

2023 Impact Report



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As of 2023, **nearly 700,000 lives have been touched by the Facilitated Collective Action Process (FCAP)**, including well over 100,000 new FCAP users reached during the past year. In this report, we take a closer look at those lives touched and summarize results from our end-of-year program evaluation data. We focus on the three countries where Spark has worked for the longest time (Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda) and three pillars of impact: **durable livelihoods, social cohesion, and gender and inclusion**. Outcomes in our partner communities have been profound: households across all three countries have **increased asset values by 354%**; we see a **tenfold increase in the amount of household savings** in Rwanda; and a **20% improvement in nutritional intake and dietary diversity** in Uganda. Across all countries, communities reported a **21% increase in shared purpose**, and the number of **women actively participating in community meetings more than doubled**. We also see **majority female leadership** in Burundi. The data provided in the following pages are supplemented by stories from community members, demonstrating the real-life impacts of the FCAP. The findings shared in this report underline the transformative power of our vision: **a world where everybody lives with dignity and determines their own positive future**. Thank you for your support along this journey.



A world where everybody lives with dignity and determines their own positive future.



ABOUT SPARK

Decades of prescriptive aid programs have sidelined communities facing poverty from the very programs meant to uplift them. Villages are littered with empty school buildings and broken water taps because they were built without community buy-in. Spark MicroGrants was founded in 2010 to address this problem. Spark has pioneered a novel approach to empower communities facing poverty to design and drive their own economic and civic development.

Spark's **Facilitated Collective Action Process (FCAP)** curates 'town-hall' style weekly meetings, in which residents come together to participate in village planning. Through this process, each village democratically elects an inclusive leadership committee, establishes a village savings account, plans one or more projects of their choice, and implements the project with a grant of \$8,000 - \$12,000. Each community receives approximately two years of hands-on management support and facilitation from Spark and our partners to ensure sustainability of the process, with lighter-touch follow up thereafter.



As a result of the FCAP, communities become more self-reliant and continue driving their own development. For every project stimulated by the FCAP, each community independently launches another, resulting in a 2x impact multiplier. The majority of these projects are profit-generating, ranging from agricultural to transportation businesses, and families more than triple their household asset values by year four. Even four or more years after starting the FCAP, 89% of villages continue to meet regularly. Spark's process isn't just local, it's inclusive; nearly half of FCAP leadership in communities are female, and all FCAP committees have youth in leadership.



2023 Highlights



"FCAP came when it was really needed, because it did not only bring the money, but also helped us to come together and start thinking outside of the box. We are almost getting to the end of our independent project, and we are ready and happy to start another one."

- Twiringiyemungu George, Uganda FCAP Participant

In 2023, FCAP communities experienced:

354%

increase in household asset values

79%

female attendance at community meetings

88%

of households actively saving

89%

of communities continuing to meet post-FCAP

Impact Domain

Outcome

Durable Livelihoods

The portion of households ranked poor drops from 49% to 27% in Uganda.

Social Cohesion

Collective action increases by 33% between baseline and year four across all countries.

Gender and Inclusion

In year one, women's active participation in community meetings increases 5.5x in Rwanda.

Our Reach

New FCAP Users (2023)

121,666

Cumulative Lives Touched

688,633

Total Community Projects

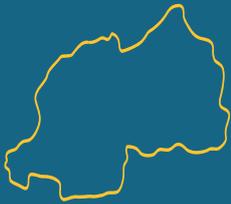
2,536

Return on Investment*

28x

*Rethink Priorities, "[Livelihood interventions: overview, evaluation, and cost-effectiveness](#)" (2023). This analysis is focused on investments in livestock rearing in Rwanda.

OUR REACH



Rwanda
Est. 2010



Uganda
Est. 2010



Burundi
Est. 2016



Malawi
Est. 2022



Ghana
Est. 2017

Nearly 700,000 cumulative lives have been touched by the FCAP through 2023. In the past year, we tripled our reach in Malawi and added new cohorts in Uganda and Ghana, **extending to over 100,000 new FCAP users** and bringing us one step closer to our goal of over one million lives touched by the end of 2024. Our growth has been possible through close partnership with national and local governments, many of which identify the FCAP as **an essential component to decentralization and poverty reduction**, as well as the continued commitment and hard work of our community partners.

