# Global Grassroots
## CONSCIOUS SOCIAL CHANGE FOR WOMEN

# Measuring Personal Transformation

## A Survey of Organizations, Change Agents, and Philanthropists Working for Social Change

# INTRODUCTION

Personal transformation – the positive, inner changes involved in personal growth – is largely intangible and inherently difficult to measure. Yet for many individuals and organizations, it is evident when personal transformation transpires and it is largely believed to contribute in some way to positive changes in broader society. Global Grassroots undertook a survey of actors in the social impact sphere to try to understand current thinking on the nature of the relationship between personal transformation and social transformation and any common practices used in its evaluation. Generally, we found practitioners recognize the challenges in assessing personal transformation, that measurement tools are limited or inappropriate, and that the experience of personal transformation is complex, subjective, context-specific, and may have a bi-directional relationship with the larger social shifts they seek to affect as well. There are, however, several mutual themes and characteristics among the programs explored. And there remains widespread interest, intrigue, and willingness to collaborate in a way that would further advance this inquiry.

## BACKGROUND

In late 2019, Global Grassroots set out to learn more about how non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other stakeholders working to affect social change are measuring inner transformation and its relationship to their desired social impact outcomes for individuals and communities. Using an email survey and phone interviews with select contacts, our objective was to discover promising practices and measurement tools already in use or in development and identify gaps between what is being measured in the field and what is needed or desired by practitioners and funders.

The overarching goal of the survey was to gain greater insight into respondent perspectives on their personal transformation program and any links between the inner experience of their participants and the outcomes of their social change work. In concert with a formal literature review of the scientific and scholarly studies on this topic, and our proposed conceptual model, our intention is to catalyze a dialogue among the social change field. Our hope is that we may contribute insights that may help actors in the field:

1. More clearly understand what is happening when individuals experience personal transformation so that they might better articulate and assess it for themselves,
2. Understand any positive connection between personal transformation and social change, to make more targeted investments in that relationship, and
3. Learn with/from a diverse community (including academics, practitioners, funders, etc.) interested in this realm of exploration.

While we did not define the following terms for our respondents, preferring that they describe their experiences and observations in their own words, we offer the following to help in the review of this report:

**Inner work:** the intentional engagement in solitary or interpersonal practices or an intentional response to challenges, most often with a degree of self-reflection that enables individuals to experience, contemplate, and integrate insights that lead to personal transformation.

**Personal transformation:** the process and experience of undergoing positive inner change towards personal growth, healing and self-actual-

ization. Personal transformation can take place as of the result of intentional effort over time, as well as a significant life changing experience that shifts our beliefs about ourselves and our relationship with the world.

**Social change or social transformation:** a significant and positive shift in the functioning and well-being of society. This can result from changes in societal norms and values; changes in the behavior, beliefs and relations of the members of that society; the alleviation of a social ill; and/or through alterations of the systems, institutions, and structures making up that society.

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> It is evident when personal transformation transpires and it is largely believed to contribute in some way to positive changes in broader society.

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## INQUIRY PROCESS

We focused our initial outreach on organizations working in the areas of **personal transformation, social change, or both,** including the following types of entities:

- Front-line/international development
- Leadership development
- Capacity-building
- Conveners/networks/movement-builders

- Incubators/innovators
- Religious/spiritual
- Research/academic
- Foundations/funders



The overarching goal of the survey was to gain greater insight into respondent perspectives on their personal transformation program and any links between the inner experience and the outcomes of their social change work.

Conscious Change Study | 3

Between November 2019 and June 2020, we reached out to 124 leaders, networks and key contacts, inviting them to respond by email or via a phone conversation to the following questions:

1. What kind of personal transformation or more intangible forms of change do you see taking place among your beneficiaries?
2. What would you attribute that transformation to in terms of your programs – what are you doing to foster that personal transformation?
3. How, if at all, do you measure this personal transformation? Would you be willing to share a sample of your tools, process, metrics and any key data points? (We are eager to share case studies of such impact)
4. How does the personal transformation you are seeing relate to or drive your social impact outcomes, either in theory or supported by your measurements?
5. Can you recommend any writings (books, articles, studies) that relate to the personal transformation and social impact intersection or anyone else exploring this?

Evaluating the effectiveness of the practices, tools, and other forms of inner work that each organization uses to foster personal transformation was beyond the scope of this survey.
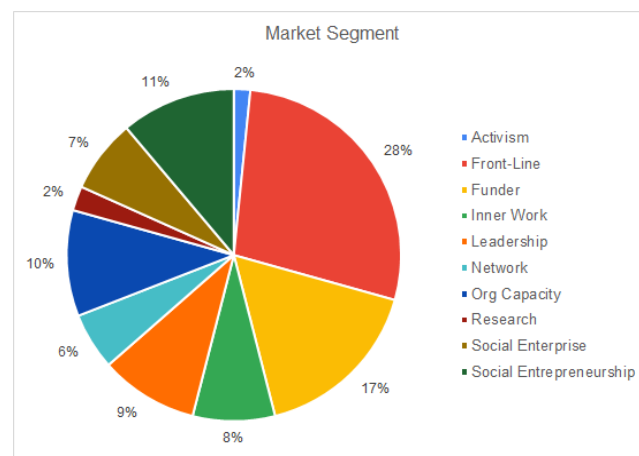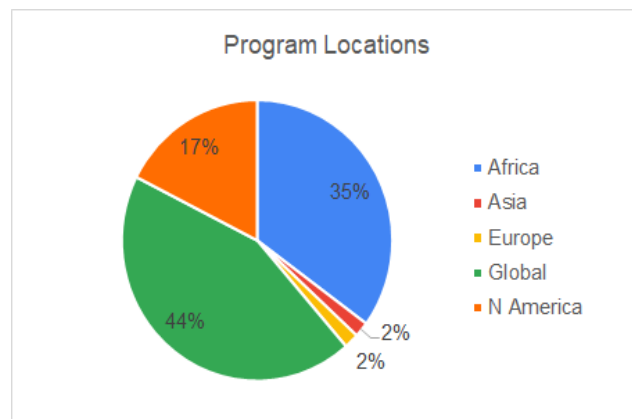
### PARTICIPANTS

We drew insight from 58 respondents to our inquiry. Among these participants, 17 completed an online survey, 10 responded through an intermediary support organization (e.g., fellowship program, grant partner), 29 participated in phone interviews, and 2 participated in both online surveys and interviews. Our exploration also included general feedback from collectives representing several other organizations, including:

- Agora Partnerships – a network of 270 purpose-driven social entrepreneurs throughout Latin America

There is a robust eco-system involved in this holistic approach to inner and outer change...According to repondents, inner work works.

