

Influence of Women Enterprise Fund on Women Economic Empowerment in Mutuango Area at Muranga County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT: Women economic empowerment has been an important developmental agenda that has been adopted worldwide. This has led to women economic empowerment becoming a major element of developmental policy especially in Africa. In Kenya the Vision 2030 aims at improving the lives of Kenyans through five major pillars. One in particular focuses on gender, child and social development, under this pillar the Women Enterprise Fund is one of its flagship projects. This research focused on the influence of Women Enterprise fund on women economic empowerment. The study was conducted in Mutuango district, Muranga County which has a population of 1119, a sample size of 92 women was used, and which was arrived on using the Slovin formula. Self-efficacy theory and resource based theory have been used to inform the theoretical framework. A descriptive research designed was used and questionnaires were the tool of data collection. After the data was collected it was arranged categorically, the quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive analysis, measure of central tendency, measure of variability and frequency, the qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis. Reliability and validity were tested using the test-retest method. The quantitative data was presented using charts, frequency tables, and pie charts; the qualitative data was presented in the form of reports. The findings of the study shows that there was some difficulty when it came to accessing the loan, there was no interest rate on the women enterprise fund loan, trainings were poorly attended and lastly the Women enterprise fund does influence women economic empowerment.

Key Words: Women Economic Empowerment, Women Enterprise Fund, Business Delivery Services, Microenterprise Development

1. Introduction

According to UN Women (2010), women are capable of contributing to the growth of an economy, but their participant is usually hindered by lack of access to financial incentives, education, healthcare and basic human rights. This leads to women being marginalized or being side-lined when it came to economic development policies. This is greatly felt especially by women in rural areas, according to the Commission on the Status of women (2012), women farmers are considered to be at the bottom of the “value chain”, and are usually secluded from opportunities and programs that would increase their capacity, yet they play a vital role in food production and security.

Most governments and organizations have established policies and programs that ensure gender mainstreaming in development and key strategies. In India the Asian Development Bank (2011) saw the need of involving women in the implementation of the urban water supply and improvement in Madhya Pradesh, because women are the ones who are most affected by lack of water and proper sanitation. The completion of the project saw women participating in municipal management and project implementation not only as beneficiaries but also leaders. Their lives were also significantly improved through access to clean water, capacity building through the Area Improvement fund and community initiatives Fund. In South Africa the National Development Plan, hopes to ensure that women are involved in all facets of social development and capacity building through economic and social empowerment. Finally in Kenya, the government launched the Women Enterprise Fund in 2007, to help women become economically empowered and to build their capacities through loans and skills training.

The Women Enterprise Fund (WEF) was established in 2007 through a Legal Notice No 147. The fund has five mandates which are: Provide loans to Micro Finance institutes, Non- governmental organizations involved in micro – financing and savings and credit cooperative organizations (SACCO) that lend to women enterprises. Facilitate investment in micro, small and medium enterprises oriented infrastructure that will be beneficial to women enterprises. Support women oriented enterprises and to develop networks with large enterprises. Promote good and services of women enterprises in both local and global markets. Support capacity building of the beneficiaries of the fund and their institutions.

The Women Enterprise Fund has been in existence for close to ten years, within those years more than Ksh 6.3 billion has been disbursed to 63,342 women groups in 290 constituencies. However even with such an amount disbursed, little has been done to examine the impact of the Women Enterprise Fund on women economic empowerment on an individual and household level.

Some studies have shown that microcredit is actually micro debt that loans are not gifts but obligations and they tend to have negative effects such as debt and declining financial growth on targeted individuals (Adams, 1991). Little research has been done to show the impact of the fund on women at the individual level. There is no clear information on whether the fund is making a positive or negative impact at an individual level.

With the main goal of the fund being improving the economic situation of women, it is imperative that it is increasing women power and agency through economic empowerment, increased control of household resources and decision making. If the impact of the Women Enterprise Fund is not measured using household resources, individual financial position and decision making paradigms, then it will make it difficult to measure women economic empowerment, and thus make it difficult for Kenya to reach its development goals.