Through the FCAP, families and individuals have seen livelihood gains via projects ranging from rearing livestock to building markets. The impact of these projects includes increased income, food security and dietary diversity, and better access to public services. Importantly, communities everywhere are building upon the FCAP platform to start additional projects that are resourced independently and not from the microgrant. In fact, we see an approximate 2x project multiplier effect - meaning, **for every project launched through the microgrant, we see an additional collective project launched through independent community means.**

Reach indicators	2021	2022	2023
Cumulative # of villages implementing the FCAP	575	727	865
Cumulative # of FCAP end users	445,850	566,967	688,633
Cumulative # of microgrant projects implemented	563	927	1300
Cumulative # of projects implemented via microgrant, savings, and advocacy	1167	1823	2536



SPARK IMPACT

FCAP activities increase civic action, build social capital, increase access to income and assets, and encourage inclusive participation and leadership. All of these combined in the long term lead to our three pillars of impact: **durable livelihoods, social cohesion, and gender and social inclusion.**

3.54X

**INCREASE IN
HOUSEHOLD ASSET
VALUES**

DURABLE LIVELIHOODS

The vast majority of FCAP communities select projects with a productive component, such as animal rearing or a social enterprise. Through the FCAP, participants regularly contribute savings to a shared account intended to fund collective initiatives. As a result of these projects, we see important livelihood gains, including **increased household savings, larger asset values, and improved food security.**

40%

**MORE CONTRIBUTIONS
TO COMMUNITY
INITIATIVES**

SOCIAL COHESION

The FCAP builds social cohesion through the introduction of a shared resource (the village grant) and a facilitation process that focuses on joint decision-making and collective action. Social cohesion is measured through four dimensions: **shared purpose, collective action, social capital, and accountable/inclusive leadership.**

119%

**RISE IN FEMALE
ATTENDANCE AT
MEETINGS**

GENDER AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

The FCAP emphasizes the importance of including all genders, ages, identities, and marginalized groups in collective decision-making. We measure social inclusion outcomes through **women's attendance and active participation** at both FCAP and non-FCAP meetings, **representation in FCAP leadership, and participation in governance processes.**

The data in this report are derived from standardized outcome indicators collected at the same time each year in Spark's partner communities in Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda*. To analyze trends over time, we group communities into cohorts based on how many years have passed since they began using the FCAP (i.e., Y0, Y1, Y2, etc.). This generates relatively large samples that help test the significance of differences between the results for each cohort and the baseline (Y0) for each indicator. So, the timing of Y1 is not the same for all countries and the 'years' referenced below do not correspond to a specific calendar year; rather, they indicate the amount of time a cohort has spent using FCAP approaches.

*To note, year three data is not available for Uganda, so values shown represent the average of years two and four. All numbers presented in charts have been rounded to the closest whole number. For details on our sample selection approach, sample sizes, and data analysis methods, see the Appendix.

DURABLE LIVELIHOODS



354% growth in household asset values across all countries



20% improvement in dietary diversity and nutrition in Uganda

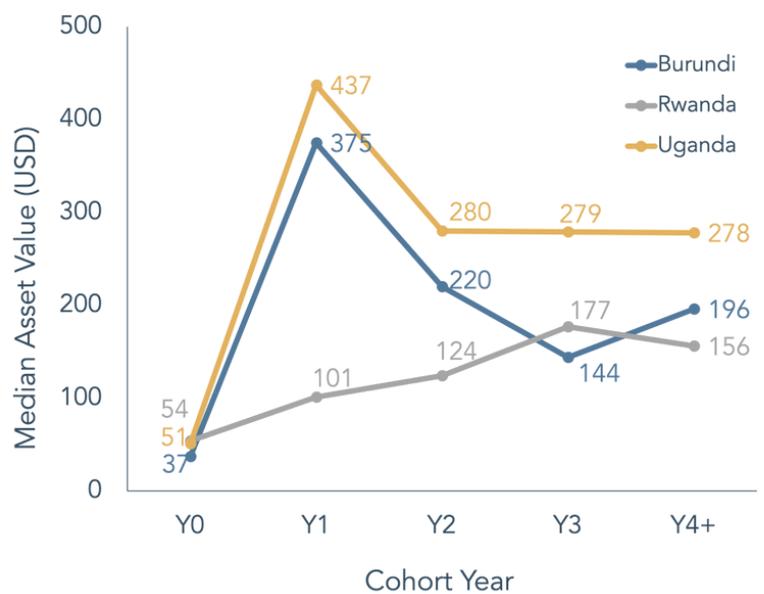


Tenfold increase in amount of household savings in Rwanda

Across all FCAP communities, **median household asset values have grown by over 354% since baseline**, just one of many important livelihood impacts are a result of the FCAP. Livelihoods are measured through three dimensions: **household assets, savings, and food security**.