- The Amani Institute – a social innovation management program integrating an inner journey component reaching 500 social entrepreneurs from 63 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America
- AMPIFY – a coalition of 18 organizations working to advance the agency of adolescent girls in East Africa
- The HOW Fund – a fellowship program for women change agents advancing holistic solutions for women and girls
- Impact Hub – A global network of entrepreneurial communities in more than 100 countries
- Opportunity Collaboration – a convener of global actors working to alleviate poverty
- The Presencing Institute – a capacity building organization working on awareness-based systems change globally
- Social Impact Award – a global franchise of social venture incubators for young people in more than 15 countries in Europe, Africa and Asia
- Street Business School – an entrepreneurial program for women with 97 partner franchises in 21 countries
- The Wellbeing Project – a collaborative, global network of over 60 organizations investing in wellbeing

There is a robust eco-system involved in this holistic approach to inner and outer change. Participants represented a diverse cross-section of the social change sector, with 30% delivering programs or direct services to beneficiaries, and another 27% identified as cultivating social entrepreneurship, incubators or social enterprise development. Other intermediaries or support organizations focused more generally on leadership development, organizational capacity building, research, or funding within the social change sector. A small portion (9%) focused on personal transformation as their primary mission. These included meditation or spiritual centers, as an example. Organizations





were primarily secular, but among those that identified as having a faith-based element to their work, religious traditions were predominately Buddhist or Christian.

The majority of organizations conduct programs or provide services globally, including Latin America, Asia, North America, Europe, and Africa. Those with a specific geographic focus that is not global are noted separately.

## LIMITATIONS

We recognize there are some limitations in our survey. First, we only surveyed those organizations that we are aware of within the landscape of non-profits that involve personal transformation as part of their social impact endeavors. We acknowledge our survey was neither comprehensive nor random in our selection of participants. We included only those who were able to complete the online survey or conduct a phone call by May 31, 2020. In the limited timeframe in which we conducted this survey, year-end obligations followed by the COVID-19 crisis influenced the capacity of organizations to respond in a timely manner. Further, despite the diversity of operations, those participants in our survey were primarily US-based organizations or those working out of their US-based headquarters, those who were English-speaking, and those with accessibility to Internet or phone. Though we have generated more leads, some were unable to respond within this timeframe, limiting our ability to include perspectives from as many front-line actors as we would have liked. We hope to continue this inquiry over time, and therefore consider this report a living document that will continue to evolve with our ongoing conversations and insights.

We have also attempted to account for any bias by including as many direct quotes as possible within the text of this document. We acknowledge that we are learners alongside everyone else and welcome feedback, insight, and challenges to our assumptions and conclusions.

## KEY FINDINGS

Drawing from anecdotal evidence and/or their theory of change, organizations were easily able to articulate their understanding of the **benefits of personal transformation** on their individual participants. These include:

1. **Hope and Optimism:** Inner work fosters a sense of optimism, purpose, meaning and connection to something larger than oneself.
2. **Wellbeing and Resilience:** Inner work generates greater awareness of the importance of wellbeing and supports learning, healing and growth, allowing change agents to stay the course longer and with greater ease.
3. **Empowerment and Agency:** Personal transformation generates empowerment, agency, and action to improve not only one's own circumstances, but others' as well.
4. **Belonging and Interpersonal Relationships:** Personal transformation impacts interpersonal relationships positively, and a sense of belonging matters.
5. **Social and Emotional Intelligence or Prosocial Skills:** Personal transformation fosters prosocial skills and social capacities including helping behavior, altruism, openness, receptivity, the ability to navigate conflict, and a willingness to be civically engaged.

### Program Characteristics

Among the various models that survey participants described, more than half were focused primarily on the deep development of individuals, for instance: change agents participating in a social entrepreneurship fellowship or organizational leaders deepening their social-emotional skills. The others were focused foremost on transformation of communities or working to impact broader societal changes, for instance: organizations running poverty reduction or violence prevention programs using multiple interventions with various stakeholders.

Whichever end of the spectrum they started from, their approaches to cultivating personal transformation, seemed to fall into two main categories, with some program integrating both:

- **Academic/classroom models:** Programs included direct teaching in mindfulness, meditation, social-emotional learning, wellbeing, unconscious bias and other practices intended to promote personal reflection, growth, and ultimately transformation.
- **Applied models:** These approaches involved hands-on activities or real world experiences where participants gained direct practice of skills or learning-by-doing in their particular context. These models sometimes emphasized the importance of personal reflection and commitments to navigate local customs and culture with integrity and respect.

It appears as well that many of these programs and approaches share a common thread, placing varying degrees on the importance of relationship, human connection, and a sense of belonging in any attempts to influence personal transformation. We'll call these:

- **Relational models:** These approaches build and depend upon a high-quality relationship involving the intentional work of skilled facilitators, mentors, guides, therapeutic or support networks and/or a sense of community.

To graphically describe the variety of approaches might look something like this:
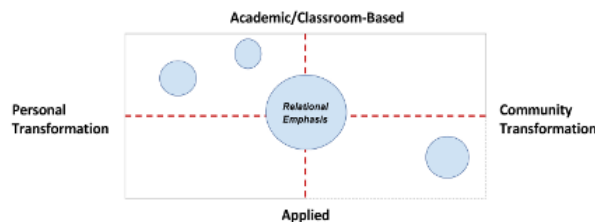


The degree of relational emphasis (cohort-based, inner work coach or mentor provided, prioritizing sense of community and belonging) varied but was a common thread across diverse organizations and programs.

More exploration is needed to gain a greater understanding of the particularities of different programs and, as is discussed below, how best to measure and evaluate the relationship between these approaches and meaningful personal transformation.

**Measuring Personal Transformation**

The **measurement of personal transformation** among respondents has been almost entirely qualitative and ranges from anecdotal to formal evaluations. Few metrics are being assessed quantitatively and caution is advised by some respondents. Concern involves being drawn into standardizing what is a very diverse experience that is personal, multi-faceted, and context-dependent.