The main research objective of this study is to investigate the influence of the Women Enterprise Fund on women economic empowerment in Mutuango area, Muranga County. The specific objectives were to investigate the accessibility of loans from the Women enterprise fund and their influence on women economic empowerment in Mutuango area, Muranga County, to analyze the interest rates on loans from the women enterprise fund and their influence on women economic empowerment in Mutuango area, Muranga County and to evaluate the impacts of the trainings offered by the Women enterprise funds on women economic empowerment in Mutuango area, Muranga County.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Self - Efficacy Theory

This study is guided by the theory of Self Efficacy by Albert Bandura (1977). This theory is defined as the people beliefs in their capabilities and how these beliefs shape their performances and influence their daily lives. One of the major processes is the cognitive processes that influence human behavior. This process explains how people tend to think about how best to increase their capabilities and visualize various scenarios in order to create environments that will help reach their perceived goals. Women in Mutuango have different goals that they have set for themselves and their families. In order to reach these goals they have formed various self- help groups and applied for loans through the Women Enterprise Fund. These choices are formed from their beliefs in financial empowerment and self-improvement. Accessibility to loans and low interest rates makes it easier for these women to want to acquire loans. Business delivery services provided by the fund, tries to ensure that they gain critical skills that will enable them to have financial sustainability and economic empowerment.

The major criticism of this theory is that it is hard to generalize self -efficacy because of the multifaceted and contextual efficacy beliefs that each individual holds thus making it difficult to have an empirical study on self-efficacy and its impact. This means that each woman holds a different belief or notion of what economic empowerment is, they also have different view on the Women enterprise fund, and thus their intentions of participation are different. This makes it difficult to define the motivation for participation (Bandura, 1977).

2.1.2 Resource Based View

This theory was established in the 1980s and 1990s, after the major works published by Wernerfelt on Resource-Based View of the Firm (1984), Prahalad and Hamel on the Core Competence of The Corporation (1990), Barney on the Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage (1991) among others. The theory is of the argument that a person's success is determined by the resources and capabilities they have? These resources can include financial capital, human capital, physical capital, technology and reputation. When a person has identified the resources, they use these resources to build capabilities by coordinating and utilizing them to ensure peak performance and high yields.

Women having access to the Women enterprise fund helps create capital, human resources and physical resources, which are important for the success and the financial sustainability of their businesses and the improvement of their financial situation. Major criticism of the theory is that in the real world it is not applicable because competitive sustainability cannot be empirically measured due to the ever changing dynamics of the markets.

2.2 Empirical Review

Women in rural areas experience a greater power imbalance than their counterparts in urban areas, they experience more challenges when it comes to the access to credit and financial services, access and control of assets, access to education and training, access to benefits, limited decision making power and other socio- cultural factors. These experiences hinder them from achieving economic empowerment. Rural development lies in the implementation of policies that take the unique aspects of rural areas. Policies should be tied to the environment, social spheres, cultural practices and land use. In Kenya, increasing value in agriculture is one of the programs that Vision 2030 hopes to accomplish. Vision 2030 hopes to integrate better farming practices

such as scheduled crops, improve crop standards and encourage other non-farming activities. These practices are being enacted using the Agricultural, livestock and Fisheries Act, The Land Act and the Crop Act (IFAD, 2013). These flagship projects are expected to increase the national GDP by KES 80-90 billion and to utilize an additional 1.2 million hectares of land by the year 2030 (Vision 2030, 2008). Since about 70% of the poor live in the rural areas that have medium to high potential of farming, these projects will be seen as a means of reducing poverty and bringing sustainability to these areas (Vision 2030 Progress Report, 2013).

As Taylor (1999) mentions, policy makers and governments have to establish the importance of gender mainstreaming when it comes to policy making and implementation. Gender analysis should be carried out when discussing rural development policies and women should be given a voice so as to be able to articulate their lives and their problems, since they are the majority and mostly the people who work in the small farms. As set out in the flagship projects, training farmers on smart and sustainable farming is important (Vision 2030, 2008), but there is a gender gap, since most people who have benefited from these trainings are mostly men. Vision 2030 hopes to ensure that every woman in Kenya will have access to various financial incentives that will facilitate economic empowerment.