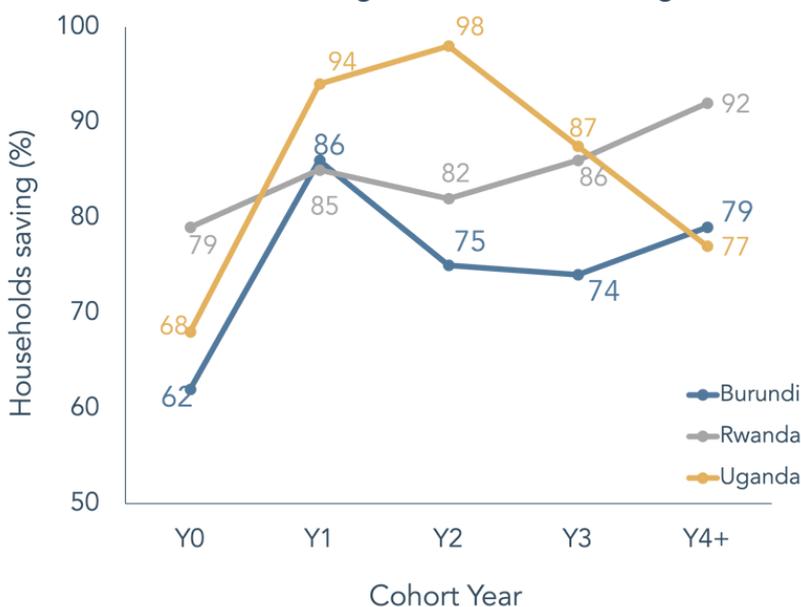
Our 'Durable Livelihoods' data show trends in each of these areas over time as communities implement the FCAP. We see **sustained improvement** across most outcomes, with positive changes at year four compared to pre-FCAP levels. Shown in the chart on the right, jumps in asset values are particularly pronounced in Uganda and Burundi in year one, but across all communities, asset values rise and those improvements sustain with time. The main driver of this change is increased livestock ownership, and investment in household items such as radios, motorbikes, and mobile phones.

Median Value of Household Assets



The proportion of households saving money jumps by up to 26 percentage points in year one. Household savings are an important component of poverty alleviation and household welfare. The FCAP facilitates pro-saving behavior in two ways: first, as mentioned earlier, most projects include an income-generating component which provides households with more savings flexibility, and second, FCAP facilitation includes setting up community savings groups.

Percentage of Households Saving

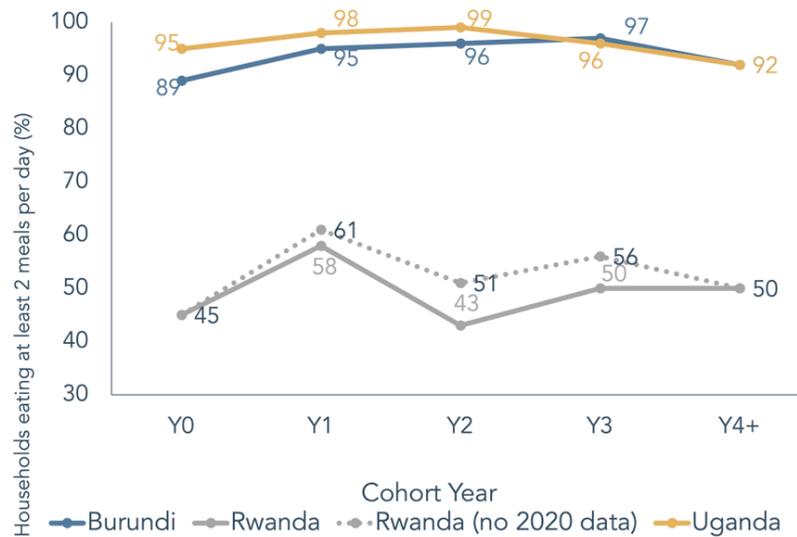


Households continue saving after the FCAP - communities in year four and beyond show sustained savings behavior, with increases between 8 (Rwanda) and 17 (Burundi) percentage points. Families also put more into their savings: we see a **fourfold increase in savings in Uganda** (from \$18.2 to \$78 USD) and an **over tenfold increase in Rwanda** (from \$1 to \$15.6) between baseline and year four.