The **connection between personal transformation and social change** was described as a rippling effect that starts with individual change, then affects the ecosystem at the interpersonal and community levels. Given personal transformation is a complex, subjective and context-dependent experience, we are unable to propose a clear and exact pathway for how inner change directly influences social change from this small sample. However, we share a few examples of theories that attempt to explain how this relationship functions, including:

**Pathway 1:** Inner work on self-beliefs (especially self-awareness, self-confidence and self-efficacy) plus skills that can be applied (such as problem-solving, conflict-resolution, communications) lead to shifts in personal healing and increased sense of agency. These personal shifts have the dual impact of influencing the positive choices of those participants that lead to greater success, and changing the perspectives among the stakeholders around them regarding their value as social change leaders.
**Examples:** AMPLIFY, Enneagram Prison Project, Street Business School, DIG, Tostan

**Pathway 2:** Inner work fosters deeper self-reflection and awareness of unconscious bias or limiting beliefs, which leads to individuals relating and leading differently (e.g., through wellbeing, emotional resilience, better communications, openness, and collaboration). This inspires deeper trust and confidence in their leadership, and also fosters a stronger sense of belonging, a culture of wellbeing, and a supportive community that drives resilience, motivation, and a sense of purpose.
**Examples:** Wellbeing Project, Amani Institute, Agora Partnerships

**Pathway 3:** Inner work changes mindsets including an increased sense of agency and personal capacity, which when paired with a deepened sense of connection and belonging, results in an increased level of responsibility for others within the community and systemic shifts fostered by broader civic engagement.
**Examples:** Tostan, ComMutiny, World Vision, Plant with Purpose

There are still **key challenges** to understanding and assessing what is happening as organizations attempt to promote personal transformation, and how those efforts and shifts may be influencing broader community or social change. Suvey participants noted:

1. Personal transformation is difficult to measure
2. Transformation is a long-term journey that is context-dependent and deeply personal
3. Participatory evaluation methods are necessary to more fully grasp what is happening within and among program participants, yet these methods are both time and capital-intensive
4. Funding cycles are often short, making it difficult to collect the longitudinal data needed for assessing deeper inner shifts

Nevertheless, overall, among respondents, there is an excitement about delving deeper into the relationship between personal transformation and social change. Participants indicated an interest in learning from one another, a desire for credible measurement tools, a willingness to work long-term to change the paradigm of how goals are identified and measured, and hope for shifts in how funding towards real transformation can be aligned with those goals. Following is a deeper look at the insights from this initial survey.

## A DEEPER LOOK

### BENEFITS OF PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION ON INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS

According to respondents, the benefits of inner work and the resulting personal transformation of individual participants are observable and can be profound. Following are our four most consistent insights:

1. **Inner work fosters a sense of optimism, purpose, meaning and connection to something larger than oneself.** Individuals who access concepts and tools that promote personal transformation seem to (re)discover an observable belief in themselves, in others, and in the possibility of a positive future.

   *I completely changed my relationship with myself and questioned most of the things I believed in. I can definitely say that when we re-write our personal stories and learn to love ourselves, fully - the light and the shadow - we love others and the world better. And as a result, our world slowly starts to change.*

   *It's about confidence and belief in both their own abilities, but also belief that a different life/future is possible. These things really go hand in hand.*

2. **Inner work generates greater awareness of the importance of wellbeing and supports learning, healing and growth, allowing change agents to stay the course longer and with greater ease.** Inner work helps surface an individual's suffering and strengths and allows for the development of knowledge, skills, positive attitudes, and behaviors that benefit one's perspective on their role in their work. It reenergizes efforts, mitigates burn-out, supports conflict resolution, and allows groups and individuals to sustain action through whatever life brings them.

*Among US and European colleagues, I've noticed a significant growth in awareness of the importance of wellbeing and "consciousness" in the psychological and spiritual sense.*

*The "kind" of personal transformation I see that is needed and that is taking place when the resources are available is developmental healing - that is becoming freed from childhood wounds and the unconscious stories that govern their behavior and also healing from trauma - and spiritual awakening - opening to and living from a place of profound connection and presence.*

*More peace, compassion, and wisdom allow us as activists and staff working for social change to defuse conflict much more skillfully and wholeheartedly than we otherwise would. While we are not conflict-free (no human group can be, for long!), and escalation still does happen, time and time again I have seen crises averted by the desire and inner resourcefulness available to move toward reconciliation.*

*We see more clear discernment of vocation and call to action and greater resilience (ability to adapt) / less burnout.*

3. **Personal transformation generates empowerment, agency, and action to improve not only one's own circumstances, but others' as well.** Participants are described as "stepping into" their own lives and moving into leadership with greater ease and confidence.

   *Supporting personal transformation empowers individuals to show up as whole people and unleashes their full capacity as leaders and change agents. It dramatically increases agency and their effectiveness in the fulfillment of their mission work.*

   *We see that when girls know their rights and have confidence communicating, they can stand up for*

*themselves. One graduate was being harassed by college teacher who threatened to fail her if she did not sleep with him. She said, "I look him in the eye and said I have paid to be here, I have every right to be here and you leave me alone." She reported that he did in fact then leave her alone and she learned how to stand up for herself in her lifeskills classes.*

*Our programming with adolescent girls shows that when girls are provided with an asset (individually or as part of a group) they -often with the support of a female mentor - are able to develop stronger communication/negotiation skills with family and peers in other aspects of their lives (delaying marriage, staying in school, etc.).*

*The relationship between inner and outer transformation is 100 percent causal. It is not just a nice thing that happens along the way. It is not that they start businesses and then discover that they believe in themselves. They believe in themselves first and that allows them to start businesses. They start to believe "maybe I can", and then with practical tools, they get started.*

4. **Personal transformation fosters a sense of belonging and impacts interpersonal relationships positively.** Personal transformation builds compassion and understanding. This results in improved relationships and connection, and a desire to collaborate or solve problems more inclusively. Also, as individuals experience transformation, they seem, in turn, to be viewed differently (i.e., as having greater value or potential) by more powerful individuals (e.g., parent) or groups (e.g., men).

*One powerful outcome we tend to see from our programs is young people, and girls in particular, feeling a sense of affirmation of their ideas and value within their families and communities. Often for the first time being asked what their opinion is, being listened to and having others respond to that opinion, is a hugely important step toward a sense of self-worth and one's right to advocate and influence based on*

*their opinions. That recognition of being someone who matters, adds value and can make important contributions is a process that begins a transformation in young people and girls in particular.*

*We see the spiritual leadership and accompaniment skills offering more depth of relationship with self and others through difficulty.*

## BENEFITS ATTRIBUTED TO RELATIONAL AND APPLIED MODELS

While there are a wide variety of practices that foster inner work and personal transformation, most respondents attributed the inner change they saw among their beneficiaries to two key program characteristics – relationship building and application of inner work "skills" in real time.

