



SPARK
MICROGRANTS



ANNUAL REPORT
2020

LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Your text messages on COVID-19 were good to inform our citizens and the way you supported them economically was also important. The support is allowing communities to continue their projects. We are confident that they will reach their goals as initially planned before COVID-19."

~ Nzamwita Deo, Mayor of Gakenke District

Dear Friends,

2020 reminded us how much we need each other. Bright spots shone through when neighbors showed up for each other to deliver food to those in need through mutual support groups all over the world. Our local cooperation has proven again and again to be our strength.

The harm of 2020 is devastating and will plague us for decades depending how we choose to act today. An estimated 100-150 million people have or will slide into extreme poverty, reversing decades of poverty elimination work. All the while, democracy has continued to decline.

Despite this trendline, villages in East Africa who have engaged in Spark's Facilitated Collective Action Process (FCAP) retained their trust in each other (88%) and in their leadership (94%). The FCAP has also contributed to their improved food security of 89% of households eating at least two meals per day. 176 active communities in the network received two \$500 top up grants. Communities allocated funds to cover food packages and health insurance for families in need, invest in local farms, motorcycles and business. When small, distanced FCAP meetings began, community members saw improvements in their happiness (99%) and trust in the community (93%).

In 2021 we are tripling our annual reach, launching a national initiative in Rwanda and a global FCAP fellowship. Spark also decided to protect our team through a livable salary insurance during the pandemic even if their workload changed. We rolled out a staff wellness program and flexible hours to suit the added complexity of working from home and the psychological impact of the pandemic.

We are fortunate for the collective action of funding partners who, rather than walk away, decided to double down. I want to use this opportunity to thank everyone who supported Spark through 2020.

This year we are also celebrating Sandra Wijnberg who served as Spark's board chair for over five years and a personal mentor to me. We welcome Lisa Jackson to the helm who transitioned into the role of Board Chair during these difficult times and has provided undeniable strength and support.

As we enter 2021 we feel the weight of hardship and the magnitude of opportunity that awaits us. We are pushing forward in 2021 to support 300 new villages and hopefully, moving us closer to a world where everyone has the right to determine their own positive future.

In gratitude and in community,

Sasha



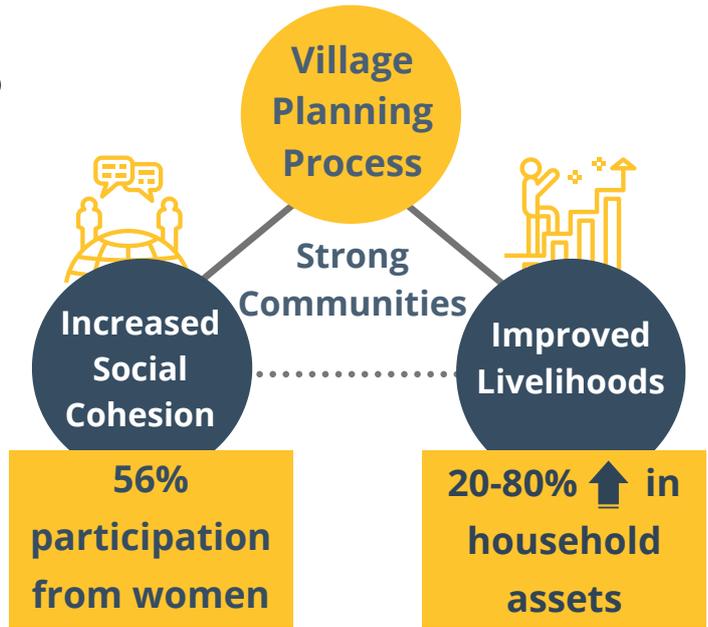
SASHAFISHER

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR & FOUNDER



ABOUT SPARK MICROGRANTS

Spark's Facilitated Collective Action Process (FCAP) increases civic action, builds upon existing social capital, increases access to income and assets, and encourages inclusive participation and leadership. All of which, combine in the long term to increase social cohesion and improve livelihoods. Villages that benefit from Spark's approach tend to have previously been sidelined from decision-making that affects their livelihoods, whether from a mining company's land grabs, a non-profit imposing a seed varietal or a national government forcing participation in a program. Community members of all genders, ages and ethnicities deserve their right fulfilled not just to participate, but to drive local change.