DURABLE LIVELIHOODS

Increased asset values, savings, and engagement in income generating activities as a result of the FCAP can lead to improved food security, measured through dietary diversity, nutritional intake, and meals per day. While we do not see notable changes in daily meals in households in Burundi and Uganda, where the majority of households already eat at least two daily meals at baseline, Rwanda sees a 13 percentage point increase in year one. Rates remain higher than baseline, except in year two. This dip is explained at least in part by the 2018 cohort, which, in year two, was severely impacted by COVID-19 restrictions; at the time of data collection, 80% of households reported eating only one meal per day.

Households eating at least 2 meals per day

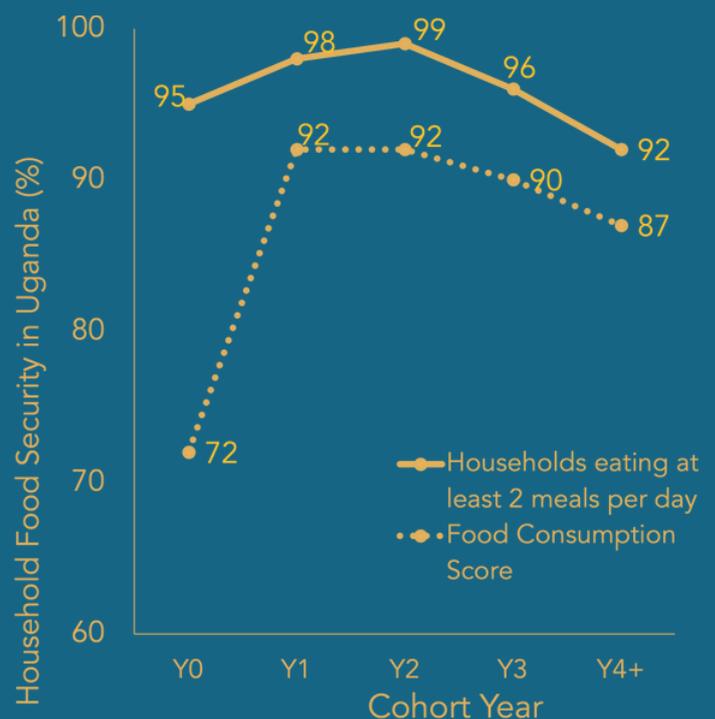


Studies in Rwanda during the pandemic reported similarly high levels of food insecurity and reduction in food consumption (see footnote). When 2020 data are excluded, the chart above shows a positive trend over time, with the number of families eating at least two meals per day increasing by about 16 percentage points between baseline and year one, and maintaining rates above baseline through year four and beyond.

Spotlight: Dietary Diversity and Nutrition in Uganda

When families have more financial flexibility, they spend on more diverse foods and rely less on own-grown food. As noted earlier, the percentage of households eating at least two meals per day was high at baseline in Uganda. However, households increased their Food Consumption Score (FCS), which accounts for factors including dietary diversity and nutritional value of food.

In the chart at right, the number of households with an acceptable FCS jumps by 20 percentage points between baseline and year one, and maintains at 15 percentage points above baseline by year four. **This demonstrates that over time households are diversifying the food they consume, relying less on staple foods with low nutritional value and maintaining more nutritionally-adequate diets.**



Footnote: A variety of sources, including UN reports, academic journals, and NGO publications reported high levels of food insecurity in Rwanda during the months of the COVID-19 restrictions, which was common across many countries at a global scale. The Famine Early Warning System reported increased (stressed and crisis) levels of food security in Rwanda in [June and September 2020](#). [Egger et al. \(2021\)](#) found that 56% of households surveyed in Rwanda in June 2020 reported missing or reducing meals in the past week, and [Hammond et al. \(2022\)](#) found that 79% of households in Rwanda reported reducing their food intake when surveyed in December 2020 - January 2021.

ZOOMING IN: DURABLE LIVELIHOODS IN BULAMBULI, UGANDA



To complement the longer-run trend data above, we present livelihoods data below from a 2022 cohort in Uganda, 18 months after beginning the FCAP. These data are compared to a group of control communities selected from within the same subcounty, with a buffer zone between them and the Spark villages to avoid spillover.

