ASPEN NETWORK OF DEVELOPMENT ENTREPRENEURS

ANDE Retrospective: 17 Years of Building the Infrastructure for Small and Growing Businesses

Introduction

When the Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs (ANDE) launched in March 2009, it was founded on the premise that small and growing businesses (SGBs)—commercially viable companies with 5 to 250 employees seeking growth capital between $20,000 and $2 million—are the primary engine for economic growth, poverty alleviation, and job creation across emerging markets.

At the time, the development sector largely overlooked these businesses. Microfinance served subsistence-level family businesses, while commercial banks, private equity firms, and development finance institutions (DFIs) gravitated toward capital deployments above $5 million. Between them lay the "missing middle"—a market of ambitious entrepreneurs too large for micro-credit, yet considered too small, informal, or risky for commercial banks.

Over its 17-year history, ANDE operated as a network convener, research hub, and catalytic funder across a rapidly evolving field. Housed at the Aspen Institute, ANDE grew from 27 founding members into an alliance of more than 750 institutions spanning eight regional chapters across Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia, alongside a global secretariat in Washington, D.C. Its membership connected historically fragmented actors: business accelerators, capacity development providers, impact investors, academic institutions, corporate supply chain leaders, DFIs, and bilateral donors.

This retrospective explores ANDE's impact through the arc of its institutional evolution, tracing how the network built the foundational market infrastructure for small and growing businesses across three core pillars:

- **Field-Building:** ANE defined the industry by organizing a fragmented landscape to establish common language and metrics, lower business support costs, and generate the empirical data needed to legitimize SGBs as an investable global asset class.
- **Deepening the Sector:** ANDE pushed to expand the frontiers of entrepreneurship support by addressing complex, systemic market challenges including gender-lens investing, corporate value chain integration, and climate resilience.

Ecosystem Building: ANDE's deliberate shift from centralized global coordination to place-based ecosystems reinforced local ownership while prompting critical discussions around the national policy, local investment and external support required to foster vibrant entrepreneurial economies.

The report concludes by examining the structural challenges that persist across emerging markets, offering high-level reflections on how the ecosystem can sustain and evolve this work in the years ahead.

> *"ANDE defined the SGB sector. It put SGBs on the map and played a key role in helping development organizations understand the needs and potential impact of SGBs."*
>
> — **Omidyar Network**, *ANDE at 10 Years: Impact Report*

Acknowledgments & Note on Methodology

Synthesizing 17 years across eight regional chapters, this retrospective draws on roughly 1,000 pieces of evidence to capture how a global membership network built and professionalized the SGB sector. Artificial intelligence tools supported data extraction and evidence synthesis.

A debt of gratitude is owed to the staff across ANDE's regional chapters and global headquarters who drove this work for nearly two decades. Special appreciation goes to Mallory St. Claire, whose analytical dedication, data curation, and vision made this retrospective possible.