THE FACILITATED COLLECTIVE ACTION PROCESS

Spark's Facilitated Collective Action Process (FCAP) is a three phase process that curates village 'town-hall' style weekly meetings through planning, implementation, and sustainability training. In these meetings, village members come together to participate in village planning. Through this process, families democratically elect an inclusive leadership committee, establish a village savings account, decide on a project of their choice, and implement the project with an \$8,000 village grant. Each community receives additional management support and facilitation from Spark and our partners to ensure sustainability of the process.



THE FCAP'S IMPACT

256,425

Individuals Reached

325

Partnered Communities

6

Countries Sparked



97%

increase in families eating more than one meal per day over course of FCAP from 45% to 89%



\$116

increase in household animal assets over course of FCAP



25%

higher livestock value in FCAP households than in non-FCAP households



65%

increase in household meeting attendance over the course of the FCAP



71%

of elected female leadership are first time leaders due to FCAP



29%

FCAP communities more likely to resolve conflicts than non-FCAP communities



2X

Project Multiplier



85%

Profit Generating Projects



56%

Female Participation



For every one project stimulated by the FCAP, a community launches another, showing a 2x impact multiplier. 85% of these projects are profit-generating and families see a 20-80% increase in household assets. Nearly 60% of these projects are agricultural or livestock focused. Across the board, 85% of villages continue to meet regularly. Spark's process isn't just local, it's inclusive: 56% of ideas come from women, 46% of democratically elected leaders are women, and 100% of villages have youth in leadership.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2020, Spark quickly responded to the rapid emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic by pivoting quickly to ensure the most vulnerable received the support they needed in East and West Africa. Spark initially implemented remote FCAP support to communities via SMS messaging and phone call trees followed by small group meetings to ensure we were providing resources, while also abiding by COVID-19 health guidelines. Spark also dispersed two rounds of \$500 top-ups to all 176 active communities engaged in the FCAP to be used to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19. Many communities were able to utilize these funds to establish alternative projects that ensured Health Insurance would be available to all those who needed it. Throughout the pandemic community members provided food baskets to neighbors and successfully sustained local businesses. Despite the difficulties of 2020, Spark communities remained resilient. Participation in the small group meetings did not falter with many communities showing an increase in attendance. Of these participants 58% of meeting attendees and 50% of small group representatives were women, demonstrating equity in this process.

As the year came to a close, Spark raised over \$3.3M, \$800,000 more than our 2020 raise goal, and ended the year with 6.6 months worth of cash on hand setting our organization in a strong position for 2021. In the upcoming year, Spark is set to partner with 249 communities in Rwanda through a collaboration with the Government, World Bank, and U.K. charity Comic Relief. Spark will also expand its Community of Practice with further expansion in Burundi in partnership with FVS-AMADE and a new pilot with the Bulambuli local government in Eastern Uganda.

PROGRESS AGAINST GOALS



Demand Building World Bank and matching Comic Relief funding nearly secured for 249 village partners in Rwanda over the course of 2021-2023. Partnership set to launch with local government in Eastern Uganda to pilot adoption of FCAP. Civil Society group, FVS-AMADE, continuing partnership with Spark, expanding to twenty to thirty new communities.



Program Excellence Spark adapted quality assurance tools in order to take COVID-19 safety protocols into account. This included enabling villages to self-report, conducting multiple phone surveys to check-in with communities, as well as cooperating with local government representatives on the ground to make visits.