We see substantial improvements across all domains, particularly in comparison to control communities. More households are saving (up 27% from baseline), households have significantly increased asset values, and households more than triple their savings, from \$52.9 pre-FCAP to \$171.9 mid-FCAP. To put that into perspective, **households have saved enough money to cover three terms of primary level schooling for a child, or to purchase two healthy goats.**

Not only do the results demonstrate exponential growth in livelihoods among Spark communities, but they also suggest a protective factor from participating in the FCAP. In 2023, Bulambuli District faced unusually challenging weather patterns. Delayed rainfall disrupted routine crop growing schedules, followed by heavy and extended rainfall that led to flooding and mudslides, destroying crops and impacting the proper drying of crops after harvest. Like many regions in Uganda, Bulambuli is heavily dependent on agriculture, so these events were devastating for many households, including those participating in the FCAP. However, community projects provided an important safety net for FCAP households. **While control communities experienced a 55% reduction in the median value of household assets and a growing percentage of households that were ranked poor, FCAP communities increased the value of household assets by nearly threefold and reduced the percentage of poor households by 22%.**

Livelihoods indicators from a 2022-2023 Cohort in Bulambuli District, Uganda

Indicator	Spark communities^^		Control communities^		Differential between Spark and control	
	2022 Baseline	Month 18	2022 Baseline	Month 18	Baseline	Month 18
Median value of household assets (USD)	174.6	473.4	129.6	58.2	45.0***	415.2***
Percentage of households ranked poor based on assets owned	49%	27%	44%	54%	4.6%	-26.8%***
Percentage of households saving	64%	91%	48%	81%	15.6%***	9.6%**
Mean savings per household (USD)	52.9	171.9	52.9	132.2	0.0	39.7***

*** - significant at 1%, ** - significant at 5%

^^Spark communities: Sample size at baseline = 947. Sample size at month 18 = 899.

^Control communities: Sample size at baseline = 190. Sample size at month 18 = 156.

SOCIAL COHESION



Shared purpose is strengthened by 21%



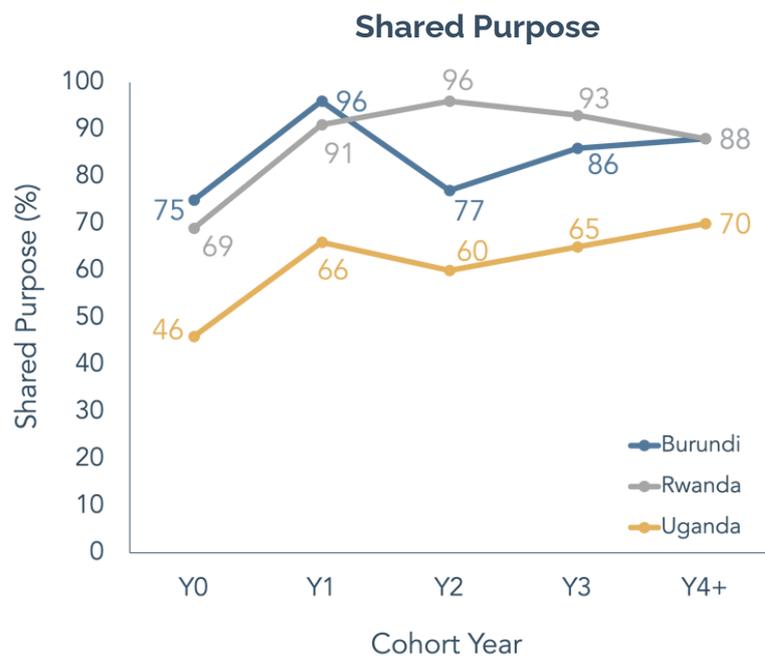
20% higher participation in community planning activities



Threefold increase in collective action in Uganda

Through participation in the FCAP, communities are provided a shared resource (village grant), design a shared vision, build consensus on project goals, and form group bylaws. These activities lead to strengthened social cohesion in FCAP communities - in just one year, a feeling of **shared purpose in FCAP communities increases by 21% across all three countries**. Through strengthening social cohesion, communities increase their resilience to external shocks and ability to manage public goods, which in turn facilitate stability and growth. We measure social cohesion in four dimensions: shared purpose, collective action, social capital, and accountable/inclusive leadership. Each dimension includes several indicators (see Appendix B); here, results are aggregated into one score per dimension, presented as a percentage.

Shared purpose reflects the extent to which community members collectively envision the future of their community. The figure at right aggregates data on collective planning, working together for the common good, and shared community values/vision. The jump in shared purpose between baseline and year one is particularly remarkable (+21%), likely due to the weekly facilitation introduced in year one, which focuses on activities that foster shared purpose.

