

From Participation to Transformation: A Systematic Review of the Community Action Cycle in Contemporary Development Practice

Juliana Syengo^{1*} & Jacob S. Jeketule²

¹Tangaza University, Kenya

*Corresponding author: jmsrsyengo@gmail.com

<https://doi.org/10.62049/jkncu.v6i2.571>

Abstract

This study synthesizes recent evidence on the Community Action Cycle (CAC) as a participatory and cyclical framework for community-driven development. While CAC is increasingly applied across sectors, the literature remains fragmented in how the framework is conceptualized and implemented. This study therefore conducts a systematic literature review of publications between 2020 and 2026 to examine definitions, application contexts, stages, outcomes, and implementation challenges associated with CAC. Guided by PRISMA principles, 81 studies were included in the qualitative synthesis, drawing from peer-reviewed and selected grey literature. Data were analyzed using a thematic approach to identify patterns across conceptualization, practice, and outcomes. The findings show that CAC is consistently defined as a structured, participatory, and iterative process that positions communities as active agents in identifying problems, planning interventions, implementing actions, and evaluating outcomes. The framework is applied across multiple sectors, with the strongest concentration in public health and community development. Across studies, implementation most frequently emphasizes problem identification, planning, and action, while reflection and iterative learning are less consistently integrated. The review further indicates that CAC is associated with multi-level outcomes, including community empowerment, capacity building, inclusion, behavioral change, and social cohesion, as well as broader systems-level influence. However, persistent challenges are reported, including unequal participation, power imbalances, resource constraints, weak institutional support, and conceptual ambiguity. The study concludes that while CAC remains a conceptually robust and adaptable framework, its effectiveness depends on strengthening participatory inclusivity, reinforcing iterative learning processes, and aligning institutional and policy environments with its cyclical and empowerment-oriented design.

Keywords: Community Action Cycle; Participatory Development; Community Empowerment; Cyclical Learning; Community Engagement; Capacity Building; Social Cohesion; Participatory Governance; Behaviour Change; Social Transformation

Introduction

Global Context

Community development has increasingly shifted toward participatory, inclusive, and locally driven approaches that emphasize empowerment, collaboration, and sustainability. Globally, development thinking has moved away from top-down, externally imposed interventions toward models that foreground community agency, co-creation, and shared responsibility in addressing social challenges (Cornish et al., 2023; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011; Nutbeam & Muscat, 2020; Wallerstein et al., 2020). This shift is grounded in the recognition that development interventions are more effective and sustainable when communities actively define their needs, priorities, and solutions.

Participatory frameworks such as community engagement cycles, participatory action research (PAR), and community-based participatory research (CBPR) have gained prominence across multiple sectors, including public health, education, governance, and environmental sustainability (Cornish et al., 2023; Barker et al., 2020; Shelton & Brownson, 2024). These approaches emphasize iterative processes of action and reflection, collective learning, and context-sensitive adaptation, positioning communities as co-producers of knowledge and agents of change rather than passive recipients of development programs (Wallerstein et al., 2020; Robinson & Zayed, 2021).

At the global policy level, participatory approaches are strongly aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emphasize inclusivity, equity, and community engagement as essential pathways to achieving sustainable development outcomes (Nutbeam & Muscat, 2020). As a result, participatory models are increasingly recognized as critical for addressing complex and interrelated global challenges such as health inequities, climate change, and social exclusion.

African Context

In Africa, participatory and community-driven approaches have become central to development practice, particularly in response to persistent socio-economic challenges such as poverty, inequality, governance deficits, and climate vulnerability. Community-based frameworks are widely applied in sectors such as public health, gender empowerment, rural development, and climate resilience, where local engagement is essential for achieving behavior change and sustainable outcomes (Isabekova, 2023; Pienaaah et al., 2024; Ozano et al., 2024).

However, the effectiveness of participatory approaches across the continent is often shaped by structural and institutional constraints, including limited financial resources, weak governance systems, and capacity gaps at community and institutional levels (Cornish et al., 2023; Robinson & Zayed, 2021; Shelton & Brownson, 2024). In addition, issues such as power imbalances, elite capture, and the exclusion of marginalized groups can undermine genuine participation, resulting in processes that are participatory in form but not in substance (Wallerstein et al., 2020; Ozano et al., 2024).

Despite these challenges, there is growing recognition of the importance of adaptive, context-sensitive, and empowerment-oriented frameworks that can strengthen local ownership and enhance the sustainability of development interventions. Participatory cycles and community action approaches are increasingly seen as

mechanisms for building resilience, fostering social cohesion, and enabling communities to respond to complex and evolving challenges.

Participatory and community-driven approaches in Africa are increasingly framed within broader discourses of social transformation, which emphasize contextually grounded solutions, collective responsibility, and long-term structural change. Furthermore, social transformation is about changing beliefs, attitudes, and mindsets (Soko, Mpande, Pierli, Katuse, 2012). These perspectives reinforce the importance of locally driven processes such as CAC in addressing systemic inequalities and fostering sustainable development outcomes (Soko, Mpande, Pierli, Katuse, 2012)

National and Local Relevance

At national and local levels, particularly within Sub-Saharan Africa, participatory approaches are widely embedded in development programming but are often implemented inconsistently. While many interventions are framed as community-driven, in practice they may be constrained by external agendas, limited community decision-making power, and insufficient integration of local knowledge systems (Cornish et al., 2023; Robinson & Zayed, 2021).

Within this context, the Community Action Cycle (CAC) has emerged as a structured yet flexible framework for operationalizing participation. CAC supports communities to identify problems, plan interventions, implement actions, and evaluate outcomes through iterative and learning-oriented processes (Breakthrough ACTION, 2022; Save the Children US, 2023; USAID Transform: Primary Health Care Activity, 2022). Its application across sectors such as health promotion, community governance, and social development demonstrates its adaptability and relevance to diverse local contexts (Browne, 2024; Isabekova, 2023).

However, the practical application of CAC often reveals variations in implementation, particularly in the extent to which participatory principles are upheld and cyclical processes are fully realized. In many cases, implementation tends to prioritize action-oriented stages such as planning and execution, with less emphasis on reflection, evaluation, and iterative learning.