**Relational Models:** Within the relational approaches, programs build and depend upon a high-quality relationship involving the intentional work of skilled facilitators, mentors, guides, therapeutic or support networks. The quality of this bond, or the sense of community fostered by these relationships contributes to a sense of support, that participants are not alone in their struggle, and contributes to their motivation to face challenges, take risks, and engage in deeper personal growth and societal transformation. The relational approach involves two key findings:

1. **Belonging and connection is important** – Practicing in supportive spaces (such as cohorts or teams) and working with a "supportive other" such as a peer mentor allows for increased personal growth. Additionally, several organizations spoke to the value of feeling part of a larger community or network towards their motivation and sense of commitment.

*Often people deal with this in their private context and when being invited to reflect and exchange about this, there is a relief to be witnessed 'I am not alone'.*

*The 5th Space is a space that exists beyond and between the 4 legitimate spaces occupied by young people that is Family, Friends, Education / Career and Leisure/ Entertainment. More often than not, the norms of these 4 are not set by young people. The 5th Space on the other hand is an empowering space governed and co-led by young people where they re-imagine the connection between their inner self to society and nurture inside-out leadership through experiences and experiments in the real world.*

*In our signature program, we have 170 companies who attend retreats. The main takeaway is that the convening is transformative. They pick up on the values and energy of others, of a high expectation of achievement. Belonging and community is really important to reassure them that they are on the right path. Agency is important and optimism from these high expectations. They leave energized, reaffirming positive values. This is an attitude of health and openness.*

*Change and enhancing personal growth through mentorship has always been our scale of vision… At the end of the treatment period, they always come out as reformed persons with new admirable characteristics…We always take our measures on how they handle the following aspects in life: Is there consciousness allowing them to create real and lasting change? Do they improve or make corrections, and if they contribute to the desired change in the entire community? If they are able to learn and develop wisdom and knowledge to make their dreams come true. Are they free and open to feedback? This is observed on how they minimize the risk of premature action and remain humble and willing to adapt…. Once an individual gets a little knowledge on the chosen path and a little experience walking the road, they always consider finding a warrior to help them through the journey.*

*It is the quality of the interaction between two people that makes or breaks the program. If there was a coalition or some evidence of statistically significant*

*RCT data that shows that such interactions lead to measurably different outcomes, we could completely change the sector. This is "right relationship" – it changes power dynamics, discrimination, etc… How you show up, how you react to people, how you relate to others with dignity and humility.*

2. **Holistic models invite positive engagement with the community beyond individual participants.**

*For young people and girls it's very important to consider those around them that have influence on their decisions (i.e. gatekeepers) like parents, siblings, teachers, local leaders. These people, if also part of their own self-transformation into someone who will be supportive of their son/daughter taking on new, sometimes non-traditional, roles [are] a critical piece of the puzzle.*

*People who come into contact with the Enneagram Prison Project are part of a reciprocity of healing. We hope to shift the views of people who witness the participants as "career criminals" – the administration and mental health staff. At San Quintin we shared our approach with the board of parole - 17 out of 18 members were with corrections not mental health officers. When you meet with your parole board, students go to demonstrate insight. They get challenged and provoked to see how they will react. Some come back from hearings denied for 1-7 years. But now the parole board is asking the students their Enneatype and defense mechanism. Now they know what kind of questions to ask and the students know what that means and how to handle it. Students speak of self-knowledge. Social workers and sheriffs now do too.*

*Tostan has typically programmed in ways that are responsive to the family and social networks of communities. Tostan tends to work in clusters of 50 communities spread across a broader geography, and intentionally works with Community Management Committees to reach out to additional communities they "adopt". The effects of this broader programming approach on personal transformation are many. First, individuals know that other people very similar to them and in some cases in*

*their extended family are receiving the same information and education program. Second, individuals are able to discuss and debate new and familiar ideas about values, rights, health, etc. with the people that matter most to them, and to witness these discussions occurring. Third, modeling occurs--in which new women leaders' behaviors become new reference models for other women leaders, creating an aspirational positive feedback loop.*

**Applied Models:** In addition to the power of relationships to support individual and community transformation, the opportunity to apply learnings and skills in real-world circumstances also catalyzes deep personal transformation. The applied model involves two key strategies:

1. **Hands-on opportunities to practice new skills** and put new knowledge to work for the benefit of others. This is even more ideal with the support of skilled mentors and facilitators.

   *Mentoring: having an experienced person share their own story of change and leading the beneficiaries to think of moments when they have initiated change and tell it as a story. This makes them realize that they are changemakers and get motivated to lead.*

   *We see people discovering the fact that they have agency, and can solve problems working with their communities. People are realizing that they have been given talents, calling and self-worth, and through that are gaining the confidence to become the agents of change in their communities.*

   *People start initiatives which enable them to provide for their kids and their relationships with neighbors. They feel empowered and influence others to have a good view of themselves. The community initiatives are evidence of personal transformation because they result from their own experience. Now they have different priorities than just survival.*

2. **Programs modelling integrity and respectful navigation of local customs and culture**

*But what is most notable in our efforts is the communities' direction of the project from the beginning. They are the architects of the program and where they want to go with it.*

*We also work slowly - on the time schedule of the local culture not on a Western time schedule.*

*What makes Street Business School different, is the amount of time we spend with women, it is the relationship – the value of that is creating the outcome. How you show up, how you react to people, how you relate to others with dignity and humility: Even the language we choose to use matters – we use the term "coach" for both facilitators AND participants. It honors that everyone will learn from each other. When we do a home visit, the internal preparation begins when we wake that morning. We reflect on what the community is like, how we will dress for making people comfortable, we prepare so we are not reacting, we compliment people, we notice, we respond appropriately.*

## CONNECTION BETWEEN PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Several respondents described the links between personal and social transformation as a rippling effect that starts with individual change that then affects the ecosystem at the interpersonal and community levels. Personal change is so distinctly different for each individual, and inner work is so diverse, we hesitate to draw any conclusions from our limited survey that would suggest an exact formula for how personal transformation consistently unfolds to influence social transformation on a systemic level (structures, norms, behaviors, beliefs). Yet, a few patterns have emerged from the theories of change and anecdotal evidence shared through our interviews in how the relationship might operate:

**Pathway 1:** Inner shifts in self-beliefs (especially self-awareness, self-confidence and self-efficacy) plus skills that can be applied (such as problem-solving, conflict-resolution, communications) lead to shifts in personal healing and agency. These personal shifts have the dual impact of influencing the positive choices of those participants that lead to greater success, and changing the perspectives among the stakeholders around them regarding their value. **Examples:** AMPLIFY, Enneagram Prison Project, Street Business School, DIG, Tostan