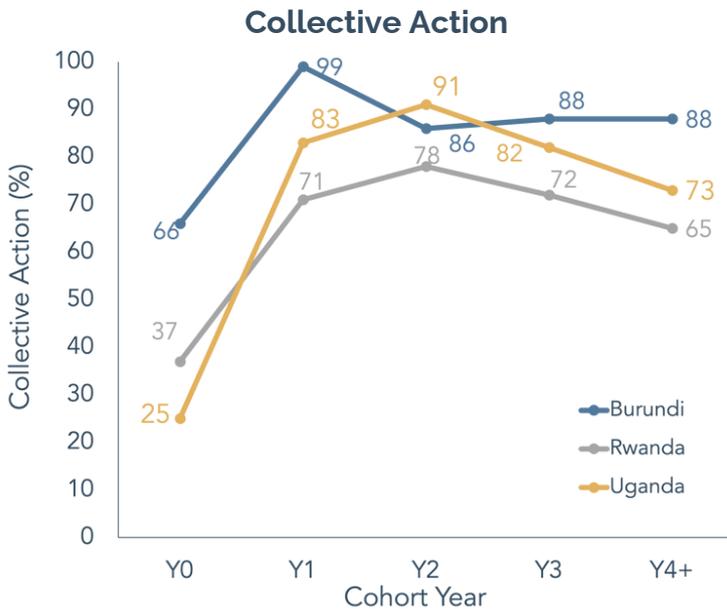


“I have realized that when people are working together, nothing is impossible.”

Nyirandorimana Elizabeth,
Rwanda FCAP Participant

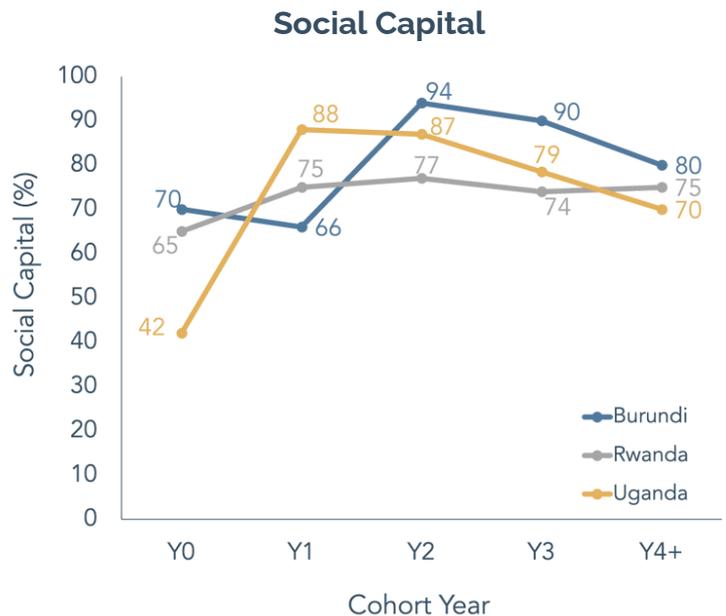
As communities progress through the FCAP, facilitation frequency and intensity decrease, but **improvements in shared purpose are durable, stabilizing at 82% by year four, a more than 18 percentage point increase from baseline**. The major drivers of change in this dimension are participation in community planning activities and a feeling of shared identity; when evaluated individually, both of these demonstrate a 20 percentage point increase from baseline to year four.

SOCIAL COHESION



The FCAP **increases capacity for collective action** by providing families an opportunity to meet, plan, and solve problems together. This leads to more shared growth across a community and is measured by contributions to community projects, belief in the value of collective action, and willingness to engage local government on community issues. **We find large and durable increases in collective action from baseline to year four across all three countries. The largest improvement is in Uganda, where rates nearly triple.** This change is driven primarily by **increased contributions to community initiatives, with a median jump of 40 percentage points** from baseline to year four across all countries.

Social capital refers to norms and networks that enable people to act collectively, and is a critical component of social cohesion. This dimension is measured by the percentage of community members feeling close to others, belonging to community groups, and reported trust; these elements are also critical for conflict prevention. We see improvements across all countries and cohorts, despite a small drop in Burundi during year one which recovers to a nearly 30 percentage point increase by year two. These improvements are primarily driven by an increased feeling of community togetherness (+16%), and increased membership to community groups (+12%) from baseline to year four. **Overall, social capital improves from an average of 59% at baseline to 75% by year four.**



“Even neighbors would not greet each other [before FCAP]. Lately people know each other and remind their neighbors of meetings, and move together to the meeting and back to their homes.”

