Participation; Even in Monitoring and Evaluation?

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1.0 Introduction

Social and development programs often struggle to achieve genuine transparency, multi-directional accountability, and sustainable outcomes. Participatory monitoring and evaluation (P-M&E) has emerged as a promising approach to address these challenges by actively involving community members, participants, and local stakeholders in assessing the progress of the project. This paper will assess if such inclusive engagement fosters transparency, accountability, and sustainability through the increased community ownership.

A previous analysis of a street-crew (gang-) violence intervention initiative, Project Restore: Bedstuy (PRB), examined how its hybrid Needs- and Rights-based approach helped shift a marginalized neighborhood from a cycle of systemic harm toward a protective, self-sustaining cycle of positive community impacts.[1] That paper addressed the programmatic mechanisms for this shift from cyclical harm to sustaining health. This included removing barriers (providing basic income), supplanting safety, and status needs via credible staff and trauma reconciliation, and expanding leaders' capacity and impact through institutional exposure and scaffolded community engagement. What it did not address, and what this paper also does not treat at length, is the status quo from which programs like PRB must operate. The communities served by PRB exist under conditions of persistent structural neglect: poverty, housing instability, gun violence, substance misuse, and over-policing that compound and reinforce one another, impacting generations.[2] This has forced younger and younger 'youth' to

[1] *Gabriel Feldman, "From Unmet Needs to Collective Rights Realization: Project Restore Bed-Stuy" (Columbia University, 2025).*
[2] *Burrows, B. (2024). Transformative Contact: Addressing Individual, Relational, and Structural-Interactive Change Through the Justice Ambassadors Youth Council Program (Doctoral dissertation, University of Massachusetts Amherst), 5–6.*

step into adult shoes with largely underdeveloped brains.[3] [&] [4] These factors do not exist in isolation; they interact in ways that are both cumulative and exponential, eroding the subsistence and resilience of communities that have been systematically denied investment. System contact itself acts as a 'threat multiplier'[5] for the very conditions that contribute to crime, leaving root causes—like the decades of red-lining, and or the inability to meaningfully access usual low-interest credit avenues—largely unaddressed.[6] PRB is not a solution to these problems. No community violence intervention, however well designed or even participatory, can, by itself, undo generations of disinvestment. What PRB can do, as argued in the previous paper and in the pages that follow, is more limited but still important (arguably more so in the interim specifically *because* of the reality of disinvestment): it can help restore the conditions under which trust, social cohesion, mutual accountability, and residents' capacity to act on their own behalf might reemerge. These communities require more than programs of interruption or repair. They require coordinated government efforts, like that of the G.I. Bill[7], where low interest rates on mortgages and business loans, and stipends for college, allowed the (predominantly white) middle class to grow and expand. They need sustained economic and social investment in housing, employment, education, and public infrastructure at the federal and the state level. This means mayors, governors, and city and state councilmembers committing to funding and coordinating long-term plans, i.e., housing, employment, education, public infrastructure, whose returns will not arrive within a single term, or even a career. This reality is not a reason to withhold the investment; it is

[3] *Nitin Gogtay, Jay N. Giedd, Leslie Lusk, Kiralee M. Hayashi, Deanna Greenstein, A. Catherine Vaituzis, Tom F. Nugent III, et al., "Dynamic Mapping of Human Cortical Development during Childhood through Early Adulthood," Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 101, no. 21 (May 25, 2004): 8174–79, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0402680101.*

[4] *Burton, Linda. "Childhood Adultification in Economically Disadvantaged Families: A Conceptual Model." Family Relations 56, no. 4 (October 2007): 329–45. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2007.00463.x.*

[5] *Satchit Balsari, Caroline Dresser, and Jennifer Leaning, "Climate Change, Migration, and Civil Strife," Current Environmental Health Reports 7 (2020): 404–14, https://doi.org/10.1007/s40572-020-00291-4.*

[6] *Coppola &Daniels, supra note [X],at Introduction.*

[7] formally the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944

perhaps one of the better indicators of meaningful social health and value, and what distinguishes governance from politics.

Without that funding, the space initiatives like PRB create will almost inevitably collapse under the weight of the very abandonment they are asked to confront. The analysis that follows should be read with this constraint clearly in view.

By centering traditionally marginalized groups in the evaluative process, the paper seeks to understand whether P-M&E builds mutual trust, promotes inclusion, and empowers local participants with greater decision-making and problem-solving agency. Such collaborative processes are believed to amplify intended results and to capture incidental and unexpected outcomes that might otherwise be overlooked. This paper argues that PRB's case demonstrates what the literature anticipates but rarely documents: that when participation is designed into M&E (not grafted onto it), it fosters multi-directional accountability, sustained empowerment, and systemic change that outlasts the program itself. P-M&E is not *supplementary* to Rights realization; it is a primary mechanism through which Rights realization sustains.

2.0 Literature Review

The existing literature establishes why participation matters and what it can provide. What it does less often is document, in granular terms, how it functions within M&E specifically, and what happens when it does. Together, these dimensions shape the outputs, outcomes, and impacts. Much of the literature notes that technical results alone are not enough—the processes by which results are achieved determine whether improvements 'stick' and Rights are realized.[8]

[8] *Ebrahim, A. (2003). Accountability in practice: Mechanisms for NGOs. World Development, 31(5), 813–829.* https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X(03)00014-7; *Snyder, J. (2022b). Human rights at a time of global stalemate. In Human rights for pragmatists: Social powerin modern times (pp. 239–254). Princeton University Press.* https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691231532-011

Participatory approaches are emphasized as a catalyst for deeper change, helping shift power dynamics and generate ripple effects beyond immediate project scope. This review synthesizes insights from recent studies on how M&E, transparency, accountability, and especially participation, can contribute to—or hinder—the direct and indirect realization of Rights, multi-directional accountability (downward, lateral, upward), and the sustainability of outcomes. It also identifies gaps where such approaches remain superficial or absent.

2.1 Accountability, Learning, and Transparency

M&E systems are intended to track progress and inform decisions, but their orientation greatly affects outcomes. Evaluations often have a "dual purpose" of upward accountability and learning,[9] but these purposes often conflict. NGO[10] accountability skews heavily upward to donors, while downward accountability mechanisms "remain comparatively underdeveloped."[11] Funders use evaluation "more as a control and justification mechanism… than as a tool for learning,"[12] emphasizing short-term outputs over processes needed for long-term change.[13] Ebrahim notes that the audience of disclosed information determines accountability direction, "upward to donors, downward to clients and communities, or internally," and that increasingly reporting to donors has "limited use for enhancing downward accountability" if communities cannot access or act on the information.[14] Locally driven monitoring achieves greater legitimacy and strengthens downward accountability precisely because it places evaluative authority closer to the people affected. Genuine learning requires trust and candid reflection, which is difficult when evaluations become high-stakes judgments.[15] Integrating participatory and

[9] *Reinertsen, H., Bjørkdahl, K., & McNeill, D. (2022). Accountability versus learning in aid evaluation: A tension unresolved? Evaluation, 28(1), 7–25.* https://doi.org/10.1177/13563890211053094
[10] *Substantively similar to Community Based Organizations (CBOs)*
[11] *Ebrahim, "Accountability in Practice," 824.*
[12] *Ibid., 818.*
[13] *Ibid., 815.*
[14] *Ibid., 824.*
[15] *Reinsersten, "Accountability versus learning," 372.*

learning-oriented approaches ensures interventions lead to meaningful change, not just checked boxes.[16]

2.2 Ripple Effect of Participation

Participation is pivotal for transformative outcomes, meaning those affected by programs have genuine decision-making power. Ebrahim outlines participation from sharing information and consulting communities (first-tier participation), involving communities in project activities or contributions (second-tier), negotiating power with communities or giving them veto authority (third-tier), up to initiatives led entirely by people themselves (fourth-tier)[17] Often, NGOs stay at lower tiers or levels—community meetings or labor contributions—that vest "very little decision-making authority" locally, becoming mere "feel-good exercises" without altering power dynamics or accountability. Najam terms this a "sham of participation," translating into a "sham of accountability".[18] Higher-level participation (third- and fourth-tier) empowers communities to shape interventions and ensure accountability, fostering resilient outcomes that address root causes.