2.2.1 Women Economic Empowerment

The Women Enterprise fund is the flagship project under vision 2030 that solemnly caters to women and women economic development. It is an economic empowerment project that gives women access to credit and other financial incentives. The flagship has five mandates which are: Provision of subsidized credit to women entrepreneurs, capacity building of women beneficiaries and their institutions, promotion of local and international markets, promotion of linkages between women owned Small Market Enterprises (SMEs) with larger companies and facilitation in infrastructure and support of investments in infrastructure that support women enterprise. The enterprise fund has given over Ksh 6.2 billion to 63,342 women groups and over 116,372 women entrepreneurs have been trained in business development and loan management (Women's role in Economic Development, 2013). The fund has been successful in improving the lives of women through increasing their economic capacity and creating better markets for them. Vision 2030 also hopes to improve the lives of women through provision of better health care, better transportation, expand markets, better education and general increase in human capabilities (Sen, 1999).

2.2.2 Women Enterprise Fund Access to Loans

Access to finance has been one of the hindrances to women economic empowerment. According to Sanusi (2012), the key barriers to access to finance is ownership to collateral due to little to no property rights for women, absence of credit history due to women not having access to bank accounts and nature of work, which majority is informal work and discrimination from banks and other financial institutes who consider them inexperienced and illiterate when it comes to money, thus making them less attractive clients. Lastly women lack of awareness of financial incentives geared for them makes it difficult for women to access loans and other financial incentives.

The Women Enterprise Fund (WEF) has tried to fill this gap by developing financial incentives and programs such as the Tuinuke Loan and the Jiimarishe loan. The Tuinuke loan has the following features: The self-help group must have 10 members and above comprising of 100% women or 70% women and 30% men. All leadership positions and account signatories must be held by women. The group must have an account in a Bank/SACCO FOSA/Post Bank/Deposit Taking Micro-finance (DTM) and must have been in existence for at least 3 months. Groups must be trained on business management skills by the WEF officers as a prerequisite for the loan application, the loan is interest free, with only 5 % administrative fee and is repayable within one year with a grace period of 2-1 months depending on amounts. 1st loan amount is Kshs.100, 000, 2nd loan Kshs 200,000, 3rd loan Kshs 350,000 and maximum loan amount is Kshs 500,000.

While the Jiimarishe loan has the following features: The loan is given to individual women Self Help Groups or companies owned by women. An affordable rate of interest of 8% per annum is given on reducing balance with a repayment period of maximum 36 months. The maximum amount per borrower is Kshs.2, 000,000 repayable in 3 years with flexible security which differs depending on Financial Intermediary.

These types of loans helps women build their capital and the training they get from the fund helps them manage it. When women have capital they are able to participate in income generating activities, contribute financially to their households and have more decision making power because they are financially independent (Cheston & Kuhn, 2002). This is not to say that access to credit guarantees that women will be economically empowered, some studies have shown that some women actually get into even deeper financial problems after having access, creating challenges for both the women and the financial institutions.

According to Ondoro and Omena (2012), when people living in poverty have access to financial services, not only do they save, but they also have a higher repayment rate when they borrow than people in middle class. SIDA (2015) also echoes the same sentiments and adds that when women have access to non – collateral credit not only do they start and grow businesses, but they also improve household spending which benefits mostly children. Even with the knowledge that women having access to credit is known and emphasized, access often seems strained especially for women in rural areas. Sanusi (2012) mentions that women face challenges such as, lack of collateral and startup capital, property rights and control over assets, cultural norms and family

responsibilities, lack of awareness, biased attitudes and formal employment. In the case of Kenya, the major impediment in accessing credit was lack of property.

Mwobobia (2012) and FIDA (2013), mentions that only 1% of women in Kenya own property and 5% share with men. This is due to cultural practices and discriminatory Land and property ownership rights. According to FIDA (2013), there are 75 land laws, and they tend to create great confusion. These land laws are also linked to customary law, which invokes that men are the ones who should own and control land. The second major hindrance to women accessing credit is lack of knowledge on the existence of loans and the cost of getting this information (Sanusi, 2012). Lack of knowledge is usually attributed to lack of civic education or clear communication from financial institutions or government.

Kiraka, Kobia and Katwalo (2013), found out that lack of knowledge on the Women Enterprise Fund was caused by lack of dissemination of information and pushing of other loans by banks and loan officers. Since the fund gives interest free loans, officers from different banks and other financial institutions would try to sell other loans that had interests in order to make a sale, thus hindering access to the WEF loans.