Alaisa Nasike, Uganda Community-Based Facilitator



GENDER AND INCLUSION



Female attendance at community meetings more than doubles in year one



5.5x increase in women's active participation in Rwanda



Women make up nearly half of FCAP community leadership

Before the FCAP, women's attendance and participation at community meetings is typically low - as low as 7% in Rwanda - as these forums can be exclusive and targeted toward men. While we do not have data on women's leadership outside of the FCAP, qualitative evidence from communities suggests that few women were participating in meetings or holding community leadership positions prior to the FCAP. The FCAP emphasizes the importance of including all genders, ages, identities, and marginalized groups in collective decision-making. As demonstrated below, Spark sees increases in women's inclusion and participation across all countries. **Attendance at community meetings rises from an average of 36% at baseline to 79%, over doubling** (a 119% increase) in year one. Similarly, in just the first year, we see an average 35% increase in the percentage of women from the community actively participating in FCAP meetings - **more than twice the baseline level of participation across all countries, and 5.5 times the baseline level in Rwanda.**



Prior to the FCAP, female attendance at community meetings **is less than 40%**.



Within the first year, female attendance at community meetings jumps **to almost 80%**.

Women's representation in leadership is an important component of the FCAP. Villages elect a leadership committee during the early stages of the FCAP. Each committee has a term of two years, after which a new team is elected. Committee size varies across villages, but usually falls between 7-12 members. Spark advises communities to consider representation of both men and women in the leadership committee to promote inclusive decision-making. As a result, **nearly half of the leadership across FCAP communities is made up of women**, ranging from 54% in Burundi to 44% in Rwanda.



“We have a really good [leadership] committee that is supporting us...50% of the committee are women which shows that women are represented in leadership and in community activities and this allows the community to have gender balance when handling different issues.”

Hategekimana Innocent, Rwanda Village Leader

ZOOMING IN: MUKANOHERI BEATA'S FCAP EXPERIENCE



“Personally, before Spark came, I could not afford to get manure to improve my crops and farm production.”

She received a pig through the project, which gave birth to eight piglets. She then sold the piglets, and used that money to buy a plot of land for coffee farming.

Mukanoheri Beata began participating in the FCAP in July 2022. Prior to the FCAP, the only time her community came together was for local government activities, which did not focus on community priorities. The FCAP was an opportunity for that to change: **“With Spark, it was a great time to bring all village members together.”**

The momentum that came with Spark's introduction in 2022 has not wavered. **“Now we all know each other due to that union of the village members, who are actively attending on every Thursday,”** she noted, adding that the level of attendance has stayed consistent since the beginning of the FCAP. She felt that the FCAP brought opportunities to work closely with other community members, and that has led to increased cohesion in her village.

The community decided to use the microgrant to invest in livestock rearing. **In just one year, community members saw incredible gains in agricultural productivity and other aspects of their lives - Beata included.** “Personally, before Spark came, I could not afford to get manure to improve my crops and farm production,” she said. She received one pig from the project, which gave birth to eight piglets. She then sold the piglets, and was able to use that money to buy a new plot of land for coffee farming.

In addition to livestock rearing, the community began an independent savings group. Through the savings group, **Beata was able to save up to buy health insurance for her family.** Beata is inspired by the inclusion and participation of women in the FCAP - “I am really appreciating the inclusion... this boosted different kinds of people to believe Spark's process and activities. **We have more than 50 women attending meetings, five females in leadership, and our (elected facilitator) is female, which encourages me as a woman to keep striving for unity, cohesion, and inclusion of the village members.**”



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For questions on this report or for more information, please contact Isabel Charles at isabel@sparkmicrogrants.org.

APPENDIX A: APPROACH

Annual data collection practices

In 2020, Spark began collecting data on standardized outcome indicators in November / December each year, to monitor trends over time. However, communities that started implementing the FCAP prior to 2020 do not have uniform baseline data for FCAP outcome indicators. From 2022, Spark adopted a strategy of collecting baseline data in all new communities, and where possible, will contract the evaluation externally to ensure objectivity. In order to estimate baseline values for earlier FCAP communities, 2020 data were adopted as proxy baseline values and considering that the new communities are within the same locations like the old communities, the assumption is that they are fairly similar pre-FCAP.

Both quantitative and qualitative data are collected to complement each other. Quantitative data are collected through a structured questionnaire administered to sampled households while qualitative data are collected through focus group discussions.

Sampling design for household surveys

The annual evaluation studies employ a multistage sampling procedure, i.e., two stage stratified cluster random sampling. Implementing partners comprise the strata while participating communities form clusters. At the first level, participating communities are randomly selected from the list of all communities if the number of communities under a partner are more than 20; otherwise, all communities are sampled. At the second stage, 20 households are randomly sampled from each sampled cluster/village for survey.

