

Participatory Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

Three case studies about the power to learn together in practice

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Good practices from partners of Wilde Ganzen from Kenya and Bangladesh

Introduction

The white paper on participatory Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (PMEL) consists of three parts: this document is the third. This part will focus on participatory PMEL in practice, while the first part will explain why it is essential. The third part will focus on how to implement Participatory Evaluation in your organisation.

Effective evaluations go hand in hand with planning, monitoring, and the willingness to learn. Ideally, to create the ultimate impact for the people of interest, every step of the project implementation is done in a participatory way. It is like a spiral of learning by doing. This white paper is focussing on lessons learned by three partners of Wilde Ganzen resp. Macheo Children's Organization (Kenya), Inua Village to Global Foundation (Kenya) and Disabled Rehabilitation and Research Association (DRRA, Bangladesh)

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This part of the white paper focuses on the best practices and experiences of three partners from Asia and Africa supported by Wilde Ganzen. This followed a comprehensive training and coaching session conducted on Participatory Evaluation between October 2023 and February 2024. The training, which included theoretical sessions and practical exercises, provided the participants with knowledge and skills to implement participatory evaluation. The one-on-one coaching session aimed to support the partners in learning the process of participatory evaluation.

The experiences of our partners who have integrated this approach into their organisations can offer valuable insights into their successes and challenges. The experiences of Macheo Children's Organization—an organisation based in Kenya working for vulnerable children—, Disabled Rehabilitation and Research Association (DRRA)—an organisation based in Bangladesh working for disabled children—and Inua Village to Global Foundation—an organisation based in Kenya working for rural communities—are described below.

Their experiences show the enthusiasm for implementing evaluation from a participatory approach and the power of participation to make interventions sustainable and meaningful. Jointly embarking on the adventure of constant planning, harvesting learning participatively, and then planning again for the eventual new step that will bring the fulfilment of the participative objectives closer to the community. Defining the long-term outcomes together and jointly navigating towards those outcomes step by step is essential.

The beauty of the case studies is found in the participatory approach. It underpins the importance of selecting the stakeholders, providing guidance openly, and providing the necessary support, space, and time you need to offer to make the participatory process inclusive. The stories of change of the partners explicitly, implicitly or tacitly bring this forward. They also show that participatory PPMEL is not only a goal but also a mean to deeper goals such as a) community empowerment, b) (downward) accountability and transparency, and c) learning.



Case study 1

Participatory evaluation enhances community participation and downward accountability

Macheo's case study demonstrates a practical participatory evaluation approach involving families and children. Their method highlights the importance of tailoring participatory processes to primary stakeholders, offering valuable insights into community-led accountability. Macheo addresses power imbalances between evaluators and participants, particularly in vulnerable populations, by focusing on this approach. This method enhances transparency and accountability and creates opportunities for mutual learning.

The first Macheo case study teaches how to evaluate in a participatory way with families and children. Being conscious of the participatory approach tailor-made to the (primary) stakeholders is an enriching contribution. Macheo's strategy in the example focuses on the importance of downward accountability. The aim addresses power imbalances between evaluators and subjects, particularly in vulnerable populations. By doing so, it enhances transparency, accountability, and opportunities for learning.



Macheo Children's Organization: how do different stakeholders work, decide and learn in a participatory way

"Macheo's stakeholders encompass participants, the Kenyan government, community leaders, and Macheo staff. We collaborate closely with these stakeholders to foster inclusive decision-making, community engagement and synergy. Moreover, by engaging closely with stakeholders, we have significantly enhanced our interventions, amplifying their impact on beneficiaries.

For instance, through stakeholder involvement, Macheo devised a new operational model, the Family Needs-Based Model (FNBM). As an organisation dedicated to child welfare, we aim to provide unbiased support and aid tailored to individual needs. This entails empowering families and children to recognise and utilise their strengths and talents. We actively involve caregivers and children in selecting interventions that best suit their circumstances. Subsequently, upon identifying needs and formulating solutions collaboratively with families, we implement action plans together, utilising mutually agreed-upon key performance indicators (KPIs) to gauge progress and adapt strategies to achieve our objectives.