2.2.3 Women Enterprise Fund loan interest

WEF has two major loans that they offer to various groups of women. The Tuinuke Loan is geared towards women in MSEM and in women groups. While the Jiimarishe loan targets mostly individual women and women in groups who want to expand their business and take part in open markets. It is known as an incubator fund for those women who have outgrown the subsidized loans. The Tuinuke loan is an interest free loan with a 5% administration fee that is usually disbursed through the Constituency Women Enterprise Scheme (CWES). The first loan given is Kshs.100, 000; second loan Kshs 200,000, third loan Kshs 350,000 and maximum loan amount is Kshs 500,000. Jiimarishe loan is an incubation loan that helps facilitate women involvement in the market. It has an 8% interest rate with a maximum loan amount of Ksh 2 million, payable in 2 years. Tuinuke loan is the most popular of the two, with over Ksh 6.3 billion disbursed, with a 89% repayment rate, Ksh 4.5 billion paid and Ksh 5 billion due (Women Enterprise Fund Report, 2016).

Some of the major challenges with WEF loan noted from various studies were that, (i) the loans are often too small to facilitate startup capital or growth, (ii) the loan was used for other purposes such as paying medical bills, paying school fess and clearing debts (iii) timing of the loan distribution takes long, changing the use of the money (Ijara, Mwangi & Nge'tich, 2014). With the amount given ranging from Ksh 100,000 to Ksh 500,000, many women felt that ones the money was divided and each member got their cut, it was not enough, leading to them not starting or growing their businesses. Diversion of loans to non-business activities is high among the loan beneficiaries, because they might become available when there are more pressing financial matters.

Sometimes the group might decide to invest the full some of money, but one group member might have a pressing financial matter and decides to borrow the full amount from the group, thus diverting the use of the money for its intended purpose (Kiraka, Kobia & Katwalo, 2013). WEF intends to address these challenges by training women and ensuring that they understand the purpose of the loans and also teach them loan management and other business development services (WEF Strategic Plan, 2009).

2.2.4 Women Enterprise Fund Business Delivery Services

Business development services are non-financial or "soft" skills that help in capacity building. They include business training such as bookkeeping, loan management, marketing, human resource management, organizational structuring, ICT training, entrepreneurship and innovative financial sustainability measures. According to Mwobobia (2012), access to credit alone without business development services can be detrimental, because these services help in creating awareness and equipping individuals with skills that would help them improve their business, thus increasing growth and human capacity. Studies have shown that adequate knowledge of products, availability of markets and business skills can facilitate women access to better jobs and markets, therefore improving their economic status.

Community awareness marketing campaigns also help both men and woman by strengthening networks and creating economic opportunities (CESO, 2013). WEF business delivery services include but not limited to: Business training, education and awareness, monitoring of business growth, exposure to role models, marketing, product certification, networking and asset Building.

The main challenged faced by the WEF business delivery services is low participation. According to Ijaza, Mwangi and Ng'tich (2014), the reason for low participation in trainings is because beneficiaries cannot be forced to attend, even though it is a requirement. Kiraki, Kobia and Katwalo (2013), bring up the question of whether the vetting process is thorough, if majority of beneficiaries do not attend trainings yet it is a requirement. Raising the issue of whether the role of the divisional women enterprise fund committee (DWEFC) is clearly defined.

3. Methodology

A research design according to Kombo and Tromp (2006) is a blue print which is used to ensure that all major components of a study come together. In this study, the researcher used a descriptive research design, because the information will be collected using questionnaires which will touch on people’s attitudes and opinions. A descriptive design made it possible to show the relationship between the independent variable which in this case is Women enterprise fund and the dependent variable which is women economic empowerment which will generate answers for the research problem.

Mutuango is a village in Kiharu sub County in Muranga County. Muranga is bordered to the North by Nyeri, to the South by Kiambu, to the West by Nyandarua and to the East by Kirinyaga, Embu and Machakos counties. It has a population of 1119 inhabitants, majority being young and elderly women. The area under study is rural and agriculture mostly small scale is its main economic activity. The area was chosen for the study because of its geographical location, and market economy which is similar to most rural areas in Kenya. This made it easier to replicate the study in other areas.

