Foundation for Sustainable Development :
Investing in Community-based Leaders & Organizations

June 2013 - Mireille Cronin Mather, Executive Director

The Foundation for Sustainable Development (FSD) supports over 300 community-based organizations around the world to address health, social, environmental, and economic issues. Since 1995, FSD has used strengths-based approaches to enable local leaders and organizations to design and manage economically, environmentally and socially sustainable programs. FSD has achieved an 80% sustainability rate of supported projects by adhering to key sustainability factors, and trains current and future global development leaders in its intentional approach.

MISSION: INVESTMENT IN LOCAL LEADERSHIP

FSD was founded in 1995[i] to support local leaders and community organizations in driving their own path towards social and economic development. We partner with over 300 community partners and emerging leaders at the grassroots level who hold the cultural knowledge base to identify and address critical economic, social and environmental sustainability factors.

Like the participants in the 2012 UN Rio + 20 conference, we are pursuing a holistic approach to community development and recognize the "need to achieve sustainable development by promoting sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth, creating greater opportunities for all, reducing inequalities, raising basic standards of living, fostering equitable social development and inclusion, and promoting integrated and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems that supports, inter alia, economic, social and human development..."[ii]

FSD supports the efforts of grassroots development organizations in the developing world that are working to better their communities, environments, and the economic opportunities around them. We believe economic development begins with community development and is only sustainable if it comes from and is supported by the members of these communities. Also, through our programs, we aim to raise international awareness of the economic challenges in developing countries and support cross-cultural communities in finding more effective solutions to development issues.

Community ownership is central to FSD's approach. Traditional, top-down international development either arbitrarily applies expensive 'solutions' on unsuspecting communities who are rarely involved in issue identification or program planning (and learn nothing from the process), or uses the unsustainable model of charitable donations that provide temporary relief but do not address the systemic issues that propagate inequities. FSD's community partners are fully engaged and drive the goals, priorities and implementation of our work, from the organizational staffing structure—program sites are led by host country national directors—to the strategic planning process.

2012 outcomes

315 local partners, grassroots ngos, community groups, micro-enterprises, village leaders

GRANTS TO PROJECTS: 242 COMMUNITY INVESTMENT: $870,000

262 FAMILIES AROUND THE WORLD who hosted... 352 VOLUNTEERS

45 REGIONAL WORKSHOPS

17 university partners

SUSTAINABLE PROGRAM DESIGN & MANAGEMENT

FSD's key value-add to our partners is expertise in sustainable community development project design and management. We provide support through technical training, small grants and trained volunteer support. As a nonprofit social enterprise model, our work is financially supported through fee-for-service revenue, and thus our development approach is not influenced by topical focus or priorities of large donors.

We work in Africa, Latin America and Asia and work in all sectors—health, environment, appropriate technology, education, human rights, gender equity, economic development—and most frequently support integrated approaches that address issues across sectors. Wes support over 200 projects each year, and have trained over 3,000 professionals, donors, students and volunteers in our approach and an integral part of our mission is to educate the international community through our experience with effective, sustainable development approaches.

TYPOLOGY OF POWER: COMMUNITIES IN CONTROL

A key factor to the sustainability of social programs is community ownership throughout the program design and

management process. Many international development approaches employ a certain level of participation by community members, as reflected in the graphic below. But typically these lower levels of participation do not reinforce community ownership and present inherent barriers for full input, engagement and accountability of the target beneficiary populations that are necessary to achieve long-term outcomes. [iii]

Residents and their Associations: A Power Ladder
(ABCD Institute)

Community in Control
Goal Setting; Planning; Implementation; Outcomes

Community as Participants
Serve on governing body or advisory group   Serve as advocates

Community as Information Sources
Part of focus groups   Residents fill out need surveys

Community as Recipients
Receive services   Agency clients

FSD's goal is to support communities to be in full control of the goal setting, planning, implementation and outcomes of the programs designed to benefit them. We listen to community priorities, help to identify goals, provide training and tools for project planning, and support participatory monitoring and evaluation so that communities are accountable for measuring and responding to outcomes.

A STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH

One of the ways FSD support communities to be in control of their development is by employing many tools from the asset- or strengths-based community development (ABCD) approach.

A strengths-based approach views communities as replete with existing resources and capacities, explicit and latent, which are leveraged first before looking to outside assets. This espouses a positive perspective on how to 'do' development, rather than framing the issues as problems of the powerless poor who have no knowledge ability or resources themselves to contribute and that need to be solved by only using external knowledge and funding. Our approach strengthens local organizations, communities and programs by helping communities to see their potential and invest in themselves, thus preventing a dependency on charitable donations or foreign aid.

APPROPRIATE TOOLS & INNOVATIONS

ABCD was formalized as a community development approach in the 1990s after decades of research by, John McKnight, Jody Kretzmann[iv], and Robert Chambers among others, and evolving from many preceding participatory approaches, (e.g. Rapid Rural Appraisals; Participatory Rural Appraisals; Participatory Learning and Action)[v]. FSD trains partners to use ABCD and other participatory tools that are appropriate for developing community contexts and supportive of local knowledge development and management. These include community mapping and visioning exercises, appreciative inquiry, positive deviance, stakeholder mapping, and other participatory approaches.

FSD embraces innovation and frequently supports and funds pilot programs that are new to our partners. However, these programs are all designed with a keen focus on the sustainability of any new innovations introduced to a community. Many well-intended 'social innovations' do not adequately take into account social, cultural and even historical constructs that may prevent the uptake of new ideas and technologies in developing communities that are not adequately equipped to sustain them or not thoroughly consulted in the initial design research. Furthermore, due to the preponderance of a top-down approach of foreign aid, communities often feel like they are powerless to reject any form of assistance offered, and so social innovations can be frequently 'imposed' rather than adopted. Our approach ensures that innovations are appropriate, feasible, community-driven, and sustainable though local knowledge and systems development.

OUTCOMES *AND* IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The assessments of FSD's work are centered on both quantitative and qualitative outcomes: we value the process our partners have experienced in the creation, implementation and assessment of their programs as much as the social impact. While every project is evaluated for impact outcomes for improving various aspects of the lives of beneficiaries (e.g. increased health careseeking; changed nutritional behaviors; income generation; environmental conservation, etc.), we also assess how working with our approach has changed the way our partner organizations view themselves and their relationships with their communities.

RECENT PARTNER SUPPORT:
• Training, registration and business development support for three women's cooperatives in rural Tola, Nicaragua
• Sustainable energy system for income-generating compound run by conservation partner in Kakamega, Kenya
• Cookstove program for households in rural Rajasthan, India to address deforestation, health and income issues

We evaluate the sustainability of our support on both discrete projects and our partners' organizational development. According to the results of an assessment of all sites at the end of 2012, of the 131 reported projects FSD supported in the past two years, 79% of the projects FSD supported in the past two years are ongoing in full.

**2012: FSD Sustainability Assessment
Are the Projects Ongoing?**

No 4%
Yes: In Part 17%
Yes: In Full 79%
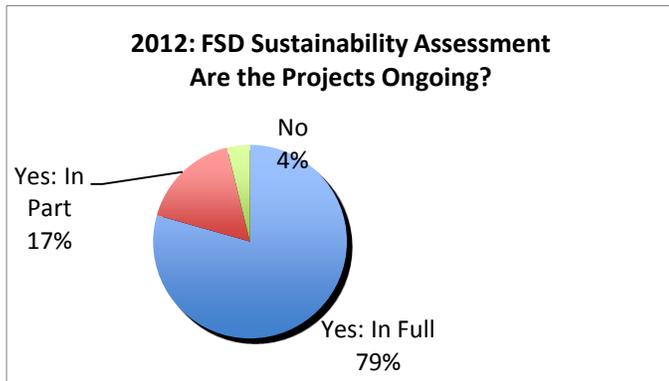
Some contributing factors to the project sustainability are:
- the project focus was a top priority to the community
- the source of the project ideas was by the organization, community or beneficiaries
- the partner organization and beneficiaries participated more in the project formulation than outside actors

FSD also provides guidance on human resource, financial, and other operational management areas to partners as well as project support. In the assessment, partner organizations identified strengthened technical capacities and enhanced operational and funding support and engagement with the community as a result of working with FSD.

