

VILLAGE2 MARKETS

A PROGRAM
FOR CHANGE

PALMERA



VILLAGE2MARKETS

MAKING MARKETS WORK BETTER FOR SMALL RURAL ENTREPRENEURS

Village2Markets is a market-based people-centric approach that seeks to improve the economic wellbeing of small rural entrepreneurs.

Its goal is two-fold:

1 For markets to better serve small rural entrepreneurs:

This involves the private sector, civil society, governments and the market system overall taking responsibility for the changes that need to occur to ensure that both female and male small rural entrepreneurs are targeted and included in market opportunities.

2 For small rural entrepreneurs to be equipped to better access and benefit from market opportunities:

Even if changes in the market occur, and market actors are responding to better include these entrepreneurs, because of a variety of socio-cultural and systemic reasons, some small rural entrepreneurs are still excluded. This goal involves small rural entrepreneurs also taking responsibility for making changes in their own practices, beliefs and behaviours so that they too are able to take advantages of market opportunities.

Village2Markets recognises that to achieve these goals, market actors need to be supported to realise the opportunities that lie in targeting and including female and male small rural entrepreneurs, and small rural entrepreneurs also require support to overcome some of the critical barriers they face. While possible, these changes rarely occur on their own. Local NGOs, therefore, have a critical role to play in supporting these actors to realise these changes.

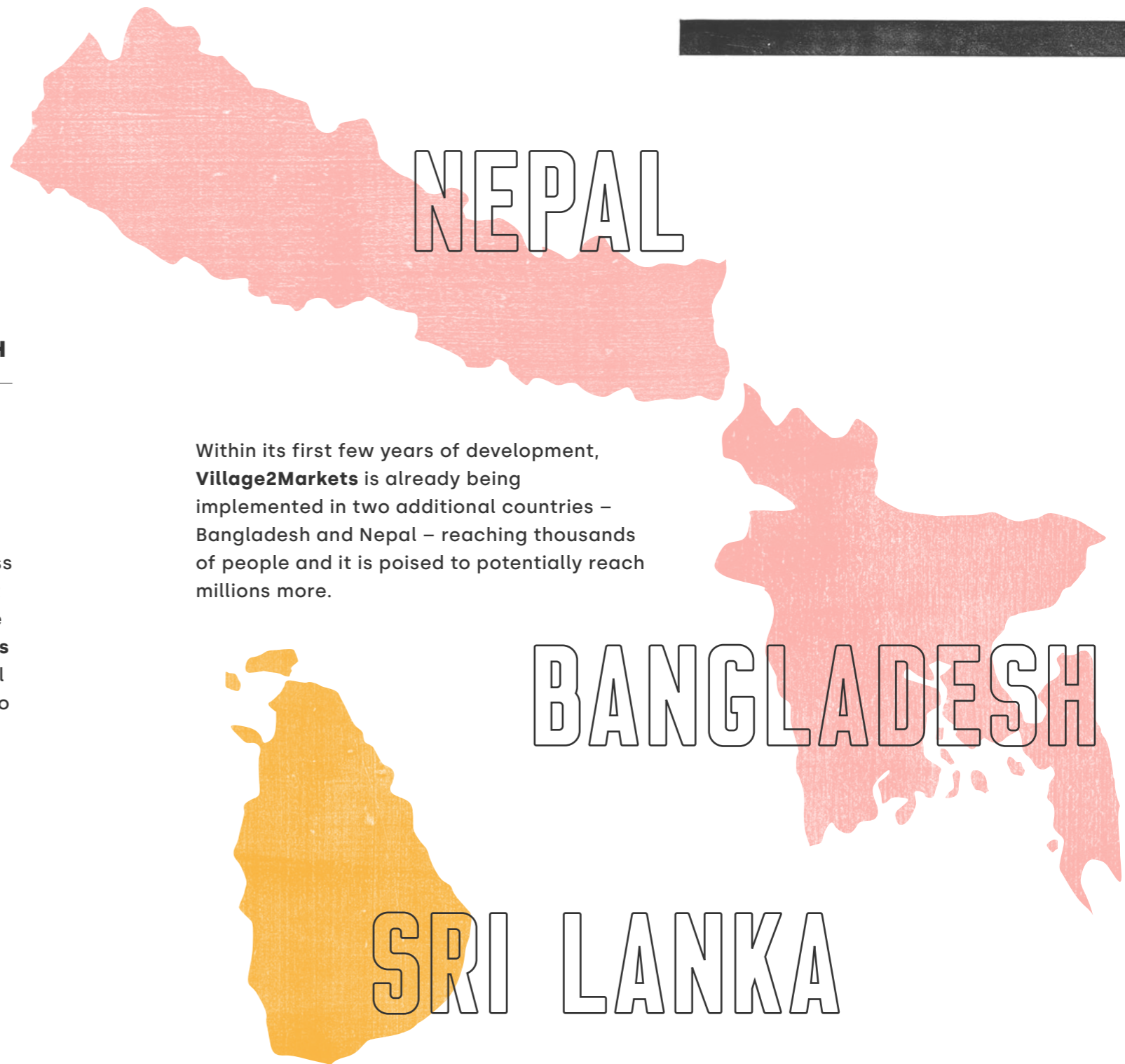
Village2Markets, offers an approach that is unique, creating a framework that helps NGOs work to address both these goals through use of a simple step-by-step guide that helps them facilitate these changes, ensuring markets better serve small rural entrepreneurs, and that they find a sustainable pathway out of poverty.