Participatory approaches create ripple effects extending beyond immediate project metrics. Merry and Levitt describe how Voices of Women transforms domestic violence victims into advocates by supporting them to become advocates, which, in turn, fosters a "distinct process of politicization and transformation in consciousness".[19] Survivors gain skills and confidence, becoming authority figures who lobby for systemic change, thus sustaining the movement. This participation reframes local issues as Rights violations, influencing institutional

[16] *Ebrahim, "Accountability in Practice," 826-827.*
[17] *Ibid., 818.*
[18] *Ibid., 818-819, 825.*
[19] *Merry, S. E., & Levitt, P. (2017). The vernacularization of women's human rights. In M. Goodale (Ed.), Human rights at the crossroads (pp. 213–227). Oxford University Press. 228.*

accountability.[20] Similarly, White and Pettit discuss participatory monitoring among marginalized Southern Indian communities, where villagers systematically recorded abuses using such tools as visual diaries.[21] This empowered communities to recognize patterns, fostered Rights consciousness, and mobilized collective advocacy. Likewise, Participatory Poverty Assessments evolved from extractive tools into catalysts for enhancing local participation and voice, merging local knowledge with advocacy to shape policy directly.[22]

Participation ensures sustainability and 'stickiness' of outcomes by embedding interventions in local contexts. Stremlau notes bottom-up approaches yield inclusive indicators and foster local ownership, making outcomes more likely to endure and expand.[23] Communities who are meaningfully engaged sustain initiatives after external actors leave, thereby diversifying accountability relationships and promoting resilience and setting precedent for long-term Rights-centered missions.[24]

2.3 Power Dynamics and Rights

Crucially, much of the literature stresses that realizing Rights requires shifting power relations, making participation indispensable. Snyder argues historically, "power leads, rights follow"—Rights advance when the social power of Rights-holders increases, not merely from top-down proclamations.[25] People must organize and build influence so claiming Rights becomes feasible and enforceable. Rights initiatives succeed when they "serve the interests of the

[20] *Merry, S. E., & Levitt, P. (2017). The vernacularization of women's human rights. In M. Goodale (Ed.), Human rights at the crossroads (pp. 213–227). Oxford University Press.*
[21] *White, S., & Pettit, J. (2004). Participatory approaches to wellbeing assessment. WeD Working Paper 08. Wellbeing in Developing Countries (WeD) Research Group, University of Bath. Retrieved from* https://researchportal.bath.ac.uk/en/publications/participatory-approaches-to-wellbeing-assessment
[22] *Ibid., 16.*
[23] *Stremlau, "Developing Bottom-Up Indicators," 1386-1387.*
[24] *Ebrahim, "Accountability in Practice," 824.*
[25] *Snyder, J. (2022a). Power leads, rights follow. In Human rights for pragmatists: Social power in modern times (pp. 1–22). Princeton University Press.* https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691231532-002

majority" and are supported by institutions capable of implementation.[26] Snyder advocates a "mutually supportive tripod" of elite advocacy organizations (upward accountability), mass social movements (downward accountability), and progressive political parties (lateral accountability).[27] Without any one component, Rights gains become fragile. In women's Rights, local NGOs have "vernacularized" global norms, translating them into familiar local practices, reducing resistance and making Rights actionable.[28] However, embedding participatory practices remains challenging due to persistent power asymmetries and reluctance among donors and governments to cede (evaluation) power to communities. *Sustained* participation, however, can foster responsive institutions and a lasting culture of accountability and Rights.[29]

2.4 Literature Review Conclusion

The literature is consistent: where participation is absent or superficial, interventions may produce temporary improvements that fade once external pressure is removed. Where it is present, outcomes are more likely to endure, expand, and generate effects beyond initial targets.[30] As Gasper suggests, Rights-based accountability, attention to basic Needs, and genuine local participation are most effective in alliance.[31] Programs, in fact, do not achieve anything themselves. It is the people interacting with the program who develop the agency to transform their own conditions. PRB's design put these principles into practice. The analysis that follows examines how.

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[26] *Ibid., 4-5.*
[27] *Ibid., 18-19.*
[28] *Merry and Levitt, "Vernacularization of Women's Human Rights," 219.*
[29] *Gasper, D. (2007). Human rights, human needs, human development, human security: Relationships between four international 'human' discourses. Forum for Development Studies, 34(1), 9–43.* https://doi.org/10.1080/08039410.2007.9666364
[30] *Conversely, where monitoring serves only donors, transparency is one-way, accountability flows only upward, and participants are not involved in decisions, improvements tend to be temporary.*
[31] *Gasper, D. (2007). Human rights, human needs, human development, human security: Relationships between four international 'human' discourses. Forum for Development Studies, 34(1), 9–43.* https://doi.org/10.1080/08039410.2007.9666364

A Note On Positionality

I am a white man from an economically privileged background in New York City. I am not from the communities PRB serves, nor have I experienced the systemic harms of incarceration, over-policing, housing insecurity, economic exclusion that shaped participants' lives. In fact, I have materially benefited from many of the very structures and arrangements that have rendered such harms unevenly distributed in the first place. My position is not outside these conditions, but implicated in them. No positionality is neutral. It carries histories, permissions, protections, and limits that shape what one can see, how one is received, and what remains difficult to know.

My involvement came through my role at the Center for Justice, where I contributed to PRB's evaluation and operations and attended programming in Bedstuy 6 days a week throughout the initiative. The participatory methodology described in this paper was not a mitigation of any outsider status; it was the design. Participants determined the evaluation questions and how they were asked, not as consultants to a framework built by the institutions of the stakeholder team, but as authors of the evaluative process.

A paper on participatory processes, written by someone outside the community it describes and published under a single author's name, carries a tension that should be named. But in this case, even the category of single authorship is unstable. My name appears on the paper, but the work itself is fundamentally collaborative, shaped through relationships, dialogue, and forms of collective labor that exceed any one person's claim. But there are two tensions, not one. Táíwò warns against a politics of deference that asks those who have borne the weight of systemic harm to also shoulder the labor of narrating and advocating for its remedy; it "asks the

traumatized to shoulder burdens alone that we ought to share collectively."[32] And Meyerson and Scully's work on tempered radicalism suggests that those who hold insider status within dominant institutions carry a corresponding obligation to leverage that access as a tool for change.[33] My position is not neutral, but it is not solely a limitation. It is also, potentially, a point of access: this paper may reach institutional audiences and policy spaces that would not otherwise engage with the findings it reports. Interpretive authority here rests with me as the author.

The interviews drawn on here were conducted with individuals I worked alongside during PRB's implementation. That relational context enabled a candor and depth not typically available to an outside researcher; it also means the data was generated within existing professional relationships where power dynamics were present. Jason Bostic's contributions as an interviewee and as an intellectual collaborator whose understanding of PRB's participatory mechanism directly shaped the analytical direction of this work exceed what citation captures. Future iterations should explore co-authorship models that more accurately reflect the distribution of intellectual labor in participatory research.

