Patterns for Sustainable Development

Linda Rising, linda@lindarising.org
Karl Rehmer, rehmerk@cox.net

This pattern writing project began with the discovery of a small paperback book called *Two Ears of Corn* by Roland Bunch.\(^1\) The title is from Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*:

> Whoever could make two ears of corn, or two blades of grass, to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, would deserve better of mankind, and do more essential service to his country than the whole race of politicians put together.

This book, subtitled “A Guide to People-Centered Agricultural Improvement,” contains many of the same patterns documented in *Fearless Change*.\(^2\) *Two Ears* is often used for courses in agriculture, for example: “The Diffusion and Adoption of Agricultural Innovations,” whose course description reads:

> Factors that influence rates of diffusion and adoption of innovations. Consequences of adopting or rejecting innovations. Processes by which change agents influence introduction and adoption of innovations.

In the introduction to *Two Ears*, you will find the following:

> The introduction of innovations into Third World agriculture has met with everything from disaster to exhilarating success. Well bred animals have often died of disease and malnutrition. Home and school vegetable gardens have yielded disappointing results in many projects in India and nearly everywhere they have been tried in Latin America. Yet poor goatherds in a remote program area in the Bolivian Andes have walked for fourteen hours to buy animal vaccines, and Indian farmers involved in a program in Guatemala are producing, with their own native varieties, up to 3,200 kilos per hectare of dry beans, twice the average yield in the United States. Some innovations increase the production of thousands of farmers while others fail to be accepted by even a handful. If we are going to work with only a few innovations, how can we choose the ones that will find the widest acceptance? World Neighbors’ experience indicates that there are a number of widely applicable criteria that can guide us in choosing the appropriate technology for any particular area.

Surely, this book and the “patterns” or strategies it contains point in a direction that will appeal to many in the patterns community, where we search for better ways. This domain is not software, but it surely impacts software and, in fact, has broad implications for how we introduce technology anywhere.

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\(^1\) World Neighbors, 1982.
The patterns in this paper are likely “middle-level” solutions. We have started here because we find a lot of evidence across a number of organizations that they work. What we don’t yet know is what the “starting” patterns are. We need to get closer and spend more time with development organizations to learn what those are all about.

Sustainable development should not be confused with aid or relief. Aid is important in areas of extreme poverty or where a disaster has occurred. Aid brings immediate assistance and allows for short-term survival of the recipients. Sometimes this is enough to help people get back on their feet and return to normal, but typically the goal of aid is not to provide a long-term solution.

The overarching goal of the patterns in this collection is to encourage recipients to make significant change to better their lives. A consequence of being sustainable is that the circumstances of the recipients are permanently altered. Permanent change is cultural change. Therefore, these patterns are patterns of cultural change. It is important to realize, however, that the goal is not to change a culture into something that duplicates the culture of the developing organization. The goal is to empower recipients to evolve their culture in a direction they choose.

It is easy to read some patterns, for example Empowering Women, as an attempt to change a culture because it is “the right thing to do.” We tend to think that we can make things better by cloning our values and imposing our ideas of morality. This would be a misinterpretation of the intent of these patterns. Our goal is to document what works.

The target user of these patterns is part of an organization that provides development assistance for communities in need. Members of these communities can also benefit from understanding the patterns. We often think of these communities as being part of the “third world,” but they could easily be found anywhere, even in the United States.

The patterns in this collection: Know Yourself, Learn about the Area, Early Wins, Constructive Participation, Passing on the Gift, Small Support Group, and Empowering Women follow the same variation of Alexander’s format used in Fearless Change (with the addition of a photo).

Each pattern includes:

Name in bold
Alias (if applicable)
Photo
Opening Story in italics, usually a description of the photo, to convey the essence of the pattern
Abstract in bold
Context
Problem statement in bold
Description of the Problem and Forces
“Therefore” in italics
Essence of the Solution in bold
Elaboration of the Solution
Resulting Context
Known Uses in italics
Names of patterns referenced in the pattern are in a different font.

The following diagram shows the relationships among the patterns we have so far. We feel pretty sure that Know Yourself is an entry-level pattern but the other connections are not solid. We definitely feel there are missing patterns that are used in the selection of the program area and we have indicated that Patterns TBD. There are other missing patterns, but this is a substantial and known hole in the language. The other connections indicate implementation or Alexander’s “completeness.” Small Support Group, Empowering Women, and Passing on the Gift can be used to implement or complete Constructive Participation.

[Diagram showing relationships among patterns]

Acknowledgements

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In addition, thanks to the members of the “People” writers workshop at PLoP ’09 who helped us improve our patterns even more: Takashi Abi, Marco Hernandez, Jeff Hutchinson, Lise Hvatum, Christian Kohls, Jake Miller, and Robert Zack. Thanks to the visitors who also gave us feedback: Robert Hanmer and Pam Rostal.
In 1989 the staff at Heifer International was challenged to think about how Heifer’s mission is carried out worldwide. They wanted to identify the most important components of Heifer’s programs, those values and beliefs that help ensure that the benefits of the projects are sustainable and continue long after Heifer leaves. For six months input was solicited from around the world. From this an initial list of values was drafted. This list was piloted during project evaluations in Guatemala. Some changes were made. Twelve cornerstones made the final list. To help people remember them they used “passing on the gifts” as an acronym. The cornerstones for just and sustainable development are:

**Passing on the Gift**
- Accountability
- Sharing and Caring
- Sustainability and Self-Reliance
- Improved Animal Management
- Nutrition and Income
- Gender and Family Focus
- on the
- Genuine Need and Justice
- Improving the Environment
- Full Participation
- Training and Education
- Spirituality
If any group wants to partner with Heifer, the cornerstones are shared with them. When groups begin planning their projects, they are introduced to the cornerstones in a workshop (like the one pictured above) and may choose some or all of these or create their own. Together the Cornerstones compose a holistic approach to development to which Heifer Project International aspires.

You’re part of a development organization that wants to make the world a better place. You have passion for your cause and you feel that most of the time your efforts are successful. You continue to face challenges as you move forward to continue your good work.

**You often wonder if what you are doing on a daily basis really matches your long-term goals.**

It’s easy to get caught up in all the need the world presents. You and everyone else in your organization face limits on time and energy, yet the problems keep coming. Even when you realize that change efforts take time, it will doubtless take more time than you realize.