SCALING IMPACT

THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS, INNOVATION AND RESEARCH

Village2Markets was born out of a desire to develop an approach that would meet the needs of the poor while also ensuring system-level impacts and scale. This desire spurred the growth of a research and design thinking process which was initiated in Sri Lanka by Palmera, that finally led to what **Village2Markets** is today. The goal is to continue to evolve the **Village2Markets** model through directed research and intentional partnerships with implementing organisations, to equip practitioners and other stakeholders with evidence needed to adopt practices that will contribute to poverty reduction the world over.



Within its first few years of development, **Village2Markets** is already being implemented in two additional countries – Bangladesh and Nepal – reaching thousands of people and it is poised to potentially reach millions more.



There has long been a need to address the gap that exists in development technologies between what are traditionally known as bottom-up approaches, where the primary focus is community mobilisation methodologies targeting those marginalised and living in poverty, and Market-Based Approaches that focus on scale and broader economic development of communities. We believe *Village2Markets* has the potential to bridge that gap.

Anthony Sell, Transform Aid International

Village2Markets has been supported by

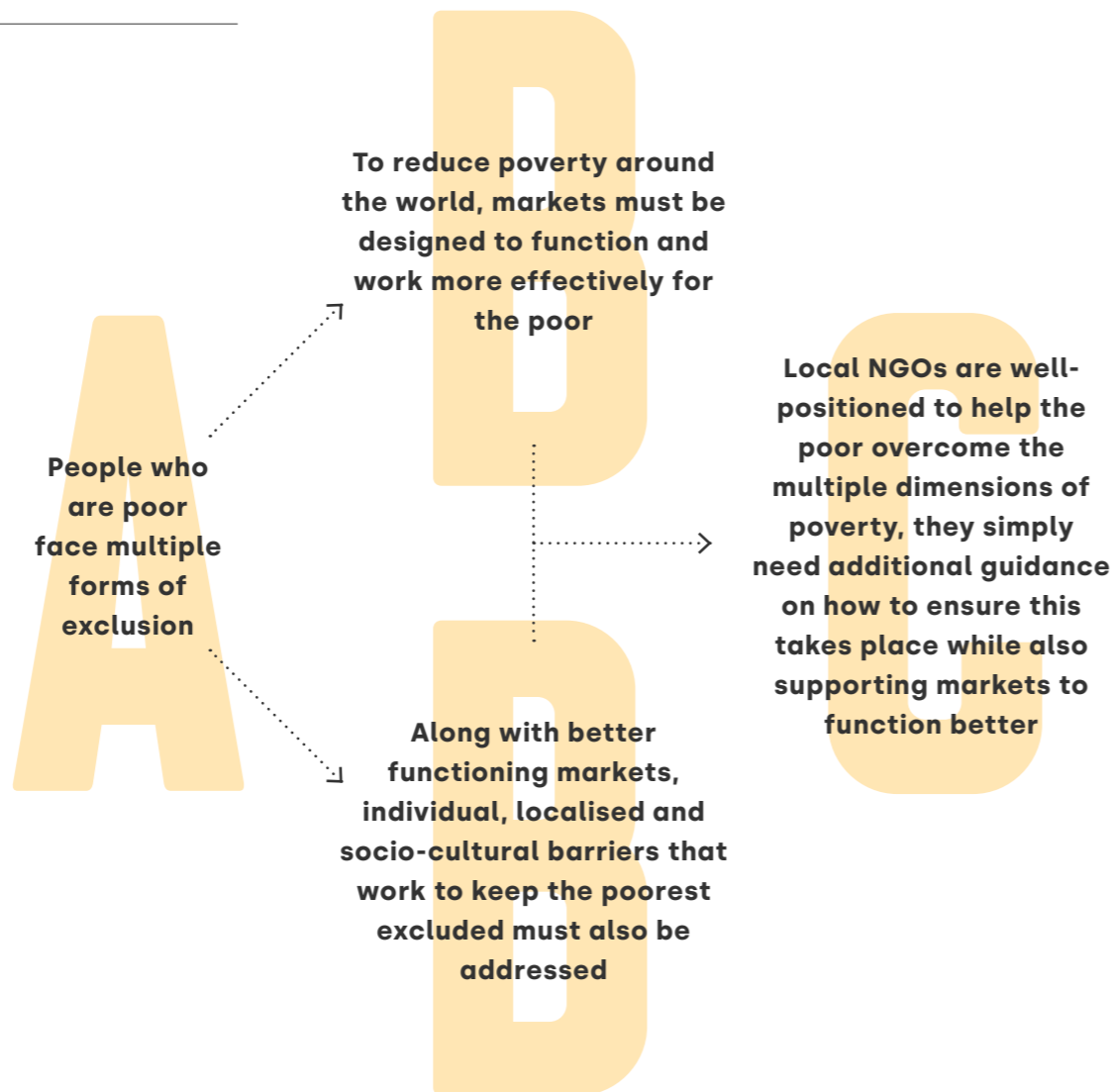


CLAYTON UTZ



RESPONDING TO THE PROBLEMS

THE VILLAGE2MARKETS WAY



People who are poor face multiple forms of exclusion.