Adopting the Family Needs-Based Model (FNBM) has yielded notable positive outcomes for our participants (beneficiaries), surpassing the efficacy of previous approaches. Macheo employs the Child Status Index (CSI) tool to assess the comprehensive well-being of every child under our care. Over the past year (since 2023), we have observed a consistent performance improvement with FNBM, surpassing the prior model's effectiveness by over 9%. However, integrating this approach into our organisation has also brought some challenges. The primary challenge revolves around the time-consuming nature of stakeholder engagement processes."



Case study 1 Participatory evaluation enhances community participation and downward accountability

Let's delve deeper into the concepts of accountability, transparency, participation and inclusion that are enhanced by Macheo's approach:

Accountability to all stakeholders in the community: Participatory evaluation promotes accountability by ensuring that stakeholders affected by a program or project have a say in its assessment. Rather than being solely conducted by external evaluators, participatory evaluation actively involves community members, beneficiaries, and other stakeholders. This inclusion helps to hold organisations and programs accountable for their actions and outcomes to the community.

Transparency and trust building: Transparency is a critical principle in participatory evaluation. Organisations build trust with their stakeholders by openly sharing information about the evaluation process, criteria, and findings. Transparency ensures that decisions are made based on reliable data and that everyone understands how evaluations are conducted.

Participation: As the name suggests, participation is central to participatory evaluation. It recognises that those directly affected by a program or policy are best positioned to provide insights and feedback. Participatory evaluation empowers communities by involving them in data collection, analysis, and decision-making and ensures their voices are heard.

Inclusion: Inclusion refers to actively seeking out diverse perspectives and involving marginalised groups. Participatory evaluation strives to include all relevant stakeholders, regardless of their gender, social, economic, or cultural backgrounds. This inclusivity strengthens the evaluation process and leads to more informed and equitable decisions.

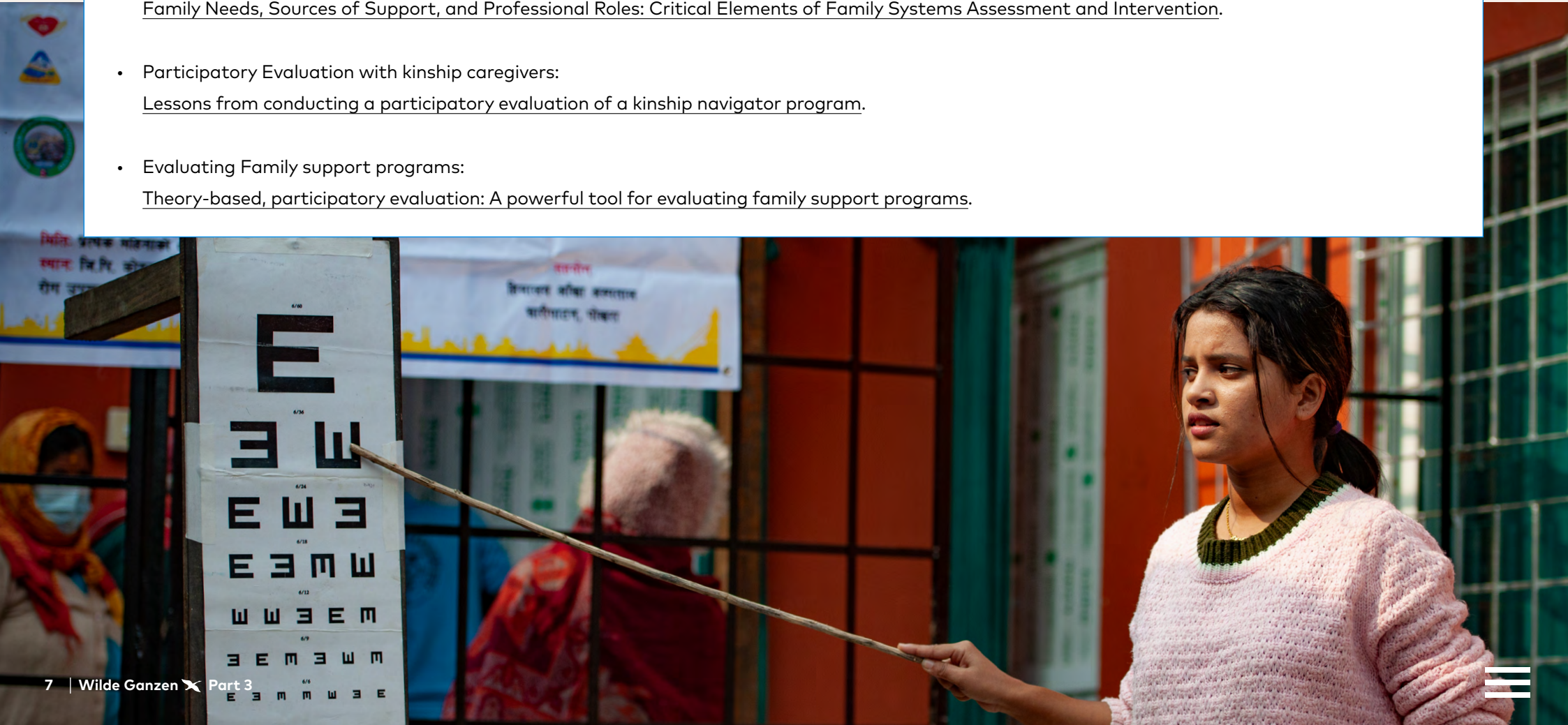
Ultimately, participatory evaluation serves as a bridge between accountability, transparency, and inclusion. Engaging communities and stakeholders in meaningful ways contributes to their development and equips them with new skills. Remember that participatory evaluation is not just about assessing outcomes; it is mainly about the process and lessons learned from it. While participatory evaluation has been widely applied in international development aid, it can also be valuable in other contexts, such as humanitarian intervention and aid efforts. By embracing this approach, organisations can create a more holistic understanding of their impact, foster collaboration, and promote positive change.