You know that you have passion for your idea today, but what about tomorrow? Is your belief sustainable? Change is all around us and you are pulled in many directions. It seems that even the best-intentions and the hardest work and the greatest abilities are no match for the challenges you face. Is it worth your time and energy?

When you don’t see yourself clearly, you’re open to being pulled in different directions. You sign on for too much. You have trouble saying, “No.” You believe you can do it all.

*Therefore:*

**Spend some time trying to understand your values, likes, dislikes, strengths, weaknesses—those things that work together to define who you are. Everyone in your organization should contribute.**

The cognitive psychologists tell us that it’s impossible to understand our own motivation.\(^3\) Scientists also say we are hardwired to be optimistic about our own abilities,\(^4\) so this exercise must be undertaken with help from others.

Someone in the organization must have passion for this task and must take ownership of the steps. It will involve compromise and openness to ensure that all voices are heard.

Words are important. Cultural interpretations of words, phrases, images, stories, are all important factors to consider.


This pattern will help you and other members of your organization develop a better understanding of your values, your strengths and weaknesses. You’ll be better equipped to make decisions about whether or not to take on a given project. Taking time for the exercise will also help you see whether your passion for the new idea lasts. It will take long-term commitment for real change.

You’ll also learn where you need to ask for help and what roles you can expect to take on what roles others will play. You might target some areas for improvement, not just for the sake of your development effort, but to improve your overall effectiveness. It’s good to stretch beyond your limits and also to recognize your limits.

This process of introspection, leads an organization to have better defined goals. It also helps the organization recognize its strengths and weaknesses. These things allow the organization to better determine what programs fit its mission and the scope of the programs it can undertake.

Just because you identify needed but missing skills in your organization that doesn’t mean you should give up. Everyone has a unique contribution in any setting. It may mean you may have to work harder; you may have to fight the system a little more; you may need to recruit additional help, but if you’re persistent, you’ll have a chance to show what you can do. When you are challenged to succeed despite some obstacles, it often means you have the benefit of learning and developing at a personal level.

You will also need an understanding of the work itself, the various domains and expertise required. You must Learn about the Area and Learn about Partner Organizations.

However, your effectiveness depends not only on your contributions, but on the environment, and both are continually changing. The result of this initial reflection is just the start. You must continually learn about yourself, your organization, and your development effort if you are to be successful in the long-run.

*In his two best-selling books, Three Cups of Tea and Stones into School, Greg Mortensen describes his journey—how he started with one small promise to build a school that ultimately became his life’s work—educating children, especially girls. As he says, “Young women are the developing world’s greatest agents of progress. Just one year of schooling will dramatically raise a girl’s later economic prospects, and where girls get to fifth grade, birth rates and infant mortality plunge. Teaching girls to read and write reduces the ignorance and poverty that fuel religious extremism and lays the groundwork for prosperity and peace. In military parlance, educating girls is a ‘force multiplier.’ Thus, the flame that burns at the center of my work, the heat around which I cup my hands, are the stories of girls whose lives have been changed by education.” This guiding principle has helped Greg Mortensen build schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan for more than a decade.*

*In their book about the Salvation Army,* Robert Watson and Ben Brown answer the questions: How do we do what we do with such a small core of officer/managers? And how have we

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5 This pattern has not been written.
managed to do it for so long when so many other organizations with similar ambitions have come and gone? We don’t consider the two aspects of our mission, to preach and to serve, as separate from one another. We don’t serve people who are hurting only to preach to them. And we don’t preach without offering the example of service without discrimination. To us, the two obligations are inseparable. Some like to call it our holistic ministry—soup, soap, and salvation. But no matter how it’s characterized, this integrated ministry of religion and social work is still a distinguishing mark of the Army, even in this information age. When an organization becomes so large and serves so many, there is always the temptation to become so preoccupied with raising money and operating the machinery that you forget your “first love.” I am pleased to tell you that there are tens of thousands in the Army family across this country who still find their greatest joy in serving others in the name of Christ in the trenches of human need.

Delancey Street is a self-help organization for former substance abusers, ex-convicts, homeless and others who have hit bottom. Started in 1971 with four people in a San Francisco apartment, Delancey Street has served many thousands of residents, now in five locations throughout the United States. The organization has a set of core beliefs that motivate all participants:

- First and foremost, we believe people can change. When we make a mistake we need to admit it and then not run from it, but stay and work to fix the mistake. And though no one can undo the past, we can balance the scales by doing good deeds and earning back our own self-respect, decency, and a legitimate place in mainstream society.
- We believe that people can learn to live drug free, crime free lives of purpose and integrity. Rather than following a medical model or a therapeutic model, we’ve developed an educational model to solve social problems. We teach people to find and develop their strengths rather than only focusing on their problems.
- Rather than solving one issue at a time (e.g., drugs or job skills) we believe that all aspects of a person’s life interact, and all people must interact legitimately and successfully with others to make their lives work. Delancey Street is therefore a total learning center in which residents learn (and teach) academics, vocational skills, and personal, interpersonal, practical and social survival skills. We believe the best way to learn is to teach; and that helping others is an important way to earn self-reliance. Person A helps person B and person A gets better.
- Delancey Street functions as an extended family, a community in which every member helps the others with no staff of experts, no “program approach.” Everyone is both a giver and a receiver in an “each-one-teach-one” process.
- Economic development and entrepreneurial boldness are central to our model’s financial self-sufficiency and to teaching residents self-reliance and life skills.
- Delancey Street is value-based in a strong traditional family value system stressing the work ethic, mutual restitution, personal and social accountability and responsibility, decency, integrity and caring for others in a pro bono publico approach.

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Learn About the Area

Alias – Listen, Listen, Listen

In 1982 the U.S. began a $220 million program to eradicate the pigs of 800,000 Haitian families as a result of discovering animals infected with swine flu. By 1984 every pig had been killed. Afterward, USA ID began a program to introduce new, improved American pigs to Haiti. The pigs, similar to those raised by large U.S. pork producers, were introduced to the applause of the Duvalier government, excited to have larger, more modern breeds. But the Haitian peasants were not so welcoming. First, there was the cost of getting a pig. The U.S. required that peasants provide proper shelter with a concrete floor and demonstrate an ability to feed the pigs. Given that most Haitians do not have concrete floors themselves, this was prohibitive for many. The feed cost for the pigs was $90 a year, while most Haitians only make about $130 annually. The American pigs were also more sensitive to disease and required regular veterinary care. The peasants began referring to the pigs as “four-footed princes.” The story of the Haitian pig, its eradication and the failures of introducing new pigs to Haiti points to the importance of appropriate technology and of listening to the people most affected by a development effort. When the Haitian pig was eradicated, no one considered what action would be in the best interests of the Haitian people.