The World Bank has found that there are more than 800 million people living below the international poverty line of US\$1.90 a day. This poverty is multi-dimensional and those experiencing it, many of whom are small rural entrepreneurs, face intersecting forms of exclusion:

- They have minimal wealth and income and thus often lack the minimum required to meet their food and other basic needs, let alone own assets.
- They often lack access to education as well as economic and social opportunities.
- They face remoteness and geographical isolation, particularly in rural areas or areas blighted by violence and lack of services, such as urban slums or areas of conflict.
- They are discriminated against for a variety of reasons which may include gender, race, caste, disability status and religious. This results in their being further marginalised by society as being seen to be inferior to other groups.

To reduce poverty around the world, markets must be designed to function and work more effectively for the poor.

For people to rise out of poverty, their immediate environment must be able to offer them a chance to access what they need to earn an income, build assets and take advantage of opportunities. When markets are not accessible or not working effectively, however, the poor are the ones who suffer the most.

In addition, the majority of the world's poor are necessity entrepreneurs. They are self-employed microbusiness owners – peasant farmers, rural peddlers, urban hawkers, and small producers, usually involved in agriculture and small trade. They tend to engage in marginal and temporary economic activities, usually for survival, to remain food secure and maintain some diversity in activities. They are often engaged in these activities not by choice or a desire to grow a business, but because it is one of the only options open to them for their survival.

Given these realities, even when the system and market are functioning better so that the poor are targeted more explicitly (through activities that are usually facilitated by larger INGOs and governments), those who are extremely poor are often left out of these opportunities (*Sivalingam and Griffin, 2012*). They remain isolated, living in rural, village contexts, and end up experiencing the more significant and compounding effects of poverty while not benefiting from these larger, system-level initiatives.

When the extremely poor do benefit, the gains they experience are rarely the result of a single intervention. They emerge from multiple changes related to accessing assets, services and opportunities, and the ability to make and act on decisions, as well as changes occurring at micro and macro levels, which often occur in a non-linear fashion.

(Bandiera et al., 2013; Kaber, Mahmud and Tasneem, 2011).

To address these challenges, Village2Markets responds by working directly with market actors themselves (businesses, services, organisations and government agencies) to understand the barriers they are experiencing in reaching necessity entrepreneurs, and designing initiatives and activities to ensure that the poor are explicitly targeted. In this way, Village2Markets seeks to ensure that necessity entrepreneurs are not left out and that the system is changing to find solutions are designed with them in mind.

However, the presence of functioning markets alone will not address the multiple dimensions that drive exclusion of the poorest.

Necessity entrepreneurs also experience additional challenges such as power imbalances that perpetuate their marginalisation, discrimination, limited confidence and skills required to pursue entrepreneurial initiatives, and various other socio-cultural barriers that are often based on informal though deeply respected practices, traditions or customs, further excluding the poor, and women in particular.

Without more directed and concerted support to help overcome these more unique barriers, the poorest remain even more vulnerable and left out of opportunities in the market that could significantly transform their lives.



The *Village2Markets* approach responds to these more individual and localised challenges by providing tailored and unique support directed at the poor themselves, and their immediate surroundings. This takes the form of capacity building, support to improve infrastructure or implement other community development-related initiatives. Where additional exclusionary barriers are identified, *Village2Markets* intervenes through developing safety nets for the poorest women and men in the community, or designing more tailored interventions, often considered to be outside the scope of market-based programming, to ensure that these women and men too are adequately equipped to seize market opportunities on their own.

Local NGOs are well-positioned to help the poor overcome the multiple dimensions of poverty; they simply need additional guidance on how to ensure this takes place while also supporting markets to function better.

Because poverty remains a problem the world over, local grassroots NGOs continue to take up the charge of working to alleviate poverty. While they are often well-equipped and positioned to address the individual, localised and socio-cultural barriers that necessity entrepreneurs face described earlier, local NGOs are not always successful at adequately identifying and addressing some of the key macro-level, market and systemic barriers that keep the poor, poor.

While these NGOs often have a strong local mandate, deep community relationships and local knowledge with experience using a more people-centric individual and localised approach, they experience a variety of barriers to implementing sustainable poverty reduction initiatives that have system-level impacts.

These particular challenges often include:

- limited capacity to effectively identify the root causes to the systemic barriers that the poor face;
- limited understanding of the need (and limited capacity) to engage a variety of market players in developing and implementing solutions that directly target and benefit the poorest;
- limited capacity to simultaneously address the socio-cultural barriers that the poor face with the market-related barriers they face; and
- they often lack the budget and resources to be able to carry out initiatives that will create more sustainable market system-level impacts.

Evidence-backed methodology Village2Markets along with similar programs have demonstrated, through a wealth of evidence, that a positive effect on household incomes can be achieved using a combination of people-centric and market-based approaches. Various external evaluations and academic papers provide strong evidence of the effectiveness of the Village2Markets approach for poverty alleviation.

The following table illustrates some of the differences between typical aid-based approaches and the Village2Markets approach

AID-BASED APPROACH ASKS:	VILLAGE2MARKETS ASKS:
What can I do for the people?	What can the people do for themselves?
What can we (the NGO) provide?	How can necessity entrepreneurs' needs be met through better services, supports, assistance from and linkages with private sector and/or government actors and how can the NGO facilitate that?
Who qualifies for assistance?	Who should be partnered with or leveraged to address the production and market access barriers that necessity entrepreneurs face to ensure that they can engage in profitable markets?
What do the authorities, government bodies and donors require?	What is demanded in the market system and how can necessity entrepreneurs get value by better meeting these demands?
The people say thank you to the NGO	The people do not need to say thank you because they did it themselves.