3.0 Methodology

This paper builds on a previous analysis of Project Restore Bedstuy (PRB), which illustrated how its hybrid Needs- and Rights-based approach pushed the transition of the marginalized community from a cycle of systemic harm toward a protective, self-sustaining cycle of positive community impacts.[34] This paper's research focuses specifically on examining

[32] *Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò, Elite Capture: How the Powerful Took Over Identity Politics (and Why You Should Let Go) (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2022).*
[33] *Debra E. Meyerson and Maureen A. Scully, "Tempered Radicalism and the Politics of Ambivalence and Change," Organization Science 6, no. 5 (1995): 585–600.*
[34] *Gabriel Feldman, "From Unmet Needs to Collective Rights Realization: Project Restore Bed-Stuy" (Columbia University, 2025).*

how P-M&E systems—designed and implemented collaboratively with participants—can foster transparency and multi-directional accountability, seeding broader impacts that endure beyond the intervention itself.

Primary data for this analysis includes the comprehensive PRB Evaluation Report[35] and additional PRB program documentation and articles[36], which discusses how participant and community input was integrated into continuous evaluation and iterative program improvement. This literature shows how using the participatory process influenced the direction and the implementation of the program via aspects like the participant-identified measures, feedback loops, and evaluative criteria.

Supplementing this documentation are interviews conducted with Geraldine Downey, Ph.D., a central architect of PRB, and Jason Bostic, a PRB graduate turned scholar, advocate, and program facilitator. The interviews were not merely retroreflective accounts; they were a participatory methodological choice; lessons gleaned *during* the program informed adjustments in real time; programmatic decisions changed in response to mid-point interviews, monitoring quantitative data, and conversations case managers and mentors had with participants. These rooted, nimble responses deepened the interview questions and gave senior staff insights to guide participants. This mixed qualitative approach clarifies how PRB's P-M&E process supported sustained accountability and transparency.

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[35] *Geraldine Downey, Darragh McGee, Gabriel Feldman, Jarrell Daniels, and Brooke Burrows, Project Restore Bed-Stuy: Evaluation Report (New York: Columbia University Center for Justice, 2024).*

[36] *Peter Dixon and Derby St. Fort, "From Punishment to Transformation: Investing in Youth to Build Community Safety," Salzburg Global Seminar, 2025, https://www.salzburgglobal.org/news/latest-news/article/from-punishment-to-transformation-investing-in-youth-to-build-community-safety; Peter Dixon, "New Metaphors, Same Framing: Breaking the Cycle of Punitive Public Safety Policy," Columbia University School of Professional Studies, 2025, https://sps.columbia.edu/news/new-metaphors-same-framing-breaking-cycle-punitive-public-safety-policy.*

4.0 Data and Analysis

4.1 Community-Led Design within an 'Ecology of Support'

Project Restore Bed-Stuy (PRB) was conceived and operated as a community-led initiative, but one uniquely sustained by high-level institutional support and backing. I describe this model as "*third-tier-plus*" participatory, extending Ebrahim's model to name a form of participation that remains community-led while also being materially reinforced by institutional power. The "plus" identifies ceding of government and institutional authority to community actors, as well as meaningful investment and support they provide for what is identified as needed by community members and participants. The program was co-designed by justice-impacted community members alongside public officials at Columbia University's Center for Justice (CfJ).[37] Participation was voluntary, reinforcing genuine buy-in rather than court-mandated compliance.[38] Critically, PRB reversed conventional power dynamics. Although agencies such as the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ), the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office (KCDA), and the NYPD were involved, their roles were carefully restricted to supportive functions, almost as silent partners rather than visible directors of the work. Law enforcement helped identify eligible youth and participated in community events as part of an effort to build trust, but only under strict limits: no surveillance, no information gathering, and no actions that would erode the protected space PRB worked to sustain.[39] Program staff never shared participant information with police unless a young person asked, ensuring that *"leadership, direction, and vision"* remained rooted in the community.[40] This balance of community primacy and institution *"buy-in"* created what was termed an *"Ecology of Support,"*

[37] *Dixon and St. Fort, "From Punishment to Transformation," 2.*
[38] *Ibid.*
[39] *Ibid.*
[40] *Ibid., 3.*

in which multiple stakeholders worked in tandem to support the youth. This coalition included[41] a local nonprofit managing day-to-day engagement, a trauma-focused CBO running healing circles, a civic and youth engagement team leading Life Skills workshops, the university providing M&E research support, and KCDA leveraging a dedicated $2.4 million budget[42] from MOCJ and prosecutorial discretion to assist participants, including intervening to secure housing or expedite legal resolutions when urgent safety Needs arose.[43]. Coppola and Daniels describe this kind of multi-level architecture as an "ecological network;" a web of supportive services and institutions characterized by engagement among state authorities, communities, and individuals entangled in the legal system. Within this framing, programs function as what they term a "two-way street": they transform the lives of individuals and their communities, but they also reshape how the state engages with those it serves. Harm, in this model, is addressed collectively, and justice is pursued through collaboration rather than imposed unilaterally.[44]

4.2 Lived Experience and Credible Messengers as Staff

The majority of PRB's staff were themselves formerly incarcerated or justice-involved[45] and deeply rooted in Brooklyn neighborhoods. This deliberate hiring of *"credible messengers"* created near-immediate trust and cultural resonance. Participants saw mentors and case managers as people who *"have successfully navigated similar challenges"*[46] and could offer authentic, useful guidance.[47] The shared background fostered psychological safety—participants felt

[41] *The coalition partners were Bridge Street Development Corp. (day-to-day engagement), Inside Circle (healing circles), and the Justice Ambassadors Youth Council, a program co-developed by formerly incarcerated, system-impacted, and tenured scholars at CfJ.*
[42] *Downey et al., Project Restore Bed-Stuy: Evaluation Report, 10–11.*
[43] *Ibid., 9.*
[44] *Federica Coppola & Jarrell E. Daniels, Justice Through Proximity: Theoretical Foundations and Practical Applications of Collaborative Justice, 78 Vand. L. Rev. 1947 (2025).*
[45] *71% of staff were from Brooklyn, and 69% had been incarcerated—with over 80% having close family affected by incarceration (Downey et al., 2024, pp. 9)*
[46] *Downey noted in her interview that having "grown adults…who've taken on agency on the streets" in leadership roles helped cultivate the participants' own sense of responsibility and leadership.*
[47] *Downey et al., Project Restore Bed-Stuy: Evaluation Report, 12.*

understood rather than judged—and facilitated honest communication about trauma, crime, and distrust of authorities. Mentors leveraged their credibility to keep the young men involved even through setbacks.[48] Additionally, staff could adeptly navigate institutions on participants' behalf (e.g., obtain IDs or help resolve court fines) because they had personally overcome similar bureaucratic barriers. This exemplified *third-tier-plus* participation by positioning system-impacted individuals not as consultants but as decision-makers and service providers. The result was a relational dynamic, reinforcing trust and open-mindedness toward change.[49] This dynamic is consistent with what desistance research identifies as a strength-based approach to change, in which positive social interactions reduce feelings of estrangement and prompt individuals to reframe their narrative identity—to see themselves as contributors to both their own well-being and that of others. Identity transformation studies within this literature examine how individuals in conflict with the law reshape their self- and public images through social interactions in new prosocial roles, and highlight that making individuals' productive accomplishments visible to the broader community is a specific strategy for facilitating this transformation.[50]

4.3 Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation for Transparency and Accountability

PRB embedded participation in its design and delivery, as well as in its M&E processes. Program youth were not passive research subjects—they played active roles as evaluators, defining success criteria and tracking progress. Early on, participants themselves helped formulate the key evaluation question: *"What do you want to say about this program's impact?"*[51] They brainstormed the outcomes that mattered to them—from personal growth to

