

Impact on the Community

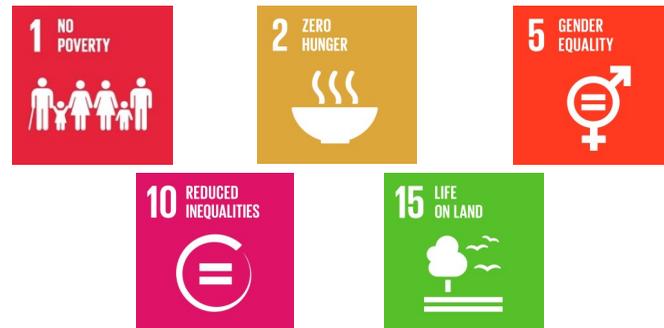
The **social impact** on the community was noted through greater solidarity, mutual support and improved participation in community affairs. A greater number of children were being sent to school and the overall well-being of the community was enhanced. **Politically**, people were better informed, more active in local decision-making and elections, and better able to voice and demand their rights.

The **economic impact** was evident in improved standards of living linked to enhanced financial independence and increased productivity. People were able to take full advantage of local resources for self-reliance, have access to small loans and escape the clutches of the money lenders.

Enhanced gender equity was identified as a significant outcome of women's empowerment. This was particularly noted in the women's groups, where participants associated their economic contribution to the upkeep of the family as having enhanced respect for them as persons and as breadwinners. Women now had greater awareness of their rights, and were able to advocate more effectively for them. Participation helped many to have a more critical approach to social and political realities and to challenge gender-based violence and discrimination.

Relationship to the SDGs

Overall, the grassroots projects directly addressed many of the goals set forth in the 2030 Agenda, including Goals 1, 2, 5, 10, and 15.



Conclusion

The 2030 Agenda is a plan aimed at achieving inclusive, universal development in all its forms: economic, social, and environmental. Our survey was aimed at identifying ways that local economies projects are empowering the persons involved as well as their wider communities, to demonstrate the power and success that bottom-up development projects can have in achieving the milestones set forth in the 2030 Agenda. Overall, the information we obtained from self-reports of grassroots projects demonstrate potential innovative, sustainable models for economic and social development. As such, we strongly recommend that the UN system and member states take these successes and best practices into consideration when developing means for implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

A more comprehensive and in-depth exploration of the information received from the surveys, including ways that the grassroots projects approach the goals set forth in the 2030 Agenda, will be available by Spring 2016 on the NGO Committee on Social Development website:

<http://ngosocdev.org/>

GRASSROOTS MATTER: ANCHORING THE SDGs IN COMMUNITY-BASED ECONOMIES

A summary of responses to a global survey conducted by the Grassroots Taskforce of the NGO Committee on Social Development, in recognition of putting people and planet first in the 2030 Agenda



**54TH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
60TH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

Introduction

The launch of the United Nations 2030 Agenda fits well with the theme of the 54th session of the Commission for Social Development: Rethinking and Strengthening Social Development. It is an optimal time to reflect on lessons learned from efforts to reduce poverty, enhance equality, and strengthen social integration. People-centred approaches must be at the forefront if we are to leave no one behind. The NGO Committee on Social Development here presents results of its 2015 survey on community-based initiatives that have evolved from the bottom up—local, collaborative groups in which people have assessed their own needs and developed economic strategies to meet them. Respondents are from programs that are working at the local level on community-based initiatives. Insights from their experiences are useful in informing governments and civil society on effective practices in alternative, grassroots forms of development that arise organically from within the community. These lessons are essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Community-based initiatives included:

- Participatory economies, such as cooperatives
- Community farming and agricultural initiatives
- Small scale industries and entrepreneurship
- Savings groups, micro finance initiatives, and more

The Survey

A survey containing 12 questions about grassroots projects was circulated globally in March and April of 2015, from which 70 surveys were returned. Survey responses spanned 6 continents, and projects from 26 countries (see map below) were identified.

Initiatives involved anywhere from 6 people creating crafts and jewelry in the United States to as many as 350,920 related to a community development project in India. Projects addressed needs of over 410,000 persons, from newborn to 95 years, and served persons of all educational levels. Though not all projects reported gender of participants, there was a strong emphasis on women-focused projects.



Factors Contributing to Project Effectiveness

Many factors were identified as contributing to effective grassroots projects. Responses fell into three broad categories: a highly participatory, group approach (e.g., regular group meetings and some degree of common background of members); substantial planning with regular monitoring and evaluation of what does and does not work (e.g., training of members was identified as important to build participant capacity); and the selection of a reasonable project that takes local conditions into

account and yields benefits to participants (e.g., using the right kind of crops or animals or making products that are easily sold and use readily available raw materials).

Factors Hindering Effectiveness

Fewer respondents identified factors leading to ineffectiveness. Some are factors beyond easy control of projects, including droughts, poor health or migration of participants, and lack of funding. Poor planning and lack of staff with sufficient knowledge and skills can interfere with success. Others noted lack of participation or commitment to the project, or interference by other outside actors, including government departments.

Sustainability

A critical component of the survey questionnaire addressed the sustainability of the projects. The majority of the respondents did indeed consider their projects to be sustainable. The factors that contributed to the self-assessed sustainability are quite varied and demonstrate the complexity of public/private partnerships, government support and community-based capacity building strength. Of those projects that considered themselves to be sustainable, many stated that they had support of their community leadership, that they are able to replicate the project framework within other similar communities and villages, and that the projects led to economic empowerment. As one would imagine, the reports from projects that did not consider themselves to be sustainable at the time of the survey identified lack of funding and community barriers as the main obstacles to sustainability.

Impact on Individuals

Economic and social benefits of the community-based initiatives on individuals were intertwined, clearly showing that **financial and social inclusion** are closely related and mutually reinforcing. The fact that community members had been able to generate income for themselves and their families enhanced their **self-esteem and confidence**. Some who had experienced stigma due to leprosy or HIV/AIDS now experienced acceptance as contributing members of the community. Many respondents identified **strengthened community relationships** and networks as social benefits of the projects. They also felt empowered by new knowledge, skills, experience and training. Involvement in the initiative had enabled many of them to participate actively in local decision-making and in political life.

Social well-being of participants was also associated with more productivity, **better livelihood strategies and improved living conditions**. In the case of agricultural cooperatives, benefits included improved food security, better nutrition and access to clean water resulting in healthier communities.

Other economic benefits mentioned by micro-finance groups included **having access to loans, developing a culture of saving, and having more security** in times of economic and family crisis. Community members benefitted from economies of scale as they sourced raw materials locally and sold the products locally. In some cases the community-based initiative opened up new opportunities for self-employment and job creation.