You’re part of an organization that has decided to provide development assistance to a specific part of the world. You Know Yourself well enough to see that the kind of development assistance
you wish to provide fits your goals and capabilities. You know enough about the area to feel that the decision was right. You have several projects in mind and experts who might provide assistance with those projects.

**What’s the right approach for selecting projects for the area?**

Development effort is a complex undertaking. Hundreds of things can go wrong, and often do. The literature is full of cases where programs failed or produced poor results because of a lack of understanding about the program area.

In Afghanistan, a program failed to convince farmers to castrate their bulls even though the farmers knew it would make their animals easier to handle. The problem was that castration of younger animals also inhibited the growth of the hump on which the animals’ yokes rested. Had program leaders been aware of the problem, they might have saved the project by introducing a different yoke.

Production of pyrethrum in Kenya dropped because of a major effort designed to boost production by organizing village men into marketing co-ops. Project organizers did not realize that village women, who grew most of the crop, would cut production once their profits were diverted to the men’s cooperatives.

In Bolivia, one program introduced a productive variety of corn that was hard to grind and turned out to be best suited for making bootleg alcohol—a fact that escaped the attention of program leaders, but not of the villagers.

Well meaning programs can fail, because they fail to recognize conditions that exist in the community.

*Therefore:*

**Study the area and the community well before a project begins and continue to learn about them during the project.**

Technology for the developing world has to be designed, keeping in mind the picture of poor people in a poor country. What are their daily problems? How can my device, appliance, or service help them find solutions to these problems? The answers to these questions will help create products and services that can truly revolutionize their world.

You get the best information by developing personal relationships with the locals. It might seem more efficient to gather the entire community together for a meeting. Meetings have advantages over conversations in that they seem to save time over individual conversations and allow people to bounce ideas off each other and discuss agreements. However, in many cultures, people are not accustomed to participating freely in meetings. Even when they are, they often hold back information that reflects negatively on themselves or others. They also tend to withhold opinions that do not agree with those of other villagers, especially when the other villagers hold positions of authority or power.
Research now shows that brainstorming is not only not productive in developing countries but in the developed world in organizations that have been advocating this practice for years.\(^7\) Elicit constant feedback one-on-one from the villagers. Probably no amount of professional information gathering in Afghanistan would have made the connection between castration and the shape of an ox yoke. Nor is it likely that any multidisciplinary team of development specialists would have predicted that the corn varieties introduced into Bolivia would be used for making bootleg alcohol. However, after the projects had started, Afghan farmers could easily have said why they refused to castrate their animals, and Bolivian farmers knew soon after the first harvest of the new corn that a lot of it would be going into whiskey.

Local details matter. It’s impossible to second-guess the people. The incredible array of problems that arise will not be avoided through increasingly sophisticated, complex, and expensive multidisciplinary analyses. Rather, we can most easily and frequently avoid them by maintaining a system of honest and on-going two-way communication with those in the local community.

Living among the villagers is an important way to learn about the area. The closer the program leaders come to living as the villagers do, the better the result will be. It is only when you can come to speak the villagers’ vocabulary, understand their priorities, and identify with their feelings and wants that will truly come to trust you and you will get the understanding that will help you be truly effective.

As you apply this pattern and continue to learn more about the area, your project is more likely to be successful. After one success, new and better ways will emerge to help understand even better ways to know the area. While it is impossible to learn so much that you never make a mistake, on-going study of an area and its culture make it less likely that you will make an obvious or very serious mistake.

If you listen to the individual voices of the community during a project and have a willingness to change and adapt, then a program that may otherwise have failed can be modified into one that can succeed.

If possible, start to use Constructive Participation, since locals have intimate knowledge of the area. As village leaders move into decision making roles, the program will be less likely to make errors based on a lack of knowledge about the area.

However, there are no guarantees that any project will be successful. The overarching approach is one of small experiments. Looking for Early Wins and learning from the successes and failures of your particular experiments will provide the best way forward—but no silver bullet.

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factory. If the factory is small and produces food that is sold to the people who live nearby, they will think of it as their factory. If it is successful, we can expand.” In the rest of the world, Danone yogurt is produced in large quantities. Large shipments are delivered in refrigerated trucks to special air-conditioned warehouses, from which the yogurt is finally taken to supermarkets and grocery stores. At every step, refrigeration is used to keep the product cool and maintain the live cultures in a dormant state. In Bangladesh, maintaining this kind of refrigeration regime from factory to consumer would be impossible. Most rural Bangladeshis are off the utility grid, and many shops and stores in village markets don’t have electric power. Refrigerators are few and far between. The local distribution system in this new venture would have to emphasize a quick turnaround from factory to consumer, with yogurt leaving the production line in the morning and ending up in children’s stomachs within no more than 48 hours. The foundation of the distribution system was Grameen Ladies—Grameen borrowers, who lived in the villages. Danone was concerned at first about setting up a series of small plants. They thought it would make yogurt production costly and inefficient, but in the initial experiment, they learned that small could be just as efficient as big.

Prostitutes in Sonagachi, the red light district of Calcutta, India, are a world unto themselves. Social norms about female sexual behavior in India are such that prostitution carries even a larger stigma in India than elsewhere. Cut off from the wider world, prostitutes have their own subculture with an elite of madams and pimps. As in any subculture, its members strive for status. The AIDS epidemic in India and the role of prostitutes in spreading AIDS caused increased concern about risky behaviors. Dr. Smarajit Jana, head of the All India Institute for Hygiene and Public Health, tried an experiment in 1992. He and his team learned about the subculture of the prostitutes and worked with it to fight AIDS. They formed a mutually respectful relationship with the madams, pimps, prostitutes, and clients. They noted the class system within Sonagachi. By trial and error, with feedback from the prostitutes, Dr. Jana and his team found a strategy for fighting AIDS. They trained a small group of twelve prostitutes to educate the others about the dangers of AIDS and the need to use condoms. These educators wore green medical coats when they were engaged in their public health work, which gave them greater status in Sonagachi. Condom use in Sonagachi increased dramatically. By 1999, HIV incidence in Sonagachi was only 6%, compared to 50% in other red-light-districts in India.