[48] *Downey et al., Project Restore Bed-Stuy: Evaluation Report, 10.*
[49] *Ibid., 31.*
[50] *Coppola & Daniels, supra note [X], at [section I.B]; see also Beth Weaver, Offending and Desistance: The Importance of Social Relations 245 (2016); Shadd Maruna, Making Good (2001).*
[51] *Geraldine Downey, interview, transcript, April 2025, 3.*

community safety—and these perspectives shaped the metrics CfJ collected. This P-M&E yielded several benefits. First, it created transparency. Everyone involved knew what was being measured and why. Nothing was hidden from participants: the evaluation wasn't a prescriptive test imposed by outsiders but an elicitive story they co-authored.[52] Downey observed that as the young men *"started to come up with the questions"* and data to assess PRB, it *"pushed them to think of it as their program rather than one imposed from outside."*[53] The youth assumed a sense of ownership for demonstrating results—*"they have to show that it can work"* in their eyes.[54] This fostered upward accountability, as participants strove to prove to authorities that the intervention was effective; holding themselves accountable to the program's goals. Coppola and Daniels term this dynamic "relational accountability": the shared and interconnected responsibilities that different stakeholders hold in reducing harm and promoting systemic change. Unlike traditional individualistic models of accountability, relational accountability seeks to address harm through the lens of interpersonal relationships, community dynamics, and state-citizen interactions. It also expands responsibility for harm beyond individuals and communities by recognizing the state's role in producing and perpetuating the conditions that ultimately lead to such harm.[55] Second, the open flow of information created downward accountability: community members and participants could see that institutional partners were honoring their commitments. I.e., participants requested a meeting with the NYPD, and program leadership made it happen.[56] This responsiveness signaled respect and accountability to the participants' Needs and ideas. Furthermore, PRB's collaborative structure generated lateral

[52] *John Paul Lederach, "Prescriptive and Elicitive: The Critical Tension," in Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation across Cultures (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 63–70.*
[53] *Geraldine Downey, interview, transcript, April 2025, 3.*
[54] *Ibid.*
[55] *Coppola & Daniels, supra note [X], at [section I.C.1]; see also Marie Manikis, Recognising State Blame in Sentencing: A Communicative and Relational Framework, 81 Cambridge L.J. 294, 305 (2022).*
[56] *Ibid.*

accountability among all stakeholders. The combination meant that PRB would not fall into the bucket that Najam noted as "sham accountability."[57] The evaluation team itself had a mix of backgrounds: academic-tenured & doctoral, and private/corporate-sector researchers; humanitarian workers; and formerly incarcerated individuals—a configuration that kept the analysis grounded and multi-perspectival.[58] Throughout implementation, weekly meetings brought together program staff, partners, and youth representatives to review progress data (e.g., attendance, conflicts mediated) and to troubleshoot issues in real time.[59] These meetings were also used to assess meaningful progress. It was here where the team could identify, highlight, and decide to celebrate particular progress or improvements. Many of the positive milestones were identified from these meetings. This meant government, institutions, service providers, and community members were continually answerable to each other, adjusting strategies collaboratively. The P-M&E process also explicitly empowered the youth with new skills. One PRB graduate, who now works at CfJ, Jason B., described how helping with PRB's evaluation (conducting interviews, analyzing outcomes) improved his critical thinking and even gave him a leg up in college courses: *"A lot of stuff that I did at [CfJ] made me more equipped than a regular college student… I'm doing [evaluation] while I'm in school."*[60] He learned to formulate problems, analyze data, and present findings, which he then applied in academic projects.[61] This is an instance of what Coppola and Daniels call "epistemic inclusion": the recognition of historically marginalized individuals as credible experts and valuable knowledge producers. By treating lived experience as a critical source of knowledge for addressing the social and community challenges that contribute to criminalization and legal-system involvement,

[57] *Alnoor Ebrahim, "Accountability in Practice: Mechanisms for NGOs," World Development 31, no. 5 (2003): 818–19.*
[58] *Downey et al., Project Restore Bed-Stuy: Evaluation Report.*
[59] *Ibid.*
[60] *Jason Bostic, interview, transcript, April 2025, 8.*
[61] *Ibid.*

collaborative justice corrects epistemic imbalances between people on different sides of the law, ensuring that experiential knowledge meaningfully informs policies and practices.[62] This capacity-building is a form of empowerment rarely seen in conventional programs. By engaging in evaluation, participants transitioned into roles of *researchers* and *advocates*; able to articulate community Needs as well as program impacts to audiences beyond their immediate circles. In the long run, this cultivates local expertise to sustain change. In fact, after PRB's formal end, alumni continued gathering data on neighborhood safety and mediating conflicts, positing insights to local officials—a legacy of multi-directional accountability and transparency that PRB instilled. This was also in concert with participants continuing their Public Safety Working Group advocacy, facilitation, and mediation—work on the ground that kept them informed as they floated between street-level realities and government and institutional spaces, leveraging their richly informed knowledge—of both street dynamics and M&E metrics, outcomes, and impacts—to challenge government personnel, many of whom they were now intimately connected with, for systemic reform and more sustainable funding streams. Since then, several other NYC borough DAs have expressed significant interest in utilizing the model in their districts to address similar retaliatory cycles of youth violence.

4.4 Empowerment and Rights Realization

The participatory structure of PRB was not an end in itself; it was a vessel for substantive individual and collective empowerment. One immediate outcome was the fulfillment of concrete Needs *as* Rights. Rather than viewing the young men as clients receiving aid, PRB treated them as *"citizens with denied Rights"* whose basic entitlements had long been unmet.[63] For example, obtaining legal identification was framed as realizing their *Right to Recognition Before the Law*,

[62] *Coppola & Daniels, supra note [X], at [section I.C.3].*
[63] *Feldman, "From Unmet Needs, to Collective Rights Realization." 3.*

and securing housing or income as fulfilling their *Right to an Adequate Standard of Living*.[64] Geraldine Downey emphasized that PRB was *"a Rights-based program, with the Rights being reflected in Needs…you have a Right to basic Food and Shelter…to the IDs needed to work…removing obstacles to your Civic Participation."*[65] By June 2023, all 30 participants had government IDs, financial accounts, and stable documentation—tangible restorations of Personhood and Economic Inclusion.[66] These outputs translated into broader outcomes: nearly all secured stable housing or income streams, and many re-enrolled in school or gained employment, exercising Rights to Education and Work.[67] Such gains were reinforced by the participatory ethos—because the youth actively shaped their goals, they were more committed to achieving them (*for instance, setting and pursuing personal 5-year plans with case managers, which would subsequently guide the guest speakers or workshops who were invited to sessions in support of their stated goals*).[68] The participatory model also cultivated collective empowerment and Rights-realization at the community level. In the latter half of the program, PRB youth convened a Public Safety Working Group (PSWG) composed of the participants—particularly leaders from both 'sides'—community members, and institutional stakeholders. This group, led by the youth, met regularly to address neighborhood safety challenges and mediate lingering conflicts. Through the PSWG, the young men stepped forward as community peacebuilders—a striking role reversal from being seen as "perpetrators." The group successfully *"squash[ed] beefs"* among the participant crews and even expanded to involve additional at-risk youth.[69] Members of the PSWG were given an 8-month paid internship with CfJ to continue their