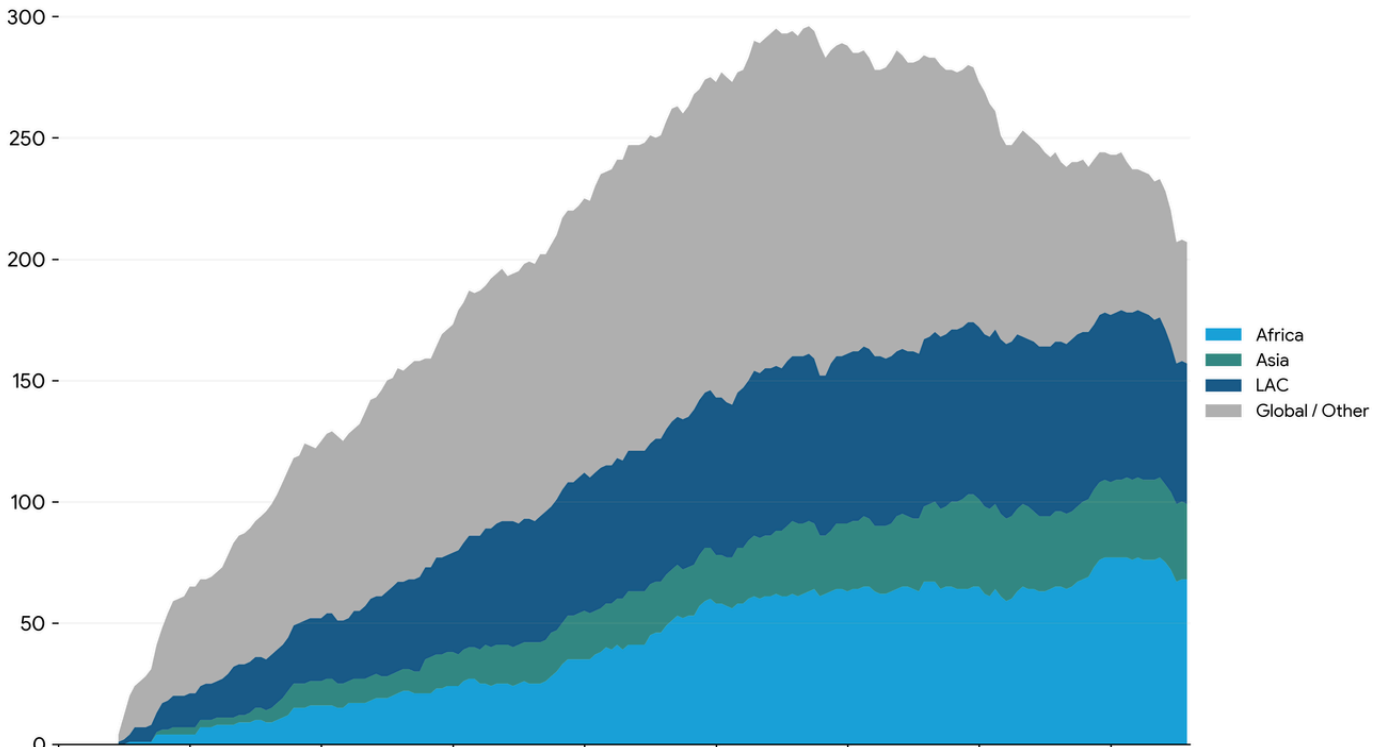
Field-Building: Putting Small and Growing Businesses on the Global Map

Building a global field requires assembling an enduring coalition of actors who see themselves as co-architects of a shared discipline. ANDE grew from 27 founding organizations into a cumulative alliance of more than 750 institutions, mirroring the maturation of the small and growing business movement itself.

Many founding members remained active for more than a decade – a few for the entire duration of the network. They provided the institutional bedrock and intellectual commitment upon which early industry metrics, benchmarks, and research programs were constructed.

As the sector expanded, steady growth across regional chapters transformed ANDE into a decentralized practitioner network anchored across Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia. While early membership was concentrated among development agencies and impact investors headquartered in North America and Europe, the network's long-term trajectory was defined by steady, organic expansion across regional chapters. At the time of ANDE's sunsetting, nearly half of ANDE's active members were Global South-based local capacity development providers and enterprise support organizations (ESOs).

From a Global North Membership to a Global South Movement



Once it had convened an alliance, ANDE turned to building out the market infrastructure needed to support global entrepreneurship. Main areas of focus included mobilizing development finance, professionalizing local intermediaries through rigorous training, and using empirical research and convenings to align the entire ecosystem.

Unlocking the Capital Pipeline

ANDE's *State of the Sector* research tracked the financial evolution of emerging-market enterprise finance. These reports documented how committed capital managed by dedicated SGB investment vehicles grew from under $3 billion between 2009 and 2013 to over $17 billion across 500+ investment vehicles by 2016. Median target fund sizes stabilized between $35 million and $50 million—a threshold showing that fund managers had moved past sub-scale pilots to institutional vehicles built around $20,000 to $2 million investments.

Early market data indicated that only 6 to 8 percent of investment funds targeted seed- or startup-stage ventures; by 2016, 42 percent of newly launched investment vehicles deployed capital to early-stage enterprises using mezzanine structures, revenue-share debt, and convertible notes. Bilateral and multilateral donor allocations for enterprise development mirrored this growth, quadrupling from $1 billion in 2012 to a peak of $4.8 billion in 2015, led largely by European development agencies.

ANDE catalyzed this expansion by tracking market data, syndicating co-investments through its regional chapters, and demonstrating to global allocators that the SGB asset class could absorb institutional capital.