*One powerful outcome we tend to see from our programs is young people, and girls in particular, feeling a sense of affirmation of their ideas and value within their families and communities. Often for the first time being asked what their opinion is, being listened to and having others respond to that opinion, is a hugely important step toward a sense of self-worth and one's right to advocate and influence based on their opinions. That recognition of being someone who matters, adds value and can make important contributions is a process that beings a transformation in young people and girls in particular.*

*…for young people and girls it's very important to consider those around them that have influence on their decisions (i.e., gatekeepers) like parents, siblings, teachers, local leaders. These people, if also part of their own self-transformation into someone who will be supportive of their son/daughter taking on a new, sometimes non-traditional, role is a critical piece of the puzzle.*

*Personal transformation in my experience is linked to both acquisition of necessary skills, combined with opportunities to practice using those skills in 'safe spaces'. Positive experiences leading and taking action, build personal efficacy and the capacity for personal transformation.*

*DIG explicitly develops skills in restorative agriculture for uniquely vulnerable groups of people. Those skills help fill gaps in the many systems that have kept them marginalized. By working in groups that*

*share certain vulnerabilities they build a network of support that builds community and networks. As they gain experience and success, they can offer those learnings to their larger community which also raises their social identity and confidence. Their resilience in food security and climate grounds them, allowing them to develop new skills. But what is most notable in our efforts is the community direction of the project from the beginning. They are the architects of the program and where they want to go with it. DIG meets them where they are as equal partners.*

**Pathway 2:** Inner work fosters self-reflection, which leads to individuals relating and leading differently (e.g., through wellbeing, emotional resilience, better communications, openness, and collaboration). This inspires deeper trust and confidence in their leadership, and also fosters a stronger sense of belonging, a culture of wellbeing, and a supportive community that drives resilience, motivation and a sense of purpose. **Examples:** Wellbeing Project, Amani Institute, Agora Partnerships

*It helps action groups stay together and work more effectively through better conflict resolution, greater creativity and synergy, better communication and greater sense of community.*

*At this time of deeply intersectional awareness of movements, the ability to defuse and de-escalate conflict certainly help political coalitions last longer without fragmenting, or mend themselves when fragmentation does occur.*

*In our theory of change, "local leadership is more confident, trust and credible" is a key pathway and medium-term outcome, leading towards our eventual goal of community self-reliance and resilience.*

*We see the spiritual leadership and accompaniment skills offering more depth of relationship with self and others through difficulty. We see more clear discernment of vocation and call to action and greater resilience (ability to adapt)/less burnout.*

**Pathway 3:** Inner work changes mindsets including an increased sense of agency and personal capacity, which when paired with a strong sense of connection and belonging, results in an increased level of responsibility for others within the community and systemic shifts fostered by broader civic engagement. **Examples:** Tostan, ComMutiny, World Vision, Plant with Purpose

*Deep Self-awareness of their own identity. Appreciation of diversity. Understanding and practice of equality and justice in their own lives and also advocating for it in their spaces. Asserting their ideas and actively engaging with them in a responsible way. Sense of wellbeing and self-worth. Sense of ownership and engagement with the world no matter what troubles and tragedies it brings. Conflict resolution abilities and negotiating their own space in their friends, family and school circles…Better relationships. Systems being and systems thinking…Empathy. Living their roles and expanding and deepening them. Envisioning their own purpose and acting on their personal goals and consistently review and remap them.*

*More peace, compassion, and wisdom…To us, this is key for being able to not only Block harm and oppression and Build structures for a more fair and peaceful society, but also to develop the ability to Be with our suffering, collectively, in order to transform towards awakening and liberation.*

*Our theory of change is that personal peace impacts interpersonal peace, community, and global peace.*

*Jagrik- is a Hindi word we created - combining the idea of a Jagrik ( Aware) Jagrik ( Citizen) – The Jagrik is a self-awakened and aware and active citizen who is being the change they are making in the world - so the idea of personal and social transformation is captured in the word Jagrik.*

*We see personal transformation as a key link in creating a virtuous cycle. Practically this is borne out when individuals, churches and savings groups be-*

*come the ongoing agents of change in their communities. We have many stories of this occurring. For example, in some of the rural areas of Haiti where we work, it was the savings groups who organized and led local relief efforts. This represents change on a couple of levels – both increased agency and an increased sense of responsibility for others in the community.*

One respondent acknowledged that they are not always sure how (or whether) to integrate inner work practices into community level work.

*It's still a practice of the privilege(d). I've had several discussions with colleagues who are seeking to take these practices beyond individual self-actualization and into collective spaces, but we are struggling with how do this.*

Yet those who are doing the work point to meaningful, observable shifts in broader social change.

## OUTCOMES

Some survey respondents noted particular outcomes for the individuals and communities they serve. These were not broadly reported but suggest that more exploration is warranted to capture the full range of impacts that inner work and personal transformation may have once embraced as a viable strategy for promoting meaningful social change.

1. **Shifts in gender roles, norms and outcomes** for women and girls

   *In the community members that we serve, we are seeing an increase in self-confidence and esteem amongst women and girls. We are seeing males encouraging women to be more independent, to become more educated, to be a part of the finances of the family and to encourage women to be community leaders.*

   *My own work has surfaced a lot of insight regard-*

*ing my own relationship to gender. This in turn is driving my current work in gender equity and women's leadership development.*

*We see an increase in girls and women engaging in society - whether in increased school education, or increased community leadership, or increased attendance to our programs = as an increase in empowerment and community support of our work.*

*Our partner organizations/programs, see Agency contributing to a number of important social impact outcomes, including increased economic empowerment (higher income, economic security, etc), reduced early pregnancy/forced marriage, increased educational attainment, and improved health and body autonomy.*

2. **Greater resilience** amongst change agents and the efforts they catalyze, and an ability to be "translators" between different worlds (e.g., traditional and modern; spiritual and social).