Learning and Standards Over the course of the year, the Impact Team conducted a number of internal studies and evaluations to answer key questions around what demonstrates a strong community, the value of the FCAP, and how FCAP communities have been affected by COVID-19. They also worked with Innovations for Poverty Action to design an external evaluation set to launch in 2021.



Organizational Advancement As the year came to a close, Spark raised over \$3.3M, \$800,000 more than our 2020 raise goal, and ended the year with 6.6 months worth of cash on hand. Spark secured its largest commitment to date with a seven figure, three year grant from Child Relief International.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

When the global COVID-19 pandemic reached East African countries in March of 2020, Spark Microgrants took action to develop a strategic COVID-19 response plan, set new policies in place, and assess the needs and impacts on our communities. A Spark COVID-19 Task Force was formed with representatives from each country program and department. This team met weekly to discuss how Spark's Facilitated Collective Action Process (FCAP) could be adapted to new global circumstances, how we would continue supporting our communities in these new contexts, and to implement our immediate response programs.

Spark understood that COVID-19 was and still is disproportionately impacting vulnerable communities, and recognized our ability to utilize our existing strategies to support communities that were being impacted. Over the course of 2020 (timeline of activities on following page), Spark leveraged FCAP leadership in facilitating collective action at the village level to 1) support villages to develop preparedness plans and manage through COVID-19 and 2) bolster recovery efforts through equipping government and civil society to employ the FCAP as an economic and social stimulus.

This community-based approach has been successful to date and covered three phases of support:



Preparedness - Supported communities through low tech solutions to develop preparedness plans to prevent spread. Gather learnings from what is happening in communities during isolation and share with partners.



Management - Supported communities, through increased economic hardship through local projects, supporting the most vulnerable and top up funds.



Recovery - Spark's FCAP will be integrated as a core part of post-COVID economic and social stimulus packages across the region. To prepare for the FCAP to reach hundreds of new villages at once Spark is building a mobile-enabled remote training program for youth facilitators and community members to increase the efficiency of the FCAP twofold.



2020 SPARK COVID-19 RESPONSE TIMELINE

MARCH

COVID-19 TASK FORCE LAUNCHED

Spark COVID-19 Task Force formed with representatives from each country program and department. This team met weekly to discuss how the FCAP could be adapted to new global circumstances, how we could continue supporting communities in these new contexts, and implement our immediate response programs.

APRIL - MAY

COVID-19 INFORMATIONAL CAMPAIGN

Between April and May, Spark sent SMS text messages to all Spark communities, with about two to six texts per week. The content of these messages focused on COVID-19, reinforcing information from the Ministry of Health and World Health Organization. SMS messages also included updates on community FCAP projects and disbursements. Two rapid community surveys were also conducted which indicated that the impact of the lockdown and restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak in the region negatively affected the livelihood, health and social interaction of the communities.

JUNE

VIRTUAL FCAP PILOT

In Rwanda, as part of our COVID-19 response Spark piloted a new "virtual FCAP" as a training program for community facilitators. The pilot was implemented in Rwanda, with fifty-eight community-based facilitators (CBFs) from twenty-nine Spark communities. The intention of this pilot was to provide additional skills-building exercises to community leaders during COVID-19 restrictions as well as test what is possible on mobile platforms for Spark's program and assess what parts can be done remotely.

JULY

FIRST TOP-UP GRANT

Spark secured funding from Child Relief International to provide a round of top-up grants of \$500 to all 176 active communities engaged in the FCAP to be used to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19. Funds were distributed in August for various initiatives which included: further investment into their primary project, health insurance programs, and food donation programs for the most vulnerable in the community.

AUGUST - SEPTEMBER

SMALL GROUP FCAP ROLLED OUT

To mitigate the negative effects of COVID, in August and September, Spark and its partners rolled out COVID-19 compliant small group meetings across its communities. In this model, community members met socially distanced in small neighborhood groups to discuss their most urgent needs in their community as well as brainstorm projects that could support these needs. Each small group then sent one representative to a village meeting to bring together ideas and agree on community COVID-19 initiatives.