In the 1990s, agriculture development workers in Bangladesh were dismayed that small-acreage farmers were applying only a tiny fraction of the fertilizer that their rice crops needed, even though they could triple what they had invested in fertilizer from the increased rice yields. Development workers complained about the irrational and superstitious behavior of small-acreage farmers, and set up extension programs and farmer-training programs. But the farmers continued to apply only a fraction of the fertilizer that their rice needed to thrive. Finally, someone asked some farmers why they were using so little fertilizer. The farmers replied, “Every 10 years or so, there is a major flood during the monsoon season that carries away all the fertilizer we apply. So we only apply the amount of fertilizer we can afford to lose in a 10-year flood.” Suddenly it became clear that the farmers were excellent, rational decision makers and that it was the agriculture experts who had a lot to learn. With very good reason, subsistence farmers care much more about the risk of losing their farm than they do about possibly tripling their income in a particular year.
After a great deal of success in Bangladesh with one irrigation invention, the treadle pump, many people now ask me if they could use treadle pumps to help farmers in other countries. “How deep is the water table in your village?” I ask, because a treadle pump won’t lift water more than about 27 feet. “I don’t know” is the most common answer. “Tie a rock on the end of a piece of string, go to the nearest well, and measure how deep the water table is,” I say. “Or go to the government ministry of water resources—they likely have maps with that kind of information.” The fact is you can’t make practical plans unless you gather a lot of details about each specific village context. What kind of high-value crops you can grow depends on the type of soil and the climate. The price of fruits and vegetables is usually highest at the time of year when it’s most difficult to grow them, so it’s important to know why these crops are difficult to grow at that time of year and what can be done to overcome the difficulty.\(^8\)

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**Early Wins**

Grameen Foundation's Village Phone program has long been touted as the poster child for using mobiles in the economic empowerment of poor women. The program gives villagers in Bangladesh—and now in several other countries—access to microcredit to buy a mobile phone that can then be rented to other villagers who do not have a mobile of their own. The mobile phones not only create a new business opportunity for the poor, but also bring access to information, market, health and other services to the remote rural areas of Bangladesh. This was

a major innovation, but a small thing: placing modern cell phones in the hand of the woman from the poorest households in remote villages, something that no telecom operator had dared to do in the past. A borrower buys a mobile phone to become the Telephone Lady of the village. She provides the telecommunication services to the village while earning profits for herself. By the end of 2008, there were about 354,000 village phone ladies who have together taken loans amounting to BDT 2.57 billion.

You’re part of an organization that has a selected an area for program development. You have passion for the work. You Know Yourself. You have started to Learn about the Area to determine what needs you can address. You’re ready to start conducting small experiments.

**Your organization has a complete arsenal of solutions to tackle the problems in the field. Where should you start when you want to solve them all as quickly as possible?**

It’s easy to be overwhelmed by the problems in a development situation. You want to tackle all the problems immediately, but everyone involved in the program has a limited amount of energy and time. Usually, the people are only willing and able to work on a few problems at a time and they will tackle these problems at their own pace.

When people work for a long time without achieving recognizable success, they start to doubt that they can solve the problem. Skeptical individuals are more likely to be convinced when they see that the program has achieved successes that benefit them directly. When big programs fail, cooperation can degenerate into mutual recrimination and bitterness.

We have a tendency to want evidence in the form of a big success. Surely, that will be convincing. What’s hard to see is the power of a lot of very small successes.

*Therefore:*

**Determine a very small number of high priority problems that can be reasonably solved and attack them with maximum efficiency with a goal of showing immediate small success.**

Start with a limited number of programs chosen, above all, to achieve significant success in the shortest time possible; three months is a recommended time. Supervise these pilot programs closely, so that 90% of these pilot programs, if at all possible, achieve success.⁹

We all like to continue doing tasks that bring us satisfaction. Success is as crucial to making participation constructive as it was to creating the enthusiasm that motivated the participation in the first place.

In an agricultural setting, this can mean increased crop yield, decreased costs, decreased risk, or some combination of these. Carefully choose technologies for their ability, in a relatively short time, to bring significant increases in yields and/or decreases in costs without increasing risks.

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Applying this pattern will build a series of small successes. Early recognizable success is crucial in making participation constructive. Success can attract the highly concerned leaders that constructive participation requires. Success can strengthen bonds between workers and earn positive feedback from neighbors and friends. Success eliminates pressure to deceitfully claim results that were never achieved. Success will overcome hopelessness and help to convince people that they can solve their own problems.

The real goal of successful experiments is to teach people how to design and run their own programs. The overall goal of this pattern language is to help people learn how to help themselves. After achieving success on a small scale, doubts are diminished and hope is increased. The community is more likely to consider additional programs that they determine meet community needs and to put together a plan to make it happen.

However, there’s always a tendency when running programs to be a leader and that creates dependency. It’s your job to ensure that the people themselves feel responsible for their own success. In other words, don’t teach them to look to you for guidance. Don’t try to take credit for the success. Learning to be successful is an important component of the successful experience. You’re the mother bird who must teach her babies to fly on their own, unaided.

Between 1987 and 1993, the Cantarranas Integrated Agricultural Development Program, financed by Catholic Relief Services and managed by World Neighbors, worked in some 35 villages around the central Honduran town of Cantarranas. Using in-row tillage and intercropped green manures as its cutting edge (‘limited technology’), agricultural output was increased. This program expanded into a general program of agricultural development and preventive health.