Lowering the Cost of Support

Building the sector also meant addressing the bespoke, high-cost models that characterized early business development services. ANDE members realized significant cost efficiencies by moving toward standardized cohort-based accelerators, structured technical assistance facilities, and economies of scale. According to ANDE data, average capacity delivery costs decreased from an estimated $11,000 per SGB in 2012 to $3,300 - 4,900 per SGB by 2017–2019.

ANDE contributed to this shift through initiatives like SCALE 360, which trained nearly 400 ESO leaders across 21 workshop cohorts on the empirical practices of effective enterprise support. ANDE also worked to standardize impact measurement across its membership. Alongside the Global Impact Investing Network (GIIN), the Impact Management Project (IMP), and standard-setting bodies, ANDE advocated for the adoption of IRIS+ metrics and SDG alignment. These efforts were anchored by annual Metrics from the Ground Up conferences, which repositioned impact measurement and management (IMM) from top-down donor compliance into a strategic management tool. Driven by ANDE's emphasis on research, more than a third of members actively collaborated on joint initiatives, producing over 280 joint research studies, shared facilities, and co-investments.

Spotlight: Investment Manager Training

15 Years of Professionalizing Impact Capital in the Global South

Launched in 2010 to bridge the gap between emerging-market fund managers and global allocators, ANDE's **Investment Manager Training (IMT)** became a premier practitioner program for emerging market capital providers. Over 15 years, the IMT evolved into an advanced curriculum spanning blended finance, gender-lens investing, and climate-aligned deal structuring.

- **Global Reach:** Delivered across 34 cohorts, training nearly 800 investment professionals in 25+ countries across Asia, Africa, and Latin America.
- **Multiplier Effect:** A 2026 alumni survey confirmed that 86% of alumni remain active in the impact sector, with almost two thirds holding director-level or senior executive positions.
- **Practitioner Community:** Generating a Net Promoter Score of 94, the IMT built an active network of capital allocators, with nearly three-quarters of alumni offering to mentor and co-facilitate future cohorts.

Spotlight: Impact Measurement and Management

Standardizing Practice and Building Measurement Capacity

ANDE worked to move impact measurement and management (IMM) from compliance into a core operational capability for intermediaries, investors, and entrepreneurs.

- **Infrastructure & Convenings:** Published over 10 primary research guides, launched the central Impact Measurement Resource Hub, and annually convened Metrics from the Ground Up across hubs like Nairobi, Bangkok, and Rio de Janeiro.
- **Funder Partnerships:** Supported by the Tipping Point Fund, ANDE developed ESG research, standards interpretation guides, and working sessions. With GIZ and Social Value International, it built specialized curricula for accelerators and incubators.
- **Applied Advisory:** ANDE staff delivered multi-day workshops, metrics labs, and 1:1 advisory clinics for more than 130 practitioners across the network's global chapters, supplemented by monthly virtual office hours.

By lowering the technical barrier to robust data collection, ANDE ensured that emerging-market intermediaries could credibly track, manage, and prove their impact to global capital allocators.

Proving What Works in Entrepreneurship Support

Field-building required rigorous research to demonstrate the value of enterprise support. ANDE led countless research initiatives to validate SGBs as engines of inclusive economic growth, including the long-running State of the Sector publication. Two flagship initiatives which laid the groundwork for evidence in the field are highlighted here.

Global Accelerator Learning Initiative (GALI)

Launched in 2015 with Emory University and supported by almost a dozen donors, GALI built the first large-scale empirical dataset on emerging-market business acceleration. Tracking over 20,000 enterprise applications across 300+ cohorts over four years, GALI demonstrated that accelerated ventures outpace non-accelerated peers in revenue growth, job creation, and follow-on equity and debt raised.

Longitudinal data also uncovered stark market disparities: women-led ventures raised significantly less capital post-acceleration than male-led peers. This finding spurred the IFC/We-Fi ScaleX program, which structured performance-based incentives for accelerators to narrow gender financing gaps. GALI also documented systemic investment biases favoring expatriate founders over local emerging-market entrepreneurs, prompting debates around equity and capital allocation in regional hubs.

The SGB Evidence Fund

Established with the International Growth Centre with support from the Argidius Foundation, USAID, and IDRC, the SGB Evidence Fund built an open-access repository of more than 100 empirical publications. By pairing ESOs directly with early-career Global South researchers and providing two-tiered grants to validate research concepts, the fund generated peer-reviewed evidence on business development efficacy, worker matching, and financial inclusion.