This study focused on women in Mutwango in Murang’a County who are the age of 20 -35 years. Mutwango is a small village in Muranga County in Central Kenya. The population is 100% Kikuyu and has 1119 inhabitants (Muranga integrated plan, 2013). Their main source of income is farming especially coffee and tea. Most of the population comprised of old people and young women, who have are mostly the home keepers and also the laborers of small parcels of land that are usually inherited from their husbands families. A sample size of 92 respondents was studied, this was arrived at by using the Slovin formula (1960) criterion of; $n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$. where n is the sample size, N is the total population and e is error of tolerance and 95% response rate.

$$N \text{ (Total population)} = 120$$

$$e \text{ (Margin of error)} = 0.05$$

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

$$n = \frac{120}{(1 + 120 \times 0.05^2)}$$

$$n = 92$$

Table 1: Stratified Proportionate Sample Size

SECTOR	TARGET POPULATION(N_1)	SAMPLE SIZE (Pn)
Farming	50	32
Small businesses	70	60
Total	120	92

A sampling technique according to Mugendi and Mugendi (2003) is a procedure that the researcher uses to select the subjects or cases to be included in a sample. This is very important because the generalization of the study depends on the accuracy of the sampling technique. This study used stratified random sampling technique because of the homogeneous nature of the subjects; researcher ensured that the subjects are women and are beneficiaries of the Women Enterprise Fund.

Data for the study was collected using questionnaires. According to Mugendi and Mugendi (2003), a questionnaire should be able to address the study objective. Sarantakos (1998) adds, what makes questionnaires effective is the minimal interference on the part of the research personnel. They are consistent and uniformed, anonymous, have a wider coverage, and are completed at the subject’s convenience with minimal error and biases. The questionnaires were handed out to subjects and will be collected after two weeks.

A letter of introduction was obtained from the Catholic University of Eastern Africa through the committee of post-graduate studies and a permit to conduct the research from the National Council of Science and Technology of Kenya (NACOST). Permission was then obtained from all relevant authorities beforehand to ensure the research goes smoothly. Thereafter the researcher trained the research assistant on how to administer the questionnaires, how to interact with subjects and how to conduct themselves according to the code of ethics. Afterwards, the research together with the research assistant administered the questionnaires to the relevant subjects, ensuring that they understand the purpose of the study. After two weeks the researcher together with the research assistant collected the questionnaires and assured the subjects that the information gathered was for purely academic purposes, and after the data is arranged and analyzed, findings would be made available to them.

After the completion of data collection, data was arranged and grouped according the three study objectives. Analysis of study variables to answer the research questions was done using descriptive statistics of frequency tables, charts, graphs and percentages and inferential statistics helped assess the relationship between the independent variable (Women enterprise fund) and the dependent variable (Women economic empowerment), and ensured generalization of findings using Pearson correlation. Quantitative data was analyzed using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences. The SPSS package was used because it is effective

in handling large amount of data for analysis. Qualitative data was analyzed through content analysis which in turn was analyzed by organizing the data into themes, patterns and sub topics.

In order to ensure external reliability, the questionnaire was assessed using the test/retest method. This method involves conducting the same test twice over a period of time to the same group keeping all conditions constant. The scores from the two tests are established and compared and a correlation coefficient is obtained. If the coefficient is high then the instrument is producing a high test – retest reliability (Mugendi & Mugendi, 2003). The researcher ensured validity by giving the questionnaires to research experts and supervisors who confirmed and ascertained that the questions are in line with the topic under study and that questions are formulated using the research objectives as the guide.

Various ethics committees were created to ensure that researchers, research assistants and participants adhere to set out ethics codes and parameters during research. The researcher sort permission from the National Council of Science and Technology and Catholic University of Eastern Africa. Participation in the study was free and voluntary. The researcher informed the respondents that the data collected was purely for academic purposes and assured them of confidentiality and anonymity. Lastly, the researcher made sure that there is accountability in the collection, dissemination and reporting of the data by ensuring there is no plagiarism and misrepresentation.