Problem Statement and Research Gap

Despite the growing prominence of the Community Action Cycle, the literature remains fragmented across disciplines, sectors, and methodological traditions. Some studies explicitly refer to CAC, while others describe similar participatory and cyclical processes under different terminologies, resulting in conceptual ambiguity and a lack of coherence in the evidence base (Cornish et al., 2023; Vargas et al., 2022).

Furthermore, there is limited systematic synthesis of recent literature examining how CAC is conceptualized, operationalized, and evaluated in practice. Existing studies often focus on specific sectors or case studies without providing an integrated understanding of CAC across contexts. As a result, there is insufficient clarity regarding the core components of CAC, the stages most consistently implemented, the outcomes it generates, and the challenges encountered in practice.

A critical gap also exists between the theoretical framing of CAC as a fully cyclical, reflective, and adaptive process and its practical implementation, which often appears more linear and implementation-driven. This

gap raises important questions about how participatory frameworks are translated into practice and how their effectiveness can be strengthened.

Purpose of the Study

This study addresses these gaps by conducting a systematic literature review of studies published between 2020 and 2026 on the Community Action Cycle. Specifically, the study aims to:

- Examine how CAC is defined and conceptualized in contemporary literature.
- Analyze the sectors and contexts in which CAC is applied.
- Identify the stages and processes most commonly used in practice.
- Assess the outcomes and impacts associated with CAC implementation.
- Explore the challenges and limitations reported in the literature.

By synthesizing diverse sources into a coherent analytical framework, this study contributes to strengthening theoretical clarity, informing practice, and guiding future research on participatory and community-driven approaches to sustainable development.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Participatory and Empowerment-Oriented Perspectives

This study is grounded in participatory and empowerment-oriented theoretical traditions that emphasize the role of communities as active agents in social change. Central to this perspective is the body of work on participatory action research (PAR) and community-based participatory research (CBPR), which conceptualize development as a collaborative and iterative process involving cycles of action, reflection, and learning (Cornish et al., 2023; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011; Wallerstein et al., 2020).

Participatory theory challenges conventional top-down development approaches by asserting that knowledge is co-created through engagement with communities rather than transferred from external experts. Within this framework, communities are not passive recipients of interventions but co-researchers and co-implementers who contribute local knowledge, lived experience, and contextual understanding (Cornish et al., 2023; Wallerstein et al., 2020). This orientation aligns closely with empowerment theory, which emphasizes increasing individuals' and communities' control over decisions and resources that affect their lives.

Empowerment is therefore both a process and an outcome of participatory engagement. Through collective action, dialogue, and shared decision-making, communities develop critical awareness, agency, and the capacity to influence social and institutional structures (Wallerstein et al., 2020; Nutbeam & Muscat, 2020). In this sense, participatory approaches are not only methodological tools but also transformative processes that contribute to social inclusion, equity, and sustainable development.

In addition, this study is informed by the pastoral cycle, a widely used framework in social transformation and development practice that emphasizes a dynamic process of social analysis, theological reflection, and action. The pastoral cycle provides a structured approach to understanding and responding to social realities by first examining contextual conditions (social analysis), critically reflecting on their meaning and

implications (theological reflection), and then engaging in informed and transformative action (Macallan & Hendriks, 2012)

This framework closely parallels the logic of the Community Action Cycle, particularly in its emphasis on iterative learning, reflection, and context-responsive action. While CAC is often applied in development and public health contexts, the pastoral cycle offers a complementary lens that deepens its interpretive and ethical dimensions by linking community action to values, meaning-making, and transformation. In this sense, CAC can be understood as an operational extension of the pastoral cycle, translating reflection and analysis into structured participatory processes that support sustainable social change.

In addition, this study draws on insights from implementation science, particularly the recognition that the effectiveness of community-based interventions depends on context, institutional capacity, and the interaction between actors, systems, and resources (Shelton & Brownson, 2024). Implementation science highlights the importance of adaptability, iterative learning, and feedback mechanisms in translating theory into practice, elements that are central to participatory cycles such as the Community Action Cycle.

The Community Action Cycle (CAC)

The Community Action Cycle (CAC) serves as the central conceptual framework for this study. CAC is understood as a structured, participatory, and iterative process through which communities identify problems, plan interventions, implement actions, and evaluate outcomes in a continuous cycle of learning and adaptation (Breakthrough ACTION, 2022; Save the Children US, 2023; Isabekova, 2023).

Conceptually, CAC integrates key principles from participatory theory, including inclusivity, collaboration, local ownership, and collective decision-making. It is not merely a procedural model but an empowerment-oriented framework that enables communities to take an active role in shaping development processes and outcomes (Robinson & Zayed, 2021; Wallerstein et al., 2020). Through this process, communities develop the capacity to analyze their own conditions, mobilize resources, and implement locally appropriate solutions. Beyond participatory and empowerment theories, this study is further informed by perspectives from social transformation scholarship, which emphasize the role of collective agency, ethical leadership, and community-centered change processes in addressing structural inequalities. Social transformation approaches highlight that sustainable development requires not only participation, but also intentional transformation of social, economic, and institutional systems through locally grounded action and shared responsibility (Soko et al., 2012). In this regard, the Community Action Cycle can be understood as a practical mechanism through which principles of social transformation are operationalized at the community level, linking participation with broader processes of structural change (Soko et al. 2012)

A defining feature of CAC is its cyclical and iterative structure. Although different studies describe variations in terminology and sequencing, the core stages typically include:

- Problem identification and prioritization
- Planning and strategy development
- Implementation of actions
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Reflection and adaptation

These stages are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, with each phase informing the next through continuous feedback and learning (Breakthrough ACTION, 2022; Save the Children US, 2023). This cyclical nature distinguishes CAC from linear project models and enables it to respond dynamically to changing contexts and emerging challenges.

Furthermore, CAC is conceptualized as a capacity-building and systems-oriented framework. Its effectiveness depends on factors such as leadership, institutional support, resource availability, and the strength of community networks (Robinson & Zayed, 2021; Shelton & Brownson, 2024). By fostering collaboration between community members, local institutions, and external stakeholders, CAC contributes to strengthening governance, accountability, and collective efficacy.

Linking Theory and Conceptual Framework to the Study

The integration of participatory and empowerment theories with the Community Action Cycle provides a coherent lens for analyzing how CAC is conceptualized and applied in practice. Participatory theory explains the underlying logic of CAC and why community involvement, collaboration, and local ownership are essential for sustainable development, while the CAC framework operationalizes these principles into a structured and actionable process.

