

# CoLMEAL Basics:

## What sets CoLMEAL apart from other approaches?

Community development has traditionally followed a top-down approach, where external organizations implement projects with limited input from the communities they aim to help. However, the CoLMEAL (Community-Led Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning) approach redefines this paradigm by empowering communities to drive and measure their own change. This document delves into the unique aspects of CoLMEAL and how it stands apart from conventional development practices.

### Key Differentiators of CoLMEAL

#### Purpose and Scope

CoLMEAL advances participatory development into the next level: community-led development. In CoLMEAL, the paradigm shifts from “doing it with them” to “enabling them to do it by themselves.” It therefore focuses on building the transformative capacity of communities, enabling them to not only direct and manage the change they want but also monitor and evaluate their progress. In doing so, the community takes ownership of the change process. Unlike traditional approaches that often limit community involvement to being subjects of data collection and validation or participants in a discussion, CoLMEAL enables them to lead the processes ensuring that communities are active agents in decision-making and action-taking.

#### Values and Principles

At its core, CoLMEAL is about inclusivity and empowerment. It prioritizes the voices of those most affected by issues, including the vulnerable and marginalized. Traditional approaches can sometimes overlook these voices, focusing more on measuring and evidencing change rather than fostering community capacity to drive these changes themselves.



## Processes and Tools

CoLMEAL leverages existing community structures, processes, and tools to collect and interpret data. While traditional methods emphasize high precision and accuracy, CoLMEAL values the contextual understanding that local narratives and stories provide. This may result in data that is less verifiable by conventional standards but is deeply rooted in the community's reality.

## Data Sets

In CoLMEAL, data sets often consist of descriptive narratives and stories, particularly in communities with low literacy levels. Traditional approaches, on the other hand, rely heavily on numerical data and structured formats. The richness of qualitative data in CoLMEAL offers a nuanced perspective that numbers alone cannot capture.

## Sources and Collectors of Data

Both CoLMEAL and traditional approaches source data from community members. However, in CoLMEAL, community members themselves collect the data, ensuring a deeper connection and ownership of the information. Traditional approaches typically employ external enumerators and facilitators for data collection.



## Users of Data

In CoLMEAL, the primary users of data are the community members. They process and share this data within the community and with local government bodies to advocate for support. Traditional approaches often restrict data usage to the project team, donors, and country offices, with community involvement limited to validation.

## Capacity Building and Sustainability

CoLMEAL builds the community's capacity to drive and measure change independently, ensuring sustainability even after external organizations exit. Traditional approaches tend to develop the capacity of their own MEAL staff, leading to a dependency that can falter once the project ends.

## Relevance and Reliability of Data

CoLMEAL prioritizes data relevance to the community, even if it sacrifices some reliability by conventional standards. Traditional approaches maintain high reliability but often at the expense of local relevance and context.

## Driving and Engaging in Change

In CoLMEAL, the community leads the change, making decisions and taking actions to achieve their goals. Traditional approaches typically see the implementing organization driving the change, with community engagement being at times passive.

## Measuring and Benefiting from Change

CoLMEAL ensures that communities measure and benefit from the changes they bring about. Traditional methods often see the project team and donors as the primary beneficiaries of data use.

## Opportunities for Scale-Up

CoLMEAL offers the flexibility to address a broad range of issues beyond the scope of any one project, providing a foundation for long-term, sustainable development. Traditional approaches may not always offer this level of adaptability.

## Likelihood of Sustained Change

The likelihood of sustained change is higher in CoLMEAL because of the deep-rooted community ownership and capacity building. Traditional approaches risk a decline in engagement and effectiveness once external organizations withdraw.

## Conclusion

CoLMEAL represents a paradigm shift in community development, focusing on empowerment, inclusivity, and sustainability. By enabling communities to take charge of their own monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning processes, CoLMEAL ensures that development is not only achieved but also sustained long after external actors have left. This approach not only optimizes the use of resources but also fosters a culture of self-reliance and continuous improvement within communities, setting a new standard for value for money in development work.