4. Summary of Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Summary of the findings

4.1.1 Influence of accessibility of loans

The findings show that all women were part of the Tuinuke loan which is interest free and is repayable within a year. 75% of the women found the application process to be neutral, while 25 % found it to be difficult and tedious, though all women agreed that the loan officer was very helpful and the information they got influenced their decision to apply for the loan.

When asked how they found out about the loan, 51% said they got the information from their respective women's group. Media had the lowest influence (12%) when it came to dissemination of information about the loan. When the beneficiaries were informed about the WEF, they took it upon themselves to be part of it.

The loan being accessible gave the participants awareness about how best to increase their capabilities and how to use this resource to empower themselves financially. These women have taken part in self-efficacy by identifying WEF loan as a tool that would help them reach their perceived goals.

4.1.2 Interest rate

Women in the research were all part of the Tuinuke loan, which is an interest free with a 5% administration fee. This loan is disbursed through the constituency women enterprise scheme (CWES). The first loan given is Ksh 100, 000 and after the repayment of the first loan, the women can apply for a second loan of Ksh 200, 000, a third of Ksh 350, 000 and that of Ksh 500,000.

The research showed that 64% were first time loan applicants so they received ksh 100, 000 while 33% were second time applicants who had ksh 200, 000. The beneficiaries all agreed that their repayment period was adequate and the amount was manageable. Due to the interest free option, this is the most popular loan at the Women enterprise fund with a repayment rate of 89% (Women enterprise fund, 2016).The 0 % interest rate on the loan made it attractive and hence why all the beneficiaries were part of the loan.

This study is in agreement with the Resource based theory, because he women identified what resource (type of loan), that they needed to utilize in order to build their capabilities. They also identified a source of capital that has shown when properly utilized does create financial empowerment at the individual level.

4.1.3 Training

The research shows that even though trainings are mandatory according to the requirements by the WEF, only 25 % (23 beneficiaries) attended the trainings offered this supports Ijaza, Mwangi and Nge'tich (2014) research on poor training attendance of WEF beneficiaries. When asked if they applied what they had learnt through the training, 4 out of 23 said they always applied it, 11 said often and 7 said sometimes.

The research also shows that those who attended the trainings felt that the WEF has improved their lives in one way or another. According to Kiraki, Kobia and Katwalo (2013), this begs the question of whether the vetting process is thorough and whether the importance of trainings is emphasized especially in the initial stages of loan application. WEF should find out what are the underlying issues that are causing low participation in trainings, and ones they have identified these issues, they design training programs that help solve these issues.

4.2 Conclusion

Women Enterprise fund is one of the flagship project that gears towards accomplishing vision 2030 and also shows Kenya's commitment towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), especially SDG 5, 8 & 10. The magnitude of the fund should not be overlooked because it is a fund that has a lot of money and can make a great impact if implemented efficiently.

The research shows that the attitude towards the WEF loan does not influence the use of the WEF products. It also shows that there is a slight influence of the fund of women economic empowerment at the household level, especially for those beneficiaries who used the money from the loan for business and farming.

The least impact was felt by those women who diverted the money for domestic and personal use. Lastly the research shows that WEF trainings are very poorly attended and more time and effort should be placed on finding a solution to encourage and increase attendance. This research adds to the body of knowledge because it has looked at the influence of the Women Enterprise Fund through three different lenses and how they impact women at an individual level, by examining the impact each has on women economic empowerment.

4.3 Recommendations

Given the importance of the Women Enterprise fund on economic empowerment, it is imperative that the fund is able to touch the lives of as many women in Kenya as possible. This can be made possible through:

- 4.3.1 The WEF ensuring that all members of women groups attend mandated trainings, by taking attendance and using individual incentives to encourage attendance.
- 4.3.2 The WEF training women group leaders or chairpersons to be trainers, and using group meetings to train members and address challenges faced by individuals.
- 4.3.3 A more cohesive partnership between the Women Enterprise Fund, Women representatives, the County government first lady offices, and other women oriented organization to help encourage women participation.
- 4.3.4 The National government using Women's day, International girl child day and other recognized days to have public service announcements on the importance of the fund and the benefits of being a beneficiary.
- 4.3.5 The Women Enterprise Fund should include beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of the fund in round table discussions from all parts of the country, and using these discussions to come up with tailor made solutions on how to improve the impact of the fund and participation.

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