Visit aspeninstitute.org/aspen-network-of-development-entrepreneurs to explore and download the full repository of sector research, diagnostic toolkits, and publications—including the complete archives from GALI and the SGB Evidence Fund. Partners and ecosystem builders are warmly invited to download and re-host these resources on their own platforms under Creative Commons licensing.

Convenings as Ecosystem Infrastructure

ANDE used convenings to build the connective tissue across a diverse membership. Between 2009 and 2025, ANDE organized thousands of working sessions online and around the world, helping decision makers to meet, form partnerships, and advance critical work supporting entrepreneurship. The flagship Global Annual Conference brought together hundreds of sector leaders, intentionally rotating across regional chapters starting in 2023 to reflect the network's geographic evolution. Alongside regional meetings like the Pan-African and Pan-Asian Conferences, ANDE provided regular spaces where fund managers, bilateral donors, and local intermediaries evaluated operational challenges, structured co-investments, and aligned their funding priorities.

Having legitimized SGBs as a recognizable asset class and established core operational standards, the field faced a second evolution. Proving that small businesses could grow was not enough; the network had to demonstrate that these enterprises could solve systemic challenges to building more inclusive, robust economies.

Deepening the Sector: Supply Chains, Gender-Smart Capital, and Climate Resilience

As the SGB sector matured, ANDE focused on critical frontier spaces where structural barriers constrained the expansion of entrepreneurial ecosystems. ANDE focused on a number of these areas over two decades, but stand-out initiatives include integrating small businesses into corporate value chains, embedding gender equity into capital allocation, and building local capacity for the green transition.

Moving Beyond CSR: Integrating SGBs into Corporate Value Chains

For decades, multinational corporations engaged small businesses primarily through philanthropic CSR grants rather than commercial contracts. Recognizing that global corporations spend over $13 trillion annually on procurement, ANDE pushed its members to open corporate supply chains as a more sustainable driver of enterprise growth. By 2019, 54 percent of ANDE members working with corporations were helping them source directly from local SGBs. Yet small suppliers consistently faced structural hurdles, including rigid vendor onboarding, lack of certifications, prohibitive payment terms, and mounting ESG compliance pressures. To help businesses adapt, ANDE published practical guidance and toolkits on its Impact Measurement Resource Hub to ensure local suppliers were not displaced by corporate compliance standards.

To dismantle these procurement barriers on the ground, ANDE anchored regional coalitions to address these challenges in key emerging markets:

- **India Impact Procurement Network:** As a founding partner, ANDE leveraged its South Asia chapter to build a neutral platform and a shared national agenda for inclusive procurement within a collaborative governance model. This regional infrastructure culminated in co-hosting the Network's milestone December 2025 convening on inclusive procurement and the green transition, positioning supply chain diversification as a core lever for both climate resilience and local economic inclusion.
- **Latin American Procurement Coalition:** In partnership with the JPMorgan Chase Foundation and SAP, and collaborating with Yunus Social Business, ANDE launched an initiative spanning Brazil and Mexico. Engaging more than 40 corporate executives across working sessions and sector roundtables, the coalition drove efforts to harmonize supplier certification standards and deployed digital assessment tools to integrate impact-driven SGBs directly into corporate supply chains.

By proving that inclusive procurement strengthens supply chain resilience rather than just satisfying corporate sustainability targets, ANDE demonstrated that corporate purchasing power can operate as a sustainable, market-driven engine for SGB growth.

Gender-Lens Investing: From Headcounts to Capital Allocation

In the early 2010s, gender initiatives in economic development rarely went beyond counting female beneficiaries. ANDE, alongside partners like Value for Women, helped shift gender-lens investing into investment screening, internal governance, and operational underwriting.

By 2019, 77 percent of ANDE members maintained formal policies prioritizing female entrepreneurs, and 61 percent actively screened candidate businesses for gender balance in executive leadership and ownership. Through the Partnership for Inclusive and Sustainable SGBs (a $1 million commitment supported by the Walmart Foundation), ANDE and Value for Women deployed the Gender Smart Nexus across Central America and South Africa. Sixty-three enterprise support organizations and 28 SGBs used the GSN diagnostic to audit hiring practices, wage parity, supply chains, and board representation, prompting 11 partner organizations to formally restructure internal policies, recruitment, and loan terms within a year. By treating gender integration as an operational capability and risk-management factor, ANDE helped establish that gender-smart enterprises generate more resilient balance sheets and predictable commercial outcomes.

