in development to truly center communities, women, lived experiences, proximate leadership, and local realities. This is in contrast to the common (neo-colonial) Western definition of local empowerment as a decision by donors and international NGOs (INGOs) to put communities in the driver's seat (Ehidiamen, 2016). This ubiquitous, mechanistic, and linear metaphor characterizes the Westerners as having the ultimate say in who 'drives' but it also implies they still 'own the car.' As we decolonize knowledge, we must rethink how we value people and their knowledge, and how they can translate it into collective voice and agency. Knowledge manifests in many ways; tacit and explicit; old and new; written, oral, and artistic; through research findings and stories, sermons and journal articles; and countless other forms. A CLD perspective seeks and values all knowledge. As we step back from seeing only knowledge valued in colonial paradigms, we recognize that the ways that many of us understand – and capture, share, and act on – knowledge has been far too limited. We also see the limitless potential to expand our collective consciousnesses:

> The traditional way was not encouraging people to lead the process. It was forcing people to be part of the project even when they didn't know the direction of the project. When we decolonize knowledge, we can empower each and every person to have power over resources, over solutions, over any developmental goals and activities**.** CLD liberates communities to use their local knowledge to lead the process of development. That's the only sustainable way each particular community will develop. (Samuel Mutambo, Zambia)

Perspective 2: Adapting a systems-change framework to reflect CLD

In the MCLD, we often use a simple yet powerful framework known as 'the water of systems change' or 'six conditions of systems change,' created by Kania and colleagues (2018). Our national networks and civil society leaders use this tool as one way to plan strategically and choose tactics that leverage power dynamics, relationships, and mental models for the purpose of generating favorable policies, practices, and resources. However, as the CLD

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work of our national networks and other civil society colleagues matures, limitations of the tool, as is, have emerged. We believe this is because it is oriented to *funders* (who tend to be program and project-oriented), as they aim to shift the conditions that hold a problem in place.

From a CLD point of view, this causes dissonance. First, CLD starts with the first-person reality of those whose lives are being affected and centers on community aspiration. Whereas project design may call for mobilizing community members to participate in the project, from the first-person worldview, one does not choose to participate in one's own life because an outsider said so. Conversely, an outside project or program should seek to be invited to participate in support of community aspirations. Colonialism or other forms of marginalization undermine a person or community's sense of agency, and a new flavor of change efforts should not do the same. Each of us is the protagonist of our own life story. Outsiders attempting to 'fix us' undermines our dignity and agency, as well as project effectiveness. From the CLD perspective, the idea that strangers from distant lands have decided to put us in the driver's seat of our own lives is sadly patronizing.

> Generally around the world, not just in Africa, as adults, when someone wants to change others' way of thinking, one may not want to change. If people come in to change you, you will be somewhat defensive. This silo mindset needs to be addressed, and we need to find a better way of allowing and facilitating new thought processes, so people can take ownership of how they want to improve. (Arthur Nkosi, Malawi)

Second, CLD focuses intensely on assets before turning to the problems to be solved. Advocates for asset-based community development make a strong case against deficit-based development, which they see as both demoralizing and ineffective (Nurture Development, 2016). Thus, we have re-envisioned this powerful model (Kania *et al*., 2018) to specifically align with the CLD perspective. While the original model itself is not colonial *per se*, it can become so when applied in certain settings. This adaptation is a work in progress.

The community-led worldview of systems change
This model is founded on local knowledge and worldviews which came to light in the interviews and survey conducted for this paper. Local knowledge and worldviews are the basis of mindset, which then enable actions that leverage mutuality, relationships, and networks, and proactively-modified power dynamics. This flows into successful advocacy for improved policies, practices, and resource generation that support inclusive, authentic

community aspirations, both tangible and intangible, at multiple levels, e.g. local, middle, national, and even international. The loop of transformation is complex and continuous.

Four aspects are different in our adapted version. First, we place the model within the context of community worldview and knowledge, also known as mental models. How do the community and its members perceive space, time, others, and their place within it all? As a survey respondent asked: 'What is the right path for localization, if the policies and procedures are always priority and the needs of people are secondary?' We hope that by placing the model with the context of community knowledge, the perspectives and the needs of the people will be explicitly recognized as driving the entire cycle.