   *It helps action groups stay together and work more effectively through better conflict resolution, greater creativity and synergy, better communication and greater sense of community.*

   *We solidly straddle between social movement and spiritual worlds (which sometimes feel quite separate or even at odds), which helps us built the trust required for radical activists to open ourselves to spiritual teachings despite histories of deeply harmful betrayal and exploitation by dominant religious institutions — especially toward queer, Black, Muslim, women, transgender, and other marginalized people.*

   *We see transformation in our staff on technical skills, capacity - building and knowledge of program management and evaluation, a larger global perspective, increased openness to different ways of life, faiths, ways of living. We also see confidence growing in being community leaders, in how to re-*

*spectfully transform and help change traditional thoughts, on how to be 'translators' between traditional mentalities and modern mentalities - respected cultural liaisons.*

3. **Ripple effects** beyond direct participants

   *Increase in empowerment has manifested in more reports of abuse and having community stakeholders respond without taking a bribe. We have also seen men seek us out to inquire about how to be involved.*

   *We also see that young people are more willing and interested in working with local leaders to undertake community service projects or request to be involved more directly in local community development.*

   *There is no survey on the bigger social impact, but you can see it – there is an immediate impact on entrepreneurs. We believe that the interior condition determines outcomes…We look at how they are perceived by peers at seven years…they are seen as navigating differently from others – more reflective, working on themselves and others. People notice when they come in with different tools on self-reflection and navigate differently.*

## CHALLENGES

The challenges with measurement, however, contribute to ongoing zones of wishful thinking – gaps between theories of change and the ability to appropriately value and adequately learn from what is or is not contributing to positive social change (and therefore worthy of ongoing or increasing investment). Key challenges include:

1. **Personal Transformation is difficult to measure but there are early attempts** – Almost no one is measuring personal transformation consistently right now, but there are emerging efforts to capture a definition, explore the mechanisms and/or propose metrics in several areas including: hope, agency, community intelligence, trust, bridging leadership, social

capital and social cohesion, and wellbeing.

*In the Wellbeing [Project] Network we have conducted Learning Journeys, Delphi Studies and track our member's and maker's wellbeing within our yearly Impact Survey.*

*We've recently conducted our first formal evaluation on our work in Malawi, which looked at community capacity, especially as it relates to leadership and trust. We have not yet built monitoring of more personal or intrinsic change into our M&E system, but I'm hopeful it is something we will have momentum to do or to at least explore in the near future.*

*The questionnaire contained a version of the 16-item Oldenbourgh Burnout Inventory, measuring the two most important factors of burnout: exhaustion and disengagement. Following a process suggested by Peterson et al. (2008), we calculated four groups according to their experience of burnout symptoms at the time of the survey.*

*Where it is happening, it is almost exclusively qualitative. Some have given great effort to measure more quantitatively but found the results inadequate to the task of fully valuing the shifts that participants could describe and staff could see.*

*In our accompaniment work, we experience the transformation through personal relationship with the clients and their own accounts of the changes. Those relationships feel important to hold as sacred beyond any surveys or formal data collection, so feedback is anecdotal.*

*Measuring spiritual change is notoriously hard. Some of the questions that attempt to get at that and which make up part of our impact evaluations include the following: a. How frequently do you help your neighbors? This is an attempt to measure behavior change associated with spiritual growth. If we are called to love our neighbors, how often are we really putting that into practice? …b. Do you feel that your work is a good use of your talents? This is an attempt to determine the degree to which creativity and calling have been embraced*

*by participants…c. Do you feel that your faith sustains you through difficult circumstances? …We also use a "Most Significant Change" approach to measuring spiritual change.*

**2. Transformation is a long-term journey** - This process is context-dependent and deeply personal, which makes it nearly impossible to standardize metrics. There is resistance to the possibility of going down this road to identify metrics only to have them be standardized and enforced by funders in ways that are not applicable or aligned with local individual and organizational experience.

*We have overinvested in measurement in the "silconvalleyism" of social entrepreneurship. As if it didn't matter if it was not measured in the 1st quarter. Ninety-percent of measurement is for the money of funders. Ten percent reaffirms the work, but we don't really need evidence if it is working. What is important is that we have to find how to help them have the energy to do their work best, learn and grow. The journey of the leader – self-mastery, relationship of the ego, the ability to reflect – the key is how we can be supporting people that work versus measuring if some intervention works. The people together create culture. People learn from each other…We should focus on leadership not project-based interventions…The best culture is one of humble leaders, building community and partnerships. What we need is the [Benjamin] Franklin model of leadership (what funders should be supporting) versus the Mark Zuckerberg model (blitz scale even if you are not ready, regardless of the net impact to the planet and the moral foundation) versus the small but beautiful concept. We don't create social change by scaling sh\*t. That is surface-level. We need to go deep and transform, but we don't really know for sure what that will look like because we change the whole trajectory of life.*

*This is hard to measure with a control group or RCT, etc. There is always a feedback delay in how it works and a continuous unpacking process. We*

*give curiosity and the capacity to navigate, then give a buffet of tools to choose from. After training, we survey at one and five years – people attribute significance for how they have changed and how they approach themselves and their work due to the inner journey curriculum…They remember they are navigating the inner journey long term and asking new questions of themselves like – is this good for myself right now, even if I have to leave the impact sector to go back to the private sector? It helps them develop perspective, self-care. This is part of a larger community giving support – a sense of belonging, that they have a sense of trust, shared language and values. Shared hope. This is an antidote to cynicism – it supports resilience so that they can keep going.*

*Standard screening tools like the PCL-17 [a tool for measuring PTSD] are not helpful as they do not describe the real healing journey. Surveys help explain what was effective in workshops…With qualitative knowledge we could acknowledge each persons' own path and could determine how to do different things with that experience. We need to break the myth about transformation – the Western idea that there is one way to show how adversity or trauma impacts a human being…It looks different for each person.*

3. **Participatory methods are essential, but time and capital intensive** – It is necessary to ensure this is not a concept or process driven by only Western, privileged perspectives. Context matters. Measurement strategies pushed upon programs may only serve to reinforce oppression and disempower beneficiaries. Yet participatory methodologies require training, the building of rapport, time for implementation, and the funding needed to carry out such processes to completion with adequate feedback loops so they are not just extractive and transactional.

*Grassroots organizations have been shut out of the discussions that measure their own effectiveness and success. By doing this, global actors have denied community-driven organizations a seat at the table*

*where success is defined, best practices are established, and ultimately, where investment strategies are created…We consider participatory evaluation to be instrumental in terms of accurately measuring outcomes at the local level, and ensuring that the impact of local solutions are appropriately represented in the menu of option considered in the global policy agenda… (Sidle et al., 2020, "Measuring Girls Agency in East Africa: Co-Creating Contextually Specific Tools for Evaluation: Lessons from the AMPLIFY Girls Collective")*

*Our theory of change asserts that transformation occurs from the bottom up, from engaging over time with a trained, culturally congruent facilitator who teaches a sequenced curriculum that invites participants to vision a collective future and deliberate about the values that will create well-being in the community at the onset of the program…Tostan's program builds communities' knowledge, self-efficacy and capacity for collective action so that they themselves can lead sustained development activities in line with their own vision of community well-being and human dignity… We are unable to track on our survey the same respondents over the three-year period, so we cannot measure the same individual's responses to the baseline, midline, or endline survey. The best data that we have on personal transformation is qualitative.*

4. **Funding gaps** – There is an overarching interest in working long-term and collaborating to change the paradigm of how goals are measured and funding is invested towards real transformation, yet conventional funding seeks short-term outputs within annual grant cycles that do not allow adequate resources for understanding or assessing deeper inner shifts.