OCTOBER

SECOND TOP-UP GRANT

With the successful rollout of the first top-up grant, Spark secured funding from World Centric to provide a second round of \$500 to be used to further mitigate the impacts of COVID-19.

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER

COMMUNITY SURVEY REPORT

After both top-ups were disbursed and communities had implemented their initiatives, Spark conducted a community survey to assess how the "top-ups" affected the state of livelihoods, communal projects and cohesion in the communities (discussed further on the next page).

COVID-19 RESEARCH AND LEARNINGS

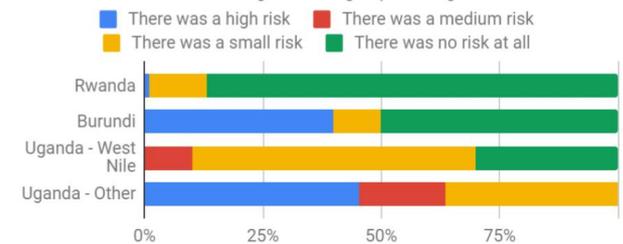
To mitigate the negative effects of COVID, in August and September, Spark and its partners rolled out COVID-19 compliant small group meetings across its communities and disbursed two rounds of \$500 as targeted livelihood support. In this model, community members met socially distanced in small neighborhood groups to discuss most urgent needs and vulnerable groups in their community as well as brainstorm projects that could support these and then sent one representative to a village meeting to bring together ideas and agree on a community COVID-19 project. After all 'top-ups' were disbursed and communities had implemented their projects, Spark conducted a third community survey to assess the outcomes of the program, looking specifically at: 1) Whether small group meetings were safe and effective in implementing the community led projects and 2) If community led projects supported by the COVID-19 'top-up' affected the state of livelihoods, communal projects and cohesion in the communities?

Below are the key findings from this survey:

Small groups FCAP meetings were safe

74% of meetings were held in an open space and community members reported that meetings followed COVID-19 prevention measures: 96% reported keeping a distance from each other, 95% washed their hands before meetings, 83% wore masks and 56% used hand sanitizer. As a result, over two-thirds (68%) of respondents thought that small group meetings did not put them at risk of infection with COVID-19.

Risk of infection of COVID during the small group meetings



Small-group meetings were inclusive

92% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that meetings allowed everyone including women and more impoverished community members to participate and together decide on the use of top-up funding.

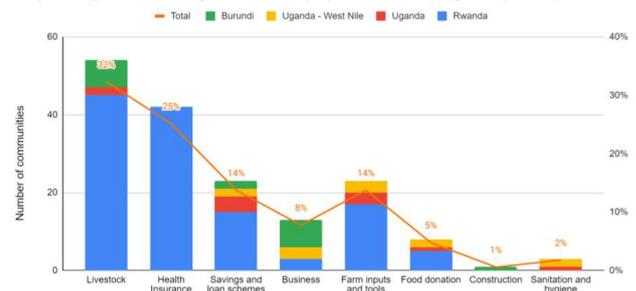
92%



COVID-19 top-up funds were used in a variety of ways

Spark's previous community research had highlighted strong community concerns around food security & livelihoods. Community project choices utilizing top-up funding were accordingly focused on improvements in these areas. 46% of projects were livestock or farming projects - investing in longer-term resilience and increasing community independence.

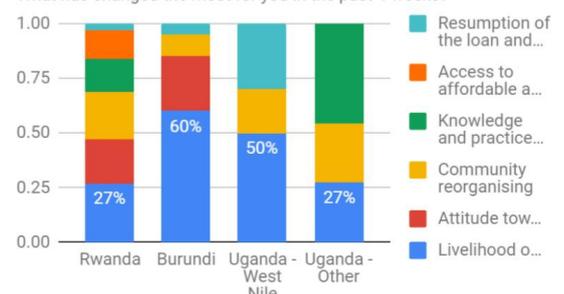
Projects implemented using the COVID top up Fund across programs (N=167)



Livelihood improvement identified as biggest change

Community members noted a number of benefits resulting from the use of the two top-funds. 34% of community members named livelihood improvement as the biggest change, followed by 21% who claimed the benefits of the community being able to organize together.