From this perspective, CAC can be understood as the practical expression of participatory and empowerment-oriented theories. It translates abstract theoretical principles into concrete stages and processes that guide community action. At the same time, variations in how CAC is implemented across contexts reflect the influence of institutional, socio-economic, and cultural factors highlighted in implementation science.

This theoretical–conceptual integration is particularly important for this study because it allows for a deeper analysis of the gap between theory and practice. While CAC is theoretically framed as a fully cyclical and reflective process, the literature suggests that its implementation often emphasizes linear and action-oriented stages, with limited attention to reflection and iterative learning. Understanding this gap requires both a theoretical lens (participation and empowerment) and a conceptual framework (CAC) that together provide a comprehensive basis for analysis.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a systematic literature review (SLR) design to synthesize empirical, conceptual, and practice-based evidence on the Community Action Cycle (CAC). The SLR approach was considered appropriate due to the interdisciplinary and heterogeneous nature of CAC literature, which spans community development, public health, governance, and social transformation. To ensure methodological rigor, transparency, and reproducibility, the review was guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework. The primary aim of the review was to map and critically analyze how CAC is conceptualized, applied, and evaluated in literature published between 2020 and 2026. Given the diversity of study designs included in the review, a SPIDER-informed logic (Sample, Phenomenon of Interest, Design, Evaluation, Research type) was adopted to accommodate qualitative, mixed-method, and practice-oriented evidence.

The study was guided by five key research questions focusing on the definition and conceptualization of CAC, the sectors and contexts in which it is applied, the stages and processes used in practice, the outcomes and impacts associated with its implementation, and the challenges and limitations reported in the literature. To address these questions, a comprehensive and systematic search strategy was developed using key terms related to CAC and participatory development, including “Community Action Cycle,” “community action,” “participatory approaches,” “community development,” “community mobilization,” “participatory action research,” “community engagement,” and “iterative learning.” These terms were combined using Boolean operators such as AND and OR to refine the search. Search was conducted across peer-reviewed academic databases as well as selected grey literature and institutional sources in order to capture both scholarly and practice-based evidence, recognizing that CAC is widely applied in development practice where not all relevant evidence is published in academic journals.

Eligibility criteria were defined in advance to ensure consistency and transparency in the selection of studies. Studies were included if they were published between 2020 and 2026, explicitly addressed CAC or closely related participatory and cyclical community-based approaches, and contributed to at least one of the review questions. The review included empirical, conceptual, review, and selected institutional or grey literature sources. Studies were excluded if they were published before 2020, were not related to participatory or community-driven approaches, or lacked sufficient conceptual, methodological, or empirical contribution. Foundational works published before 2020 were retained only for theoretical grounding and were not included in the primary evidence base.

The study selection process followed PRISMA guidelines and proceeded through four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. A total of 1,317 records were initially identified, including 1,245 from academic databases and 72 from grey literature sources. The academic databases searched included Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, and Google Scholar, which were selected to ensure broad interdisciplinary coverage across public health, social sciences, development studies, and participatory research. In addition, targeted searches were conducted in ScienceDirect and JSTOR to capture relevant peer-reviewed articles, while grey literature was sourced from institutional repositories, development agency reports, and organizational publications to reflect practice-based evidence.

After removing duplicates and screening titles and abstracts, 1,050 records were excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria. Full-text assessment was conducted on 267 articles, of which 186 were excluded due to irrelevance, publication outside the defined timeframe, or insufficient methodological or conceptual contribution. Ultimately, 81 studies were included in the qualitative synthesis. This systematic and stepwise process ensured a transparent progression from broad identification to focused inclusion, enhancing the credibility and reproducibility of the review. See Figure 1.

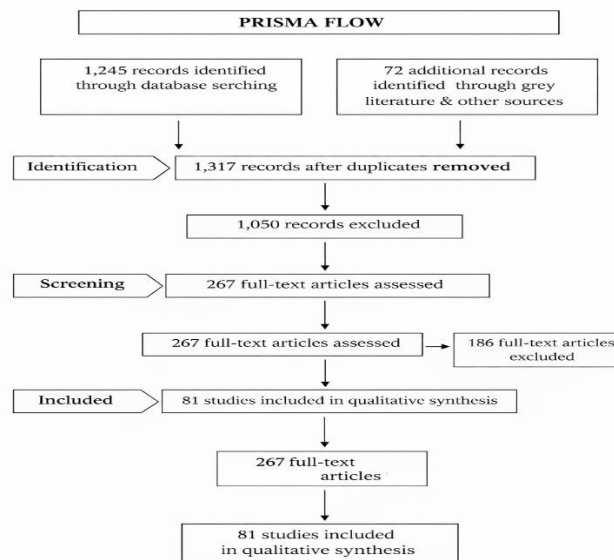


Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram Depicting the Study Identification, Screening, Eligibility, and Inclusion Process for the Systematic Review on Community Action Cycle (2020–2026)

Data extraction was conducted using a standardized framework to ensure consistency across studies. Extracted information included the author and year, type of study, context or sector of application, conceptualization of CAC or related approaches, stages or processes described, outcomes and impacts reported, and challenges or limitations identified. Due to the heterogeneity of the included studies in terms of design, context, and outcomes, meta-analysis was not appropriate. Instead, the study employed a narrative and thematic synthesis approach to identify patterns, convergences, and divergences across literature. Thematic analysis enabled the organization of findings into key domains, including conceptualization, application contexts, stages and processes, outcomes and impacts, and implementation challenges.

Quality appraisal was conducted using a pragmatic and interpretive approach suitable for diverse study designs. Rather than applying a single standardized checklist, studies were assessed based on clarity of purpose, appropriateness of methodology, transparency of reporting, credibility of findings, and relevance to the review questions. Conceptual papers and institutional reports were evaluated based on analytical depth, practical relevance, and source credibility. Study quality informed the weighting of evidence during synthesis but did not automatically determine exclusion. The synthesis and reporting of findings followed PRISMA principles, with results presented through structured narrative analysis and supported by tabular summaries. The PRISMA flow diagram was used to enhance transparency in the study selection process, and the final synthesis integrates evidence across disciplines to provide a coherent understanding of CAC as a participatory and cyclical framework for community development.