Case study 1 Participatory evaluation enhances community participation and downward accountability

Further reading about learning points from Macheo's Children Organisation's case study:

- Macheo's homepage:
[Macheo - Supporting Kenya's Children.](#)
- Family-level needs-based model of assessment and intervention:
[Family Needs, Sources of Support, and Professional Roles: Critical Elements of Family Systems Assessment and Intervention.](#)
- Participatory Evaluation with kinship caregivers:
[Lessons from conducting a participatory evaluation of a kinship navigator program.](#)
- Evaluating Family support programs:
[Theory-based, participatory evaluation: A powerful tool for evaluating family support programs.](#)



Case study 2

The power of participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation to support collective learning

The second case study from Inua Village to Global Foundation illustrates a holistic approach to strengthening community economic growth through learning by doing. It emphasises the importance of focusing on outcomes and selecting benchmarks incrementally to achieve these outcomes (as discussed in the first part of the white paper on navigating complexity). Inua prioritises genuine community engagement to ensure economic sustainability. Their approach is an excellent example of how participatory evaluation can enhance community empowerment. By involving community members in the evaluation process, Inua fosters local ownership and decision-making power, demonstrating the practical benefits of participatory methods in development projects.

The second case study of Inua Village to Global Foundation describes a holistic approach to strengthening economic growth in a community through learning by doing. It shows the necessity of focusing on outcomes and choosing benchmarks step by step to realise those outcomes (see the first part of the white paper for more on navigating complexity). Their work emphasises authentic community engagement to guarantee (economic) sustainability. Inua's approach is an excellent example of how participatory evaluation can increase community empowerment.



Inua Village to Global Foundation: sustainable community empowerment through participatory evaluation

“The concept of participatory evaluation is integrated into our organisation's philosophy and way of working to ensure that stakeholders, including beneficiaries, partners, and community members, are actively involved in the evaluation process. The added value of Participatory Evaluation to our organisation is that it leads to more holistic and accurate assessments of program impact.

This is done through regular consultations, feedback sessions, and participatory workshops that help gather diverse perspectives and insights. By involving all stakeholders in the evaluation process, we can gain a deeper understanding of their needs, priorities, and experiences. This results in more informed decision-making and the ability to tailor our interventions to better meet the community's needs.

Our organisation's successes in participatory evaluation include improved program outcomes, increased community ownership and empowerment, and stronger partnerships with local organisations. For example, in a recent project evaluation, we found that by involving beneficiaries in the evaluation process, we identified new opportunities for collaboration and resource sharing. Challenges within participatory evaluation for our organisation include the time and resources required to engage stakeholders effectively, the need for ongoing capacity building and training, and the potential for conflicting perspectives and interests among stakeholders. For example, in a recent evaluation, we faced challenges in ensuring meaningful participation from diverse community members, particularly those with limited access to resources or decision-making power.”

