



Working together with the community

The importance of community participation

by

Wilde Ganzen

Everything starts with the people themselves

Global poverty is the reason Wilde Ganzen Foundation exists. We are touched by the injustice and suffering that poverty causes. This motivates us to create a positive change.

But poverty in developing countries is not something you can 'just' tackle from the Netherlands. We are convinced that lasting change only sets about when people living in poverty decide for themselves how their problems should be tackled and take ownership over the solutions. That is why we believe in a bottom-up approach.



Community participation

We call this bottom-up approach 'community participation': initiatives ideally come from the community and are set up and implemented by their local organisations. This is how we believe that sustained, active involvement of people is achieved. Private development organisations (PDI) in the Netherlands together with Wilde Ganzen strengthen these initiatives, so that together we ensure that a project succeeds.

In this document we would like to tell you more about this 'participatory approach'.

What is community participation?

Community participation involves local people and organisations in a project from start to finish. They see a problem and try to solve it to improve the lives of people in the area.

Such involvement can take many forms, but the most ideal one is when people have a **voice** in the decisions to be taken and thus also take **responsibility** for a project. So it goes far beyond asking for a financial contribution or by contributing in kind.

By giving (part of) the direction and power of decision to the people who have the strongest interests in a specific project, we stimulate **self-esteem** and increase **self-confidence**. If people set their own priorities and make their own decisions, they also feel more responsible for bringing about the desired change themselves. So it ensures active involvement, increases local ownership and is crucial for long-term change.

If we turn it around and let outsiders or external experts make the decisions, we risk becoming paternalistic and this often inhibits lasting change. People become dependent on foreign or external support and lose the motivation to take initiative which affects their self-esteem and self-confidence.

Shift the Power

This way of working is also in line with the desire of Wilde Ganzen and other development organisations to shift the balance of power. Where currently too much power is in the hands of donors and international NGOs, it should be shifted to actors that are close to the specific problem that we attempt to overcome.

Intrinsic motivation

Practice shows that the extent to which organisations involve the community in their activities is diverse. Most of our local partner organisations agree that if we want to involve individuals, households or communities, we have to start by getting them motivated. And that can almost only be achieved by appealing to their intrinsic motivation.

[Read more](#) about motivating and mobilising communities in our blog.

Who are the people from the community?

By community, we mean concerned citizens, parents acting together, a neighbourhood aid organisation or, for example, a school board. They are people who have a common interest in tackling a problem. In addition, you have stakeholders.

In practice

In a rural village in Kenya, the primary school is bursting at the seams. An extra classroom needs to be built. The school management and the parents' council are working together to get it done. Together they form 'the community'.

In every project, you have people who have an interest. The government wants to have a say in it. Local residents want to know how big the school is going to be. And of great importance are the pupils themselves and their parents. They are the ones who will ultimately benefit most from the expansion. It is important to create as much support as possible and to ensure that all interests are equally weighted.

The participation ladder

For a project to run smoothly, Wilde Ganzen always works with a local partner organisation (LPO), which is responsible for the whole project cycle. The involvement of the community can be arranged in various ways. We have chosen to classify them into the following five levels (according to the participation ladder theory):

Level 1: Inform

The local partner organisation informs stakeholders about planned projects and activities. Informing can take place through several channels: e.g. an information meeting or brochure. Participation is passive rather than active, there is no room for input - and thus ownership - of the stakeholders.

Level 2: Consultation

The local partner organisation discusses options with stakeholders and their opinions are sought. Providing active moments for feedback allows stakeholders to give input and inform the LPO about local considerations. Power and control remain with the local partner organisation, who makes the final decision.

Level 3: Deciding together

The local partner organisation encourages stakeholders to come up with their own ideas and help decide on the route to follow. They are consulted. Through for example committees or participatory activities, decisions are made jointly. Stakeholders have the opportunity to become co-owners of the process.

Level 4: Acting together

The local partner organisation fulfils the role of partner or facilitator. Stakeholders are involved in all stages of the process: not only do the different stakeholders here decide together what the best solution is, but they also take ownership or form partnerships to implement it. There is an equal distribution of power.

Level 5: Self-organisation

Here, ownership lies fully with the stakeholders. Support takes place within frameworks of grants, advice and support. Power and control rest entirely with central stakeholders.

Change the Game Academy offers a handy [toolkit](#) on this roadmap for partner organisations abroad.

How to tackle this? – The role of the local partner organisation

Experience shows that community participation requires extra attention in the preparation phase around an initiative.

Here are five key steps you can apply - or may already be applying - to participatory work:

1. Map (and unite) all stakeholders

Everyone needs to be on the same page. A stakeholder analysis helps with this.

2. Connect with stakeholders' wants and needs

Listen to priorities. Do participatory action research to understand wants and needs. This will increase your support and strengthen your legitimacy.

3. Involve all stakeholders from start to finish

Everyone needs to be heard. Ideally, the community plays a leading role, not only in planning, but also in implementation and evaluation.

4. Make clear, transparent and written agreements with all stakeholders

Make sure agreements are properly recorded.

5. Stimulate, motivate and facilitate

Through open communication people are mobilised and motivated. Encourage them to shape their desired change themselves.

What Wilde Ganzen can do for you

Wilde Ganzen wants to contribute to a world in which people in poverty are more self-reliant in their basic needs. Self-reliance also refers to the extent to which communities are self-managing and (can) make their needs known towards and in cooperation with local partner organisations.

We support local partner organisations that work with the community on sustainable poverty reduction. We encourage organisations that only inform the people concerned or limit their influence to consultation to increase their efforts to more participation of the community. This requires specific competences of the local partner organisations to organise and facilitate the participatory process. Therefore, in addition to co-financing for initiatives, we can also use co-financing for organisational development. Or we (partly) finance participative evaluations.

Want to know more?

Please visit our website www.wildeganzen.org.

Toolkits

[Change the Game Academy](#)

Do you and your partner want to map out who makes up the community and which stakeholders are involved? Then you can use these (free) toolkits:

[Stakeholder Analysis](#)

[Module Mobilising Support](#)

[Participatory Action Research](#)

[VCA Toolbox](#)

Self-confidence and a change in mindset in the community are essential for community participation. The Vision, Commitment and Action method (VCA) provides organisations with concrete tools and techniques to make the community aware of its own capacities as well as responsibilities.

[Open Space](#)

Plan your activities through 'Open Space', where all stakeholders can contribute to success in an energetic and collaborative way. Please find an introduction to 'Open Space' in this link.

[CLD Assessment Tool](#)

This tool allows organisations to test the extent to which their projects and programmes are actually aligned with community-led development.

[Power Awareness Tool](#)

Do you also want to shift power in your relationship with your partner or community? Then use the Power Awareness Tool developed by Wilde Ganzen in collaboration with Partos.

[Quality Appraisal Tool](#)

A simple tool that uses thirteen questions to help organisations understand the strengths and weaknesses of their Monitoring & Evaluation system in the context of community-led development.

[The Most Significant Change](#)

Evaluate project outcomes with stakeholders.