Results and Discussion

Definition and Conceptualization of the Community Action Cycle

The reviewed literature consistently defines the Community Action Cycle (CAC) as a structured, participatory, and cyclical framework through which communities identify problems, plan interventions, implement actions, monitor progress, and evaluate outcomes (Beck et al., 2021; Breakthrough ACTION, 2022; Save the Children US, 2023; Isabekova, 2023). Across studies, CAC is described as a community-driven process that positions community members as active participants in decision-making and implementation rather than as passive beneficiaries (Breakthrough ACTION, 2022; Robinson & Zayed, 2021; USAID Transform: Primary Health Care Activity, 2022).

The literature further conceptualizes CAC as aligned with participatory action research traditions, emphasizing collaboration, context-specific engagement, and iterative learning (Cornish et al., 2023; Feekery, 2024; Kleijberg et al., 2022; Peterson et al., 2020). Studies consistently highlight its cyclical nature, where action and reflection are interconnected processes that enable continuous adaptation and learning (Save the Children US, 2023; Kleijberg et al., 2022).

In addition, CAC is presented as a capacity-sensitive and evidence-informed framework, where effectiveness depends on leadership, community structures, partnerships, and access to resources (Robinson & Zayed, 2021; Wallerstein et al., 2020). Several studies also note that CAC incorporates participatory monitoring and the use of local data to inform decision-making (Browne, 2024; Isabekova, 2023; Peterson et al., 2020). Overall, the literature portrays CAC as integrating participation, empowerment, cyclical learning, and context-responsive action.

Sectors and Contexts of CAC Application

The findings indicate that CAC has been applied across multiple sectors, with public health and health promotion emerging as the most prominent areas of application. Studies show that CAC is used in maternal health, community health promotion, and behavior change interventions, where participatory engagement is critical for improving service uptake and trust (Isabekova, 2023; Save the Children US, 2023; USAID Transform: Primary Health Care Activity, 2022; Nutbeam & Muscat, 2020).

CAC is also widely applied in community development and governance contexts, where it supports stakeholder engagement, collective action, and local decision-making processes (Browne, 2024; Gyan & Kwakye, 2025). Evidence shows that participatory cycles are used to strengthen civic participation and community-led development initiatives (Isabekova, 2023).

In the area of capacity building and participatory learning, studies demonstrate that CAC-type approaches are used in climate-resilient agriculture and community-based learning systems to support iterative problem-solving and adaptation (Pienaaah et al., 2024; Shelton & Brownson, 2024). These applications highlight the role of CAC in strengthening local competencies and adaptive decision-making.

Literature also identifies applications in gender equity, social development, and violence prevention, where participatory cycles are used to address social norms and support collective action (Chatterji et al., 2020; Chakraborty et al., 2020). Additionally, CAC has been applied in environmental sustainability and climate

resilience, where community engagement is central to adaptation strategies (Hügel & Davies, 2020; Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2023).

Commonly Used Stages and Processes of CAC in Practice

Across the reviewed studies, the most frequently reported stages of CAC are problem identification, planning, implementation, and monitoring (Browne, 2024; Barker et al., 2020; Luger et al., 2020). These stages are consistently identified as the core components of CAC implementation.

Problem identification is reported as the initial and foundational stage in most studies, where communities identify needs, risks, and priorities (Browne, 2024; Barker et al., 2020). In participatory approaches, this stage involves community members acting as co-researchers in defining issues (Cornish et al., 2023; Diaz & Polanco, 2026; Feekery, 2024).

Planning is described as the phase in which strategies and interventions are developed, often through participatory and evidence-informed processes (Giosa et al., 2026; Moullin et al., 2020; Nutbeam & Muscat, 2020). This stage is consistently emphasized across the literature.

Implementation is the most dominant stage, involving the execution of interventions such as health programs, educational activities, and community initiatives (Beck et al., 2021; Barker et al., 2020; Pienaaah et al., 2024). Monitoring is commonly embedded within implementation, focusing on tracking progress and activities (Browne, 2024; Chen et al., 2020; Fraisl et al., 2022).

In contrast, reflection, evaluation, and iterative learning are less consistently reported in practice. Some studies indicate that these stages are either weakly implemented or replaced by conventional evaluation approaches (Browne, 2024; Barker et al., 2020). More structured integration of reflection is observed mainly in participatory action research contexts (Andresen et al., 2020; Mertler, 2021; Peterson et al., 2020).

Outcomes and Impacts Associated with CAC

The literature reports multiple outcomes associated with CAC implementation across different levels. The most consistently reported outcome is community empowerment, where participation in CAC processes enhances agency, voice, and control over local development decisions (Cornish et al., 2023; Dudgeon et al., 2022; Fraisl et al., 2022; Wallerstein et al., 2020). This pattern is also reflected in empirical evidence from community-based structures such as women's self-help groups, where participatory governance, collective decision-making, and internal accountability mechanisms contribute to sustainability, cohesion, and empowerment outcomes at the grassroots level. Studies from informal settlements in Nairobi demonstrate that regular participation, shared leadership, and collective problem-solving strengthen trust, resilience, and long-term group stability, even in resource-constrained environments (Njoroge, Soko & Kimuru, 2025)

Capacity building is also widely reported, including improvements in technical, organizational, and relational skills necessary for sustained community engagement (Browne, 2024; Chen et al., 2020; Robinson & Zayed, 2021). Studies further highlight knowledge co-creation and evidence literacy, where local and scientific knowledge are integrated in decision-making processes (Browne, 2024; Cornish et al., 2023; Fraisl et al., 2022).

The findings also indicate outcomes related to inclusion and participation, particularly the involvement of marginalized groups in shaping priorities and interventions (Ozano et al., 2024; Wallerstein et al., 2020). At the community level, CAC is associated with behavioral and social change, including improved health practices, environmental behaviors, and civic engagement (Chatterji et al., 2020; Fraisl et al., 2022; Nutbeam & Muscat, 2020).

Additional outcomes include social cohesion, trust, and community networks, which contribute to collective action and sustainability (Beck et al., 2021; Dudgeon et al., 2022; Rempel et al., 2025). At broader levels, CAC is linked to systems influence, policy engagement, and sustainability, where community-generated knowledge informs governance and institutional practices (Fraisl et al., 2022; Fitzsimons, 2022).

Challenges and Limitations in Implementing CAC

The literature consistently identifies several challenges associated with CAC implementation. One of the most prominent is low or unequal participation, where marginalized groups are not fully included in decision-making processes (Barker et al., 2020; Wallerstein et al., 2020).