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Case study 2 The power of participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation to support collective learning

Again, let's delve a bit deeper into the concepts that come forward in Inua's case study:

Collective learning: Participatory planning, monitoring, and evaluation is an exciting journey to support collective learning. This happens especially if you focus on a collectively chosen outcome and navigate towards the outcome through learning by doing. This means that you learn constantly on the journey while you navigate to the expected outcomes.

Creating a common ground to learn collectively: Navigating complexity can only be done if you work collectively by trusting, seeing and listening to all stakeholders. Their concerns, values, and interests should be central, and common ground should be sought to find balanced solutions. A base of trust, capacity, space to speak up and be heard and the necessary competencies to store the developed knowledge and the reasoning behind choices.

Appreciation and failures are valuable lessons: Equally important is the ability to appreciate what goes well. Collectively, you create recognition, positive feedback, trust, and a mutually recognised point of departure for further change. **In this process, mistakes should not be considered failures but opportunities to deepen learning to understand why they went wrong.** For instance, it might have been presumed that all **stakeholders** understood and agreed with the selected pathway. Be sure to check double! If the group who makes the change happen is open to learning together and diving 'deeper into the cave of knowledge and understanding', the community gains strength, resilience and self-esteem.

Affiliation between traditional ways and innovation: It makes clear that collective learning in a participatory way can only be successful if local norms and values, ways of storing knowledge, and approaches are respected. At the same time, it must be open to new ideas, values of younger generations, or interests of those who are not included in the process. In other words, respect the mainstream but be open to innovation!

Further reading about learning points from Inua Village to Global Foundation's case study:

- Inua Village to Global Foundation's homepage: [Inua Village to Global – Opening Communities](#).
- Outcome-based education: [Outcome-based Education: An Outline](#).
- True community engagement: [What is authentic community engagement and why it matters \(now more than ever\)](#).



Case study 3

Participatory evaluation creates inclusive decision-making

The third case study of DRRR highlights the importance of giving decision-making power to the community in each step of the change. Shifting decision-making power also shows how participatory evaluation supports accountability towards the primary stakeholders (beneficiaries). We start with an inspiring story of change from DRRR, in which the value of participatory evaluation is concretely shown.



A Story of Change: The Impact of Participatory Evaluation at AmarJoti Special School by DRRA

"At AmarJoti Special School, a groundbreaking transformation occurred when the Disabled Rehabilitation and Research Association (DRRA) introduced a participatory evaluation approach. This innovative method fostered an **inclusive decision-making** environment that involved the staff, parents of the students, and the wider community. This shift represented a crucial step from top-down decision-making to a **collaborative and engaged model** that valued every voice. The transformative journey began with interactive workshops that actively involved students' parents. These sessions were designed to encourage open communication and to articulate their specific needs and concerns. Additionally, focus groups were established, drawing in diverse viewpoints from the community to identify areas for improvement in the school's operations. One of the critical insights gained from these sessions was the lack of awareness and education regarding the reproductive health of adolescents with disabilities. Many parents were unfamiliar with this crucial aspect of their children's development. In response, AmarJoti Special School took proactive steps to **integrate reproductive health education** into their curriculum. The school also **introduced crafts and other productive activities** that enhanced learning and **enabled students to earn an income, fostering a sense of independence and self-worth**. This initiative was complemented by a shift from predominantly theoretical life skills education to a more practical, hands-on approach.

Furthermore, the participatory approach significantly enhanced the school's healthcare practices, particularly in managing medical emergencies and routine care for conditions like epilepsy. Feedback from parents led to the incorporation of essential medications and protocols into the school's health program, which was tailored to meet the student's needs better.

The impact of adopting a participatory evaluation method was profoundly positive. Parents and **stakeholders transitioned from passive observers to active contributors** in the planning, designing, and implementing school programs. Their increased involvement fostered greater trust and satisfaction with the school, as they could see the direct effects of their contributions. Moreover, the school staff acquired valuable skills in participatory methods, empowering them to make more informed and effective decisions.