BUILDING CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT VILLAGE2MARKETS



Village2Markets is well-suited to NGOs focusing on the economic empowerment of the poorest and seeking to transition to a more sustainable market-based approach. To support with the successful implementation of the approach, Palmera is able to provide your organisation with the following support and resources:

1

Training on the Village2Markets approach.

This week-long training program provides an overview of the **Village2Markets** approach and key concepts to understand and assumes that the participants have some understanding/working knowledge of livelihoods and market-based programming.

2

Unlimited access to online portal.

Village2Markets offers a unique online portal for NGOs, making available the entire Operational Guide along with numerous tools and available resources. The information provided in the portal makes the capacity building that some NGOs require that much easier. It also contains blogs and real-life examples of how **Village2Markets** is being applied in different parts of the world, so other organisations have these stories and case studies as practical examples of how the approach can work.

3

Ongoing technical assistance and specialised trainings.

This assistance can be provided on a variety of topics that are either cross-cutting or technical in nature (i.e. gender, value chain development, facilitation skills, project design, implementation techniques, etc.). The NGO can make a request to Palmera for training to take place either virtually or in-country. We have put together a roster of consultants with expertise in key technical areas for this purpose and experts can be drawn from this roster should their services be required.

4

Critical Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) support.

Village2Markets utilises a continuous and participatory approach with a set of MEL systems that can be integrated into all aspects of the project.

Some NGOs benefit from additional support in this area given the complexities that can come with monitoring progress and tracking toward targets in market-based programming; therefore, Palmera has expertise available for in-country or virtual support should NGOs require it as well.



All this time we were only getting half the price for our groundnuts. After learning about what the buyers want, we now sort our groundnuts and sell to different buyers at different prices. Before we just worked in the farm, now we are doing business.

Producers in V2M programme, Mullaithivu



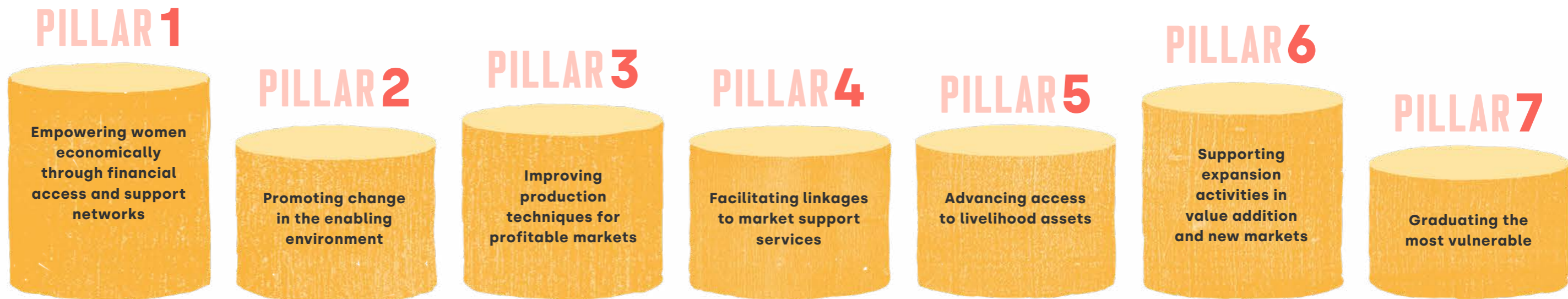
A PILLAR-BASED APPROACH

The *Village2Markets* approach is divided into seven pillars, providing a simple framework for NGOs to identify and address barriers that poor women and men face to market inclusion.

The seven pillars can be split into groups that address two specific types of barriers:

1. **Market system barriers** which exist more generally such as issues relating to productivity, market linkages, support services and the enabling environment. The pillars that more specifically work at these issues include Pillars 2, 3, 4 and 6.
2. **Socio-cultural and individual barriers** that are unique to poorer, more vulnerable and excluded female and male village members and communities such as issues relating to discrimination on the basis of gender, class, ethnicity, or ability, poor social networks, and limited resilience which are needed for gaining access to markets and benefiting from opportunities. The pillars that more specifically work at these issues include Pillars 1, 5 and 7.

Therefore, *Village2Markets* offers an approach that is unique, creating a framework that helps NGOs work to address both types of barriers in one approach.



THE PURPOSE AND BARRIERS OF THE ENTRY POINTS



Improving productive capacity of poor households to engage in profitable subsectors

Provides guidance on building the capacity of female and male necessity entrepreneurs to do business better and increase their incomes, to overcome the following barriers to their market inclusion:

- Lack of capacity of women and men producers to meet market requirements
- Lack of assets needed for access to profitable subsectors
- Absence of incentives for asset suppliers to target the last mile

Ensuring effective integration of buyers with the last mile poor

Provides guidance on xxxxxxx

- Lack of motivation from buyers to engage with the last mile poor
- Lack of coordination within the last mile community

Strengthening last mile market and financial services

Provides guidance on supporting existing and new market support services through facilitating market linkages, offering technical assistance and improving their businesses to overcome the following barrier to necessity entrepreneurs' market inclusion:

- Lack of awareness and coordination to access existing financial and/or relevant support services
- Absence of sufficient incentives for service providers to reach the poor in the last mile

Strengthening enabling environment and market agency

Provides guidance on mobilising female and male village members and necessity entrepreneurs to engage with relevant stakeholders and platforms, creating a more supportive and inclusive enabling environment, to overcome the following barriers to their market inclusion:

