FSD FOUNDER'S STORY

I started the Foundation for Sustainable Development in 1995 while working on my doctorate in economics at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. After numerous volunteering stints in Latin America, I realized that countless community leaders and grassroots organizations were doing incredible work, but were limited in terms of human and financial resources. These were people with full-time jobs who didn't go home at the end of the day. Rather, they voluntarily worked around the clock to help their communities find a way out of poverty.

It was frustrating to see the limitations these organizations faced because they often didn't have the needed resources to accomplish their objectives. After seeing the same situation over and over, I committed myself to starting FSD.

From the beginning, I did my homework. By observing other organizational models in action, I quickly realized what I **did not** want FSD to become:

- A donor organization that funds projects in communities where it didn't have a physical presence (I saw so much money wasted on inefficient or corrupt projects that were insufficiently planned or monitored);
- An organization that was reliant on grants that could force me to shift my development vision—a phenomenon known all too well as *mission creep*;
- A volunteer organization that simply connected culturally inexperienced, untrained "Westerners" with local organizations that knew little about hosting foreigners (in the long term, this route is sometimes beneficial to the volunteer, but often fails to build sustainable organizations or empowered communities);
- A well-intentioned international organization that patronizingly imposes utopian development solutions on communities who have little participation or ownership in the projects.

I wanted FSD to be a development organization, which empowered underserved communities to voice their needs and participate in the implementation of locally managed solutions. I worked to create a feedback loop to ensure the flow of communication and resources between community leaders, the local grassroots organizations, interns and volunteers, donors, and the FSD staff - which is made up of local community leaders and trained practitioners from Western nations. Central to the vision was a binding adherence to the truth that development solutions are only sustainable when they come from an empowered community base.

In 1996, after building a sustainable organizational model and development philosophy, I established our first work site in Nicaragua. Five interns worked with local organizations that summer, establishing FSD as a positive community presence and setting the precedent for decades to come.

Over these last 18 years, FSD has steadily grown to include more than 300 community partners spread throughout ten sites in six countries. Our community impact continues to rise exponentially due to the commitment to sustainable principles by all of our stakeholders.

However, none of the growth would be possible without the time and resources given to FSD by the people who care about eliminating global poverty and working towards sustainable

development. I hope the story of FSD inspires you to get involved (in any capacity!) to bring greater opportunity to people throughout the world.

Sincerely,
Alicia Robb
FSD Founder