

## Five Talents' Approach to Measuring Social Impact

Five Talents collects core metrics for all FT programs (see [here](#) and the table below).

CUMULATIVE IMPACT (December 2020)	
Cumulative Members since FT began	263,113
Cumulative Indirect Beneficiaries (*5)	1,315,565
2020 STATS	
Current Number of Members	25,718
New Members in Year	11,329
Current Number of Groups	989
New Groups in Year	487
% of women	81%
Literacy Groups - current	245
Literacy Group members - current	5,031
Total Number of Loans Given out in Year	tbc
Total Member Savings Current USD	\$492,100
Average Savings per Member USD	\$19
Total Member Savings Current GBP	£410,069
Average Savings per Member GBP	£16

But these are simply **output** measures. We also seek to measure **outcomes**, capturing the social impacts - what changes have members experienced their lives? These are typically non-financial indicators and much harder to measure, but they are essential for us to know if we are achieving our mission to transform lives.

### Process / Approach:

The GPT began by identifying the outcomes or impact areas which Five Talents seeks to influence positively through our programs (we recognise of course there is a difference between correlation and causation). We then identified core, measurable / verifiable indicators relating to these outcome areas, and questions which can be asked of Groups / members accordingly. An example is given in the table below.

It is important to note the difference between **extractive vs participatory Monitoring & Evaluation**<sup>1</sup>. In the former, data is extracted from members for external parties. This is the approach seen in the trend for results-based grant programmes, where a funder pays out grants based on the performance indicators (chosen by the funder) being met. The incentive here is simply to get the data from the members and pass it to the funder. Members are passive objects in the process. In participatory M&E however, members themselves engage in the process, determining the outcomes that are important to them and the appropriate questions or ways to track them. They are active subjects.

---

<sup>1</sup> This short paper offers a helpful definition of participatory M&E:  
<https://www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Participatory-ME.pdf>

Unsurprisingly, Five Talents prefers participatory M&E. We often say our aim is to help communities identify and solve their own problems, in their own way, themselves. This means that they should be the ones to determine what success or impact looks like.

What does this mean in practice? It means we do not have standardised impact questions or surveys which all programs must use; instead, each program identified the measures which are important to its context. We do feel it is important to have **standardised core impact areas** which align with FT's mission (as set out below) and which all programs track. But we do not use cookie-cutter questions which all programs must adopt. Instead we leave each program the space to contextualise questions according to local culture and priorities.

For example, in DR Congo there are questions on SGBV (Sexual and Gender Based Violence) under Female Empowerment as that is a core issue for them whilst in Burundi there is a question on women and men's involvement in household responsibilities. These questions both provide evidence of change under the Female Empowerment impact area, but are tailored to be appropriate to the local context and program objectives. In Baringo, the team identified vaccination against TB as an important indicator for the needs assessment and so this was incorporated. In Terekeka, there is a question on ownership of a radio as a measure of isolation. For the MU VICOBA program in Tanzania, they have included a question on groups' involvement in community or church-based ministry and tithing. In some programs, ownership of household assets will be a key indicator; in others, participation (or not) in civic affairs may be more important.

The participatory approach also leads to better data insofar as partners co-create the questions to ensure they are worded appropriately. This is one reason we moved away from using the PPI (the World Bank's Poverty Probability Index), which is highly statistically robust but allows for no flexibility. It often includes questions on the construction materials of latrines, which in some cultures is not appropriate to ask. Worse, we experienced some 'unintended consequences' - for example, one question in the PPI asked how many towels a household had. The member felt shame at not having any and so spent money in buying one. It is essential to frame appropriate questions and ensure members are aware that they are free to answer or not, that their answer in no way prejudices their right to belong to the program and the data is to help us identify how the program could be improved, not to judge them. Participatory M&E is much more likely to strike this balance than extractive M&E.

The participatory approach to M&E is also relevant to our conversations on 'shifting the power.' As Dan MacQuillan notes, "Mapping and measurement were the original mechanisms of colonial control and projects that simply add visibility without agency risk reinforcing the status quo."<sup>2</sup>

### **Five Talents' standardised core impact areas (outcomes)**

The first five bullet points below we believe are core outcomes or impacts which ALL Five Talents programs should seek to achieve, and therefore all programs should report on outcomes in these areas. The last three are program-specific; they will not be relevant to all programs but we have developed indicators which can be used to measure these impacts as relevant.