*Front-line Organization: For funders, case studies are not enough. They need numbers to go with…[but] these tools are not helpful, like how the overhead percentage is not indicative of success… Also, there is a problem with these measurements in terms of timing – sometimes it can take a lifetime to heal, and that*

*is not measured within a grant cycle.*

*Funder: Some [metrics] are difficult to quantify and get out of your beneficiaries. We share the idea and strongly believe that the bedrock for any project is to analyze outcomes and change projects based on their impact. That is more popular, but not the norm.*

*Funder: Intensive programs are hard because they are expensive. It is hard for donors to realize that trainings are not effective if you are just dropping information and expecting people to absorb it and take it out into the world… So, looking at the how and why will be tangible justification for future donors. Then they can know this work not just from anecdotes. It's all in the data and impact that we can communicate… Some donors are apprehensive…It seems new and sexy to include any personal development or mindfulness in the international development space, but donors are not sure how to measure the impact of all those activities. If you can reinforce the linkage…it will be very helpful.*

## MEASUREMENTS

The measurement of personal transformation among respondents has been almost entirely qualitative. Few metrics are being assessed quantitatively, and while many are looking for or developing tools to help establish a common approach, caution is advised by some respondents. Their concern involves measuring what is a very diverse experience that is personal, multi-faceted, and context-dependent.  The qualitative methods used most frequently by respondents include:
- Self-reports
- Observation
- Stories
- Focus groups and interviews
- No formal measurement systems

Metrics that are being assessed within qualitative or quantitative approaches include:
- Attitudes and beliefs - confidence, hope, optimism
- Skills - communication, decision-making

- Behavior change – taking on more challenging problems
- Participation - in programs, community projects, leadership roles, advocacy
- Agency - self-governance, leadership, self-belief, environmental beliefs
- Voice - having a voice in their home or community

Also mentioned but less commonly, include measures of:
- Burnout risk - exhaustion, disengagement, depression
- Perception of others - 360 feedback from parents, teachers, peers
- Life circumstances - delayed pregnancy, delayed marriage, ability to earn a living wage, improvements in drug use, recidivism rates, and changes in other risky behavior
- Community capacity

Examples of endeavors to improve measurement methods and tools include:

- **AMPLIFY:** AMPLIFY is a collective of 18 organizations working on agency among adolescent girls in East Africa. Together they have developed an operational definition of agency and have developed and tested a survey instrument for measuring agency. AMPLIFY used a participatory and group concept mapping process to identify successes for girls. The coalition characterizes agency as the ability of girls to affect change in their own lives and the world, which is made up of positive self-beliefs and concrete skills. The approach allows agency to be adaptable to each local context, where organizations can identify the skills and beliefs that matter for girls. The self-report Sidle AMPLIFY Agency tool was developed collectively and tested for validity among AMPLIFY members. It includes four internally-facing (self-efficacy, self-esteem) and externally-facing (empowerment and positive gender attitudes) belief metrics and eleven internally and externally facing skills metrics (including problem-solving, decision-making, self-awareness, interpersonal

communications, conflict resolution skills, etc.). It was found that individual skills are less important than the overarching capacities that the skills represent, such as self-governance or self-belief.

- **Ihangane Project:** The Ihangane Project works in the realm of primary healthcare delivery, primarily material child healthcare, in Rwanda. They recognize that the quality and successes of maternal and child health depend on the ability of local healthcare workers to encourage healthy behaviors for preventative care. This, in turn, is driven by the level of hopefulness among healthcare workers and the community members. Hope is defined as "interconnectedness, readiness for change, and future-oriented mindset". The Hope Initiative of the Ihangane Project is working to adapt the Hert Hope Index into the local language and context in Rwanda, the first adaptation and validation of the tool in a low-income country.

- **Tostan:** Arjan Appadurai's approach to visioning, what he calls "the capacity to aspire" has influenced Tostan's approach. Tostan works in clusters of 50 communities over three years, with local communities reaching out and "adopting" others. Tostan has found that in many cases, individuals cannot on their own sustain changes without the support of community. Tostan's curriculum is designed so that participants learn the skills and abilities needed to accomplish their goals. Tostan creates new roles for community members to inhabit, frequently for the first time and trains them in fulfilling these new roles. For example, learning one has the right to a "voice" is paired with practice in participation (gradually over time) so that women develop the capacity to call meetings and lead them in their communities. Tostan then evaluates the tangible changes communities make in improving governance, health, education, economic activities, environment cleanliness, etc. What is intangible is the pride taken by the community in accomplishing their goals and their motivation to continue transforming their communities for the better. Tostan's theory of change sees individual/personal agency and capacities and collective agency and capacities and corresponding transformations as intertwined. Measurement is qualitative conducted through focus groups and interviews around social norms – attitudes, perceptions and beliefs. Personal transformation and its link to social change occurs along three paths: (1) women's participation reshapes public debate, (2) women's leadership and agency drives collective agency, and (3) individual efforts translate into coordinated actions with support so people are not alone in problem-solving and social pressure supports collective change.

- **Opportunity International:** The Holistic Community Assessment Approach designed by Opportunity International involves a multi-dimensional qualitative, story-telling approach that explores how people have experienced or contributed to change in their community, environment, family relationships, self, and relationship to God. Each set of personal stories allows for insights to be mined from a unique community context that can demonstrate challenges, levers for social change, and solutions or starting points for interventions that lead to specific outcomes. Qualitative responses can be scored to provide rubrics adapted to a local context that can be analyzed across a region. While the method has not been used in a systematic longitudinal study yet to pinpoint trends in the relationship between personal transformation and social change, insights from across stories have indicated values such as trust, hope, and solidarity are important. The theory is that with a values-based curriculum, deeply held motivations can connect to and drive behavior change.

