SPARK MICROGRANTS

About Spark

The Issue

The current and prevalent system of international aid is often driven by partners external to the communities that they serve. Schools are built, water wells are installed, land is repaired - the list goes on. However, when external partners (be they government, NGOs or philanthropists) leave an area, resources for continual improvement of that area and local livelihoods may leave with them. Sustainable development is stronger when communities are invested in deciding on their priorities, driving change and building their futures.

The Intervention

Spark MicroGrants was founded in 2010 to prove community-driven development can be done at scale. Spark supports communities facing poverty to take action, and has partnered with over 180 villages across Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Ghana. They combine capacity building with a micro-grant to support villages to come together, choose their priorities and implement change. Spark's partner communities act as the main decision makers at every stage of the process and its model is an example of Community-Driven Development (CDD). This is a paradigm for development in which communities are the main decision makers in the programmatic design and implementation of aid projects. It shifts focus away from large entities, instead emphasizing that individuals should have a strong voice in projects aimed to help them.

The Approach and Model

Spark's approach begins with the recruitment of a local university graduate who is enrolled in a facilitator fellowship program. Over the course of two years, facilitators take seven communities through the Spark approach - the Facilitated Collective Action Process (FCAP). This covers six areas - Community Building, Goal Setting, Proposal Development, Technical Advisor Review, Implementation, and Future Envisioning. Whilst the micro-grant is an important part of Sparks work, the capacity building process is even more crucial as it invests the community with confidence and skills that can drive future development and increase resilience.