KEY FACTORS TO SUSTAINABILITY

- Community-driven in all program stages: research, planning, implementation, assessment, revision
- Program focus high priority to and goals identified by the community
- Program resources leveraged from local assets first
- Local implementation – role of outsiders intentional
- Appropriate innovations & tools employed
- Value of process as much as outcomes (allow risk)
- Built-in leadership and organizational development
- Strict adherence to sustainability principles, despite difficulty (long-term approach)

BEYOND SEMANTICS: THE ROLE OF THE OUTSIDER

FSD is part of a widening community of development supporters and practitioners implementing community-based, participatory programs.[vi] We are pleased to be advocating and educating our large and growing network in the international development community. There is great momentum towards changing the way both donors view beneficiaries and communities see themselves as agents of social change, and it is more generally accepted today that an inclusive approach is key to expansive change.

However, we are cognizant of the fact that no matter how participatory we aim to be, we are still the outsiders to our community beneficiaries, and we are very conscious of the role we must play to not undermine the approach. We follow the guidance of Terry Bergdall[vii], a community development practitioner for over 30 years, who identifies the key roles of the outsider as a:
- Catalyst to stimulate change
- Facilitator, not implementer
- Trust builder among and between communities
- Holder of a declared agenda
- Mirror to communities, holding them accountable for outcomes
- Leveraging agent of external resources, when necessary

We know that the most apparent issues are not necessarily the first priorities for communities, and have learned that a long-term investment will have stronger outcomes than short-term impact-focuses programs. We have also learned that the pace of development in our communities is on a different timeline that must be respected, or we risk the trust, engagement and sustained capacity of beneficiaries. We learn more by the time spent just being in our communities than pushing an agenda according to our own arbitrary priorities, and that incremental development often produces stronger holistic outcomes.

EDUCATING THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

As we approach our 20th year, we are more intentional than ever in our approaches to educating the international community. Over the last six years, FSD has collaborated with over 20 top universities to design experiential and service learning programs for the next generation of global development leaders. Our Giving Circle program educates donors on ethical community support, and our ProCorps programs allow professional volunteers to apply their skills to sustainable social programs. We are now seeking to expand our knowledge with the Corporate Citizenship community and are actively seeking partnerships. FSD also hopes to expand its geographic focus to Southeast Asia by 2016.

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[i] See FSD Founder's Story:
http://www.fsdinternational.org/about/founder
[ii] 'The Future We Want." 22 June 2012. Outcomes document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio + 20.
[iii] Kretzmann, J and McKnight, J. 2005. *Discovering Community Power: A Guide to Mobilizing Local Assets and Your Organization's Capacity -*

A Community-Building Workbook from the Asset-Based Community Development Institute. Evanston, IL: Institute for Policy Research.

[iv] Kretzmann,J and McKnight, J. 1993. Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets, Evanston, IL: Institute for Policy Research.

[v] Cunningham, G and Mathie, A. 2008. *Mobilizing Assets for Community-Driven Development*. Participant Manual. Antigonish, Nova Scotia: Coady Institute, St. Francis Xavier University.

[vi] See Cunnigham, G and Mathie, A. (Eds) *From Clients to Citizens: Communities changing the course of their own development*. 2008. Practical Action.

[vii] Bergdall, T. 2003. *Reflections on the Catalytic Role of an Outsider in Asset-Based Community Development*. Paper for ABCD Institute faculty. www.abcdinstitute.org