AmarJoti Special School's success story is a powerful testament to the benefits of **community involvement in educational settings**. By moving away from assumption-based decision-making to an approach that actively engages the community, the school enhanced the quality of education and **strengthened its relationships** with the community. This has created a more supportive, effective, and dynamic educational environment for all stakeholders."



Case study 3 Participatory evaluation creates inclusive decision-making

DRRA has carefully integrated participatory planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning into its organisation to sort such inspiring results. They have integrated the approach in their organisation and partner organisations through the following principles:

Inclusive Decision-Making: DRRA ensures that persons with disabilities and destitute rights holders, along with staff and stakeholders, are actively involved in decision-making processes related to evaluation activities. Their perspectives and experiences shape the evaluation criteria, methodologies, and outcomes.

Capacity Building: They prioritise capacity building for the right holders, staff, and stakeholders to participate effectively in evaluation processes. This includes providing training on evaluation techniques, data collection methods, and analysis tools, ensuring that they have the skills and confidence to contribute meaningfully.

Community Engagement: DRRA actively engages with the communities they serve throughout the evaluation process. This includes conducting community consultations, focus group discussions, and participatory workshops to gather input, feedback, and suggestions from community members.

Empowerment and Ownership: DRRA believes in empowering right holders and stakeholders to take ownership of evaluation processes and outcomes. By actively involving them in decision-making and implementation, DRRA ensures they feel they are responsible for the results.

Continuous Improvement: DRRA views evaluation as a continuous learning process and strives to continuously improve its practices based on feedback and insights gathered from rights holders and other stakeholders.

Further reading about lessons learned by DRRA on participation and accountability:

- [Participation inclusion, empowerment and accountability.](#)
- [Accountability Transparency, Participation and Inclusion: Accountability, Transparency, Participation, and Inclusion: A New Development Consensus? - Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.](#)



Conclusions given by DRRA

“Overall, the added value of Participatory Evaluation to our partner’s organisation is profound. It enriches the quality of our evaluations and nurtures a culture of collaboration, learning, and continuous improvement among our staff. Furthermore, Participatory Evaluation promotes transparency and accountability within our partner organisations. When staff members evaluate the outcomes and impacts of our work, it reinforces a culture of openness and shared responsibility. This strengthens trust among team members and encourages a collaborative approach to improving our programs and services.

By integrating Participatory Evaluation into our organisation's philosophy and work, we ensure that the voices and experiences of rights holders, staff and stakeholders are valued, respected, and reflected in all aspects of our programs and initiatives. Next, by involving partner team members directly in the evaluation activities, we foster a sense of ownership and empowerment. This engagement cultivates a deeper understanding of the programs or initiatives being evaluated as staff members contribute their unique perspectives and insights.

Participatory Evaluation has brought the following notable successes to our organisation and partner organisations: 1) enhanced stakeholder engagement, 2) increased ownership and commitment to evaluation outcomes, 3) capacity building among staff, 4) improved program design and implementation, and 5) promotion of a learning culture. These practices have become integral to our approach, driving positive organisational change and fostering a more significant impact. **These successes are all reflected in the following 'Story of Change':** *“While Participatory Evaluation brings significant benefits, we and our partner organisations face challenges. **Capacity Building Needs:** Building the skills and capacity of staff and stakeholders to participate in the evaluation process requires ongoing investment in training and support. **Resistance to Internal Evaluation:** Some stakeholders, including donors or partners, may prefer external evaluations for perceived objectivity and credibility. Convincing them of the value of participatory approaches can be a challenge. **Resource Intensive:** Participatory Evaluation often requires significant time, effort, and resources to facilitate meaningful engagement from diverse stakeholders. This may strain organisational capacity and budgets. Addressing these challenges requires clear communication, stakeholder engagement, and a commitment to demonstrating the value and rigour of participatory approaches in evaluation.”*

Participatory evaluation offers a powerful approach to enhancing stakeholder engagement and program effectiveness. Our partners' experiences show that participatory planning, monitoring, evaluation, and learning enhance (downward) accountability, collective knowledge, and inclusive decision-making. Moreover, involving stakeholders in the evaluation process ensures that evaluations are more relevant, accurate, and actionable. However, we need to realistic about challenges such as time and cost intensive and those need to be addressed as far as possible. Despite, the participatory approach holds significant potential for empowering communities and driving meaningful program improvements.