[64] *Ibid., 3-4.*
[65] *Geraldine Downey, interview, transcript, April 2025, 5.*
[66] *Feldman, "From Unmet Needs, to Collective Rights Realization." 3.*
[67] *Feldman, "From Unmet Needs, to Collective Rights Realization."*
[68] *Ibid., 12.*
[69] *Downey et al., Project Restore Bed-Stuy: Evaluation Report, 26.*

community work.[70] Coppola and Daniels argue that collaborative-justice programs can function as points of contact for individuals reintegrating into society; spaces to express their needs, access resources, and reclaim their roles within their communities. Crucially, under this model, individuals are not viewed as passive recipients of services or objects of surveillance but as active participants in reconstructing their social identity, increasing the likelihood of community reacceptance and successful reintegration.[71] As a result, even after the program's official end, the PSWG, which now includes 10 members, having risen to ~25 by the end of 2025, has committed to ending violence within their neighborhoods.[72] They deliver presentations to local schools and organizations on how community-led strategies can improve public safety,[73] advocating PRB's approach and holding public agencies accountable to support such strategies. This program evolution reflects what I referred to as the community's emerging *"Right to Self-determination regarding public safety."*[74] By empowering those most affected by violence to lead prevention. PRB advanced not only individual Rights (like Security of Person), but also the collective right of the Bedstuy community to live in peace and to have a say in how that peace is achieved.[75] The long-term empowerment is evident: participants transformed from marginalized youth to recognized stakeholders whose voices influence policy. The Brooklyn DA, for instance, began consulting PRB alumni on youth violence issues and publicly championing the program's model as a new paradigm for justice.[76] In fact, when a surge of shootings occurred after PRB's pilot, the NYPD *reached out to PRB graduates* for help, rather than resorting to mass arrests, a sign of role reversal and downward accountability to the community's methods.[77] With funding streams

[70] *Ibid.*
[71] *Coppola & Daniels, supra note [X], at [section III.A].*
[72] *Downey et al., Project Restore Bed-Stuy: Evaluation Report, 26.*
[73] *Ibid.*
[74] *Feldman, "From Unmet Needs, to Collective Rights Realization," 8.*
[75] *Ibid., 6.*
[76] *Geraldine Downey, interview, transcript, April 2025, 1-2.*
[77] *Geraldine Downey, interview, transcript, April 2025, 2.*

being cauterized, these kinds of mindset shifts risk being wasted if sustained investment does not follow. Ultimately, PRB's participatory structure improved the likelihood that impacts endure beyond the pilot's end.

4.5 Conditions for Transformation

Underlying PRB's success were certain psychosocial conditions intentionally cultivated through its participatory, community-rooted approach. Carol Dweck's framework on human motivation and self-coherence is instructive here: individuals can only truly embrace change when they experience a basic sense of safety, a feeling of belonging, and a belief in their own efficacy or control.[78] PRB's program design aimed to foster all three. Psychological safety was established by creating an environment of trust and consistency. The youth knew that PRB was a *"safe space for transformation"*—information they shared stayed confidential, and neither staff nor policies/protocols would penalize them for setbacks.[79] This safety was reinforced by staff consistency and the absence of coercion (as mentioned, participation was voluntary, eliminating fear of punishment for non-compliance). One participant shared that prior to PRB, he never revealed his true self for fear of ridicule or surveillance, but in PRB's groups, he felt *"able to express myself"* without judgment.[80] That newfound sense of security enabled him to open up about personal interests and trauma, which was the first step toward growth. Belonging was nurtured through group-based activities and a culture of unconditional acceptance, buttressed by the "realness" of the staff, which meant that none of it was performative. PRB brought youth from rival crews into an inclusive space, and, via the PSWG, eventually, together to work toward common goals. This structure satisfies what Allport's contact hypothesis identifies as the

[78] *Carol S. Dweck, "From Needs to Goals and Representations: Foundations for a Unified Theory of Motivation, Personality, and Development," Psychological Review 124, no. 6 (2017): 689–719.*
[79] *Dixon and St. Fort, "From Punishment to Transformation," 2.*
[80] *Jason Bostic, interview, transcript, April 2025, 1.*

conditions for successful intergroup contact: equal status among participants, common goals, cooperative (non-competitive) engagement, and ***institutional support***. Coppola and Daniels argue that by embracing these conditions, collaborative justice fosters mutual humanization by breaking down prejudice and social distance through close dialogue, cooperation, and institutional backing. This process enables individuals to transcend their assigned social roles and recognize each other as equal contributors to the collective good.[81]

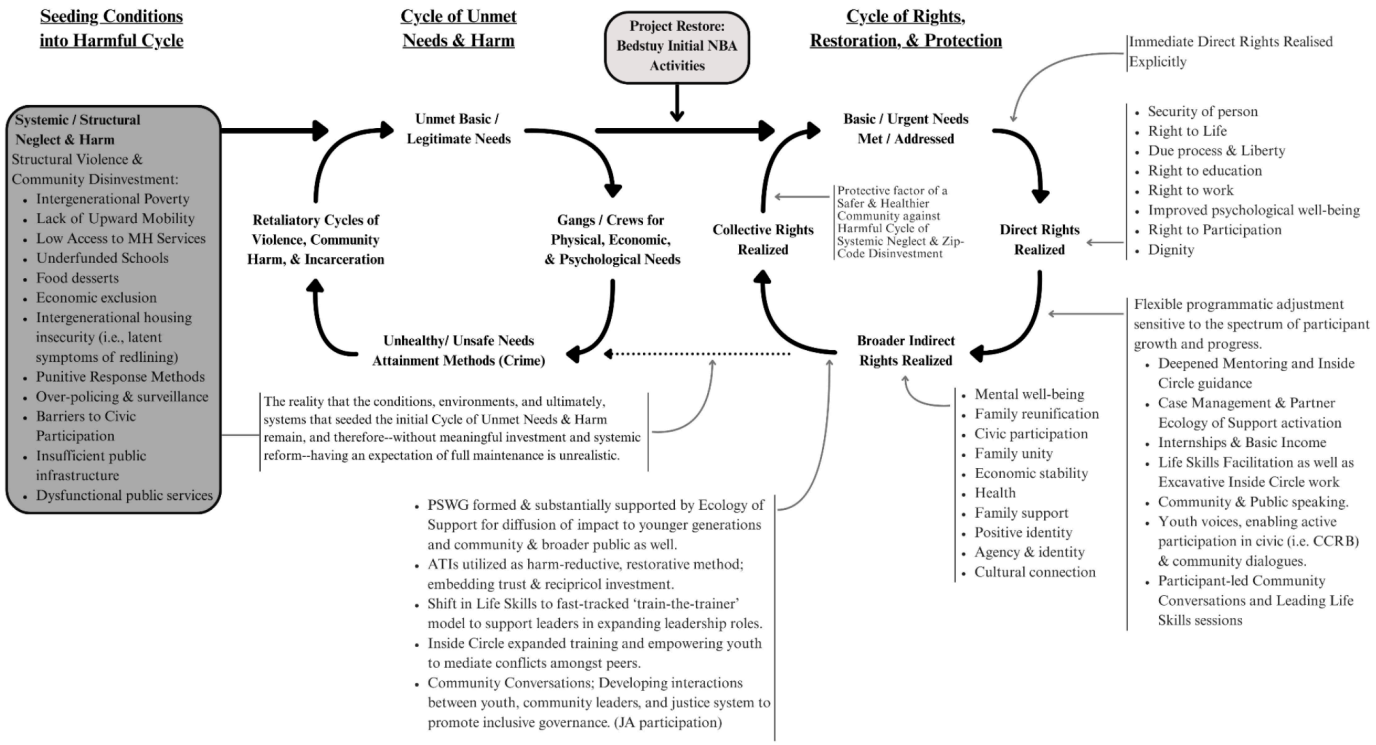
Jason B. recounted how engaging in Life Skills (LS) and healing circles allowed him to shed the tough façade he wore on the streets and find kinship: positive behaviors that were "deemed not cool" in the neighborhood became sources of pride within the PRB group, and peers began *"prais[ing] [each other] for the positive things they did."*[82] This affirmation was novel for some of the youth who were used to primarily negative attention. Finally, PRB promoted agency and control for the participants. Youth were engaged as decision-makers in their own development plans and in program governance. They set personal goals (with social workers' help) and co-designed the steps to achieve them, rather than having goals handed down by funders via compulsory programmatic/funding expectations. In community meetings, their ideas drove action—e.g., when participants suggested a session with police or a community basketball or cookout event—PRB staff worked to implement those ideas.[83] This conveyed to the young men that they had real influence over their environment. Over time, this experience of control translated into a greater internal sense of control: participants started seeing themselves as active agents of change rather than powerless victims. Downey observed a dramatic shift in mindset, from a fatalistic *"it is what it is"* attitude at intake to a more hopeful outlook where