Program Spotlight: The Guatemala Entrepreneurship Development Initiative

A Blueprint for Value Chain Integration and Gender Acceleration

ANDE's efforts on corporate supply chain integration and gender-smart programming converged in the Guatemala Entrepreneurship Development Initiative (GEDI), a $7.5 million USAID-funded initiative designed to address the root economic drivers of irregular migration by strengthening local business ecosystems with a focus on driving capital to women entrepreneurs.

Catalyzing Private Capital: Using donor funding to absorb risk across regranting facilities, ANDE secured $32.5 million in initial private sector leverage commitments across 17+ corporate and investor partners, including Cargill, Castillo Love, Rex Cargo, and Dole. GEDI's 16 local subgrantees subsequently mobilized over $19.1 million in additional investment, reaching 5,700+ entrepreneurs and creating or improving nearly 2,500 jobs.

Commercial Integration with Cargill: Cargill partnered with GEDI to build an inclusive distribution network supporting 100 street-food microfranchises and 40 corner stores. Participating stores experienced a 77 percent average sales increase, and Cargill purchased over 57,000 pounds of poultry and sausage directly from these operators—prompting the company to permanently expand delivery routes and dedicated telesales staff to service the micro-operator network.

Gender Acceleration & Formalization: Eighty women-led businesses completed dedicated investment-readiness tracks. More than a quarter increased annual revenue by over 25 percent, while formal financial record-keeping among participating women-led businesses jumped from 26 percent to 84 percent.

By proving commercial viability to corporate buyers while systematically de-risking women-led enterprises, GEDI illustrated how corporate value chains and gender-lens investing can reinforce each other to drive local wealth creation.

Just as ANDE worked to move gender inclusion from an abstract ideal into everyday investment underwriting, the network applied the same practitioner-led approach to the climate crisis.

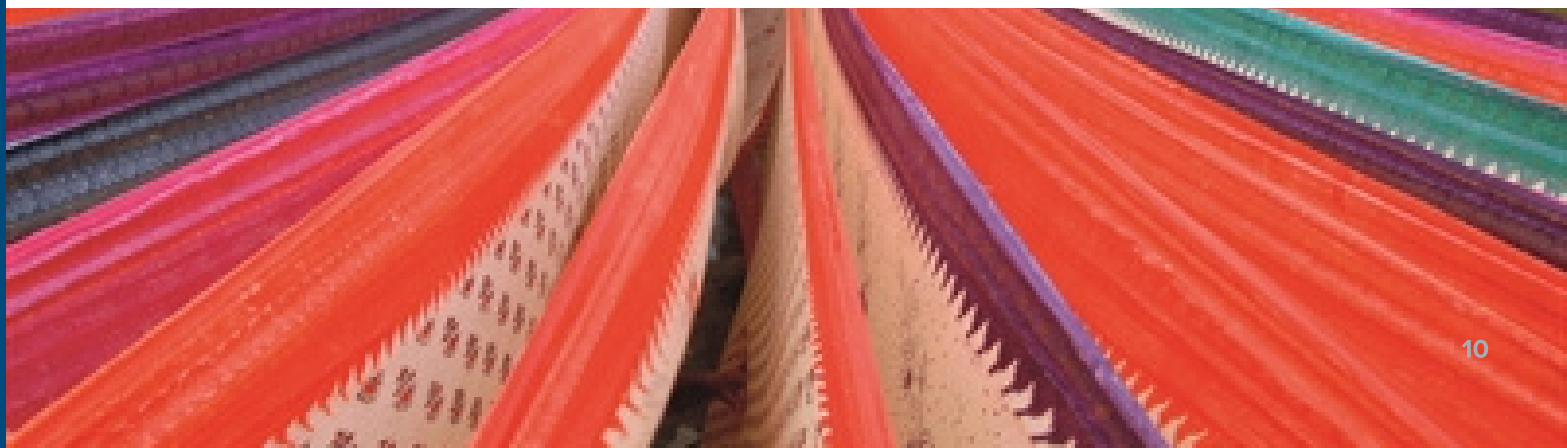
Green and Climate Entrepreneurship: Building Adaptive Ecosystem Capabilities

Following a 2019 strategic review, ANDE identified an acute gap across the entrepreneurial support sector: despite escalating climate vulnerability in emerging markets, ESOs and local capital allocators largely lacked the technical tools, green finance literacy, and deal-structuring capabilities required to support climate-resilient enterprises. Anchored by foundational seed funding from The Lemelson Foundation, ANDE established a permanent Climate and Environment practice. The portfolio quickly expanded with major support from the IKEA Foundation, Global Affairs Canada/FMO, IDRC, GIZ, and the Laudes Foundation, shifting ANDE's role from raising awareness to building specialized green market infrastructure.