In his two best-selling books, Three Cups of Tea and Stones into School, Greg Mortensen describes his efforts to build schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The interest in female education extended to women’s vocational centers in Kabul—places where women could gather to learn skills such as weaving, embroidery, and other domestic crafts. The units became neighborhood literacy centers—classrooms where older women who had been deprived of the chance to go to school could learn to read and write. Classes were held in private homes taught by teachers moonlighting for extra cash. It was a good experiment—but they failed to anticipate the reaction it would provoke. Women attending these classes told their friends, who in turn told their friends, and soon applicants were signing up in such numbers that each center soon reached maximum capacity. Initially women came to learn to read and write, but the scope of their ambitions began to expand radically. Some started book clubs. Others began to exchange information about dental hygiene and reproductive health. The curricula spilled into nutrition, diet, and disease prevention. There were seminars on typing, learning to read calendars, counting money, and the most popular of all, for which the demand was off the charts: the rudiments of using a mobile phone. This was the result of a small, simple experiment with women who had been forced to lead restricted and sequestered lives, putting them into the same room, and giving them the license to dream. The idea of women teaching other women was so electrifying that each class rapidly grew, forcing them to set up 2, 3, and sometimes 4 teaching shifts to handle the load. Husbands permitted their wives to attend classes in the hope that
learning to read and write might eventually enable them to earn additional income for the family. Each night after preparing dinner and attending to their domestic duties, many of these women did their homework together with their daughters.

The Delancey Street Foundation was started in California in 1971 by Mimi Silbert, a criminologist, and John Maher, an ex-convict (who died in 1984). The two formed the foundation's core beliefs: That people thought to be incorrigible can get better by working hard and holding each other accountable. Most new residents start with simple tools and simple tasks. They are given a broom and a list of chores. While sweeping or mopping or shoveling snow, the more experienced residents whisper in the ears of the new residents, telling them about the foundation and its history. By the end of their time on a maintenance crew they know the entire history of the property they're cleaning. Slowly but surely, in a series of small steps, a foundation is built. While doing menial work, newcomers are also required to get their high school equivalency diploma if they do not already have it. Over time, every resident learns a job skill. Slowly but surely, self-confidence comes back. Delancey Street residents can't say what moment or event caused them to abandon their old ways. All they know is that they're not the same people they once were.

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Constructive Participation
<Abstract in bold>

Roy Kady is one of the Navajo Nation's best-known male weavers. He's a member of the Dibé bi'iiina' group (Sheep Is Life) and has dedicated his life to the Navajo's beloved Churro sheep, as well as to the tradition and spiritual art of weaving. "In our lives, sheep have been the most important," Kady said. "Herding sheep provides you with the opportunity to learn about the earth - rocks, land formations, plant life." But the sheep industry, which is vital to both the Navajos' economic future and spiritual well-being, has been deteriorating. After years of continuous over-grazing, much of the Navajo land has eroded and can't continue to support a sheep industry of sufficient size. Constant in-breeding has reduced the quality and number of mature sheep and goats. Fewer than 550,000 head now exist, and as a result, the last 15 years have seen Navajo wool production decrease to one-third its former volume. After being contacted by The Rancers Roundtable, Heifer International began sending top-quality rams to 100 Arizona and New Mexico families in the fall of 2002. Kady knew immediately that Heifer was different from other organizations. He said, "These families are very independent and like to do things their own way, and Heifer understands because of mutual respect."

You're part of an organization that has a selected an area for program development. You have passion for the work. You Know Yourself. You have started to Learn about the Area to determine what needs you can address. You want to provide sustainable solutions.

Providing the answer you see as the best way to address a problem and then moving on may satisfy your needs, but may not provide a sustainable solution for the people.

When you see a problem, your first inclination is to jump in and solve it. It can be very tempting to rush in and be a “knight in shining armor” who alleviates a problem, and then rides off into the sunset basking in the gratitude of the people you have rescued.

Unfortunately, the “knight in shining armor” image runs counter to the locals’ feeling that the solution is theirs. You may feel that you are involved in a difficult, uncomfortable, and at times, dangerous job, and your only reward is the appreciation you receive for having made sacrifices. But your job is not to be a hero, but to make heroes of the people you are working with. Some gratitude will always be forthcoming, of course, but when things are as they should be, in the end, the people will mostly be thanking each other.

The danger is that your influence can be so overwhelming that it will survive long after you have gone. Two years after one African program had been “Africanized,” the size of each resident trainee’s plot of land, the acreage to be planted in each crop, and the techniques to be used were all still dictated by rules laid down by development who, perhaps inadvertently, had established a tyranny of rules and attitudes that “this is how it is done” that no Africans dared to question.

Therefore:
The work must revolve around participation by the people. Avoid paternalism, that is, doing all the work for the people. Plan up-front for a phase-out of all outside support.

The opposite of doing for the people is involving the active participation by the people. This participation must happen in the preliminary and decision-making phases as well as program execution. Increasing participation is essential to the long-term survival of the program’s work. Work toward Empowering Women and enlist one or more Small Support Groups.

Participation provides tremendous advantages for a program. Involving the people helps ensure that the program will respect local cultural values and will address their needs. Those who participate in the program can enable a better understand and better communication between the program and the local people. Involvement of the people helps them learn to appreciate the difficulty of the work of the program and helps to address suspicion about its motives. Those who participate are more likely to commit to improvement.

Development personnel will likely be required to help get the program started. The degree of assistance needed will vary. Avoid providing any more information than necessary, and work toward the day when your input not needed. To this end, ensure that the community follows the recommendations in Passing on the Gift.

Constructive participation is learned over time. Some development agencies, trying to avoid paternalism and the “know it all” attitudes of the past, have moved to the opposite extreme of providing essentially no input at all. They form a local committee and start sending payments, assuming that the only thing missing is funding. It takes effort to help people learn how to participate constructively. Short courses and constant attention to what daily experience in the program is teaching are required.

How you work with the people may influence innovation adoption. Probably the most important factor is understanding the working environment. The appropriateness of the technology is key to successful adoption and requires feedback from the people in the early stages of program planning. This makes it more likely that the people will be more accepting of the new technology. It helps to build on traditional practices so as not to introduce a radical change. Introducing a radical change forces the people to take a big gamble on unproven techniques, when we know that poor people are less likely to take on a large amount of risk. Development must introduce simple techniques that can easily be integrated into traditional practices.\(^\text{10}\)

Plan for the phase-out of development workers. One important goal of all programs should be the eventual ownership of local participants. From the beginning, every activity should be organized so locals can learn how to manage it and how to sustain it when the program ends. Remember that the purpose of each activity, apart from its own results, is that the locals learn how to handle it themselves.