Power imbalances between community members and external actors are also frequently reported, limiting the extent of genuine participation and local ownership (Ozano et al., 2024; Wallerstein et al., 2020).

The review further identifies resource constraints and capacity limitations, including insufficient funding, limited technical expertise, and weak institutional support, which affect implementation quality (Browne, 2024; Robinson & Zayed, 2021).

Other reported challenges include coordination difficulties, weak monitoring systems, and limited integration of reflective learning processes, which reduce the effectiveness of the cyclical model (Browne, 2024; Barker et al., 2020). Additionally, conceptual ambiguity and inconsistent use of participatory terminology across studies complicate the application and evaluation of CAC (Vargas et al., 2022). See Table 1.

Table 1: Matrix of Key Findings from the Systematic Review on Community Action Cycle (2020–2026)

Review Objective	Key Theme	Summary of Findings	Representative Sources
1. Conceptualization of CAC	Definition of CAC	CAC is defined as a structured, participatory, and cyclical framework involving problem identification, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.	Beck et al. (2021); Breakthrough ACTION (2022); Save the Children US (2023); Isabekova (2023)
	Participatory orientation	CAC positions communities as active agents in decision-making and implementation rather than passive beneficiaries.	Robinson & Zayed (2021); USAID Transform (2022)
	Theoretical grounding	CAC aligns with participatory action research and emphasizes collaboration, co-creation, and context-sensitive engagement.	Cornish et al. (2023); Wallerstein et al. (2020); Peterson et al. (2020)

	Iterative learning	CAC is cyclical and adaptive, integrating action and reflection for continuous learning.	Save the Children US (2023); Kleijberg et al. (2022)
	Capacity and systems perspective	Effectiveness depends on leadership, partnerships, institutional support, and access to resources.	Browne (2024); Robinson & Zayed (2021)
2. Application Contexts	Public health	Widely applied in maternal health, behavior change, and community health promotion interventions.	Isabekova (2023); Tilahun (2022); Nutbeam & Muscat, (2020)
	Community development & governance	Supports civic engagement, stakeholder participation, and local decision-making.	Browne (2024); Gyan & Kwakye (2025)
	Capacity building & learning	Used in participatory learning systems and climate-resilient agriculture for adaptive problem-solving.	Pienaa et al. (2024); Shelton & Brownson (2024)
	Social development & gender	Applied in addressing gender-based violence and social norms through community dialogue.	Chatterji et al. (2020); Chakraborty et al. (2020)
	Environmental sustainability	Supports climate adaptation and community-based environmental management.	Hügel & Davies (2020); Dushkova & Ivlieva (2023)
3. Stages in Practice	Problem Identification	Foundational stage where communities identify needs and priorities; increasingly participatory.	Browne (2024); Cornish et al. (2023)
	Planning	Development of strategies and interventions through participatory and evidence-informed processes.	Moullin et al. (2020); Nutbeam & Muscat (2020)
	Implementation	The most dominant stage involves the execution of interventions across sectors.	Beck et al. (2021); Pienaa et al. (2024)
	Monitoring	Focused on tracking progress and activities, often procedural in nature.	Chen et al. (2020); Fraisl et al. (2022)
	Reflection & learning	Less consistently implemented; often weak or replaced by conventional evaluation methods.	Barker et al. (2020); Mertler (2021)
4. Outcomes & Impacts	Community empowerment	Enhances agency, voice, and participation in decision-making processes.	Wallerstein et al. (2020); Cornish et al. (2023)
	Capacity Building	Strengthens technical, organizational, and relational competencies.	Browne (2024); Robinson & Zayed (2021)
	Knowledge co-creation	Integrates local and scientific knowledge for context-relevant solutions.	Fraisl et al. (2022); Cornish et al. (2023)

	Inclusion & participation	Promotes involvement of marginalized groups in development processes.	Ozano et al. (2024); Wallerstein et al. (2020)
	Behavioral & social change	Associated with improved health, environmental practices, and civic engagement.	Chatterji et al. (2020); Nutbeam & Muscat (2020)
	Social cohesion & trust	Strengthens community networks, trust, and collective action.	Beck et al. (2021); Dudgeon et al., (2022)
	Systems & policy influence	Contributes to governance improvements, policy engagement, and sustainability.	Fitzsimons (2022); Fraisl et al. (2022)
5. Challenges & Limitations	Unequal participation	Marginalized groups often excluded or underrepresented.	Barker et al. (2020); Wallerstein et al. (2020)
	Power imbalances	External actors or elites may dominate decision-making processes.	Ozano et al. (2024); Wallerstein et al. (2020)
	Resource constraints	Limited funding, expertise, and institutional capacity affect implementation.	Browne (2024); Robinson & Zayed (2021)
	Weak reflection processes	Iterative learning and reflection stages are often underdeveloped.	Barker et al. (2020); Browne (2024)
	Conceptual ambiguity	Inconsistent terminology across studies complicates application and evaluation.	Vargas et al. (2022)
	Institutional misalignment	Donor timelines, rigid systems, and policy gaps hinder participatory processes.	Shelton & Brownson (2024)

Discussion

This study set out to synthesize recent literature on the Community Action Cycle (CAC) and to provide a coherent understanding of its conceptualization, application, processes, outcomes, and limitations. The findings reveal that CAC is both conceptually robust and widely applicable, yet its implementation varies significantly across contexts. These findings are consistent with participatory and community-based development literature, which emphasizes the complexity of translating participatory frameworks into practice (Cornish et al., 2023; Wallerstein et al., 2020).

CAC as a Participatory and Empowerment-Oriented Framework

The findings confirm that CAC is firmly grounded in participatory and empowerment-oriented traditions, aligning closely with participatory action research and community-based participatory research frameworks (Cornish et al., 2023; Wallerstein et al., 2020). Across the literature, CAC is consistently described as a process that enables communities to define problems, co-create solutions, and engage in collective action (Breakthrough ACTION, 2022; Robinson & Zayed, 2021). This reinforces the theoretical position that sustainable development is more effective when communities are active agents rather than passive recipients (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011; Nutbeam & Muscat, 2020).