To close the capability gap, ANDE and its members authored more than 36 primary research publications and diagnostic briefs while mobilizing stakeholders across international summits, specialized trainings, and action labs:

- **Equipping Intermediaries and Fund Managers:** Partnered with FUNDES Latinoamérica to deliver "Train-the-Trainer" workshops across Mexico for over 100 leaders on managing dual green and digital transitions. To unlock early-stage climate finance, ANDE delivered specialized Climate Investment Manager Trainings across Ghana, South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya to build fund managers' capacity in green and gender-smart underwriting.
- **Prototyping Market Solutions via Action Labs:** In India, the Climate Action Lab funded innovative financing mechanisms, including an Outcomes Exchange Platform and the Climate Seeders Club. In Kenya, participatory action labs engaged stakeholders in circular-finance design, directly training green ventures and deploying pilot seed capital to high-potential enterprises.
- **Elevating Frontline Evidence in Policy:** ANDE brought local enterprise data to global decision-making arenas, hosting delegations, panels, and working groups across COPs 27 through 30, the Africa Climate Summit, and New York Climate Week.

By embedding green capabilities directly into accelerators, regional investment funds, and policy working groups, ANDE helped ensure that efforts to transition to a low-carbon economy actively includes emerging-market entrepreneurs.



Ecosystem Building: Strengthening Local Markets from the Ground Up

As ANDE's membership shifted to a Global South majority and core field-building tools matured, the network turned its focus toward strengthening local ecosystems across emerging markets. This shift reflected both the growing leadership of ANDE's regional chapters and a core operational reality: entrepreneurial ecosystems are fundamentally place-based and must be locally owned. ANDE turned to tackling the systemic challenges that can inhibit the growth of entrepreneurial ecosystems. Through diagnostic mapping, curated funder retreats, action labs, and direct policy engagement, ANDE worked to build sustainable, locally led market environments.

Replacing Guesswork with City-Level Diagnostics

Before ANDE introduced systematic ecosystem mapping, economic analysis across emerging markets relied on macro-level indicators—such as aggregate GDP growth or national ease-of-doing-business rankings—that obscured the city-level realities where enterprises operate. Recognizing that local intermediaries needed granular intelligence to allocate resources effectively, ANDE developed and published **77 ecosystem diagnostic studies** across Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia.

ANDE's Ecosystem Assessments Deepened Understanding of Emerging Markets Globally



To formalize the approach, ANDE codified the Ecosystem Diagnostic Toolkit, adapting OECD, Babson, and World Bank frameworks to assess eight domains across 65 indicators.

By standardizing local assessments, the toolkit enabled regional practitioners to assess whether a city's primary constraint was early-stage risk capital, local mentoring capacity, or regulatory friction. In Uganda, the Uganda Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Initiative (UEEI)—supported by the Argidius Foundation, the Dutch Good Growth Fund (DGGF), and the Small Foundation—applied this approach across Kampala and Gulu. By identifying why secondary cities lagged behind primary administrative capitals, ANDE enabled funders to move past generic business training and channel philanthropic capital toward specific regional pipeline gaps.

Professionalizing the Frontline: Strengthening Local Intermediaries

As enterprise support organizations (ESOs) grew to represent nearly half of ANDE's network, strengthening these frontline institutions became essential to ecosystem durability. ANDE recognized that durable ecosystems require operationally resilient, specialized local institutions, and focused its efforts on providing them with direct support.

- **Strengthening Capacity:** Drawing directly from GALI's longitudinal dataset on effective acceleration, ANDE partnered with the Argidius Foundation to introduce the SCALE framework. Built around five core operational disciplines, SCALE 360 trained nearly 400 ESO leaders across 21 cohorts in 14 countries to improve program selection, benchmark curriculum quality, and build earned-income models that reduce donor dependence.