- Lack of the enabling environment factors which make it difficult for last mile poor to engage effectively in profitable markets
- Absence of power and influence over market forces

Improving social exclusivity for economic growth

Provides guidance on xxxxx to overcome the following barriers to their market inclusion:

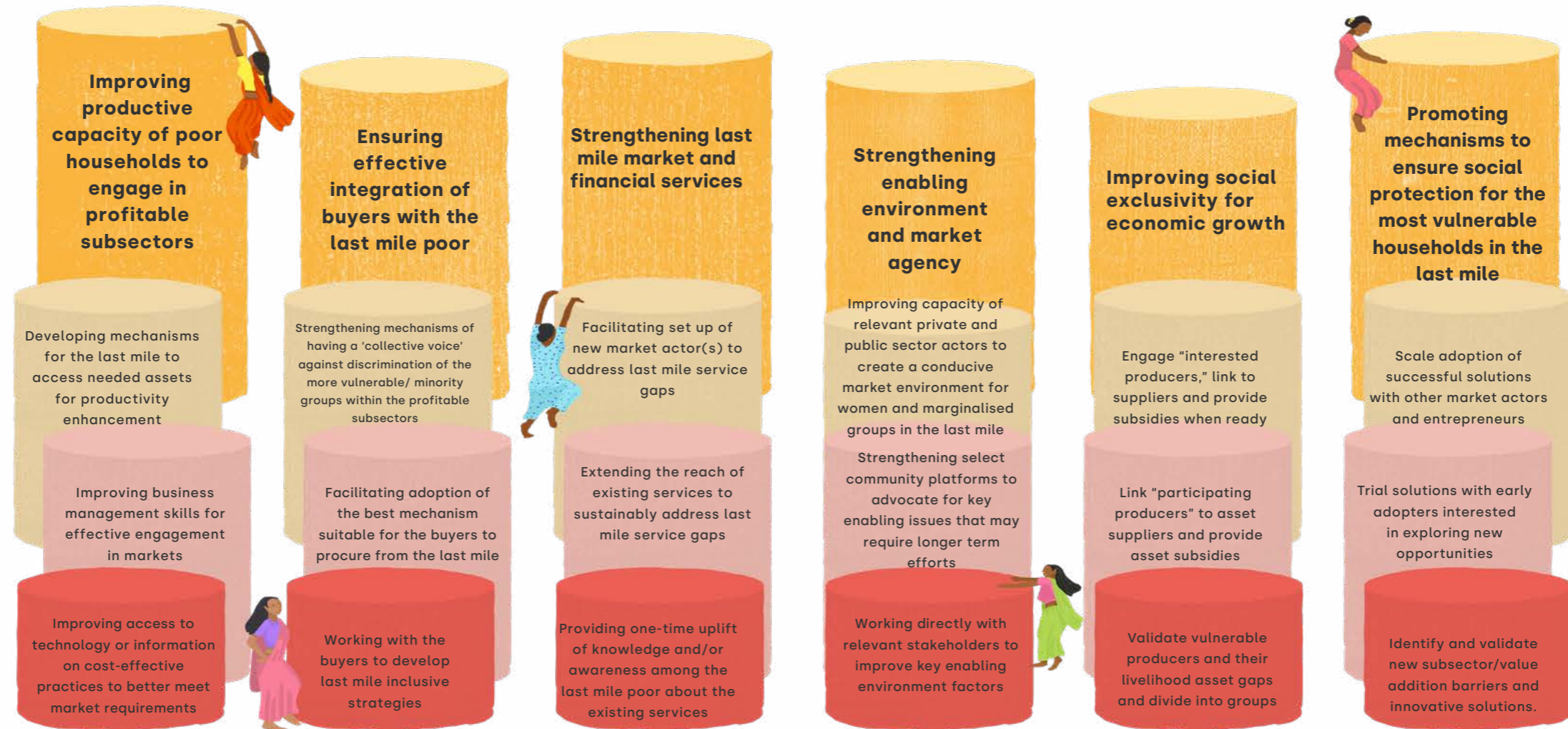
- Power conflicts/ lack of social integration (particularly of the most vulnerable or minority groups) necessary for economic empowerment
- Discrimination due to gender-based, ethnic, or religious, norms

Promoting mechanisms to ensure social protection for the most vulnerable households in the last mile

Provides guidance on supporting extremely poor, vulnerable and the most excluded women, by engaging them in platforms of support (i.e. self-help groups) and developing graduation pathways for them to access profitable markets, to overcome the following barriers to their market inclusion:

- Absence of social protection for the most vulnerable in the last mile
- Low resilience to face shocks

ENTRY POINT STRATEGIES



UNDERSTANDING THE PILLARS AND STEPPING STONES



LAYING THE FOUNDATION

FOR A VILLAGE2MARKETS PROJECT

This is the foundational pillar of the **Village2Markets** approach. Any good development project requires extensive research and preparation before it even begins. The **Village2Markets** approach is no different. At this stage a holistic assessment is undertaken of villages that have the greatest need and are most excluded from market participation; the key barriers that those living there face; and the market opportunities that are present in that region.

From this assessment, a village is selected for project implementation and a number of subsectors are also selected based on a set of criteria that include the subsectors' potential to reach higher value markets and increase incomes. Once subsectors are selected, a more extensive market and gender assessment of the barriers and opportunities present in the village is conducted (more detailed assessments are conducted at the beginning of each Pillar to further understand realities on the ground and design interventions relating to that Pillar's focus). This assessment helps the NGO determine the most appropriate **Village2Markets** pillars to implement in that village, ensuring the project is responsive to the context and that the NGO has the the capacity and resources to implement.