Mistakes will be made. You must be humble enough to realize your mistakes and that some of the locals’ methods will be improvements on those you have introduced. Mistakes can provide

\(^{10}\text{Patterns of sustainable agriculture adoption/non-adoption in Panamá, Jason Cochran, Master’s thesis, McGill University, October 2003.}\)
valuable lessons, as long as they are not so frequent or so disastrous that they drastically reduce the program’s enthusiasm or faith in local leadership.

As a result of their experience, participants learn to plan, solve problems, teach others, and organize themselves. They learn how to face the give and take within an organization and how to help each other without hurting feelings. These skills are essential if they are to form and manage their own organizations successfully.

Participants will increase their self-confidence, pride, and the satisfaction of successful achievement. They will develop the ingenuity and creativity that will help them continue to improve their communities. These changes are crucial to the fulfillment of the broader human goals. This growth through participation is the essence of development, where people learn to take charge of their own lives and solve their own problems.

However, participation is not automatically a good thing. It can divide and tear down as well as unite and build up. The challenge is to keep it constructive. In some programs, a single leader emerges and takes control and everyone else learns to be submissive. In other situations, lack of experience at making decisions as a group causes disagreements. Factions develop and groups disintegrate. Even well made decisions can lead to failure, causing disappointment and mutual casting of blame.

Many cultures have no acceptable way of correcting inappropriate or dishonest actions of leaders, so when leaders misbehave, people simply sit back and gradually become convinced that organizations are ineffective, or even dangerous.

Usually little is known about handling money. Financial losses as a result of insufficient planning, poor decisions, graft, or nepotism can cause division and mutual recriminations. These practices teach people that others are not trustworthy, that getting involved in organizations only causes problems, and that locals are not capable of solving their own problems. The practices teach manipulation, deceit, exploitation, individualism, hopelessness, and dishonesty. They are destructive and do not produce development—they preclude development.

Be wary of any sign of these side-effects. A careful nudge in the right direction may be called for. Initial planning and working agreements where risks are anticipated is always a good idea.

CHOICE (Center for Humanitarian Outreach and Intercultural Exchange) offers solutions to the hardships of poverty in the rural villages of the world with simple technologies, self-help initiatives and public awareness. The goal is to establish local institutions that can eventually function without outside supervision. These autonomous institutions may take the form of cooperatives, village committees, women’s organizations, small scale enterprises that enhance employment opportunities, or social and cultural organizations that stimulate villager pride and individual dignity. Villagers, however, are taught not to be limited by any of the systems that may have been established with the help of CHOICE; the ultimate goal is to teach villagers to rely on their own ingenuity. CHOICE supports the villagers in the mobilization of their own resources to
carry out their chosen solutions. Assistance and intervention from CHOICE is provided only in areas where villagers cannot provide for themselves.

In his two best-selling books, Three Cups of Tea and Stones into School, Greg Mortensen describes how he started building schools with the close cooperation of the local communities in Pakistan and Afghanistan. In 2005, there were riots in response to the Newsweek story about the desecration of the Koran. Areas where NGO offices were located had been destroyed. The buildings, which housed the Aga Khan Development Network, FOCUS, East West Foundation, Afghan Aid, and other NGO offices, lay in ruins, even safes and desks had been smashed to pieces. As he pulled up in front of a new school, Greg and his team could see that no windows were broken. The door was intact. A local resident explained that during the peak of the riots, a faction of the mob had stormed down the road in the direction of the school. Before reaching the boundary wall, they had been met by a group of elders who had donated the land for the school, organized the laborers who had built it, and participated in the laying of the cornerstone. The elders informed the rioters that the school belonged not to a foreign aid organization but to the community. It was their school, they were proud of it, and they demanded that it be left alone. With that, the rioters dispersed. After all the damage had been tabulated, the cost of the riots was assessed at more than $2 million. The school that Greg had helped to build was one of the few buildings associated with an international aid organization that was left standing, and the reason for this, he is convinced, is that the school wasn’t really “international” at all. It was, and remains, local in every way that counts.

Global Volunteers is a private, non-profit, non-sectarian, non-governmental organization engaging short-term volunteers on micro-economic and human development programs in close partnership with local people worldwide. Working at the invitation and under the direction of local leaders, volunteers help create a foundation for world peace through mutual international understanding. Their purpose is to maintain a genuine, sustained service partnership with the host community and provide volunteers a genuine opportunity to serve. In 1984 Global Volunteers pioneered direct service-learning programs abroad. Today, they mobilize more than 2,500 volunteers annually on work projects, assisting more than 100 host communities in 19 countries on 5 continents through volunteer service, direct project funding and child sponsorships. Global Volunteers is guided by a unique philosophy of service, stating that to be successful in sustainable development assistance, outsiders must work at the invitation and under the direction of those they are attempting to assist. By remaining faithful to this philosophy they’ve created opportunities for volunteers to provide a genuine service all over the globe.

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Passing on the Gift
Fourteen women who'd earned income from their goats would now pass on the offspring to newer members. The donors wore red saris; the new initiates wore lavender. The whole village had turned out. I felt hope rise, and soon was crying like a child, because Dhana Bishow-Karma, whose old untouchable hand I'd wanted to hold, was now standing, throwing her shadow over everyone, holding her gift: a lop-eared goat wearing a necklace of marigolds. She walked toward her chosen recipient, another poor widow belonging to the highest caste in the village. Last year Bishow-Karma couldn't have entered the woman's home. Today she gave her good fortune. In the embrace of two old women holding each other, I saw the architecture of human grace. How astonishingly simple: mental poverty ends this way. A person's status can change, not by receiving but by giving.11

To ensure that development efforts live on after the donor organization departs, set up a system whereby recipients of a gift make a commitment to give a similar gift to others.

You’re part of a development organization working on a specific program. You’re working to ensure Constructive Participation.

**Your well-intentioned actions for development can die a short time after you depart. What can you do to make it more likely that the local community continues the effort?**

We often view the problems of others as a puzzle that requires our best efforts to resolve. We want to get our hands on it and straighten out the crooked parts and make everything right. Then we can feel satisfied and go on to the next problem. It’s hard for us as outsiders to accept that we might not know what’s best for the local community. We are reluctant to listen and slow to learn that the locals know more about their problems better than we do.