Second, we abandon the common term 'mindset change' because it is often perceived as another outside fix. We replace it with the term, 'growth mindset.' We place individual *and collective* growth mindsets in the top position as the starting and often revisited point of the cycle of transformative change. We conceptualize mindset on two levels: the attitudes and beliefs held by individuals and by groups. These drive interactions within and across personal, social, economic, and physical ecosystems. We consider appraisal, traditions and innovation, decisions, conflict resolution, social cohesion, inclusivity, and commitments to act – or not. We also emphasize the distinct nature of the collective mindset, which is key, for example, to community resilience in difficult situations. We recognize that the concept of mindset is controversial, criticized for its Western baggage, including biases toward individualism, the intellect, logic and reason as the superior human qualities, and reliance on binaries and linear thinking (Savage, 2019). The MCLD fully acknowledges the truths of these kinds of critiques. But unlike trends in the West that may overemphasize fostering growth mindsets of individuals e.g. students, as a silver bullet solution, we place it within our interconnected vision (Richie 2022).

Third, our new framework describes a series of conditions of change which weave together growth mindset, mutuality, power dynamics, relationships; and only then do we move to policies, practices, and resources generation. The MCLD builds on a system which highly values growth mindset as an indispensable element that leads us to transformation and resilience, namely the ultimate goals of our Movement. So the term growth mindset works for us, for now. But within the Movement we plan to explore evolving the concept and its terminology, including through dialogues held in local languages, We will specifically explore elevating the concept to encompass heart-centered consciousness.

We add mutuality to the center level. Martin Luther King is often quoted as saying, 'All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.' Mutuality can also be described as the African concept *Ubuntu*, defined most simply as: 'humanity to others' (Mangena, 2023).The complex concept of mutuality is poorly understood in the West, especially in ultra-capitalist settings, where the idea of doing good things with no thought of return is often considered irrational, suspect, or unbelievable.

Fourth, we add arrows to signify the looping nature of the cycles of change and adaptation, with the goal of authentic transformation. And we note that the drivers at the heart of the process are intangible, eventually leading to the tangible, and back again. Critically, this is the converse of the hugely influential basic concept of Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' that tangibles need to be in place first. We note this is actually not an accurate representation of Maslow's original concept. (Hendrix-Jenkins, 2021; Bridgman *et al.,* 2019).

Figure 1: The community-led worldview of systems change (Adapted from Kania et al., 2018)

Implications and recommendations

> We are coming from another era. Decades ago, people were told: This is how you will move. This is what you are going to do. This is how you are going to think. We now need to move to people being more able to think for themselves, think outside the box, question, and be curious. That's the kind of world we need to create for and with everyone. (Arthur Nkosi, Malawi)

Now more than ever, we see how today's aid systems were created on the backs of the colonial systems that preceded them. The siloed nature of development undermines lateral connections that reflect the holistic lives we all live, and renders nearly invisible the age-old power of community connections. Continued reliance on top-down, single-solution, expert-driven projects undermines needed post-colonial repair of repressed civil societies. Using knowledge management as the starting point, and considering the decolonization of knowledge from the CLD perspective has proved invaluable. Although knowledge management is often undervalued, our movement-mates have found it to be a strategic jumping-off point for feeling confident in one's own knowledge, for surfacing shared vision, generating commitment, and building know-how so we can find our ways to authentic CLD. Many practical ideas and methods to strengthen social learning capabilities to use, share, and create knowledge are available and should be utilized (Wenger-Trayner *et al,* 2020; van Veen *et al,* 2013; Ferreira *et al*, 2005).

The recommendations from this first article are simple. Asset-based efforts to foster sustainable change must begin with developing respectful relationships within and with communities. There are many productive resources, ideas, and connections that outsiders (both domestic and international) may offer, as humble accompaniers. The damage of colonialism and neo-colonialism must be acknowledged, and ways to address trauma, and problematic power dynamics. We need an authentic, explicit and shared faith that within communities, 'the answers are there' (to quote the title of peacebuilder Libby Hoffman's book). Ways forward must be informed by a systems-change approach that involves diverse stakeholders, perhaps using our community-led worldview framework, or one of many systems- and community-centered strategies. We've seen that the 'projectizing' of people's lives not only doesn't work – it causes harm. But all is not lost: good projects, conceived and implemented within a cohesive, locally-driven, systems-informed structure, can be ideal. Let's be clear about the difference.

Additional co-created research, advocacy, innovations, and initiatives are needed to help us take on the big challenge of modifying systems–big and small, tangible and intangible–that can make it possible for donors, governments, academics and private sector to partner with

communities and civil society in new kinds of equitable relationships. These will be based on shared values, manifest equitable power dynamics, and focus on the dignity and well-being of everyday people and their communities.

In the second article of this two part series, we highlight a set of action-oriented implications that have surfaced as a result of the focused co-creation that we have undergone as we created this framework and these articles. We welcome feedback to help us continue to evolve our own community and ideas.

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