What has changed the most for you in the past 4 weeks?



COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHTS

Muhama, Burundi

The Muhama community is located in Burundi's Makamba province. This community has 523 households and its inhabitants come from different provinces. The Muhama community has a legacy of supporting each other both in good and bad times. They attend different events in the community and help each other to reach health centers in cases of illness. The community members have mostly been dependent on products from Tanzania to support both their families and their livestock. As borders closed, due to COVID-19, prices began rising and community members could no longer afford to get what they needed from Tanzania. They used their top-up fund to support their goat rearing project. They also began collecting money to support one another through the pandemic in the form of loans.

Rurama, Rwanda

The Rurama community is located in the Rulindo District in the Northern Province. While most community members are subsistence farmers, the community elected to launch a motorcycle transportation business. Like many communities around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on the Rurama village. Many community members lost their jobs which led to a reduction in income and a lack of access to food and basic needs. Despite the hardships that community members were facing, they sought a way to support each other through the crisis. Some community members donated food, and others lent money to those in need. They worked together to alleviate the negative impacts of COVID-19 on their daily lives. The top-up funding from Spark enabled community members to purchase seedlings and tools for farming. Since the majority of community members are farmers, they selected a project that they knew they could complete together and would provide them with access to a regular food source.

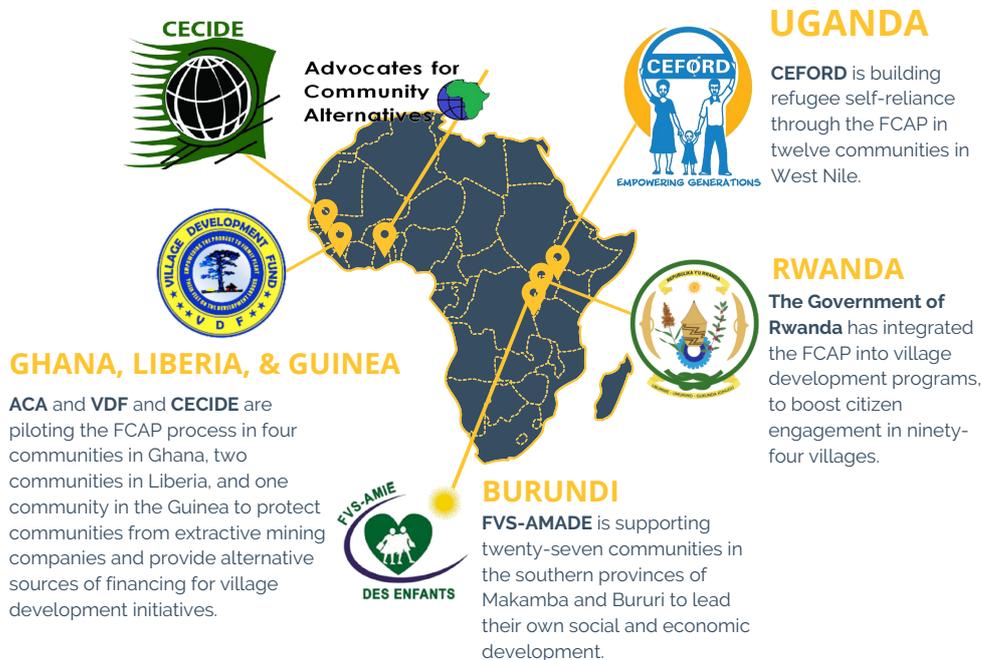
Bumasikye, Uganda

The Bumasikye community is located in the Eastern part of Uganda, in the Mbale district. Utilizing their initial grant, the community planned and implemented a dairy farming project. The community used the funds from their grant to initially purchase eleven cows. They were able to purchase eighteen additional cows with the revenue generated from this project. The Bumasikye community also organized a savings and loan group to ensure that community members have enough capital to cover their basic necessities. COVID-19 has been challenging for community members, however they remain resilient, and throughout the pandemic have continued to carry on with small group activities; taking care of the cows and also continued to contribute to the savings and loan group, while observing the standard operating procedures recommended by the government. With the additional \$500 in funding from the first round of top-ups the Bumasikye community was able to purchase horticulture grow tents to increase their income after harvesting and selling their crops.



COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

The Community of Practice (CoP) is a collective of organizations that are implementing the FCAP across various countries and contexts. Since 2015, Spark has equipped local governments and civil society organizations across six countries within the CoP with training, coaching and accompanying tools to adapt and use the FCAP in their regions. Alongside Spark's Task Force activities, the CoP also responded in 2020 to COVID-19 and supporting their respective communities by implementing some of the following community-led response initiatives:



