

# INTER-AMERICAN FOUNDATION

## MEASURING IMPACT

### The Grassroots Development Framework

#### What is Grassroots Development?

Grassroots Development is community-based change through participatory, self-help initiatives. The primary objective is to improve the quality of life for the poor and disadvantaged. For the Inter-American Foundation, development encompasses a broad agenda, which includes increasing incomes, as well as improving literacy rates, housing conditions, health, encouraging the growth of democratic institutions and much more. The Foundation's 40-year experience has demonstrated that development programs must involve beneficiaries in project design and implementation, if programs are to yield long-term, sustainable results. This approach, working with the beneficiary as a partner, and finding solutions at a local, community level, is what makes development, grassroots.

In recent years, donor agencies such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank have come to see the value in this approach, which the Inter-American Foundation pioneered in 1971. Assessing aid and its impact has become a priority for donor agencies around the globe. To evaluate its own projects, in 1994 the Foundation created the Grassroots Development Framework (GDF).

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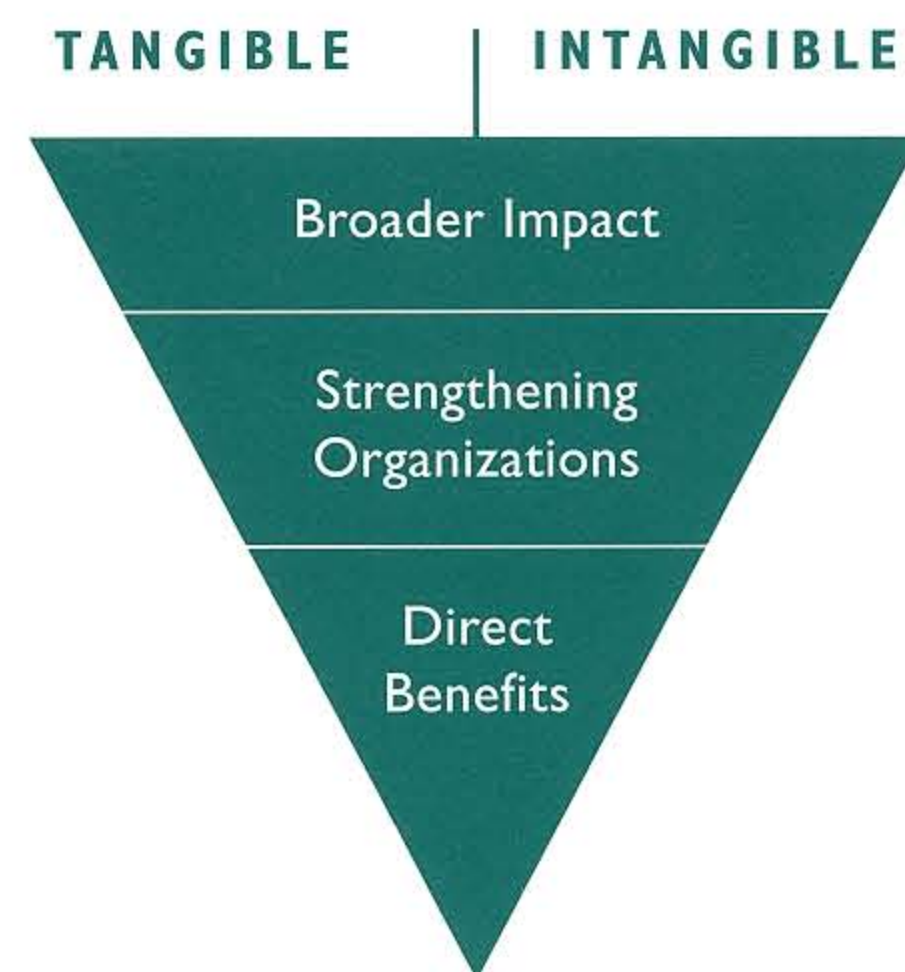
In a world of growing demand and dwindling resources, results are vital. Results can inform decisions, signal challenges, and confirm success. That is why the Foundation devised a system to measure results in development projects. Employing lessons learned from supporting over 3,800 projects, the Inter-American Foundation created the Grassroots Development Framework.