Importantly, the review shows that CAC operationalizes participation through a structured cycle of action, making it a practical expression of participatory theory. This distinguishes CAC from more abstract participatory approaches by providing a concrete, implementable process across diverse sectors (Save the Children US, 2023; Isabekova, 2023). The consistent association of CAC with empowerment outcomes further supports its role as both a methodological and transformative framework (Wallerstein et al., 2020).

Cross-Sectoral Relevance and Adaptability

The evidence demonstrates that CAC is applied across a wide range of sectors, including public health, community development, governance, climate resilience, and social development (Browne, 2024; Pienaa et al., 2024; Ozano et al., 2024). Its strong presence in health promotion reflects the importance of community engagement in influencing behavior change, service uptake, and trust-building processes (Nutbeam & Muscat, 2020; Tilahun, 2022).

This breadth confirms CAC as an adaptable framework rather than a sector-specific tool. Nevertheless, cross-sectoral adaptation sometimes weakens fidelity to its participatory and cyclical logic, creating inconsistencies in practice (Cornish et al., 2023; Vargas et al., 2022).

The Gap Between Cyclical Theory and Linear Practice

One of the most significant findings of the review is the gap between the theoretical model of CAC and its practical implementation. While CAC is conceptualized as an iterative and reflective process involving continuous learning and adaptation (Save the Children US, 2023; Peterson et al., 2020), the evidence shows that implementation tends to emphasize linear stages such as problem identification, planning, and action (Browne, 2024; Barker et al., 2020).

This divergence is important because reflection and feedback are central to CAC's transformative value. When these elements are weak, CAC risks becoming a linear project tool rather than a dynamic participatory process, a concern also noted in implementation science (Shelton & Brownson, 2024).

Multi-Level Outcomes and Transformational Potential

The review demonstrates that CAC generates outcomes at multiple levels. At the foundational level, it contributes to community empowerment, capacity building, and inclusion, enabling communities to strengthen agency and participate more effectively in development processes (Cornish et al., 2023; Wallerstein et al., 2020; Robinson & Zayed, 2021). These findings are consistent with evidence from grassroots organizational contexts, where sustainability is shaped not only by structural design but also by internal governance practices, trust, and member motivation. For example, studies on women's self-help groups in informal settlements highlight that collective decision-making, shared responsibility, and strong internal systems enhance cohesion, participation, and long-term sustainability, reinforcing the role of participatory structures in driving social transformation outcomes (Njoroge, Soko, Kimuru, 2025).

At the intermediate level, CAC is associated with behavioral and social change, including improved health practices, environmental behaviors, and civic engagement (Chatterji et al., 2020; Fraisl et al., 2022; Nutbeam & Muscat, 2020). The literature also highlights improvements in social cohesion, trust, and collective action, which are critical for sustaining community-driven initiatives (Beck et al., 2021; Dudgeon et al., 2022).

At a higher level, CAC contributes to systems influence, policy engagement, and sustainability, with community-generated knowledge informing governance and institutional practices (Fitzsimons, 2022; Fraisl et al., 2022). These findings indicate that CAC has the potential to function as a transformative framework capable of addressing both immediate development needs and broader structural challenges.

Structural and Institutional Constraints

Despite its strengths, the findings highlight persistent challenges that limit the effectiveness of CAC. Unequal participation remains a significant concern, with marginalized groups often excluded from meaningful decision-making processes (Barker et al., 2020; Wallerstein et al., 2020). Power imbalances between community members and external actors further constrain genuine participation and local ownership (Ozano et al., 2024).

Resource constraints, including limited funding, technical capacity, and institutional support, are also widely reported as barriers to effective implementation (Browne, 2024; Robinson & Zayed, 2021). In addition, weak integration of reflection and learning processes reduces the effectiveness of the cyclical model (Barker et al., 2020; Browne, 2024).

The review also identifies conceptual ambiguity and inconsistent terminology as challenges, with overlapping concepts such as co-creation, participatory learning, and community engagement complicating the standardization and evaluation of CAC (Vargas et al., 2022). Institutional constraints, including rigid donor requirements and policy misalignment, further limit the flexibility required for effective participatory engagement (Shelton & Brownson, 2024).

Conclusion and Implications

This systematic literature review examined CAC as a participatory and cyclical framework for community-driven development between 2020 and 2026. The findings show that CAC is consistently framed as an empowerment-oriented process through which communities identify problems, plan interventions, implement actions, and evaluate outcomes.

The review further demonstrates that CAC is widely applied across sectors, particularly in public health, community development, governance, and climate resilience, highlighting its flexibility and contextual adaptability. However, a consistent pattern emerges in practice: while problem identification, planning, and implementation are strongly emphasized, reflection, evaluation, and iterative learning are less consistently integrated, indicating a divergence from the full cyclical model. These findings are further supported by empirical evidence from grassroots community organizations, which demonstrate that sustainability emerges from the interaction between participatory governance, member motivation, and institutional support systems.

In terms of outcomes, CAC is associated with multi-level impacts, including community empowerment, capacity building, inclusion, behavioral change, and social cohesion, as well as broader systems-level influence. At the same time, the review identifies persistent challenges, including unequal participation, power imbalances, resource constraints, weak institutional support, and conceptual ambiguity.

Overall, the evidence suggests that CAC remains a conceptually strong and practically relevant framework, but its effectiveness depends on strengthening participatory inclusivity, reinforcing cyclical learning processes, and ensuring supportive institutional and policy environments.

This study also highlights the relevance of the Community Action Cycle within the broader global development agenda. The findings demonstrate that CAC aligns strongly with the principles of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly through its emphasis on inclusivity, participation, and sustainability. By promoting community engagement, local ownership, and iterative learning, CAC provides a practical mechanism for localizing SDG implementation and enhancing context-specific responses to development challenges.

Strengthening the Theoretical Foundations of CAC

The findings reinforce the relevance of participatory and empowerment theories in understanding community-driven development processes (Cornish et al., 2023; Wallerstein et al., 2020). CAC contributes to these theoretical traditions by providing a structured mechanism through which participation is translated into iterative action and collective learning.

However, the review highlights the need for greater conceptual clarity and theoretical consolidation. The overlap between CAC and related approaches, such as participatory action research, co-creation, and community engagement, suggests the importance of clearly articulating CAC's distinct contribution as a cyclical, learning-oriented framework (Vargas et al., 2022).