Prioritizing Community Preparedness:

- ACA and CEFORD supported communities in Ghana and Uganda to set up hand washing stations with high-quality soap.
- CEFORD, FVS, Spark and the Government of Rwanda supported communities in Uganda, Burundi, and Rwanda to develop Preparedness and Response Plans.
- CEFORD in Uganda has provided critical PPEs to community leaders and health workers.

Supporting Communication Campaigns:

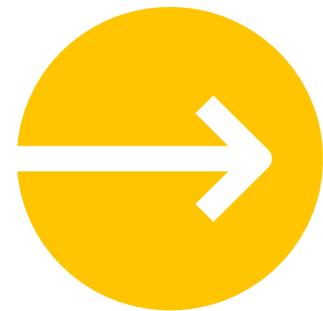
- Community facilitators are helping Ghana health services to use radio and community info centers to spread COVID info on a weekly basis.
- VDF in Liberia recorded jingles to share with communities to relay critical messaging.
- CEFORD in Uganda are sharing sensitization messages using radio, and SMS, and supporting local volunteers to share messages safely.

Facilitating Strong Community Leadership:

- In Ghana, ACA helped communities to form Citizen Committee Networks, which support information sharing, contact tracing, support for those in isolation, and working with community health volunteers to educate their immediate communities.

Mitigating Social and Economic Impacts of the Lockdown:

- CEFORD in Uganda supported the livelihoods of impacted communities through the provision and distribution of inputs and seeds for planting, working through lead farmers provided with hand washing facilities and hand sanitizers.



2021 Key Initiatives

Advancement for Citizen Engagement Project Launch

Spark Microgrants in collaboration with the Government of Rwanda, the World Bank, and the U.K. charity Comic Relief, will bring the FCAP to 249 villages in Rwanda over the next three years, both providing funding and policy support for its realization. The Advancement for Citizen Engagement (ACE) project objectives are to improve livelihoods for 17,750 households and the capacity of villages with the support of national and local government to encourage citizen engagement. The total population in the target villages, according to official data, is 152,645. This entire number is expected to benefit from improved village planning and engagement with local government, including enhanced understanding of and access to government social protection programs. Spark will receive final sign-off from the Japanese Government for the JSDF grant, the subsidiary of the World Bank providing the funding, at the beginning of 2021. Based on the current timeline, we are hoping to officially get approval and launch this initiative in April/May of 2021.

Collaborate with Local Government in Uganda to pilot FCAP

Spark is set to launch a pilot with the local Ugandan government in ten villages in 2021, to be led by the local government. As part of the pilot, the government will provide staff time and a smaller seed grant of \$2,500 to five of the ten villages and Spark will provide an \$8,000 seed grant to the remaining five villages in order to evaluate for the optimal grant size for this program. Over the next two years, Spark will train local government officials in Bulambuli on the FCAP to accelerate community driven change, support ten villages and 7,700 community members to improve sustainable livelihoods through new businesses & social cohesion, and elect and train ten young adults to lead their communities through the village planning process.

