

GRADUATING COMMUNITIES

The Agros model calls for a long-term commitment to sustainable development for rural communities. The World Bank defines sustainability as “development that meets the needs of the people today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” During partnership with Agros, the community goes through several stages of development. Typically, Years 0-3 are more intense as a community organizes, laying a foundation with basic infrastructure and sustainable agricultural and business practices. In later years, with developed leadership and established processes for planning and executing projects, a community reaches a point where they have the experience and confidence to thrive on their own. Ensuring that families are equipped with the tools to sustain themselves after the Agros partnership is just as important as the concentrated early stages of development. How does Agros know that a community is “sustainable”? How does the partnership end? Here is a look into how Agros strategically exits graduating communities in stages to ensure longevity and sustainability.



Graduating Communities

Reaching a Sustainable Future

WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY?

Development that meets the needs of the people today without compromising the ability of **future** generations to meet their own needs. (World Bank)

For Agros, an important part of exiting a village project is being clear from the first contact about the length of the partnership and the roles and responsibilities of the families and Agros. From the very beginning, Agros works hard to communicate to families the end goals and context of the development process: that partnership is for a finite time period of time, and the goal for Agros is to exit once a community has the assets, knowledge, and training to thrive for generations to come.

Throughout the partnership, Agros staff and community leadership facilitate planning, monitoring and evaluation activities. This provides a road map for development so that families know where they are going and how to check their progress along the way. Milestones are set for each stage of development and regular evaluations are conducted to measure key progress indicators. Examples of milestones that show a community is reaching sustainability include:

- Representation of all sectors of the community (women, men, youth) in leadership and community processes
- Community organization based on a master plan that guides decisions
- Land is reforested to improve environment, watersheds and soil retention
- Families have well-constructed homes, efficient cook stoves, latrines and access to water to improve health, decrease environmental impact, and minimize time women need to retrieve firewood and water
- Families increase income through: improvement of productive activities and profitability, accessing markets jointly with other communities, and other family members contributing to family income
- Women have access to credit, are involved in leadership, and have increased feelings of pride and respect for themselves

- Children attend elementary school and an increased number of adults are literate
- Families have balanced and nutritious diets, and access to preventative and primary medical attention and reproductive healthcare
- Spiritual lives and harmony among different religious groups is strengthened
- Families acquire, develop and become titled land owners

As the community meets all of the sustainability milestones, the exiting process—consisting of two phases for villages with land loans—can begin.

During the time leading up to the first phase, direct support from Agros gradually decreases, usually around Year 7. Direct support includes weekly visits from Agros staff for trainings, technical assistance and community activities. Agros also decreases the direct investment in the village activities and projects themselves. Agros staff defers more decision-making to community leadership and families are prepared for independence and self-sufficiency.

At Year 8 direct support officially ends and staff visits are only made to collect pending land loan payments and provide support with regional projects, such as the collaborative pea and coffee export projects in which several Agros communities in Guatemala participate.

Two years later, at Year 10, the final exit phase takes place. In this phase, families will have completed their land loan payments, received their land titles and have been functioning on their own for some time. These communities are considered “graduated communities.” Agros may continue to be in contact with graduated communities for evaluation purposes or if they participate in regional projects, however, at this point in the development process, the community is a fully functioning, sustainable village, capable of meeting their needs and achieving their goals well into the future.