The GDF serves both the grantee and the donor. The Framework provides grantees with a means of setting their development goals and reporting the achievements and shortcomings of a project. The GDF provides donors and grantees alike with a tool to measure impact. It is a methodological guide comprised of quantitative and qualitative indicators of grassroots development. Since the pilot testing and application of the GDF across the region, several international development assistance organizations have consulted with the Inter-American Foundation about adapting the Framework for their own needs.

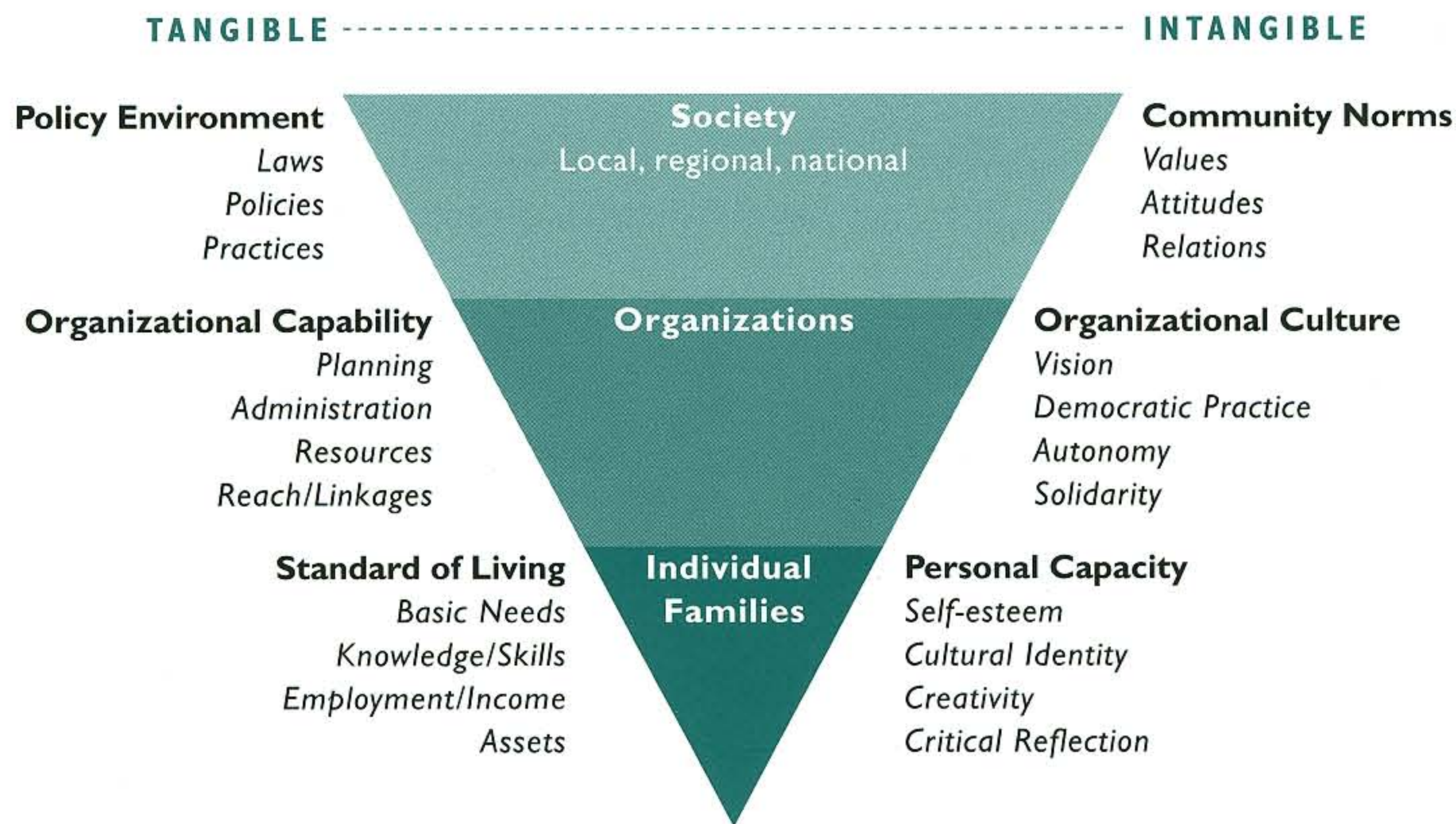
#### How does the GDF work?