Expansion in Burundi with FVS-AMADE

In 2017, Spark partnered with FVS-AMADE, a local civil society organization in Burundi, to implement the FCAP. To date, Spark and FVS-AMADE have facilitated the FCAP in twenty-seven communities in Burundi. Spark has also collaborated with FVS-AMADE to design and plan a new program that would involve the FCAP being facilitated in cooperative groups – entities made up of representatives from community savings groups. These cooperative groups create a space for communities to hold each other accountable and learn from one another. Spark and FVS-AMADE launched the FCAP in three cooperatives in 2020. In 2021, we are partnering with twenty to thirty new communities in Burundi split across the communes of Mabanda and Bururi. Within each commune, we will also partner with one new cooperative. Currently operating in both communes, Spark and FVS-AMADE are confident that we will be well prepared to launch these new partnerships with quality and assurance. If successful, Spark and FVS-AMADE plan to continue scaling in these communes.

2020 FINANCIALS

2020 Actual* + Projected Income and Expenses

Confirmed Income

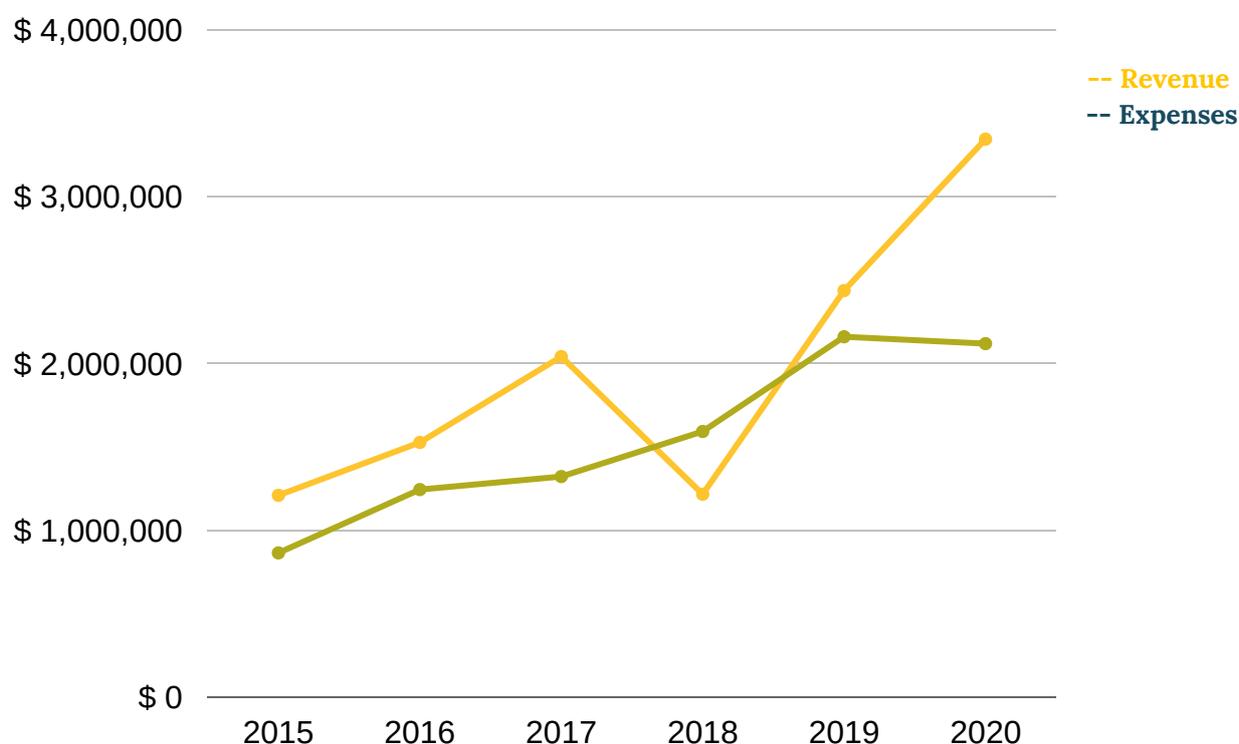
Foundations	\$ 2,793,609
Individuals	\$ 280,109
Corporations & Law Firms	\$ 271,315
Total Income	\$ 3,345,033

