

# IDEX

International  
Development  
Exchange



## MEET THE ORIGINAL INNOVATORS

### WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT


Getting ahead from  
being behind

### ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIES

New models for  
greater prosperity

### AGROECOLOGY

How radical  
sustainability  
is defeating Big Ag

A woman with a bright pink sari and a white blouse stands in a lush green field, smiling warmly at the camera. The background shows a rural landscape with trees, a utility pole, and a thatched-roof building under a clear blue sky.

**“This field is *my* labor, and my family’s food. I am not afraid to protect my hard work. They dare not eat my crops or *me!*”**

— Mohini Devi

# Growing Against the Grain

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**B**ig agri-business would have you believe that GMO seeds, synthetic pesticides, petro-chemical fertilizers and huge mono-crop plantations are the only way to feed the world. But what if there were another way?

Meet **Mohini Devi** of Rajasthan, India, who received training in sustainable agriculture from IDEX's partner **Sahyog Sansthan**. She is one of the world's innovators who are pushing the forefront of agricultural practices with a system that is informed by thousands of years of traditional farmers' wisdom blended with cutting-edge scientific knowledge. It's called **agroecology** and it's being practiced by grassroots communities around the world.

In contrast to industrial agriculture with its dependence on endless amounts of unsustainable synthetic inputs, women like Mohini in rural areas are *increasing their crop yields* using sustainable farming practices that are organic and GMO-free.

It's hard work, but the dignity and pride that comes with self-sufficiency shows. When asked whether she was afraid to protect her fields from the roving bulls in the area, she's quick to reply. "This field is *my* labor, and my family's food. I am not afraid to protect my hard work. They dare not eat my crops or *me!*"

IDEX is proud to partner with organizations like Sahyog Sansthan that are promoting innovations, like agroecology, that tap into the huge wealth of resources at the grassroots. Agroecology isn't promoted by big-budget ad campaigns of multinational corporations because its returns aren't measured on profit-and-loss statements. They're measured in the ability of women like Mohini Devi to feed their families, to earn extra money selling vegetables in the market and to do it all with independence.

To support IDEX's partners working in agroecology, visit [idex.org/agroecology](http://idex.org/agroecology)



**“The work I do has value...I’m contributing”**

— Martha Leticia Chacón Chuquiej

# Indigenous. Woman. Leader.

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**W**omen in Guatemala, especially indigenous women, have suffered centuries of discrimination and exclusion – they are particularly underrepresented in elected government. So, how is it that an indigenous woman, **Martha Leticia Chacón Chuquiej**, was elected mayor of the small community of San José Pacul?

Martha was encouraged to run by **AFEDES**, an indigenous women-led community group and long-term IDEX partner.

Originally conceived as an economic development organization, AFEDES realized that their microcredit program alone didn't address the root causes of inequality. So, they pivoted – changing strategy while staying true to their mission. AFEDES emerged with a focus on empowering women through civic participation and leadership development; which lead to the creation of their School for Women's Political Education.

Martha Chacón is one of the graduates of the political leadership school.

When asked about being elected mayor, she says “This position that I have has been a big challenge for me, as a woman, as a person.... Now [my husband] realizes that the work I do has value and that I'm contributing economically to our household. Since I took this role, he now feels committed to support me even more.”

IDEX remains committed to the radical notion that the role for women in development is not as recipients of aid, but as the innovative leaders of the future. The women of AFEDES not only organized themselves to improve their lives, but to effect systemic change that benefits the whole community.

To support IDEX's partners working on women's empowerment visit [idex.org/empowerment](https://www.idex.org/empowerment)



**"I have learned poverty isn't everything in life - you can make something of yourself."**

**— Jennifer Clack**

# Community-Built Opportunity

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**W**hat do you do when the economy you find yourself in fails to provide opportunities to earn a livelihood? The answer for many IDEX partners is clear: create a new system that *does* work.

The **Angus Gillis Foundation** (AGF) is a community-based organization in South Africa that did just that. Initially formed to serve the villages on the outskirts of a private game reserve, AGF fights the conditions that have led to impoverishment and dependence with programs for healthcare, food security and income generation.

Privately owned reserves are often developed for tourism projects that completely ignore the local communities. The women of Angus Gillis Foundation decided to build a “Pro-Poor” tourism program that would nurture their economic opportunities, cultural traditions and community development.

The success of this innovative model of economic development depends in large part on AGF’s Self-Help Groups where women come together to support each other in planning,

saving for and managing both income-generating projects and community development initiatives.

The Self-Help Group model enabled community member **Jennifer Clack** to go from being unemployed, to a co-op entrepreneur, to a community leader and on to full-time employment. Jennifer was a founding member of the collective that makes the wildly successful Unopopana Dolls and then part of the Steering Committee that planned the Pro-Poor Tourism Center. AGF built the Center as a community resource that contains a health clinic, gym, pre-school and meeting room, in addition to generating revenue from visitors and its craft market.

The Self-Help Group model is sustainable and replicable. Indeed, IDEX partners from Nepal to Mexico organize their community members in these small, mutually supportive groups – an innovation from the grassroots that holds promise for the whole world.

To support IDEX’s partners working on alternative economies, visit [idex.org/alteconomias](http://idex.org/alteconomias)

IDEX is an international social justice grantmaker that goes well beyond making grants. We identify, evaluate and grow the best ideas from local leaders and organizations in Asia, Africa and Latin America to alleviate poverty and injustice. We connect a passionate and engaged network of supporters in the Western world to the visionary grassroots leaders and organizations in the Global South that are creating lasting solutions to their communities' most pressing challenges.

IDEX's work increases community self-determination; builds the organizational resilience of our partners; creates global solidarity; and advocates for better social justice giving. We envision a world in which community-based organizations and philanthropy achieve full economic, environmental and social justice for all marginalized people. IDEX has funded over 500 grassroots organizations in over 40 countries since its inception in 1985. Collectively, our current partners are improving the lives of over 1.2 million people each year. IDEX has made over \$5 million in grants to grassroots groups at the frontline of social change.

Our partners have developed groundbreaking, holistic and sustainable projects to address the specific needs in each of their communities. They've made thousands of acres of desert fertile again. They've successfully withstood huge multinational companies pushing GMOs and toxic pollutants into their communities. They've created alternative economic models that include and empower rural indigenous women. The members of our partner organizations are the true innovators of the world and we are proud to support them.