The premise of the Framework is that grassroots development produces results at different levels and there are important intangible, as well as tangible, results that must be considered. In business, profits are the bottom line. In grassroots development, a project must generate material benefits and more, to improve the quality of life for the poor. Because poverty is not merely a lack of income, but a lack of access to a range of basic services (including education, healthcare, housing and the capacity to participate as an active citizen), the GDF merges all those indicators into one tool.

A development project is a special kind of investment that will bring tangible and intangible returns, therefore the GDF is divided into two *SECTIONS* to measure both. Foundation experience has demonstrated that each project can plant a seed for change, and grassroots development produces results not only for individuals but organizations and society. Therefore, the GDF cone shape represents the impact of a grassroots development project from individuals through organizations and to society at large—the three *LEVELS* of the Framework.



## The Grassroots Development Framework



### An Example of the GDF Applied

When the Framework was applied to assess the effectiveness of an Inter-American Foundation project in Mexico, PAIR (Program for Integrated Use of Natural Resources), it became clear just how different a project can look through the wider GDF lens. Traditional monitoring of this grant for non-timber forest products demonstrated that PAIR worked with two municipalities in the state of Oaxaca to improve coffee production, introduce vanilla and cacao crops, protect hardwood forests, and begin a reforestation project. The project upgraded 20 hectares of coffee, planted 20 hectares of cacao, and established nine experimental plots of vanilla. A nursery, completed through the project, provided 5,000 seedlings of cedar and aguajillo (a tree that is indigenous to the region), which were transplanted into fields. These results, the type of findings reported through traditional analysis, can also be measured according to GDF CATEGORIES: Standard of Living and Organizational Capability.

Notwithstanding the importance of these material benefits, there are other important outcomes to expect of grassroots development projects. Failures or successes in these areas are made apparent through the GDF. A project examined through the GDF Framework allows us to evaluate whether it is effecting the type of intangible benefits that secure long-term returns in grassroots development. Is the project producing worthwhile lessons that benefit more people than the grantees involved directly? Are people learning through the project? Are the grantees involved acquiring skills that are applicable to other activities related to their livelihood and civil society? The GDF sets a standard for grassroots development projects to incorporate these considerations and through the Framework we can measure a broader spectrum of results.

In the project, PAIR collaborated with six major non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Therefore the project's influence expanded to an additional 10 municipalities, involving NGOs, the Mexican government, and peasant organizations. Working in a community, not in isolation, is a key component of a successful grassroots development project and PAIR's effect on civil society is evident through the application of a GDF. Moreover, on the strength of PAIR's track record in natural resource planning in Oaxaca and other states, several of its founders were named to national posts in the Mexican government's Office of the Secretary of Environment, Natural Resources, and Fishing (SEMARNAP). As the Secretary, Undersecretary for Planning of SEMARNAP, and Director of Regional Development, these grassroots development innovators promoted approaches to natural resource use and conservation on a national scale, based on practices learned at PAIR. These results would be measured according to GDF CATEGORIES: Personal Capacity, Organizational Culture, Community Norms, and Policy Environment.

*This example is drawn from an article by Marion Ritchey Vance in the Grassroots Development Journal, Volume 20, No. 1, 1996, "Social Capital, Sustainability and Working Democracy: New Yardsticks for Grassroots Development." For a more in-depth explanation of the GDF, visit our Website, [www.iaf.gov](http://www.iaf.gov)*



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