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gold.ac.uk/news/comment-smart-slums-utopian-or-dystopian-vision-of-the-future/>

Core outcome areas for all programs:

- Increased access to finance (saving and lending services)
- Increased capacity for income generation
- Increased resilience
- Increased female empowerment
- Reduced poverty levels

Outcome areas relevant to some programs (eg where lack of numeracy or presence of trauma is a barrier to successful savings groups, or where community members identify a need for these outcomes themselves):

- Increased literacy and numeracy
- Improved capacity to cope with traumatic events
- increased capacity of local Anglican Church to financially support local implementing staff (salary, transport or agreed in kind contributions)
- [This list is not exhaustive; others can be added as determined by the program]

Having identified these core impact areas (which are not exhaustive), we then identified key questions / indicators relating to the outcomes. The wording of indicators to ensure they are unambiguous and measurable is not straight-forward. For example, if asking how many meals did a household eat yesterday, what is defined as a meal? If asking how many children in the household attend school, what about those who are over-age but are catching up? Or children staying in the household temporarily? If asking about how many employees a member may have through their business, what about part-time assistance from a relative, or a seasonal business which employs several people for a couple of months only? As explained above, the indicators also need to be co-designed with partners (or members) to ensure they are appropriate to the context. So this table is simply an example to illustrate.

Ideally the survey would be completed at the beginning and end of a savings cycle. The results can be expressed as a % - so, for example, in the table below we could say that at the beginning of our program, 28% of members have a small business or income generating activity. By the end, 68% have.

There are two further challenges to note; first, many of the outcome areas below take time. Our program cycles are typically 2 - 5 years. Within 24 months, there might not be a huge change in for example gender dynamics. Secondly, there is the challenge of cause vs correlation. Even if we see an encouraging % change e.g. in number of children going to school, we cannot be sure that Five Talents caused that. Perhaps another NGO offered school bursaries in the community. Our local partner would likely be aware of that but the only way to separate out cause from correlation is to have control groups - which come with their own ethical questions.

### Example Social Impact Survey

Core FT Impact Areas	Possible Indicators	Rationale
Increased capacity for income generation	Number of Members who currently have a small business or income generating activity	This shows whether members are using savings and loans to invest in increased/improved income generation (rather than consumption loans)

Increased capacity for income generation	Number of members who have purchased something to help you generate more money for your business (an asset) in the last 12 months. For example, an animal, cultivating tools, a phone, a sewing machine (but not food seeds or stock for a shop)	This shows members have an improved ability to generate in income with appropriate and available productive assets
Increased Resilience	Number of members who could afford medical fees and medicine if a member of your family got malaria [or other relevant affliction]	This shows that members have access to a form of social insurance through their groups.
Increased Resilience	Does the group save separately for a social fund which can be used as an emergency or mercy fund?	This shows that the group members have a 'safety net' if needed as well as somewhere to help them decrease their vulnerability.
Female Empowerment	Number of members of the committee who are female?	This shows increased access to leadership opportunities for women as part of a pathway to empowerment
Female Empowerment	Number of members who currently participate in decisions about money in your household OR ask how many members says male makes decisions and how many say female and how many say both together.	This shows increased access to leadership opportunities for women as part of a pathway to empowerment
Female Empowerment	Number of members who participate in community decision making? OR ask how many members say male makes decisions and how many say female and how many say both together.	This shows increased access to leadership opportunities for women as part of a pathway to empowerment
Poverty levels	Number of members who have at least one school aged child? Of those members, number of members who have been unable to afford school fees, uniform or other schooling requirements for	This shows changes in ability to pay for schooling (pay fees, pay for materials, afford not to have children working at business).  This shows changes in attitude towards the education of children.

	any school age children at any time in the last 6 months?	
Poverty levels	Number of members who have been unable to afford food at any time in the last 12 months?	This shows the members ability to afford nutritious food. A positive change in this may be a result of increased incomes of the households.
Poverty levels	At group start or start of savings cycle ask members to do a participatory wealth ranking--here is what destitute, poor, middle class and well off 'look like'. Members confidentially self report where they would place themselves. Do the same again at the AGM--look for the difference.	This shows changes in members perceptions of their own household income over time as a result of participation in the programme using indicators relevant to the community
Increased literacy and numeracy	Number of learners who have been certified as literate	This shows literacy gained through the groups that enable people to independently access information, participate in society and increase their access to improved/diversified economic opportunities
Increased literacy and numeracy	Number of learners who have been certified as numerate?	This shows numeracy gained through the groups that enable people to independently run their business more effectively, participate in society/markets and increase their access to improved/diversified economic opportunities

We are not experts at participatory M&E (for example, our partners typically use surveys rather than other participatory M&E tools such as Focus Group discussions or activity-based exercises); some of our data collection will still resemble extractive M&E at present. We recognise of course that Five Talents is accountable to donors to spend their funding well and we must provide robust data to evidence that. That is why we have developed standardised impact areas which all programs must report against, so that we will have outcome data linking back to Five Talent's mission. However, our commitment to programs being owned and led by the community with members at the centre leads us to lean towards improving our participatory approaches. M&E is never 'job done' - it should be constantly evolving and improving. We are grateful that Five Talents is now taking a harmonised approach to measuring outputs and outcomes and able to share learning across all programs through the GPT.