SCALE Principles

Select the right enterprises
Charge for services
Address real problems
Learn from performance data
Lead by **E**xample

- **Digital Infrastructure Upgrades:** Rapid technological change required modernizing the operational systems of local hubs. Through the five-year Mastercard Global Inclusive Growth Partnership, ANDE hosted 16 Digitalization Learning Labs across Latin America, Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Alongside Accenture's open-access Digitalization Assessment Tool, the program helped over 100 ESOs pivot to remote delivery during COVID-19, automate pipeline tracking, and deploy cloud accounting systems across portfolio businesses.
- **Redefining the Entrepreneur:** ANDE pushed intermediaries to rethink who qualifies as an investable entrepreneur, extending support beyond conventional tech founders into informal economies and historically overlooked leaders. In South Africa, supported by the Walmart Foundation, ANDE launched the Kasipreneur Impact Program (KIP) with the African Management Institute, training 240 practitioners to adapt advisory models to informal township supply chains and local savings circles, while partnering with GIZ and the PYEI on the YD-Colab to map youth-focused support organizations. Complementing this geographic expansion, initiatives like the Advancing Women's Empowerment Fund trained ESOs and women's rights organizations to challenge gender biases in traditional screening, redesign incubation for female-led businesses, and align grassroots inclusion with rigorous investor due diligence.

By systematically upgrading how local intermediaries adopt technology, structure programming, and engage informal and underrepresented markets, ANDE helped transform fragile support hubs into durable anchor institutions capable of sustaining local small business growth.

Breaking Funder Silos through Curated Convenings

International development funding is frequently siloed: bilateral agencies, private family foundations, commercial impact funds, and DFIs often design parallel programs with minimal coordination, resulting in duplicated grant competitions and inconsistent reporting requirements for local ESOs. To foster genuine ecosystem collaboration, ANDE established the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Convening (EECO)—donor-focused retreats that brought together 30 to 50 senior leaders from donor agencies including USAID, the OECD, Citi Foundation, Ford Foundation, and Swisscontact, as well as numerous private philanthropies.

Held under the Chatham House Rule, EECO sessions encouraged funders to move beyond institutional marketing and openly address portfolio roadblocks, co-investment opportunities, and shared evidence. These curated exchanges generated tangible field alignment: 95 percent of surveyed participants reported forming concrete institutional partnerships, including joint program implementations between SECO and GIZ, as well as blended finance facilities co-designed by Swisscontact and Triple Jump.

By providing an environment focused on candid peer exchange, ANDE helped funders align their strategies and reduce fragmentation across regional markets.

Policy Integration and National Ecosystem Strategies

As ANDE's regional chapters matured into trusted local institutions, the network moved beyond market research to help shape national policy. Acting as an objective technical resource to regional governments, bridging the gap between frontline capital providers and national ministries.

In South Africa, the chapter's applied research on township economies led to direct policy appointments, including representation on South Africa's StartUp20 Working Group under the G20 Presidency, while the Department of Small Business Development incorporated ANDE's metrics into the National Entrepreneurship Strategy. In Guatemala, the GEDI initiative convened policy roundtables with the Ministry of Economy (MINECO), the Ministry of Finance, and local funds to address regulatory barriers affecting angel investing syndicates and crowdfunding. By connecting local practitioner networks to public institutions, ANDE demonstrated that sustainable ecosystems require enduring institutional bridges between government strategy and frontline enterprise finance.

Reflection: Enduring Ecosystem Challenges and the Path Forward

Over seventeen years, ANDE's steady progression—from defining an asset class, to deepening specialized practices, to embedding networks into national policy—fundamentally transformed the landscape of enterprise support. Yet as these ecosystems matured, they also brought into sharp relief the complex market dynamics that remain across emerging economies. As ANDE closes its doors, these enduring challenges will define future efforts to sustain and build entrepreneurial ecosystems globally.