Receiving an outright donation of training or food or cash or technology leads to expecting more aid. When organizations leave, their good works can die because nothing has been learned except that there are outsiders who are willing to help. What this teaches the recipient is that waiting for aid may lead to more assistance and so a vicious feedback cycle of dependency results.

In the face of all the problems in the world, you know that your bank account is limited and is always inadequate to address the problems you see. You can raise all the money you can possibly raise and it will never be enough. The need is boundless.

*Therefore:*

**Ensure that each recipient of a gift agrees to give similar gifts to others, where the gift is not a simple hand-out but a means to enable the recipient to help himself.**

As the old saying goes: Give a man a fish and you’ll feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you’ll feed him for a lifetime. The gift is a help-up not a hand-out.

The gift is also not just a job or some isolated course of training, although these can be part of the gift, in fact, the gift must include any training that will result in the recipient’s being able to effectively use the actual gift.

The goal of a sustainable development is to empower the people to solve their own problems. We often believe that what we can do is to solve the problems that we see as outsiders. This is often the goal of training programs. Yes, you want to improve the knowledge of animal husbandry and other topics of interest, but you also want to increase sustainability, the largest part of which is passing on the gift.

The responsibility for determining the gift and the next recipient is not determined by outsiders but by the members of the local community. They know the local needs and who needs help better than the outside organization.
Many cultures and religions have a deep notion of sharing and caring, although in some cultures this may only be practiced within the family.

This pattern makes it more likely that the well-intended actions live on. Recipients will own the process and can begin to take control of their lives. This practice is larger than the simple handing off of an equivalent animal or amount of money. This is an operational directive that people who live well follow in their own lives. We are continually giving to others in response to what we feel we have received. Those who practice this say that the more they give the more they are enriched. Passing on the Gift is a metaphor for a rewarding life.

By having individuals pass on the gift, the changes that result from the assistance are at first small, but grow to involve more and more recipients as the gifts are passed on. The cultural change that is a consequence of the assistance occurs gradually and so is less likely to meet resistance than an influx of large sums of money for aid.

However, there can be a tendency to be heavy-handed in this process and play the role of overseer. The people must themselves be responsible and take ownership of the ritual and their lives. Care must be taken to make sure that the original gifts are appropriate for the environment and culture of the recipient.

In the 1930s, Dan West, an Indiana farmer doing relief work in Spain began to ask why he was handing out powdered milk to refugees. With the observation that it would be more effective to give “a cow, not a cup,” Heifer International started more than 60 years of work providing livestock to impoverished people. The cornerstone of Heifer’s work is “Passing on the Gift,” which means that recipients agree to share the offspring of animals they received from Heifer by giving to others in need. The impact of this ritual is the heartbeat, the lifeblood of the organization today.

Habitat for Humanity is an international non-profit organization devoted to building "simple, decent, and affordable" housing. Homes are built using volunteer labor and are sold at no profit. This policy has been in place since 1986. Homeowners are usually expected to put in “sweat equity” into their own and other project homes. When the homeowner helps to build another home, he not only helps out another individual, but increases his own sense of worth and a feeling of community belonging.

Each participant, within the NFU New Farm Project, who receives a gift of livestock, seed, orchard tree seedlings, hand tools, or training, signs a contract to pass on a similar gift to another farmer. This encourages community members to support each other in an ever-expanding circle of giving. Sharing best practices, individual successes and research with others benefits all. This is the basis of community: sharing and caring.

www.newfarmproject.ca/passing-on-the-gift
The ability of each member of A.A. (Alcoholics Anonymous) to identify himself with and bring recovery to the newcomer is a gift. Passing on this gift to others is our one aim. (Alcoholics Anonymous – Tradition Five from Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions)

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Small Support Group

The Grameen Bank Project was started in Bangladesh in 1976. It is owned by the poor borrowers of the bank, mostly women. No one who borrows from Grameen Bank stands alone. Each belongs to a self-made group of five friends, no two of whom may be closely related. When one of the five friends wants to take out a loan, she needs approval from the other four. Although each borrower is responsible for her own loan, the group functions as a small social network that provides encouragement, psychological support, and at times practical assistance in bearing the unfamiliar burden of debt and steering the individual through the unfamiliar world of business.

Individuals who receive assistance need support to ensure that they are able to sustain change in their lives.

Members of a community are about to receive help and are involved in Constructive Participation.

After a development organization has moved on, the individuals receiving support will encounter problems, but will have no place to go for help.

Organizations that provide aid create dependency as a side effect and become indispensable to those they help. In some cases, recipients may lack the desire to solve their problems feeling that they will lose their assistance.
Leaving individuals on their own does not provide the resiliency to allow them to overcome obstacles that always seem to arise. Without this ability, the assistance becomes a temporary fix that soon fades.

Therefore:

**Structure those receiving assistance into small groups where ideas can be exchanged. The members of the small groups will provide support for each other.**

The goal of successful development is to empower people to solve their own problems. Since individuals in developing communities often do not have the experience needed to be independent, a group of similar others provides an opportunity to learn together and support each other’s learning. The collective knowledge is greater than the sum of its parts. Sometimes a member of the support group can lend concrete assistance to someone else. Just being able to share problems and get sympathetic responses can improve an individual’s ability to make progress.

In her book *It Takes a Village*, Hillary Rodham Clinton says, “I'm obviously not talking just about or even primarily about geographical villages any longer, but about the network of relationships and values that do connect us and binds us together.”

“We must remember that one determined person can make a significant difference, and that a small group of determined people can change the course of history” (Sonia Johnson, American feminist activist and writer.)

The community-oriented dynamic of Grameen is an important reason for the success of the system. The positive social pressure created by the group does a lot to encourage borrowers to remain faithful to their commitments. When Grameen members are surveyed about why they repay their loans, the most common answer is, “Because I would feel terrible to let down the other members of my group.”

Using this pattern helps to build a community, and in many cases creates positive cultural change by encouraging interactions among members from different sectors of the society.

Individuals form a community. Building community extends individual’s feelings of responsibility to a larger group beyond the family. If the group can be comprised of individuals from different sectors of the society, then this will tend to open more general communication.

However, in some cultures it may be difficult to form a diverse group. The culture of a region may discourage interactions among certain groups so an important part of creating a support group may be overcoming these taboos. The opening story for *Passing on the Gift* shows that it is possible for a group to overcome even the barriers of the caste system in India.