[81] *Coppola & Daniels, supra note [X], at [section I.C.2]; see also Thomas F. Pettigrew & Linda R. Tropp, A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory, 90 J. Personality & Soc. Psych. 751 (2006).*
[82] *Geraldine Downey, interview, transcript, April 2025, 6.*
[83] *Ibid., 3.*

youth felt *"they could do more"* with their lives.[84] Several even took on facilitation roles (e.g., co-leading LS or mediating peers' disputes), further reinforcing their sense of competence and leadership. Figure 1 illustrates how these supportive conditions helped catalyze a transition from a Cycle of Harm to a Cycle of Growth and Rights Fulfillment.

Figure 1[85]*: PRB's third-tier-plus participatory model bridged the "Cycle of Unmet Needs & Harm" (below)—characterized by structural neglect, unsafe survival strategies, and retaliatory violence, and the "Cycle of Rights, Restoration & Protection" (right) in which basic Needs are met, direct Rights are realized, and empowered youth sustain the community safety they co-authored.* PRB's data underscore that meaningful transformation requires more than services; it requires a context that addresses unmet, fundamental Needs. By coupling a community-led, participatory structure with high-level support, PRB helped participants feel safe, valued, and in control, allowing them to realize Rights for themselves and their community.

Figure #1: Transition from Cycle of Harm to Cycle or Protected Rights



5.0 Conclusion

PRB demonstrates that a deeply participatory design[86]—especially one built on P-M&E—can drive meaningful, scalable, and systemic change. From the outset, PRB implemented a "third-tier-plus" participation model that placed community leadership at its core while leveraging institutional support. In practice, this meant the program was co-designed and guided by those directly affected, even as partners such as the DA and Columbia provided resources and infrastructure. Participatory structures were at every level of PRB—from hiring staff from the community, to designing and altering programmatic parts, to interacting with funders—ensuring that leadership, direction, and vision remained community-centered. By combining grassroots insight with institutional buy-in, PRB created an "Ecology of Support" in which multiple stakeholders worked in tandem and community voices carried authority across decision-making tiers.

A cornerstone of this approach was PRB's P-M&E, which seeded multi-directional accountability and transparency throughout the program. Upward, downward, and lateral accountability mechanisms formed as everyone––from youth participants and neighborhood members to service providers and officials—were answerable to each other for 'success.' This transparency accelerated traditional outcomes: immediate Needs were met, and Rights realized more swiftly and credibly because participants themselves helped define and track these goals. At the same time, the inclusive M&E brought emergent impacts that were beyond initial targets. Local NYPD officers began reaching out to PRB graduates for help de-escalating conflicts rather than resorting to mass arrests, and participants co-created the Public Safety Working Group to

[86] *PRB was co-founded by a formerly incarcerated community leader, a career prosecutor, and a tenured professor who had spent decades teaching in maximum-security prisons. Their shared conviction—that those most impacted by injustice must be co-creators of solutions—shaped every aspect of the program's design.*

continue peacebuilding in their neighborhood. These unplanned outcomes show that authentic participation can amplify results while sparking spontaneous, systemic ripple effects.

PRB's participatory approach was not symbolic; it was foundational to the program's effectiveness. The complexity it introduced in coordination of inclusive governance and feedback loops, building trust and adaptability that a top-down model could not, was worth it. Future research should examine the push-and-pull of community and what it means to have to name 'participation' for marginalized groups, but not for majority groups already receiving the nuanced support of institutions. This is not a hindrance to this work; it is a critical factor in long-term success.

The case of PRB illustrates that participatory monitoring and evaluation, done authentically and comprehensively, is compulsory for lasting success. Participants as real partners in evaluation and implementation lead to genuine empowerment, which lays the groundwork for transformation, including structural transformation. Looking ahead, other development and justice initiatives would do well to adapt similar participatory frameworks as a strategy to undo marginalization and reduce reliance on reactive, 'after-the-fact' interventions. Ultimately, participation (*democracy*) is not an accessory to programming—it is infrastructure for justice. This aligns with the collaborative-justice framework's grounding in deliberative democracy; a form of governance that places people at the center of decision-making and provides them with a more direct route to participate in decisions that affect their lives. As Coppola and Daniels argue, incorporating diverse perspectives into policymaking fosters transparency and cultivates shared ownership of justice processes, empowering all stakeholders as agents of both legal and social change.[87] By treating ***community engagement as foundational*** infrastructure, future programs can build more just, resilient systems that uphold dignity and agency for all involved.