PILLAR 1

EMPOWERING WOMEN ECONOMICALLY THROUGH FINANCIAL ACCESS AND SUPPORT NETWORKS

In the first stepping stone, the NGO starts by **diagnosing the women's barriers to market inclusion and simultaneously begins to demonstrate its role as a facilitator** rather than an aid provider. The NGO brings the community together early on in the project to enhance their ownership of the initiatives by establishing savings groups. Using savings groups is a "light-touch" activity because it requires the commitment, motivation and ownership of the participants themselves to be successful and this is clearly articulated at the outset.

In the second stepping stone, the NGO works to **address the financial barriers women face** first. By this time, the savings groups are fully formed, and women begin to build their capacity in financial literacy and savings practices through having greater access to safe and affordable finance. Individual members are also linked to financial service providers when they are interested.

In the final stepping stone, the NGO works to **address the socio-cultural barriers women face**. Ultimately, the savings groups are more than just for saving. The women are supported to overcome additional barriers they are facing (such as limited mobility, lack of confidence, limited access to opportunities, etc.) so they can better engage in markets. In these spaces, women learn leadership and decision-making skills, and gain access to training and participation in other workshops. As time is spent in these groups, women build the confidence and skills they need to advocate for change in their homes and communities and more importantly for them to participate more freely in the market as entrepreneurs in their own right.



PILLAR 2

PROMOTING CHANGE IN THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

1 In the first stepping stone of Pillar 2, the NGO works to further **assess the barriers that are present in the enabling environment** which inhibit necessity entrepreneurs' from succeeding and with the community members, begins to develop strategies that will enable reform. This diagnosis process is critical as it allows for any additional barriers and opportunities where reforms can occur to be unearthed in a participatory manner.

2 In the second stepping stone, the NGO works simultaneously to **build the capacity of village members to advocate for change and together address the barriers that require more immediate reforms**. This is an important combination because the support village members receive along with the reforms that are pursued demonstrate the potential for the faster pace at which change can occur if members are capacitated. The barriers that are often addressed at this stage can include limited access to water, poor roads or infrastructure or even limited access to market information. Through village members engaging in simple reform efforts such as meeting with community leaders, government officials, civil society and even the private sector, solutions can sometimes easily arise where water tanks are then distributed, or roads are fixed or even a community bulletin with price information is set up to address the barriers identified.

3 In the third stepping stone, the NGO builds on the work done in the second stepping stone but focuses primarily on **addressing barriers that may require more longer-term reform efforts**. These enabling environment barriers may relate to poor policies or regulations for small business owners, or inhibiting land ownership rights for women, or even poor access to quality inputs. The NGO works with community members to advocate for reforms at this level knowing these efforts will require commitment and change may not occur for a while. Efforts may include participation in stakeholder forums or engagement with leaders and officials to discuss issues and start to recommend changes to policy and laws to ensure the barriers identified are addressed.



PILLAR 3

In the first stepping stone of Pillar 3, the NGO works to **validate and further identify the production and market-related barriers that necessity entrepreneurs face and then design innovative solutions to address these barriers**. This involves a full investigation of the identified subsectors to uncover these barriers which may include (but are not limited to): poor access to and use of quality inputs; lack of knowledge of strategies to address environmental problems or recover from disasters; or access to/awareness of innovative products or services that will improve production. Once identified, an in-depth exploration of possible innovative solutions also takes place. This involves engaging with market actors from within and outside the village who can provide insight into new or successful solutions to implement. Because innovations and technologies do not always reach female and male necessity entrepreneurs as a result of their isolation or exclusion from opportunities, this process of investigation encourages practitioners to look further and wider to find the solutions that will work best.

IMPROVING PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES FOR PROFITABLE MARKET

In the second stepping stone, the **viable solutions are further designed and contextualised, and then implemented, initially with 'growth entrepreneurs' or 'early adopters'** (those who are willing to take a risk on something new, and who typically have more land and assets), whose businesses are also used as demonstrations to showcase the new production techniques. Once positive results start to occur, **solutions are further tailored as needed and then scaled to other necessity entrepreneurs or 'late adopters'** (those who are more livelihood insecure, who typically have fewer assets and smaller land sizes, and who have a lower risk tolerance) when they are ready.

As uptake of new practices and technologies occurs, and more necessity entrepreneurs' capacities are built, linkages between the 'early' and 'late adopters' are facilitated so knowledge and practices can continue to spread. Typically, more intensive work with 'later adopters' is required to ensure their barriers are addressed and their access to markets improved.



The final stepping stone focuses on **building the skills of necessity entrepreneurs to be able to negotiate with buyers and also linking them to market actors** to then mobilise with one another and engage in negotiations on their own. Even with a good product to sell, necessity entrepreneurs are often taken advantage of by traders and other buyers because they feel they do not have the power to negotiate.

The **Village2Markets** approach builds necessity entrepreneurs' confidence and skills in communication and negotiation, as well as understanding how markets work, and when and how they should mobilise as a group to get better prices, and how to access other opportunities should they arise and are the main focus of activities in this third stepping stone.