In addition, the findings underscore the need to strengthen the iterative and reflective dimensions of CAC within theoretical models. While theory emphasizes cyclical learning, the evidence shows that this aspect is often weakly implemented, pointing to a gap between theoretical expectations and practice (Peterson et al., 2020; Shelton & Brownson, 2024).

Translating Participatory Principles into Effective Practice

From a practical perspective, the findings indicate that effective implementation of CAC requires moving beyond procedural participation toward meaningful and inclusive engagement, ensuring that marginalized groups are actively involved in decision-making processes (Wallerstein et al., 2020; Ozano et al., 2024).

There is also a need to strengthen the reflective and adaptive components of CAC by integrating systematic reflection, feedback, and learning mechanisms throughout all stages of the cycle. This is essential for maintaining the dynamic and iterative nature of the framework and for supporting continuous improvement (Barker et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of capacity building at both community and institutional levels, including skills in facilitation, participatory monitoring, and evidence use (Browne, 2024; Robinson & Zayed, 2021). Strengthening these capacities can enhance both the quality and sustainability of CAC implementation.

Finally, practitioners should apply CAC as a coherent and integrated framework, rather than as a collection of isolated participatory activities, by maintaining fidelity to its core stages and principles.

Creating Enabling Policy and Institutional Environments

The review highlights the critical role of policy and institutional environments in shaping the effectiveness of CAC. Policymakers should develop enabling frameworks that promote participation, flexibility, and local ownership, while supporting long-term engagement with communities (Shelton & Brownson, 2024).

There is also a need to align donor requirements and program timelines with the iterative nature of participatory processes. Rigid planning and reporting structures can limit adaptability and reduce the effectiveness of CAC implementation.

In addition, policies should prioritize investment in community systems, infrastructure, and long-term capacity development, ensuring that participatory approaches are not only implemented but sustained over time (Fraisal et al., 2022).

Contribution of the Study

This study contributes to literature by providing a systematic and integrative synthesis of CAC research across multiple sectors and contexts. It advances understanding by clarifying the conceptual foundations of CAC, identifying patterns in its application and implementation, highlighting the gap between cyclical theory and linear practice, and synthesizing evidence on outcomes and challenges. By bringing together fragmented literature into a coherent analytical framework, the study provides a stronger basis for future research, policy development, and practice in participatory and community-driven development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this review, several key recommendations emerge for strengthening the effectiveness and consistency of the Community Action Cycle (CAC) in practice.

First, there is a need to strengthen participatory inclusivity by ensuring that CAC processes actively engage marginalized and vulnerable groups in meaningful ways. This requires deliberate mechanisms to address power imbalances and promote equitable participation across all stages of the cycle.

Second, practitioners and program designers should reinforce cyclical learning processes by embedding structured reflection, feedback, and adaptive learning throughout implementation. Strengthening these elements is essential for maintaining the iterative nature of CAC and enhancing its responsiveness to evolving community needs.

Third, there is a need to enhance institutional and community capacity by investing in training and support systems for facilitators, community leaders, and implementing organizations. Building competencies in participatory facilitation, monitoring, and evidence use can significantly improve both the quality and sustainability of CAC interventions.

Fourth, efforts should be made to standardize the conceptual understanding of CAC by developing clearer guidelines and frameworks that distinguish it from related participatory approaches. This would support more consistent application and improve comparability across contexts.

Fifth, policymakers and development partners should align policy and funding frameworks with the participatory and iterative nature of CAC. This includes designing flexible program structures, realistic timelines, and funding mechanisms that support long-term engagement and community ownership.

Finally, it is important to promote evidence-informed practice by strengthening participatory monitoring and evaluation systems. Integrating local knowledge with systematic data use can support more informed decision-making and continuous improvement within CAC processes.

Areas for Future Research

This review also highlights several areas that warrant further investigation. Future research should focus on comparative studies of CAC implementation across different sectors and regions in order to better understand contextual variations and transferability.

In addition, longitudinal studies are needed to examine the sustainability and long-term impacts of CAC, particularly at community and systems levels. There is also growing scope to explore the role of digital tools and innovation in supporting participatory cycles, especially in enhancing communication, data collection, and engagement.

Finally, further research is needed on strategies for strengthening reflection and iterative learning, given that these components remain underdeveloped in practice despite being central to the CAC framework.

References

- Andresen, B. B. (2023). From professionals in context to context with professionals: Quality improvements in ECEC through professional learning communities. In *Quality in early childhood education and care through leadership and organizational learning: Organizational and professional development* (pp. 113–122). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-39419-5_7
- Barker, K. M., Ling, E. J., Fallah, M., VanDeBogert, B., Kodl, Y., Macauley, R. J., Viswanath, K., & Kruk, M. E. (2020). Community engagement for health system resilience: Evidence from Liberia's Ebola epidemic. *Health Policy and Planning*, 35(4), 416–423. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapol/czz174>
- Beck, D., Veliz, P. T., Munro-Kramer, M., Boyd, C., Sakala, I., Chiboola, N., & Lori, J. (2021). Exploring change over time in community mobilization domains: Results from a maternity waiting home intervention in rural Zambia. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 20(1), 228. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-021-01557-5>
- Breakthrough ACTION. (2022). *Using the community action cycle to build trust between health centers and pregnant women and other rural community members in Boké*. <https://breakthroughactionandresearch.org>
- Browne, G. R. (2024). An evidence cycle framework for community development initiatives. *Community Development Journal*, 59(1), 30–48. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsac011>
- Chakraborty, P., Daruwalla, N., Gupta, A. D., Machchhar, U., Kakad, B., Adelkar, S., & Osrin, D. (2020). Using participatory learning and action in a community-based intervention to prevent violence against

women and girls in Mumbai's informal settlements. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, 1609406920972234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920972234>

Chatterji, S., Stern, E., Dunkle, K., & Heise, L. (2020). Community activism as a strategy to reduce intimate partner violence (IPV) in rural Rwanda: Results of a community randomised trial. *Journal of Global Health*, 10(1), 010406. <https://doi.org/10.7189/jogh.10.010406>

Chen, L. (2020). A historical review of professional learning communities in China (1949–2019): Some implications for collaborative teacher professional development. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 40(3), 373–385. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2020.1717439>

Cornish, F., Breton, N., Moreno-Tabarez, U., Delgado, J., Rua, M., de-Graft Aikins, A., & Hodgetts, D. (2023). Participatory action research. *Nature Reviews Methods Primers*, 3(1), 34. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43586-023-00214-1>