[87] *Coppola & Daniels, supra note [X], at [section III.B].*

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Appendix

Screenshots of all figures follow for reference

Figure #1: Transition from Cycle of Harm to Cycle or Protected Rights

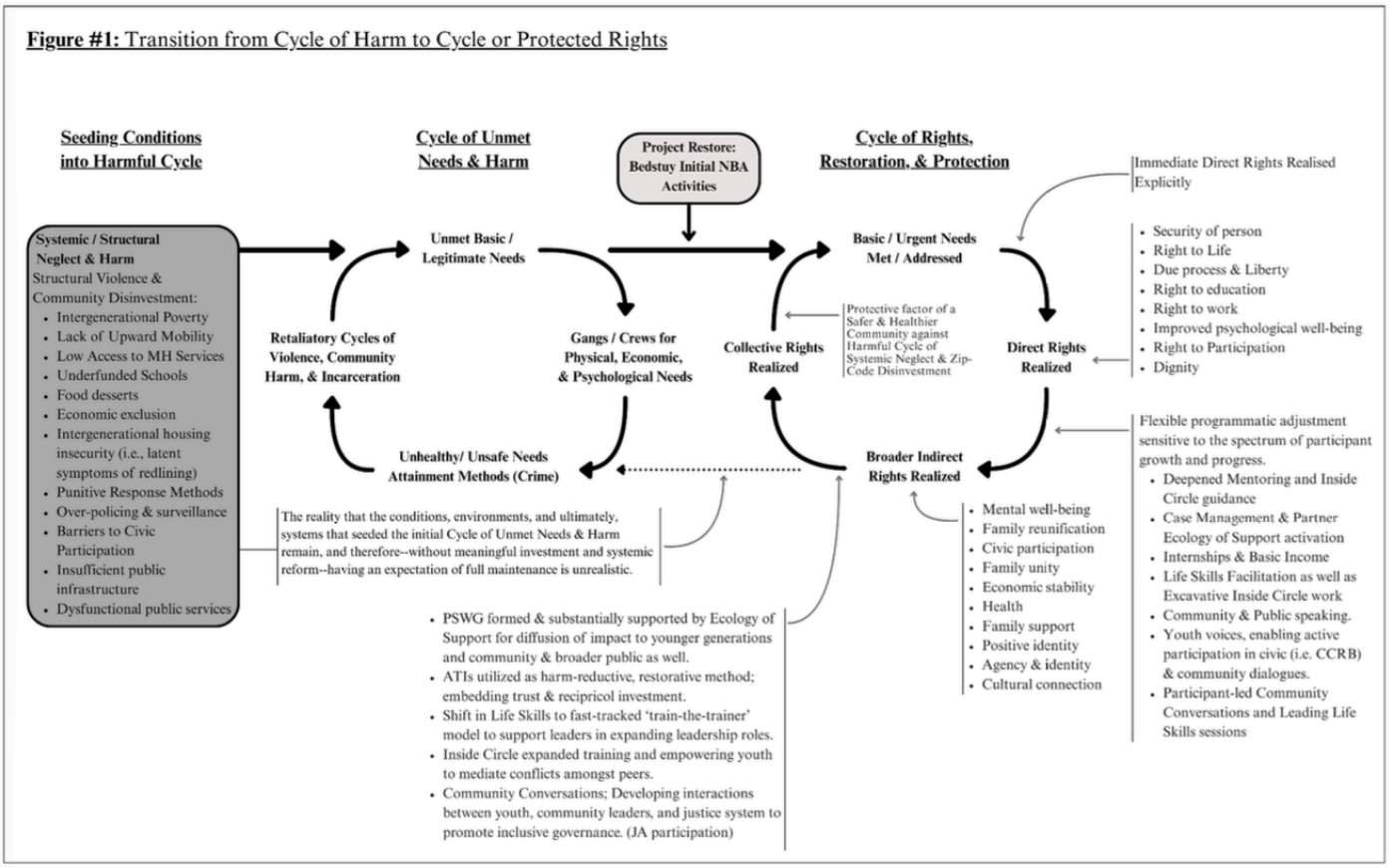

Figure #2: Logistical Framework - Needs to Rights to Fortified Retainment

Unmet Needs	Inputs PRB NBA Activities	Outputs Basic/ Urgent Needs Met	Translation to Immediate Rights	Outcomes Direct Rights Realized (Explicit)	Inputs PRB RBA Activities	Outcomes Indirect Rights Realized (Implicit)	Inputs PRB RBA Activities	Impact Collective Rights Realized	Impact & Input PRB RBA Participant/ Youth-Led Activities	Sustained Impact Protecting Positive Cycles
Safety from violence (living in fear; unsafe)	Initial engagemnt w/drivers of violence; Keeping them Busy and off the street; Providing Safe Spaces **Mentorship & Case Management**	Immediate physical safety; safe environment		**Security of person; Life** (freedom from violence; no incarceration) **(UDHR Art. 3; ICCPR Art. 6, 9)**	Credibility established via reliable, caring interactions, utilizing trusted community mentors to mediate interpersonal conflicts. **Deepened Mentoring and Inside Circle guidance**	**Mental well-being** (freedom from fear; trauma healing); **Family reunification** (restored relationships) **(ICESCR Art. 12; ICCPR Art. 23)**	(PSWG): Support of diverse group; rival leaders, credible staff, & Partners to strategize sustained community safty.	**Public safety/peace** (community free of violence, collective security) **(UDHR Art. 3, ICCPR Art. 9)**	**Ongoing conflict mediation; PSWG sustained**: Continuation and institutionalization of conflict-resolution mechanisms to preserve long-term peace and safety.	**Ongoing peace capacity** (PSWG mediating conflicts, violence-free environment supports future safety)
Justice & legal resolution (warrants, risk of imprisonment)	KCDA collaboration; Diversion of cases for chance to take advantage of PRB	Legal protection; toward resolved warrants/cases; avoiding incarceration		**Due process & liberty** (fair trials; diversion from prison) **(UDHR Art. 9-11; ICCPR Art. 9, 14)**	Case manager support resolving legal issues; clearing barriers to civic trust & engagemnt **Case Management & Partner Ecology of Support activation**	**Civic participation** (engaging with authorities; voice in community); **Family unity** (present fathers/ sons) **(ICCPR Art. 23; ICESCR Art. 10)**	ATIs: Facilitating partnerships with law enforcement, community organizations, and residents for restorative justice ATIs where appropriate.	**Community self-determination** (participatory justice, collective agency in safety) **(ICESCR Art. 1; ICCPR Art. 1, 25)**	**Institutionalization of PRB model**: Replication and embedding of PRB's community-centric, diversion-focused approach within local justice and civic structures.	**Institutional reform** (shifts in DA/NYPD approach, PRB model replication ensuring needs-based support)
Education & jobs (dropouts; unemployed)	Salaried Employment; Internships; Structure & Routine; GED support **Life Skills & Internships & Basic Income**	Income stability; Education engagment; Employment		**Right to education** (GED, school enrollment) **(UDHR Art. 26; ICESCR Art. 13)**; **Right to work** (jobs, internships) **(UDHR Art. 23; ICESCR Art. 6)**	Personal and professional mentoring; 2nd round of internships, focused on career paths; building confidence, employment readiness, & personal growth. **Internships & Basic Income**	**Economic stability** (income, savings, better housing); **Health** (less stress, routine); **Family support** (ability to provide) **(UDHR Art. 25; ICESCR Art. 11, 12)**	Participants urged to act as positive role models; to be the next gen. of credible leaders toward broader community progress.	**Community development** (lower poverty & crime; educated workforce); **Right to development** (social progress through youth empowerment) **(ICESCR Art. 1)**	**Employer & school partnerships**: Establishing lasting collaborations with employers and educational institutions to sustain economic stability and opportunities for youth.	**Positive economic cycle** (reduced poverty, more investment and opportunities for youth, model scaled in other areas)
Mental Health (trauma, dysregulation)	Healing circles; trauma counseling **Mentoring, Life Skills, & Inside Circle**	Emotional healing; Trusted relationships		**Improved psychological well-being; Renewed sense of dignity**	Relatable, applicable guidance on emotional management and decision-making from mentors. **Expanded Mentoring & Life Skills Facilitation as well as Excavative Inside Circle work**	**Positive identity; emotional regulation**	Training and empowering youth to mediate conflicts amongst peers, to directly reduce community-level violence.	**Collective healing; reduced violence**	**Community restorative practices continued**: Embedding restorative, trauma-informed approaches within community structures and practices.	**Trauma-informed community culture**
Belonging & voice (stigmatized, voiceless youth)	Non-judgmental staff; participatory design; consistency irrespective of participants' initial engagement or 'success.'	Status, confidence, agency, and voice: **Self-coherence**		**Participation** (youth in program design, say in public affairs) **(UDHR Art. 21; ICCPR Art. 25)**; **Dignity** (respect, agency restored) **(UDHR Art. 1)**	Community & Public speaking. Cultivating leadership skills and amplifying youth voices, enabling active participation in community dialogues. **Participant-led Community Conversations and Leading Life Skills sessions**	**Agency & identity** (self-worth; "right to have rights" mindset); **Cultural connection** (rejoining community/family life); **Mental health** (trauma addressed) **(UDHR Art. 22, ICESCR Art. 15)**	Community Conversations; Developing interactions between youth, community leaders, and justice system to promote inclusive governance. (JA participation)	**Collective empowerment** (inclusive governance, youth seen as community assets); **Social cohesion** (renewed social contract) **(ICESCR Art. 1; UDHR Art. 27)**	**Ongoing youth involvement in civic life**: Ensuring sustained engagement of youth in community leadership, governance, and decision-making processes, creating lasting empowerment and accountability.	**Sustained civic engagement** (youth leaders/mentors remain active; community monitors its needs); **Local ownership** (rights practices embedded in culture, ensuring long-term support for basic needs)

Citation Key:

UDHR: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

ICCPR: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)

ICESCR: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)

Description:

This table outlines the progression from Unmet Basic Needs of high-risk youth through specific Project Restore Bedstuy (PRB) interventions, to the realization of Individual and Collective Human Rights, and finally, to the expected establishment of self-reinforcing Cycles of Community Stability and Well-being. Each row represents a thematic domain—safety, justice, education, mental health, and social inclusion—demonstrating PRB's holistic, rights-oriented approach (RBA) activated by an initial needs-based approach (NBA). Key human rights frameworks referenced include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). This structured progression maps out how addressing immediate practical needs directly with sustained, intentional engagement can support individual rights fulfillment, indirectly fosters broader personal rights and community coherence, and ultimately, can institutionalize protective factors, practices, and policies that can sustain long-term community resilience and security.