- **The Enneagram Prison Project (EPP):** EPP is developing a 53-question survey crafted from their own experience to measure eight domains of personal transformation, including self-awareness, tolerance, self-regulation, self-compassion, appreciation of others, behavior toward others, support and self-care. They theorize that self-compassion plus self-regulation work together to allow for self-compassion to come online, bringing you into a level of tolerance for your own thoughts, feelings and sensations. Most incarcerated individuals with whom EPP works never developed the capacity for self-regulation because they did not have attachment and mirroring from a loving caretaker. The individual work paired with the therapeutic bond with a program guide, enables the participant to heal and move into a capacity for self-parenting. As the incarcerated student heals, they are perceived and treated differently, leading to a "shift in caring" by the entire correctional system.
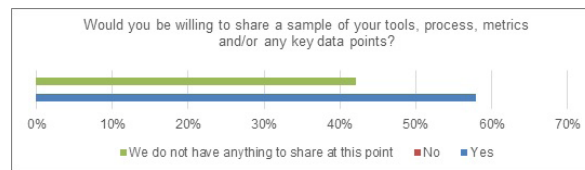
## OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Respondents identified a number of needs and opportunities for adding value to the process of measuring personal transformation and social change. Recommendations include:

1. There is a need for measurement work to focus on the value derived from personal transformation, rather than (or alongside) what impact is being achieved. Using a valuation approach aligns with theories of change better than an objective assessment of impact, which may inadvertently reinforce a lack of self-belief, such as by imposing externally-defined measures of how successful beneficiaries have been in exhibiting change in themselves and community.

2. Because what measures is what matters, it is important to be selective in tracking a small and readily measurable set of long-term indicators. However, it is also valuable to allow for outcome divergence among those indicators.

3. Begin with beneficiaries. If they name and prioritize their desired outcomes at individual, interpersonal, community, social levels – and that generates the first layer of measurement of "success" – perhaps that might be valued by funders differently.

4. Build NGO-researcher-funder partnerships. NGOs lack capacity and funding for deeper clinical research. Researchers cannot generate learning without real world contexts. Neither can operate without resources. A deeper investigation must be conducted together. There is interest in collaboration.



Would you be willing to share a sample of your tools, process, metrics and/or any key data points?
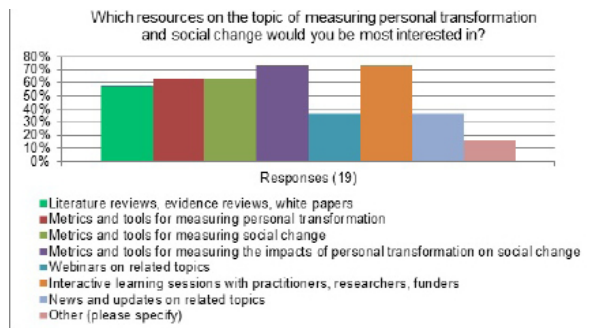
5. Cultivate networks to accelerate learning from the field to academia and back again. There is an eagerness to do so. There are substantial collectives already looking closely at how agency (AMPLIFY), community intelligence (CQ and Tostan), wellbeing (Wellbeing Project), and personal transformation (Global Grassroots, Synergos, and the Presencing Institute's Social Field Research initiative) connect to social change.

6. Help identify ways to measure that are not just quantitative and data based. Identify more examples of methodologies and systems for monitoring and evaluating qualitative impact.

Though it was outside the scope of this survey, we also believe it will be valuable to investigate more

deeply the actual tools and practices of organization-driven inner work, including how they are introduced in a range of contexts, the duration and frequency with which they are practiced, what level of instruction and support is offered, the timeframe over which they are used, which stakeholders are involved, whether they are practiced in solitude or community, and any other defining feature of inner work programs, their link to personal transformation and social transformation.



Which resources on the topic of measuring personal transformation and social change would you be most interested in?

Responses (19)

- Literature reviews, evidence reviews, white papers
- Metrics and tools for measuring personal transformation
- Metrics and tools for measuring social change
- Metrics and tools for measuring the impacts of personal transformation on social change
- Webinars on related topics
- Interactive learning sessions with practitioners, researchers, funders
- News and updates on related topics
- Other (please specify)

## CONCLUSION

According to our respondents, inner work works. Inner work affects individuals - like turning on the pilot light, either for the first time or after it has been extinguished by oppression, learned helplessness, trauma, disillusionment, or burnout – and fosters positive personal transformation. Personal transformation then becomes the fuel for greater hope, optimism, purpose, agency, wellbeing, belonging, and prosocial engagement towards positive social change. Combined with practical skills, opportunities for applied hands-on learning, and relational support (peer mentors, guides, ethical support from trusted others), personal transformation catalyzes more sustained, holistic social change efforts. This can transpire through the mindset shifts and civic actions of individuals towards the common good, the changed perspectives of stakeholders towards previously disempowered members, the trusted and inspired leadership of self-aware change agents, and a sense of community that drives systemic shifts towards collective wellbeing. While there are still challenges in measuring the intangible nature

of personal transformation and even more challenges in determining a direct relationship with social change, there is growing enthusiasm for deeper collaboration towards a common understanding of this intersection. We remain inspired to go deeper with this research and to foster collaboration towards the sharing of tools, practices and methodologies that will further advance our collective understanding. We are excited to offer these initial insights as a starting point for a broader conversation and look forward to the learnings and feedback it may inspire.

## APPENDIX A | Additional Response Summaries by Type

*From Participants*
- Being together is refreshing, invigorating, therapeutic, nourishing
- Participants report increased self-awareness; are able to talk about their own journey
- More capable and powerful; can jump into the unknown
- More aware of others' preferences and ways of working
- Able to see themselves through other peoples' eyes
- Realize it could be possible to do something they love that's good for the world
- Feel clear about and connected to their purpose
- Personal transformation is sometimes very difficult work
- Not a short-term process; sometimes years before one feels the effects
- Loving/supportive community matters a lot; "makes me feel less lonely"
- Value a combination of inner work and applying learning day to day
- Forces one to be more intentional about behavior
- Moving away from being transactional
- Developed shared value with other changemakers
- Realized changemakers are people too
- Being believed in by an organization can help get others in community on board

*From Organizational Leaders*
- Difficulty measuring inner change is clear
- Leaders are looking for changes in vision, agency, empowerment, confidence, hope
- Also active listening, being responsive to others, drug/alcohol use, insomnia, behavior change, wellness in individual and community members
- Some use a variety of tools, yet know they are not able to show all of the change happening
- Some groups are researching/creating new tools/measures
- Concerns about science, research, measurements being drawn primarily from white, western populations
- See value in participants/beneficiaries defining outcomes for themselves
- Interested in collaborating with Global Grassroots on this project

*From Funders*
- Open and curious about connection between inner work and social change; understanding of what that means and what it looks like is needed
- Believe measuring personal transformation is hard; not sure it can be done or done well; wonder about validity of measures
- Some intangible concepts like "leadership" are more familiar
- Powerful to hear beneficiaries (women, girls) speak about their experiences and projects; yet also want to see concrete evidence of impacts (i.e., education)
- Interested in long-term outcomes for individuals and communities
- Suggestion: Picking 3-5 measures, set up measurement systems in advance, stick with them; then add stories and other evidence to that picture