Expenses

Microgrants & Field Costs	\$ 547,029
Personnel Costs	\$ 575,620
Reserach & Development	\$ 220,036
Operating Expenses	\$ 776,545
Total Expenses	2,119,230

Net Income	\$ 1,225,803
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Revenue & Expenses Since 2015



*With a difficult end of 2018 regarding fundraising, Spark fell way below our intended raise goal. After 1Q19 close, Spark had made up the shortfall which led us to believe that internally Spark had been overly ambitious in the closing of grant commitments within the 2018 calendar year. In 2019 and 2020 Spark has continued with a positive trend of surpassing our raise goals.

**2020 financial data is provisional and final financials will be posted on the website and available upon request when completed.

VISIONARIES - \$100,000+

Child Relief International
Imago Dei Fund
Lucille Foundation
Marr-Munning Trust
Peery Foundation
Planet Wheeler Foundation
Segal Family Foundation
Woodcock Foundation
World Centric

STRATEGIC PARTNERS - \$10,000-\$100,000

Amol Jain
Anthony Massaro and Laura Pelaez
Anonymous
Anonymous
Bylo Chacon Foundation
Highwater Global
Joseph Frumkin
Julia Morgan Fund
Marcy Engel
Martin & Kirsten Segal
Maureen White
Peter Sherris
Ripple Foundation
Rob & Brooke O'dea
Sall Family Foundation
Sandra Wijnberg
World Connect

SPARK ADVOCATES - UNDER \$10,000

Amy Joelson
Alison Bialecki
Allison Devore & Ross Levinsky
Anders Jones
Arthur Gray
Basil Cowieson
Brian Hamilton
Charles Weidman
Charlotte Stone
Charlotte Trieffus
Claudia Wornum
Colette Such
Cynthia Brockwell-Carey
Dale Melcher
Dana Conroy
Daniel Baum
Daniel Pincus
Daniela Quicksilver
Danielle Roberts
Deborah Carey
Erin Friday
Gale Gottlieb
Heather Smith
James Cohen

James Meeks
Jana Haimsohn
Jason Lynn
Jeffrey Pascoe
Jennifer Weidman
Jill Gentile
John Cullison
John Estes
Jonathan Jackson
Jonathan Lewis
Joseph Boehm
Joshua Fogelson
Jude Faella
Juliane Segal Fund
Jewish Women's Foundation of New York
Kathleen Flanagan
Katie Hatch
Kim Klipstien
Kira Gidron
Kirstie Watkins
Kurt King
Laura & Alex Saltonstall
Lisa & David Issroff
Liz McKenna
Louis Thompson
Margaret Moore
Margaret Upshaw
Margot Brandenburg
Martin & Jacqui Gottlieb
Mary Berryman
Matthew Forti
Meg and Max Goetsch
Neal Lesh
Network for Good
Richard Sloan
Robert Shapiro
Robin Laudette
Rowena Luk
Sally Hayman
Samantha Smith
Sarah Graizbord
Scott Zemser
Shannon Such
Simon Morfit
Soraya Svoronos
Stephen Gleit
Stephen Kotran
Steven Fore
Susan Lennon
Thomas Dackow
Vanessa Gottlieb
Virginia Cohen
William D. Unger Foundation
Zachary Richner