A Still-Missing Middle

While institutional capital dedicated to SGB investment vehicles expanded beyond $17 billion across 500+ funds, actual deployment drifted steadily upmarket toward larger, growth-stage transactions. The early-stage financing gap—enterprises seeking risk capital between $20,000 and $250,000—remains structurally broken. Because median fund sizes stabilized between $35 million and $50 million to achieve institutional viability, standard 2–2.5 percent management fees cannot cover the high fixed legal, audit, and diligence costs required to underwrite small tickets in frontier markets. Furthermore, the broad "SGB" label may have obscured crucial distinctions: many high-growth tech ventures can absorb staged equity, but the vast majority of emerging-market enterprises are commercial "dynamic enterprises" requiring a portfolio of working capital, asset-backed debt, and revenue-share instruments.

ANDE and its members pioneered blended finance facilities, returnable grants, and regranting funds that demonstrated how concessional capital can unlock private coinvestment. Many of these models remain project-bound, though, and the sector has yet to build self-sustaining, local-currency capital structures that don't rely on donor subsidies.

The Capital City Bubble

A mature entrepreneurial ecosystem must reach beyond metropolitan centers. Up to 90 percent of early-stage risk capital and formal accelerators remain concentrated in tier-one capitals like Nairobi, Jakarta, and Mexico City. Outside these centers, secondary cities, rural economic corridors, and informal township economies operate under fundamentally different commercial realities. They face sparse entrepreneurial density, fragile physical infrastructure, and severe deficits in basic professional accounting services. In some informal economies, documenting cash flows or registering an enterprise can expose small businesses to extortion and physical security risks. Standard cohort acceleration models imported from primary capitals falter in these settings; true localization requires business support tailored to local supply chains, informal credit circles, and working-capital friction.

Financial Sustainability of Local Intermediaries

The health of an ecosystem depends on its local Enterprise Support Organizations (ESOs), yet intermediaries face a persistent business model paradox: they are expected to accelerate external ventures toward financial sustainability while operating on fragile, donor-aligned budgets themselves. Early-stage entrepreneurs in emerging markets often cannot afford to pay commercial consulting rates. At the same time, taking a small equity stake in their businesses rarely pays off in cash because local stock markets are illiquid and acquisitions are rare. Consequently, local ESOs remain dependent on short-term international donor grants that restrict overhead and dictate thematic priorities. This dynamic drives project churn, prevents deep institutional specialization, and incentivizes local organizations to run introductory workshops over long-term accompaniment of high growth-potential firms. Strengthening local support systems requires a funding environment that provides multi-year, flexible general operating support to build autonomous, durable local institutions.

A Legacy Entrusted to the Field

ANDE sunsets its operations having achieved its foundational mission: the small and growing business movement is universally recognized, open-source diagnostic and measurement tools are widely adopted, and regional chapters have fostered an extraordinary generation of local leaders. Yet field-building is not a project with a neat final deliverable. Structural market frontiers—most stubbornly the persistent early-stage financing gap in the missing middle and the financial sustainability of local intermediaries—remain complex and ongoing. While ANDE helped prove the thesis of enterprise-led development, the work of addressing these deeper market dynamics is inherently iterative, requiring continuous experimentation long after initial platforms are built.

As the sector transitions from centralized global coordination to decentralized, local execution, it faces a vital coordination challenge. Ecosystem infrastructure—shared datasets, impact standards, policy alignment, and neutral convening—operates as a public good that benefits the entire field, but by nature lacks a single commercial owner. The enduring risk is not a lack of commitment, but the loss of a collective, neutral "big tent" that keeps capital providers, capacity builders, and policymakers talking to one another rather than drifting back into isolated silos. Preserving the momentum ANDE built will require local and global leaders alike to intentionally steward and co-invest in the shared connective tissue that keeps entrepreneurial ecosystems whole.



ASPEN NETWORK OF DEVELOPMENT ENTREPRENEURS

Honoring 17 Years of Shared Impact

Founded in 2009, the Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs (ANDE) set out to prove a simple idea: small and growing businesses drive inclusive economic growth, and they succeed when backed by strong local ecosystems. Over 17 years, a founding coalition expanded into a network of more than 750 organizations across Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia.

Today, the ecosystem ANDE helped organize is fundamentally more resilient, connected, and locally led—which is why ANDE is concluding its operations. This retrospective preserves the lessons, evidence, and shared insight forged over nearly two decades, ensuring they remain accessible to the local leaders shaping the future of the field.

The Aspen Institute extends its deepest gratitude to the staff, Advisory Committee members, ANDE members, donors, and partners who made this movement possible. We are proud to have played a role in building a global entrepreneurial ecosystem that will continue to thrive for decades to come.