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Some critics worry that this requirement seems coercive. As long as no one is ever forced to join and if the only agenda item is to help poor people lift themselves out of poverty, it seems appropriate to recognize the support group as an example of the power of community to encourage people to achieve things they might otherwise find impossible.

*Heifer works with groups to identify their own strengths, to connect to a common vision, and to organize a budget that helps implement their plans. Support is tailored to each project. All groups commit to a participatory process which gives all members a voice in all decisions.*

I was in Zacapu, Michoacan, Mexico in the summer of '64. Our project was to begin the construction of a community center in a small slum near the city. It was very poor with just a couple of dirt streets. The only water was from a central tank. A middle class guy helped us get and transport cement for the foundation. The men of the village broke up big rocks into small rocks to make the walls. We didn't really do a lot about formal organization with the locals, but an interesting thing happened over the following winter. Something stalled the work on the community center. The men of the village got together and decided that it was a bummer that the streets were muddy. They realized that what they had for resources was time and (big) rocks, so they spent the winter making small rocks from big ones and paved their own streets. What we contributed was our example that “something could be done,” and that made them look at the muddy streets differently.13

*Banco Mariposa, a student-run organization, will give micro-loans to low-income female entrepreneurs in the city of Valparaiso, Chile. It also creates a unique system of repayment, in which group members are responsible not only to the lender, but also to each other. If a group member is unable to make a loan payment, the group will make up the difference for that week. These communities of women support and encourage each other through the process, while developing leadership, building teamwork, and maintaining accountability.*

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Empowering Women

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13 From our first shepherd, Joe Bergin.
In 1999, a Bangladeshi organization, Prokaushali Sangsad Limited (PSL), headed by women engineers, decided to bring rural women from a remote location into the mainstream energy arena. They turned the tables making the women energy service providers as opposed to users. Thirty-five women on the isolated island of Char Montaz were organized into a cooperative. They discovered they could make a huge difference in their community by going into business. Ignoring criticism that they were breaking society's rules by working outside the home, they started the Women's DC Lamp Enterprise with funding from the World Bank. The women built battery-powered direct current lamps to replace kerosene lanterns widely used in local homes—a known source of indoor air pollution. As they mastered lamp construction, they also learned about quality control, business development, and marketing. Soon, their critics were their customers. Within two years, they were bringing low-cost light and clean power to over 1,200 households, shops, and boats, and 300 businesses. Shops stayed open longer, children spent more time on school work at home, and incomes increased by 30 percent.

Focus on women recipients for development to ensure that the impact lives on through the women’s children.

Women and girls suffer disproportionately from the burden of extreme poverty. Your development organization wants to address these issues as well as the other obvious problems. Members of the community are involved in Constructive Participation.

In many cultures, the role of women has been minimalized. Even when development aid is given, women are not the primary recipients, men are.

The historic approach to development support allocation is not effective. What can be done to improve the impact?

Muhammad Yunus won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 for his work with the Grameen Bank and the microcredit innovation. He found that giving credit to poor women brings more benefits to a
family than giving it to men. It was Grameen’s experience that when men make money, they
tend to spend it on themselves, but when women make money, they bring benefits to the whole
family, particularly the children. For Grameen, lending to women created a cascading effect that
brought social benefits as well as economic benefits to the whole family and ultimately to the
entire community. Their conclusion is that if poverty is to be reduced or eliminated, the next
generation must be the focus. This next generation is reached through the women, the mothers in
the family, not for emotional reasons, but because it makes economic sense.14

Women make up 70 percent of the one billion people living on less than a dollar a day. They
work two-thirds of the world’s working hours, produce half of the world’s food, yet earn only 10
percent of the world’s income and own less than one percent of the world’s property. In some
cultures women are not full members of society but may even be treated as sub-human.

It might be that women see problems differently than men as they have to deal directly with
issues that arise because of lack of food or illnesses in children.

*Therefore:*

**Turn your attention to women recipients, not to the exclusion of men, but to encourage an
equal share in decision-making, labor, and benefits.**

The goal of successful development organizations is to empower the local people to solve their
own problems. Many of the problems arise because women, who are the primary nurturers in a
family, have no control over the use of the limited family resources. By emphasizing women as
recipients of assistance, you will directly benefit the whole family. Women tend to have a greater
focus on the well-being of the children and therefore have a more long range view.

Women have become the focus of many microcredit institutions and agencies worldwide,
because loans to women are more likely to benefit the whole family than do loans to men. Giving
women control and responsibility for small loans raises their socio-economic status, which has a
positive impact on many of the gender and class relationships.

Using this pattern helps target the recipients who will make the most lasting change. Not only
will the lives of women be improved but also the lives of their children.

However, care must be taken to not overburden the women. We have all heard of the problem of
the “supermom” who tries to do too much and fails to balance the needs of a career and family.
In “Expanding women’s opportunities: the potential of heifer projects in sub-Saharan Africa” (F.M. Ssewamala in the journal *Development in Practice*) says, “Of special concern, however, is
the issue of increased workload, which may eventually adversely affect the health of women and
constrain their participation in community meetings.”

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When speaking of change brought about by helping women, Darcy Kiefel Gyatri Adhikari, a member of a Heifer women’s group in the village of Astam, says, “Before the formation of our group, men used to believe women could do nothing but today, the men have progressed as well and are treating us equally. They have started appreciating our work along with supporting the poorer members and lower caste.”

A summary of microlending practices by ACCION reports, “Loans to women more often benefit the whole family than loans to men. Giving women the control and the responsibility of small loans raises their socio-economic status, which positively impacts the relationships of gender and class.”

Heifer International says, “By focusing on women we also help struggling families and communities. Overlooked by government programs and often denied education, rural women face a cycle of poverty, hunger, and despair. Without help, many toil endlessly yet watch, helpless, as death, too often, steals their children.”

Women for Women International began its Microcredit Lending Program in Afghanistan in July 2004 with an initial investment of $34,210, and is the only organization in the country that offers loans exclusively to women. As of November 2006, $2.7 million in loans had been dispersed to more than 7,500 women, with a total of $4.2 million projected over the next five years. The current repayment rate is 100 percent. The Microcredit Program provides vital income-generation support to some of the most socially excluded women in Afghanistan.

http://www.womenforwomen.org