The success of Pillar 3 hinges on two key elements:

- 1 Strong partnerships with local experts and organisations who can provide the needed technical assistance and support. This not only leverages the strengths and presence of existing market actors, but it ensures the sustainability of efforts as a result; and
- 2 Close and ongoing monitoring of activities to ensure that the new practices and technologies are "sticking." Typically, if necessity entrepreneurs do not experience success early on, they tend to stop their efforts quite quickly; therefore the careful monitoring of activities allows for rapid adjustment in an activity or solution to ensure adoption by all.

PILLAR 4

FACILITATING LINKAGES TO MARKET SUPPORT SERVICES

In the first stepping stone of Pillar 4, the NGO builds on the work done in Pillar 3 which focused on production and marketing, by further **identifying the gaps present relating to market support services, and then designing and solutions to fill these gaps**. Similar to Pillar 3, this involves a full investigation into the subsector and the barriers present which may include: poor access to quality inputs, or business development supports, or training, or finance, or even transportation services. In rural villages, where most of the poor live, these services are typically of even poorer quality and are less available because of they are isolated from major urban centres. Once these barriers are identified, an exploration of possible innovative solutions also takes place, so that the most appropriate and pressing gaps are filled through solutions that are designed to ensure the greatest benefits to female and male necessity entrepreneurs are realised.

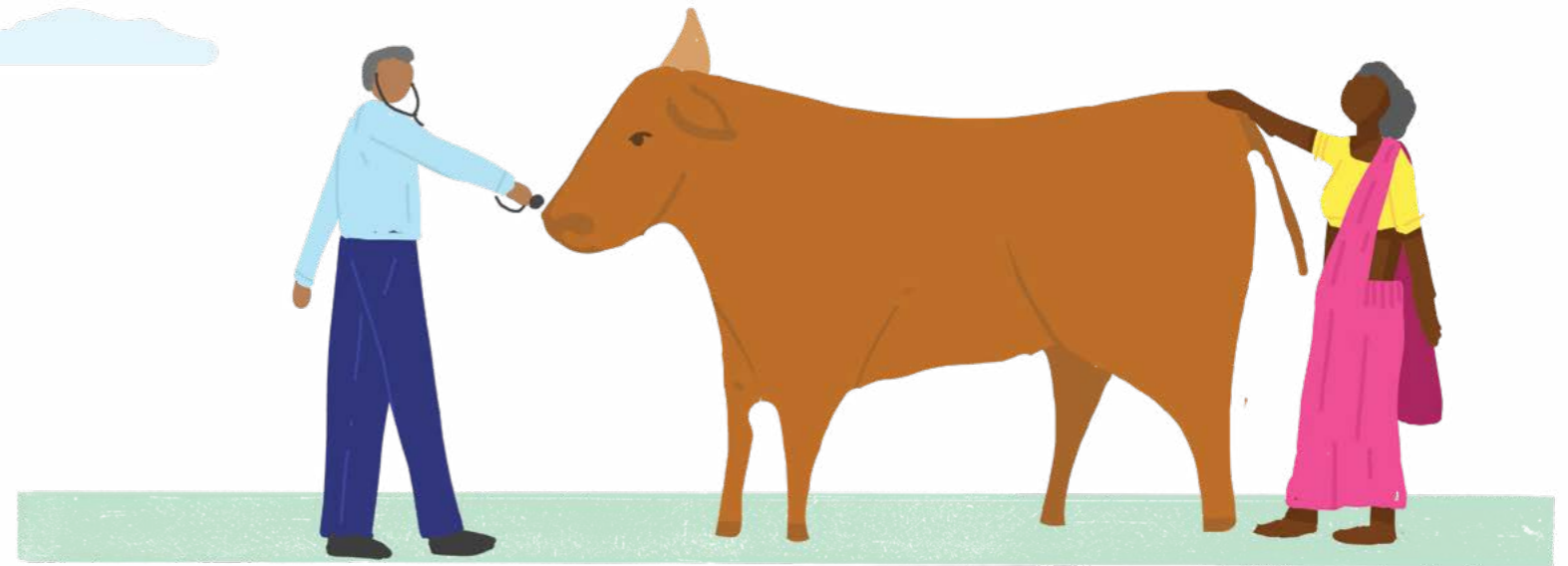
In the second stepping stone, **strategies to fill gaps present in services that already exist are rolled out** first. Approaches to filling these particular gaps may include strengthening the linkages between producers and existing services providers; strengthening the services of existing service providers; and expanding the services of existing providers. This ensures that the services providers that are already present are leveraged rather than focusing on trying to create a new service if that service or an actor who can take that service on already exists. Business supports, market linkages and capacity building are the types of supports provided to these existing services where needed.

In the third stepping stone, **strategies that involve establishing new market services are rolled out**.

Approaches utilised to achieve this include:

1. Supporting the establishment of informal networks or businesses;
2. Supporting the establishment of new cooperatives;
3. New social enterprises; and
4. New formal businesses.

These approaches mainly revolve around building new market actors' capacities to be able to play these market service roles that are required. In this way, new business opportunities are created where a need has been identified, new entrepreneurs are sometimes able to enter into the market and their skills are built, and just as importantly, the necessity entrepreneurs' needs for specific market services that did not exist before are addressed, helping them to increase their incomes through improved access to these services as a result as well.