Díaz, J., & Polanco, Y. (2026). Evaluating participatory action research projects: Process, outcomes, and use: AEC841/WC504, 1/2026. *EDIS*, 2026(1). <https://doi.org/10.32473/edis-WC504-2026>

Dudgeon, P., Derry, K. L., Mascall, C., & Ryder, A. (2022). Understanding Aboriginal models of selfhood: The National Empowerment Project's cultural, social, and emotional wellbeing program in Western Australia. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(7), 4078. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19074078>

Dushkova, D., & Ivlieva, O. (2024). Empowering communities to act for a change: A review of the community empowerment programs towards sustainability and resilience. *Sustainability*, 16(19), 8700. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16198700>

Feekery, A. (2024). The 7 C's framework for participatory action research: Inducting novice participant-researchers. *Educational Action Research*, 32(3), 332–347. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2023.2234417>

Fitzsimons, C. (2022). Community work and adult education in Staveley. *Community Development Journal*, 57(2), 386–390. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsaa043>

Fraisl, D., Hager, G., Bedessem, B., Gold, M., Hsing, P. Y., Danielsen, F., ... & Haklay, M. (2022). Citizen science in environmental and ecological sciences. *Nature Reviews Methods Primers*, 2(1), 64. <https://hal.science/hal-04201076v1>

Giosa, J. L., Evans, C., Cardozo, V., & Holyoke, P. (2026). Developing and applying the "Participatory Research to Action Framework" for meaningful engagement of experts-by-experience in applied health services research: A case study approach. *Research Involvement and Engagement*, 12(1), 7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40900-025-00824-x>

Gyan, C., & Kwakye, J. (2025). Building resiliency in community development: The experiences of women in rural communities in Ghana. *Social Inclusion*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.8705>

Hügel, S., & Davies, A. R. (2020). Public participation, engagement, and climate change adaptation: A review of the research literature. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 11(4), e645. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.645>

Isabekova, G. (2023). The "Community Action for Health": The project life cycle. In *Stakeholder relationships and sustainability: The case of health aid to the Kyrgyz Republic* (pp. 129–152). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-31990-7_5

Kleijberg, M., Hilton, R., Ahlberg, B. M., & Tishelman, C. (2022). Conceptualizing impact in community-based participatory action research to engage communities in end-of-life issues. *Palliative Care and Social Practice*, 16, 26323524221095107. <https://doi.org/10.1177/26323524221095107>

Luger, T. M., Hamilton, A. B., & True, G. (2020). Measuring community-engaged research contexts, processes, and outcomes: A mapping review. *The Milbank Quarterly*, 98(2), 493–553. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/1468-0009.12458>

Macallan, B., & Hendriks, H. J. (2012). A post-foundational practical theology? The pastoral cycle and local theology. *Dutch Reformed Theological Journal Nederduitse Gereformeerde Theologische Tydskrif*, 53(3–4), 194–205. <https://journals.co.za/doi/abs/10.10520/EJC130416>

Mertler, C. A. (2021). Action research as teacher inquiry: A viable strategy for resolving problems of practice. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, 26, 19. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1314304.pdf>

Moullin, J. C., Dickson, K. S., Stadnick, N. A., Albers, B., Nilsen, P., Broder-Fingert, S., ... & Aarons, G. A. (2020). Ten recommendations for using implementation frameworks in research and practice. *Implementation Science Communications*, 1(1), 42. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43058-020-00023-7>

Njoroge, I. N., Soko, J. J., & Kimuru, P. (2025). Organizational practices, governance structures, and sustainability of women's self-help groups in informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya. *Journal of the Kenya National Commission for UNESCO*. <https://doi.org/10.62049/jkncu.v5i1.425>

Nutbeam, D., & Muscat, D. M. (2020). Advancing health literacy interventions. In *Health literacy in clinical practice and public health: New initiatives and lessons learned at the intersection with other disciplines* (pp. 115–127). SAGE Publications. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.3233/SHTI200026>

Ozano, K., Alam, W., Aktar, B., Okoth, L., Chumo, I., Quach, J. A., ... & Steege, R. (2024). Seven core competencies and conditions for equitable partnerships and power sharing in community-based participatory research. *BMJ Global Health*, 9(11), e015497. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2024-015497>

Pienaaah, C. K., Antabe, R., Arku, G., & Luginaah, I. (2024). Farmer field schools, climate action plans, and climate change resilience among smallholder farmers in Northern Ghana. *Climatic Change*, 177(6), 90. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-024-03755-w>

Rempel, E. S., Polizzi, G., & Yates, S. (2025). Exploring the benefits of participatory action research to a participatory data stewardship community project: The Round 'Ere case study on data and well-being. *Frontiers in Digital Health*, 7, 1520825. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fdgh.2025.1520825>

Robinson, R. S., & Zayed, H. (2021). Understanding the capacity of community-based groups to mobilise and engage in social action for health: Results from Avahan. *Global Public Health*, 16(10), 1590–1603. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2020.1837912>

Save the Children US. (2023). *Engaging communities for health & social change: Community action cycle toolkit* [Technical brief]. Child Rights Resource Centre. <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/engaging-communities-for-health-and-social-change/>

Shelton, R. C., & Brownson, R. C. (2024). Advancing the science and application of implementation science to promote health equity: Commentary on the symposium. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 45. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-062723-055935>

Soko, J., Mphande, M. O., Pierli, F., & Katuse, P. (2012). *Management for social transformation*. Paulines Publications Africa.

Tilahun, Y. (2022). *USAID Transform: Primary health care activity: Community engagement and action cycle guidance*. Pathfinder International. <https://www.pathfinder.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/USAID-Transform-Community-Engagement.pdf>

Vargas, C., Whelan, J., Brimblecombe, J., & Allender, S. (2022). Co-creation, co-design and co-production for public health: A perspective on definitions and distinctions. *Public Health Research & Practice*, 32(2), e3222211. <https://doi.org/10.17061/phrp3222211>

Wallerstein, N., Oetzel, J. G., Sanchez-Youngman, S., Boursaw, B., Dickson, E., Kastelic, S., ... & Duran, B. (2020). Engage for equity: A long-term study of community-based participatory research and community-engaged research practices and outcomes. *Health Education & Behavior*, 47(3), 380–390. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1090198119897075>