For household surveys, a sample size is calculated by considering the population size (total number of households) of all communities served by a given partner, and then adjusted according to the formulas in Appendix A. For qualitative surveys, eight members are selected to participate in a Focus Group Discussion and four FGDs are conducted per partner. Qualitative data in this survey has also been drawn from in-depth-interviews conducted during regular project monitoring processes.

Data Quality Assurance

Quality assurance starts with programming questionnaires in CommCare (Spark's data collection application), where consistency and logical checks ensure that enumerators' data submissions are complete, and that correct values/responses are captured for each question. Data are checked for consistency on a daily basis, including the duration of each interview, number of interviews conducted, and outliers/errors in submitted figures. Potential errors are investigated and corrected immediately before the next day's data collection.

Data Analysis

Data are analyzed to show trends in FCAP indicators over a period of time from the baseline. To do this, we group communities by the year that they began partnership with Spark. This generates cohorts of communities based on how many years of partnership they have completed (i.e., Y0, Y1, Y2, etc.). As mentioned above, Spark now collects standardized baseline data in all new communities, but where baseline data is missing from earlier partnerships (2019 and earlier), baseline data from recent expansion communities in the same area is used as a proxy. This generates relatively large samples that help test the significance of the differences between the results for each cohort (Y1, Y2, etc.) and those at baseline (Y0) for each outcome indicator. For continuous data (asset values and savings), quantile regression is used, as it is not skewed by outliers in the data. For categorical variables, binary logistic regression is used (N.B. some variables which are not binary in nature are first transformed to enable analysis). Analysis is done using Stata and Microsoft Excel.

Report Development

This report was developed by Abubaker Kalule, Dorcus Acheng, Enock Tusingwire, Isabel Charles, and Katherine Reynolds.

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE SIZE CALCULATION

Sample size calculation

For household surveys, a sample size for each partner is calculated by considering the population size (total number of households) of all communities served by a given partner. The formula below is used to calculate the sample size:

$$n_0 = \frac{z^2 p(1-p)}{e^2}$$

Adjusting for the population size

$$n = \frac{n_0}{1 + \frac{n_0 - 1}{pop}}$$

Where

n_0 – Initial sample size before adjusting for population size

z – Critical z value corresponding to 95% confidence interval (1.96)

p – proportion of households participating FCAP set at 0.5 to achieve the maximum possible sample

e – Margin of error set at 5% for Rwanda & Bulambuli, Uganda, and at 7% for Burundi & West Nile, Uganda

pop – Population size (Total number of households in beneficiary communities for a given partner)

n – Final sample size adjusted for population size

The above methodology results in the below sample sizes for each of the three countries included in this report's dataset.

Spark years	Burundi	Rwanda	Uganda
Year 0	530	3,002	561
Year 1	446	3,270	1,035
Year 2	257	767	270
Year 3	218	740	0
Year 4 +	653	1,066	1,404

APPENDIX C: INDICATOR LIST

Outcome Area	Dimension	Indicator
Social cohesion	1. Shared Purpose	% of individuals who agree or strongly agree that they feel that they are part of their community
		% of individuals who believe that their community identity is collectively shared
		% of individuals who believe they participate in the community to improve conditions for other members of the community
		% of community members who believe that they participate the community to help shape its future
	2. Increased Collective / Community Action	% of individuals aware of communal projects being implemented in their villages
		% of households that contribute to communal projects being implemented in their villages
		% of community members confident to engage government on issues affecting them
		% of community members who agree that there has been increased community action within the community
	3. Social Capital Built Upon	% of community members who feel close to other community members
		% of individuals that belong to community groups
		% of community members who have strong generalised trust
	4. Accountable Leadership	% of community members that have participated in at least one election for their community leaders
		% of community members who agree that their leadership have done a good job
		% of community members aware of community bank account
		% of community members aware of whether community bank account was used in past 6 months
		% of community members aware of what funds in bank account were used for
Durable Livelihoods	1. Household savings	Average savings per households
		% of households saving
	2. Household consumption	% of households having more than one meal a day
		% of households who are food secure based on the Food Consumption Score
	3. Household assets	Average \$ value of household assets of target households
		% of households ranked poor based on assets owned
Gender and inclusion	1. Women's participation in community meetings	% of female heads of households that regularly attend community meetings
		% of female heads of households that regularly contribute ideas during community meetings
	2. Women in leadership	% Community leaders who are women
Path to Scale	1. Coverage/reach	# of villages that have or are implementing FCAP
		# of lives touched through FCAP (i.e. beneficiaries)
	2. Communal projects	# of microgrant projects implemented
		Microgrant project multiplier effect
	3. FCAP cost	Cost per village