PILLAR 5

ADVANCING ACCESS TO LIVELIHOOD ASSETS



In the first stepping stone, the NGO by further **identifying and validating who the most vulnerable in the village are, determining their livelihood asset gaps, and forming them into groups to receive appropriate support** – either “participating producers” (those already somewhat involved in the subsector, though require some additional support to fully engage) and “interested producers” (those who are not really involved in the subsector but want to get involved). Vulnerable female and male necessity entrepreneurs typically have the capacity or interest to improve their productivity and market access, yet they are sometimes more disadvantaged and excluded from opportunities than others because they lack the critical livelihood assets they need which would allow them to participate more fully. Examples of critical livelihood assets include: wells, fences, livestock, land, or tools and equipment. Households may have never had access to these assets; they may have lost them due to war or a natural disaster (such as typhoons and tsunami); or chronic poverty may have compelled the sale of the assets for survival. Without these assets, households have no means of earning an income.

In the second stepping stone, once the groups have been identified, activities involve **supporting the “participating producers”** to start to demonstrate a commitment to the viable subsector. This is usually provided through technical assistance in improved production practices. Once their commitment is clear, these necessity entrepreneurs are **provided with a subsidy and linked to an asset supplier** who can provide them with the asset they require. This linkage is created so that the entrepreneurs have a direct relationship with the asset supplier so that a longer-term connection is made possible. “Participating producers” are then supported to begin utilising the asset and when they are ready, they are linked to the supports provided through Pillar 3 so that they can continue to advance in their productivity and marketing capacity.

In the final stepping stone, **“interested producers” are engaged** by working to bring them into a relevant subsector so that they can demonstrate their commitment to the business for the long term. These facilitative efforts also include capacity building, technical assistance, and sometimes other measures which can often take a longer time to implement because of the lack of experience and skills that “interested producers” often have. However, once they have demonstrated their commitment to the subsector, they too are then **supported through the provision of a subsidy and linkages facilitated to the asset supplier** where a similar direct relationship between market actors themselves is formed. Finally, similar to stepping stone two, “interested producers” are also supported to begin utilising the asset and when they are ready, are linked to the supports provided through Pillar 3 so that they can continue to advance in their productivity and marketing capacity.

PILLAR 6

SUPPORTING EXPANSION ACTIVITIES IN VALUE ADDITION AND NEW MARKETS

1

The first stepping stone of Pillar 6 begins by **identifying a new profitable subsector or market opportunity** upon which female and male necessity entrepreneurs could depend and diversify their incomes. This is carried out through a rapid market assessment. Once a viable subsector or opportunity (including value addition opportunity) is identified, the barriers and opportunities present in that subsector or opportunity are explored through a more in-depth market assessment and solutions to address the barriers developed.



In stepping stone two, work on **trialing the solutions developed with early adopters** who have expressed an interest in exploring the new opportunities or subsectors identified is carried out. Because these opportunities are likely new for most of the village members, more work and support is carried out with them to ensure they start to adopt the new techniques and solutions that will help them be profitable. Just as the subsector or opportunity might be new to the necessity entrepreneurs that are being supported, efforts to link to these actors will likely be just as new to the private sector actors (such as buyers) or other government entities that are being engaged to roll-out the solutions. Therefore, additional support is also provided to them to ensure that market relationships are established and support where gaps or barriers are experienced is provided over the changes that are occurring.

In the third stepping stone, an emphasis is placed on **accelerating adoption of the innovative solutions** that were implemented with early adopters, with other market actors who are interested in getting involved. As part of this, early adopters are encouraged to share learnings with new potential actors who receive support to take on new roles and become successful business people in the new subsector or opportunity as well. Continued monitoring and ongoing support is provided where needed to both the early adopters and other market actors to ensure success of their businesses.

PILLAR 7

GRADUATING THE MOST VULNERABLE



In the first stepping stone of Pillar 7, the NGO works to **diagnose the barriers to market inclusion faced by the most vulnerable, who tend to be women.**

It then designs solutions to address these barriers. This involves a full investigation with the women who are most vulnerable, along with key relevant stakeholders and community leaders who understand their situation well. Key barriers that are identified often include (but are not limited to): lack of resilience; food insecurity; poor shelter; poor access to supports and services; various socio-cultural challenges related to marginalization and discrimination, etc. Once identified, an in-depth exploration of possible innovative solutions also takes place whereby a decision is made over whether a Self-Help group approach would be appropriate to address some of the challenges the most vulnerable women in the community are facing. If Self Help Groups seem like an appropriate platform to support the women to overcome these barriers, then the groundwork is laid to ensure they are well-established.

In the second stepping stone work is done to **address critical financial and social needs of the women first.** The Self-Help groups are fully formed and the women begin to be able to meet some of their social needs through the safety net the groups naturally create. Those who require it receive additional support for basic needs through stipends, as well as opportunities to build their confidence, self esteem, and capacity on topics related to saving and financial literacy so the women are better equipped to engage in income generating activities that are successful. This also empowers the women themselves because they begin to see what they are capable of when a focus on building group cohesion is emphasised.

In the final stepping stone, efforts are made to **address the livelihood barriers that were identified through providing assets, technical training and providing the women with a graduation pathway** so even the most vulnerable women in the community are eventually able to benefit from markets as well. This involves supporting the women to receive an asset so they can begin to demonstrate their commitment to livelihood activities and earn an income on their own. Their skills to engage in other business-related activities are also built with an eye to graduation. Links to financial services are facilitated if desired and finally, once the women (or groups) are ready, they are introduced to support offered through other pillars so that they can eventually engage in markets as equipped and self-sufficient entrepreneurs.

If scaling
impact is
the goal —
sharing our
playbooks
makes

*perfect
sense*

PALMERA