

External Mid-Line Evaluation of Spark's Impact in Rwanda

Executive Summary

For nearly a decade, Spark Microgrants has been pioneering a new approach to international aid that is 100% community driven, supporting rural villages facing poverty to design and implement their own social impact projects. Spark offers a proven model for catalyzing mutually reinforcing economic and democratic development across East Africa, using **The Facilitated Collective Action Process (FCAP)**, a village planning process that's paired with a small grant. This collective action results in once marginalized communities driving their own economic, civic, and social progress, with sustainable impacts on increased social cohesion and improved livelihoods.

This study was an external evaluation of the 21 communities in the Rukozo sector of Rwanda, which gathered preliminary learnings on civic engagement, cohesion, and livelihood outcomes in communities approximately one year after starting the FCAP.

Methodology

This evaluation was conducted by an externally contracted consultant with Spark's role limited to the setting of key deliverables, objectives and providing logistical support to empower the consultant to engage with community members. The methodology settled upon by the consultant allowed for an analysis between a target group of 21 communities who had taken part in the FCAP process and 19 communities who had not taken part. The existence of two surveys at two time points in Spark and comparable communities allowed the consultant to calculate the "difference-in-differences". At the heart of the DID method is the ability to control for changes over time that are not related to the intervention. These unrelated changes are tracked in the comparison community and subtracted from the change in Spark communities, allowing us to better isolate the portion of change that may be due to the Spark process. New questions were also added to the midline survey. For those new measures, we were able to make midline-to-midline comparisons between the two survey groups.

The 21 target villages were purposively selected from a single district sector (Rukozo sector) and targeted for Spark partnership based on Spark's strategy of implementing the FCAP in all villages within a sector. The 19 communities in the comparison group were selected because they are also all from one sector (Cyungo sector), which is a sector neighboring the Rukozo sector. The baseline survey was administered in 2018 before any of the communities had started the Spark process. The midline survey was administered in 2019, approximately one year after the 21 target villages had started the Spark process. Altogether, more than 2,900 households were surveyed from 40 communities at baseline and nearly 2,400 households were surveyed from the same 40 communities at midline. The evaluation was focused on three outcome areas: cohesion, civic engagement, and inclusive livelihoods.

A recognized weakness of this methodology was the fact that target and comparison groups were located within neighboring districts, with anecdotal evidence from community based facilitators pointing towards spillover effects between target and non-target communities. This effect potentially minimizing the differences seen between the communities. Future methodologies will attempt to control and measure this spillover between direct and indirect communities. A potential unintentional benefit of Spark's model of delivery.

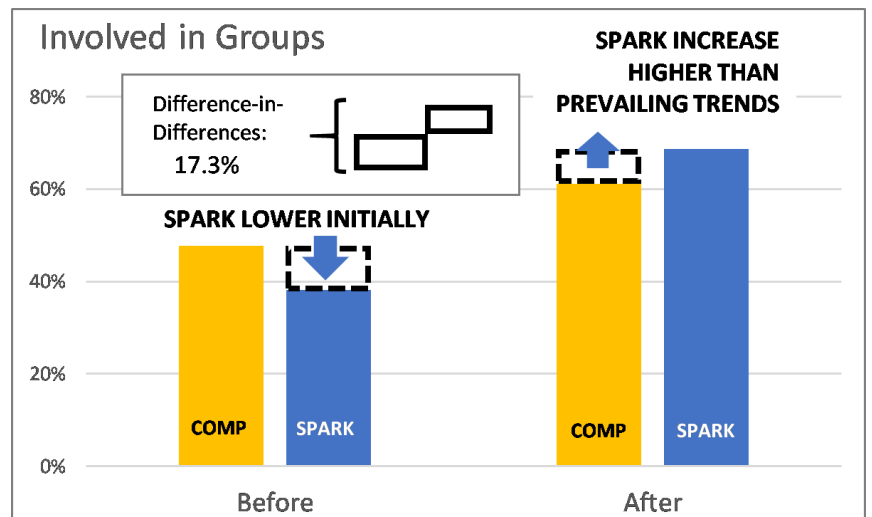
Spark intends on following up this midline assessment with an endline assessment in 2021 to gather more comprehensive data on impact after the communities have completed the process.

Cohesion

Key Finding #1

Spark communities demonstrated an increase in involvement in groups after starting the Spark process that was more than 17% higher than the increase in Comparison communities (DID 17.3%, $p < .01$)

The average portion of survey respondents who were involved in groups increased to a significantly greater extent in Spark communities from baseline to midline than in comparison communities (38.2% baseline Spark vs. 47.8% Comparison; 68.7% midline Spark vs. 61.1% Comparison). The “difference-in-differences” (DID) result demonstrates the increase within Spark communities was above-and-beyond underlying trends in the region.



In addition to the positive DID result were these findings about involvement in groups from the midline survey:

- A significantly greater number of women in the Spark group were involved in groups at midline (68% Spark vs. 61% Comparison, $p = .007$ relative to .025 significance threshold).
- Looking within Spark communities only at midline, a significantly greater number of individuals who were current Spark participants were involved in groups (79.7%) compared to individuals who dropped out of the Spark process (53.2%) and those who never joined (35.2%) ($p < .0001$ relative to a .025 significance threshold).

Key Finding #2

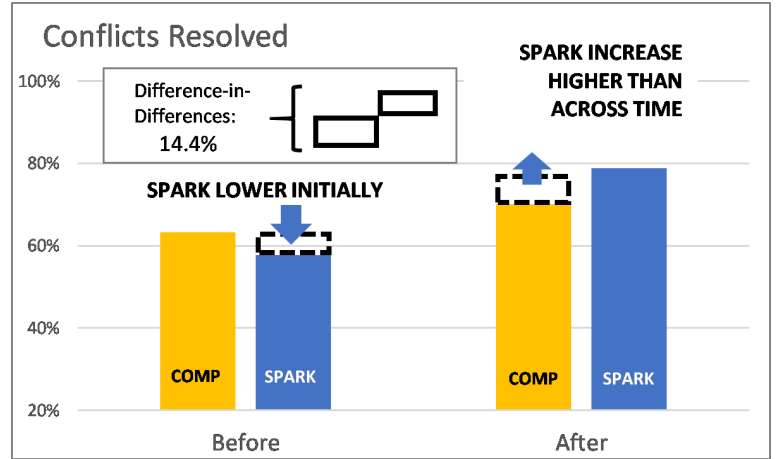
Spark communities demonstrated an increase in awareness of community bank accounts after starting the Spark process that was more than 12% greater than the increase in Comparison communities (DID 12.4%, $p < .05$)

- The difference in the awareness of community bank accounts changed to a significantly greater degree over time among Spark communities (15.0% baseline Spark vs. 24.3% Comparison; midline Spark 37.3% vs. 34.3% Comparison).
- Within Spark communities, survey respondents were significantly more likely to be aware of a community bank account if they were a Spark participant (42.4% Spark participants vs. 30.3% who joined Spark but later dropped vs. 23.4% who never joined; $p < .0001$ relative to a .025 significance threshold).

Key Finding #3

Spark communities reported an increase in resolution of community conflicts after starting the Spark process that was more than 14% higher than the increase in Comparison communities (DID 14.4%)

- Among those who reported conflicts, the portion of households in Spark communities reporting “many, very many, or all” conflicts were resolved also increased over time to a greater extent in the Spark group than the Comparison group (DID 14.4%^[1]; 57.7% baseline Spark vs 63.3% Comparison; 78.8% midline Spark vs. 70.0% Comparison). Focusing on the midline result only, the difference between the two groups was statistically significant.



- In addition to this key finding, in the midline survey significantly more respondents in Spark communities reported “no conflicts” (62.5% Spark vs. 58.9% Comparison; $p=.077$).

Civic Engagement

Key Finding #4

Awareness of community projects more than doubled in Spark communities after starting the Spark process (50.0% midline versus 23.4% at baseline).

- In the midline survey, Spark respondents also reported significantly more involvement in community projects (72.0% Spark vs 57.8% Comparison; $p<.0001$) and significantly more households making contributions to (68.3% Spark vs. 53.4% Comparison; $p<.0001$).
- Focusing solely on Spark participants within Spark communities in the midline survey, we also saw a significant difference in awareness of community projects among those who participated in the Spark process vs. those who did not (52.0% Spark participants vs. 45.2% among those who joined and later dropped and 42.7% among those who never joined; $p=.021$).

Key Finding #5

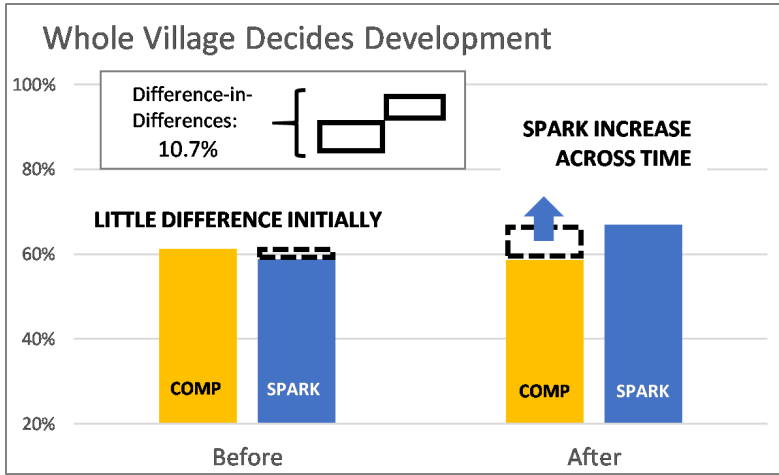
After starting the Spark process, respondents in Spark communities reported an increase in their participation at meetings that was greater than the increase reported in Comparison communities (DID 2.5%, holding gender constant; NS)

- The increase in meeting participation over time was found by comparing those who reported they spoke at community meetings “sometimes”, “often” or “always” over those who said “never” or “rarely”.

1. DID result was not statistically significant ($p=.119$)

Key Finding #6

After starting the Spark process, more than 10% of the Spark group shifted their perspective, saying “the whole village” should be involved in development decisions (DID 10.7%).



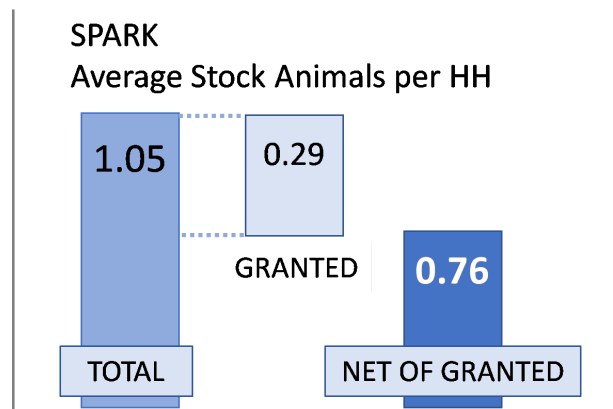
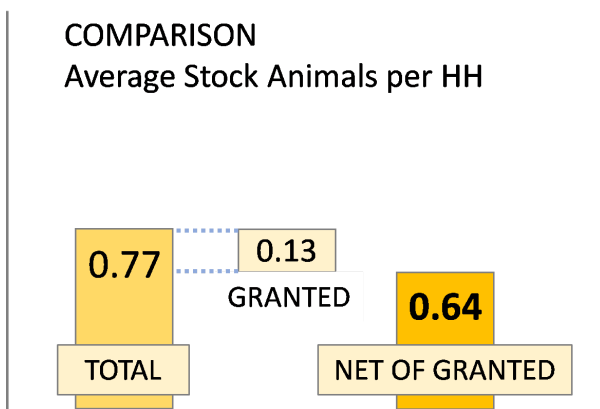
- An upward shift of 8.2% among Spark villages was contrasted to a 2.5% decrease among Comparison villages, yielding a net DID change of 10.7 (58.8% baseline Spark vs. 61.2% Comparison; 67.0% midline Spark vs. 58.7% Comparison).[1]
- At midline, focusing on overall group averages (versus village-level averages used in the DID analysis), the survey results showed a significantly larger

portion of Spark respondents said “the whole village” should be involved in development decisions (66.2% Spark vs. 58.4% Comparison; $p < .0001$).

Livelihoods

Key Finding #7

In the midline survey, the average number of stock animals owned per household, net of granted animals, was 20% higher in Spark communities (0.76 stock animals net of granted stock animals per Spark HH vs. 0.64 per Comparison HH; $p = .023$).



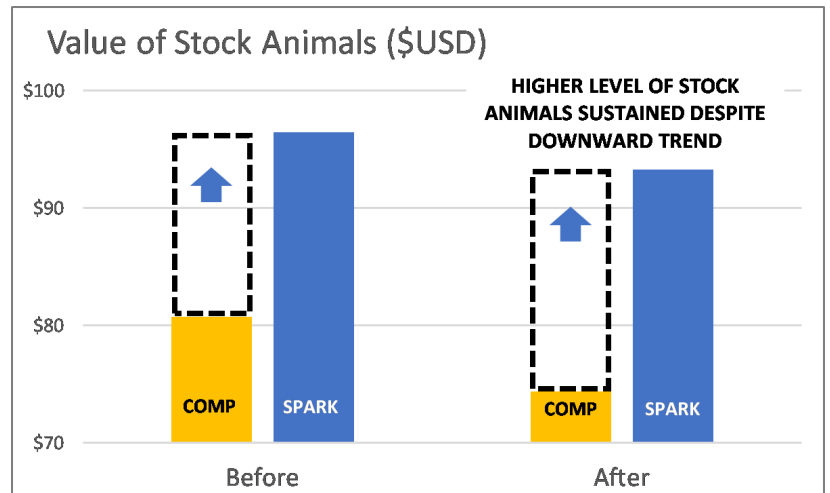
- After adding measures in the midline survey that allowed us to better understand the source of each household’s stock animals, we were to confirm that higher levels of stock animals among Spark communities were independent of the effect of animal grants.
- This finding was even more remarkable in light of the fact that the average number of granted animals per household was significantly higher in Spark communities (0.29 granted stock animals per household Spark vs. 0.13 Comparison; $p < .0001$).

[1] The DID value for development decisions did not reach statistical significance.

Key Finding #8

The average value of stock animals owned per household was sustained amidst an apparent downward trend in comparable communities (DID \$3.24, NS).

- Between the baseline and midline surveys, stock animals in both groups were drawn down; however, in Spark communities, the decline in the value of stock animals was smaller than in Comparison communities (-\$3.13 USD Spark vs. -\$6.38 USD Comparison). At the midline point of the DID analysis, the average value of stock animals was 25% higher in Spark communities (\$93.30 USD per Spark household (vs. \$74.38 USD per Comparison household; $p=.016$).



- The influence of Spark animal grants was an important factor in this difference. The average number of stock animals granted per Spark household was more than two times the number granted in the Comparison group (see detail under Key Finding #7). The animal grants helped Spark communities maintain their animal stocks despite an apparent downward trend in comparable communities.
- At midline, the average value of stock animals, net of those granted, was 18% higher in Spark communities, a difference that was nearly significant at the 95% confidence level (\$63.67 per Spark HH vs. \$53.80 per Comparison HH; $p=.047$).

Key Finding #9

A significantly larger percentage of Spark households created a budget (37.0% Spark vs. 32.0% Comparison; $p<.010$).

- Additionally, within Spark communities only, households that participated in the Spark process were significantly more likely to create a budget (40.8% Spark participants vs. 31.4% those who joined but later dropped vs. 26.4% among those who never joined).

***Additional statistics are available from Spark MicroGrants.**