Figure #3: Rights Identified – Direct, Explicit, Indirect, and Implicit

Explicit Rights PRB Directly Fulfills

PRB's core services correspond clearly to certain fundamental rights. These rights were directly and deliberately advanced by PRB's program design (even if PRB did not label them as such):

Right	How PRB Fulfilled This Right
Right to Life, Liberty and Security of Person UDHR, Art. 3; ICCPR, Art. 6 & 9	PRB's primary goal was to reduce gun violence and keep participants safe, directly protecting their lives and personal security (Downey et al., 2024). By de-escalating conflicts and preventing retaliatory shootings, PRB helped ensure that no one is arbitrarily deprived of life or security . In practical terms, community safety improved (shootings dropped ~28% in the target precincts), meaning both PRB interns and their neighbors could live free from deadly violence. PRB also kept all 30 young men out of jail during the program, preserving their liberty by preventing criminal involvement.
Right to Education UDHR, Art. 26; ICESCR, Art. 13	PRB fulfilled the right to education, which guarantees everyone access to learning and personal development. Participants engaged in life-skills classes, tutoring, and were supported in continuing their schooling or vocational training (Downey et al., 2024). By reconnecting youth who were "disconnected from education" to learning opportunities (Downey et al., 2024), PRB met this right's aim of education for the full development of the person.
Right to Work (and to Fair Conditions) UDHR, Art. 23(1); ICESCR, Art. 6 & 7	PRB provided paid internships and job training, directly enabling the right to work – the right of everyone to gain a living by freely chosen work . Interns earned a basic income while learning job skills, which not only gave them immediate employment but also improved their future employability. This aligns with the obligation to ensure "the opportunity to gain [one's] living by work" . PRB's supportive work environment, with mentorship and a living stipend, reflects "just and favourable conditions of work" and a wage worthy of human dignity, consistent with international labor standards.
Right to an Adequate Standard of Living (incl. Housing) UDHR, Art. 25(1); ICESCR, Art. 11	PRB addressed basic needs integral to an adequate standard of living. It helped participants obtain stable housing and income, crucial for "health and well-being… including food, clothing, housing and medical care". For example, staff assisted those at risk of homelessness in finding temporary housing. The program's stipend and connections to social services allowed these young men to afford food and other necessities, embodying the right to living conditions sufficient for themselves and their families. In short, PRB ensured participants weren't left destitute, but had the essentials of a dignified life.
Right to Health (Physical & Mental Health) ICESCR, Art. 12; UDHR, Art. 25	By providing trauma-informed counseling, healing circles, and access to therapy, PRB advanced the right to the highest attainable standard of health . This right encompasses both physical and mental health. PRB explicitly focused on healing "unhealed trauma" and psychological harm caused by violence (Downey et al., 2024). Participants received emotional support and learned coping skills, which improved their mental well-being – fulfilling the right to health's mandate that everyone should enjoy medical care and health services. Additionally, helping youth avoid violent injury (e.g. avoiding being shot or harmed) protected their physical health. PRB's holistic approach thus ensured participants could attain better health outcomes, consistent with human rights standards.

Implicit Rights PRB Supports Indirectly

Beyond the above, PRB's model implicitly upheld other human rights as a byproduct of meeting participants' needs. These rights were not the stated goals of the program, but PRB's activities helped realize them in practice:

Right	How PRB Indirectly Protected or Fulfilled This Right
Right to Social Security (Social Protection) UDHR, Art. 22; ICESCR, Art. 9	International law recognizes everyone's right to social security – support in times of need . PRB, while NGO-run, functioned as a form of social support for a vulnerable group. The program provided a safety net (a stipend, basic needs assistance, help navigating services) much like social security benefits. By "addressing economic insecurity" and lack of income (Downey et al., 2024), PRB ensured participants had support if unemployed or in crisis, echoing the right to social security's promise of assistance against life's risks (unemployment, poverty, etc.). In essence, PRB filled gaps in the social safety net for these young men, indirectly upholding their right to social protection.
Right to Participation in Community/Public Life ICCPR, Art. 25	PRB's participatory approach gave young community members a voice in shaping the program – a practice aligned with the right to take part in public affairs . Participants were treated as "interns" and partners, invited to provide feedback, help define success, and even adjust programming. This mirrors the human right of everyone to participate in decisions affecting their community. Although not formal political participation (like voting), this inclusion empowered a marginalized group to influence an initiative in their neighborhood. It reflects the spirit of Article 25 ICCPR (the right to participate in governance) applied at a community level. In short, PRB fostered agency and voice – an implicit recognition of the participants' right to be heard in matters of public concern (in this case, community safety and development).
Right to Equality and Non-Discrimination UDHR, Art. 2; ICCPR, Art. 26	PRB advanced equal rights by focusing on young men of color impacted by systemic and interpersonal violence – individuals who often face social exclusion and discrimination. The right to equality guarantees all people the same rights and opportunities "without distinction of any kind, such as race, social origin, or other status". By providing these marginalized youth with education, employment, and healing on an equal basis, PRB worked to level the playing field. It implicitly challenged the discrimination they might otherwise encounter (e.g. in job markets or public services due to criminal records or racial bias). In practice, PRB affirmed that these men are equal in dignity and rights, deserving the same investment and chances as anyone else. This commitment to non-discrimination is in line with UDHR Art. 2 and ICCPR Art. 26, even if PRB never explicitly cited those laws.

Collective Rights Engaged by PRB's Model

PRB's impact touches on collective rights. These rights aren't always explicitly named in the main human rights treaties, but they are recognized in principle (or normatively) and emerge from fulfilling individual rights at scale. PRB's strategy of meeting individual needs in turn promoted these broader, collective entitlements:

Collective Right	How PRB Engaged or Fulfilled It
Right of a Community to Live in Safety ("Freedom from Fear") – implicit in UDHR preamble and SDG 16	Every community aspires to live free from violence – essentially a right to a safe neighborhood. While no single article of the UDHR or Covenants states this outright, it's implied by the "freedom from fear" that the UN chartered as a fundamental goal . PRB made Bedstuy safer by curbing shootings and conflicts, thus realizing the community's collective right to security. Residents of the 79th and 81st Precincts experienced a tangible increase in safety (a 22% drop in felony assaults during PRB). In effect, the program created conditions in which everyone in the area could more fully enjoy their rights without fear of violence – aligning with the idea that people have a right to peace and public security in their community.
Right of Peoples to Economic & Social Development – ICCPR/ICESCR, Art. 1	International law affirms that "all peoples" have the right to freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development . PRB's community-level work exemplifies this principle. By lifting up individuals – helping them get educated, employed, and civically engaged – PRB contributed to the broader development of the Bedstuy community. Each success story (e.g. a young man obtaining stable work or avoiding incarceration) has ripple effects: families are more stable, neighborhood economic prospects improve, and a culture of positive achievement grows. In this way, PRB supported the community's collective right to improve its social and economic well-being. It's a grassroots fulfillment of the right to development: the community, through a local initiative, gained greater capacity to thrive and determine its future.

THEORY OF CHANGE

Figure #4: