



Catalyzing Locally Led Development, Sustainably

Heifer International is a global development organization on a mission to end hunger and poverty sustainably. Currently present in countries across Africa, Asia and the Americas, we support smallholder farming households and their communities to identify, manage and invest in diversified livelihood opportunities in agricultural value chains. We also promote environmentally sound and climate-smart agricultural practices.

Our approach is and has always been locally led by the communities we serve, in response to their expressed needs and priorities. Heifer offers capacity strengthening to bolster autonomous action and facilitates linkages with private sector value chain partners to ensure sustainability of community farming enterprises.

Our goal for these rural communities is that over time, Heifer's interventions catalyze and expand rural development, and development initiatives sustain and scale on the momentum driven by local actors.

What is locally led development?

Locally led development (LLD) has gained traction as a guiding principle in the global development sector over the past two decades as aid agencies seek more-sustainable impacts. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has been a leading proponent of LLD by committing to align U.S. foreign aid to participants' priorities while appreciating and strengthening local capacities¹.

While the definition of LLD has evolved over time and has various degrees of adoption, there is a common understanding that it places decisions in local organizations' hands with "initiatives owned and led by people in their own context"². Local organizations are not simply subjects or implementers of projects conceived elsewhere but are initiators and owners, while global NGOs and donors act as support and facilitation entities.

Empowerment for local leadership can encompass several elements of the development process, including priority-setting to design, management, establishing partnerships, monitoring progress and evaluating results.

Why is locally led development important?

In essence, LLD ensures that development assistance is more efficient and sustainable because local organizations are most attuned to the needs of their communities, which are then also motivated to invest their own resources in a development initiative that they "own"³.

Development assistance can be more transformative for these communities by catalyzing personal, institutional and systemic change⁴. From a political perspective, LLD "decolonizes aid" from a paradigm of charity and guidance to one of partnership and mutual accountability⁵.

How does Heifer International promote sustainable locally led development (SLLD)?

Our fundamental principle for SLLD is to ensure that power over development decisions is fully devolved to local communities which then set and forge their own pathways to progress. It is essential to trust these communities' capability to know what is best for themselves, while also helping to build the confidence of community members in their own judgment, experience-based knowledge in the local context and collective power to improve their circumstances.

Heifer's SLLD focus is on building resilience from the ground up, by supporting the creation of locally organized collectives, primarily women-led self-help groups, many of which coalesce into agricultural cooperatives, producer organizations and business hubs. Our work prioritizes supporting groups as they envision what their future looks like.

This means:

- Supporting members as they build cohesion and explore income-generating opportunities within their communities and target how they can scale up their businesses to access new markets for their goods or services.
- Sharing best development practices appropriate to local conditions and contexts.
- Providing practical training and mentoring in agriculture, management and business.
- Facilitating effective partnerships with government, civil society and private sector representatives.
- Facilitating access to finance, infrastructure services and external technical assistance.

Key outcomes are:

- Personal growth and empowerment among participants.
- Social inclusion and group cohesion – creating opportunities for disenfranchised and disadvantaged members of the community, including women.
- New and strengthened skills which naturally create pathways for opportunity.
- The collective ambition to address problems identified by the group.

Heifer's SLLD approach is grounded in empirical evidence⁶ that counters the common misperception that locally led and formed organizations are not equipped to manage multifaceted development initiatives. The evidence shows that locally-led development is more cost-effective, efficient and sustainable.

The opportunity for communities to identify local needs more accurately generates greater buy-in and commitment by individuals.

Ultimately, participants invest their own resources in the initiative which increases their resilience and the sustainability of the interventions.

Heifer also takes a longer-term perspective compared to development approaches that seek "quick wins."

Case Study: Empowering Nepali Women Farmers

Heifer Nepal, in partnership with local NGOs, has engaged more than 300,000 smallholder women and their households in 44 districts, supporting them to organize into self-help groups (SHGs) to build and strengthen social capital and leverage the benefits of collective action. Participants gain business and technical skills that enable them to set attainable development goals and fulfill their entrepreneurial potential. They develop the confidence and ambition to take initiatives in societies where the culture often relegates women to a limited range of household tasks.

Heifer has so far worked with 13,000 SHGs in Nepal in which around 20 to 25 women pool funds and decide on a development initiative to pursue, such as growing fodder for their livestock. Many groups of these SHGs have joined together to form 267 agricultural cooperatives, known as Social Entrepreneurial Women's Cooperatives (SEWCs). They evolve into business hubs to facilitate essential services for their farmer members to help them become more productive and profitable with access to:

- Production inputs and services (such as veterinary and extension services);
- Markets beyond local traders offering prices at low margins;
- Insurance products (such as animal or climate insurance); and
- Financial services, including credit instruments.



EMPOWERING NEPALI WOMEN FARMERS: KEY RESULTS

- ▶ In 2022, 255 SEWCs facilitated by Heifer posted combined turnover of USD 100 million, up from 227 SEWCs with turnover of USD 30 million in 2019. Combined working capital rose to USD 92 million from USD \$20 million over the same period.
- ▶ As of 2021, the average annual household income of families participating in Heifer's Nepal programs reached nearly USD 3500, up 175 percent from USD 1268 (baseline data of 2012).
- ▶ Women participants are not only advancing entrepreneurially - they are also creating opportunities socially and politically. In Nepal, more than 500 women from Heifer-supported SHGs and cooperatives chose to run for local political offices and 457 of them were elected, attesting to the spirit of empowerment among women participants.
- ▶ Through partnerships with financial institutions, Heifer has helped mobilize USD 15 million in investment financing available to SEWCs, with USD 75.6 million committed overall.
- ▶ All the 267 SEWCs founded so far continue to be active entities, attesting to the strength of Heifer's SLLD approach. Evidence has shown that agricultural cooperatives in low- and middle-income countries frequently fail due to financial problems, investment in non-income generating activities, poor organization, weak or bad leadership, and/or mistrust and conflicts (34,35). Building social capital and mutual trust within the group is essential to avoiding these issues.

Crowding in local support

Heifer Nepal works closely with government actors, particularly local governments which commit budget resources that increase the sustainability of SEWCs by reducing dependence on support from donors.

Since 2019, local governments have entered into 51 partnership agreements with Heifer Nepal in a cost-sharing model and government commitments to Heifer-supported initiatives have totaled USD 14 million to date. This reflects local governments' confidence in Heifer's SLLD model and appreciation for the long-term collaborative partner approach of providing essential technical assistance and services to local communities, thereby assisting the government in reaching its rural development goals.

"This scheme relies on quality and on quantity. The production of goats has increased, and the farmers have scaled up their enterprises." Pokharel and his team partnered with Heifer Nepal to initiate subsidies for goat meat, dairy, vegetables and honey to bolster his community's agricultural economy.

— BHUPAL POKHAREL, CHIEF OF DHURKOT RURAL MUNICIPALITY

ECUADOR

Connecting to urban markets

Heifer's SLLD approach in the Americas focuses primarily on strengthening capacities of pre-existing community organizations as opposed to helping organize new entities. In Ecuador, under the Future of Food Program, the objective is to harness community-based power to boost their production of nutritious, sustainably grown food and market it to urban customers.

One such method, which emerged during COVID-19 lockdowns, was for the farming communities to organize direct delivery of food "baskets" to urban areas via bicycle and motorbikes. This evolved into an online marketplace, La Cosecha del Dia, which allows smallholder farmers to directly market their products to consumers. This is just one small part of broader efforts in Ecuador that has positively impacted nearly 23,000 farming families which have developed 34 businesses posting nearly USD 3.5 million in sales since 2020.

NIGERIA

Bolstering women poultry farmers

In Nigeria's Edo State, many women farmers raise local breeds of chicken that they only sell in local markets, earning little money. The women wanted to be able to sell in more-lucrative markets and requested help from Heifer to facilitate links to potential buyers, which included Amo Farms.

To provide incentive for Amo Farms to invest time and resources to help the women improve quality of their product and more readily access markets, Heifer arranged a recoverable grant for Amo to kickstart collaboration with 200,000 of these women farmers. In addition, a 10,000 chicken-per-day processing plant was built near the farms and the women also now have access to much-needed financing to invest in their farm operations.

The Keys to SLLD Success

- **Strengthen social capital within the group** by helping them identify shared values and goals, creating buy-in and encouraging longer-term commitment and investment in their chosen development initiatives.
- **Strengthen farmers' (especially women farmers') capacities** in leadership, literacy, financial management, livestock and crop production, aggregation, valued-added production and marketing.
- **Encourage sharing knowledge, skills and/or assets** gained through the collective enterprise to expand reach and impact to other households in the community or in neighboring communities. The practice also reinforces the group's sense of accountability and responsibility for expanding the impact of their achievements.
- **Engage with farmers over the long term.** Heifer country teams remain present and available as resources while the collectives grow, evolve and diversify their enterprise. Increasingly in Nepal, as SEWCs master production, managerial and operational matters, they seek more support from Heifer in identifying market niches and opportunities further along food value chains beyond raw products and developing competitive brands for added-value products.
- **Engage all relevant stakeholders** – community leaders, government, NGOs, businesses, etc. – so that solutions are holistic and sustainable. Business engagement is particularly important to ensure the cooperative's enterprise is grounded in the private sector and linked to markets.



This brief draws primarily from a Heifer report, *Locally Led Development: A Case Study from Nepal*, written by Katherine Warner. Access this report here by scanning the QR code or going online to https://media.heifer.org/About_Us/press-resources/HPI-Locally-Led-Development-Nepal-Case-Study.pdf

PARTNER WITH HEIFER INTERNATIONAL

Catalyzing successful and impactful locally led development requires multisectoral partnerships at the global, regional, national and subnational levels. Contact us to learn how to partner with Heifer to help end hunger and poverty sustainably in rural communities: heifer-dc@heifer.org

FOOTNOTES

¹ Ingram, C (2021) *Locally driven Development: Overcoming the Obstacles*, Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/essay/locally-driven-development-overcoming-the-obstacles/>

USAID (2021a) *Local Capacity Development Policy; v8*. https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/LCD_Policy_-_FORMATTED_508_01-11.pdf

USAID (2021b) *What is locally led development? Factsheet*. <https://www.usaid.gov/documents/what-locally-led-development-fact-sheet>

² Mathews, D. and Draper, S. (2021) *Why locally-led development must be at the heart of the new International Development Strategy*. Bond. <https://www.bond.org.uk/news/2021/10/why-locally-led-development-must-be-at-the-heart-of-the-new-international-development>

³ Devex (2022) *The localization agenda*. <https://devex.shorthandstories.com/the-localization-agenda/index.html#group-section-The-need-for-localization-A9MwYxRdJm>

⁴ Chikwema, E. *Opinion: Locally led development – what it means to me (2022)* <https://www.devex.com/news/sponsored/opinion-locally-led-development-what-it-means-to-me-102633>

⁵ Savedoff, W. (2019) *What is 'Country Ownership'? A Formal Exploration of the Aid Relationship*. Center for Global Development Working Paper 519. October 2019. <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/what-country-ownership-formal-exploration-aid-rela>

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⁶ Devex (2022) *The localization agenda*. <https://devex.shorthandstories.com/the-localization-agenda/index.html#group-section-The-need-for-localization-A9MwYxRdJm>

Thoretz, J and Smith, C. (2022) *Operationalizing Locally Led Development: Debunking the Myths*. <https://humentum.org/blog-media/operationalizing-locally-led-development-debunking-the-myths/>

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