

How to assess the impact of core support grants?

Experiences of the Ford Foundation in Indonesia

Based on TAI Funder Call on 17th of April 2024



Discourse on system change and trust-based philanthropy is becoming widespread, but we use these terms with different expectations and understanding of them. While most funders would not argue with principles of trust, equity and inclusion, they are also concerned about the impact of their investments. Funders want to be able to measure what philanthropic capital brings to communities. At this call we explored ways to measure the effectiveness of complex social changes and more flexible and longer-term support donors are offering to grantee partners.

At this call we heard about the experiences of the Ford Foundation offering unrestricted support to its grantee partners.

Eszter Filippinyi from the Trust, Accountability and Inclusion Collaborative interviewed Maryati Abdullah, Program Officer for Natural Resources & Climate Change at the Ford Foundation's office in Jakarta, Indonesia. Maryati brings extensive experience working on transparency and accountability, economic development, and governance in the extractive industries.

Eszter asked Maryati about how the Ford Foundation approached grant-making strategy. She also asked why in Maryati's view unrestricted support was relevant and what changes it could bring. What are the Ford Foundation's approaches to assessment of these core support grants? Finally, asked Maryati about how the Foundation contributed to the sustainability of its grantee partners, beyond the flexible and long-term financial support.

What we learned about the BUILD Program:

PRESENTATION SLIDES

The Ford Foundation has 11 offices worldwide and the Natural Resources and Climate Program (NRCC) operates in seven of them, Indonesia included.

The Ford Foundation introduced a special program in 2016, called BUILD, to strengthen institutions and improve capacity of organization and networks. This is not only a core support program but also for a longer-term, on average for a five-year period, and it is combined with targeted organizational strengthening support, across all geographies where the Ford Foundation operates.

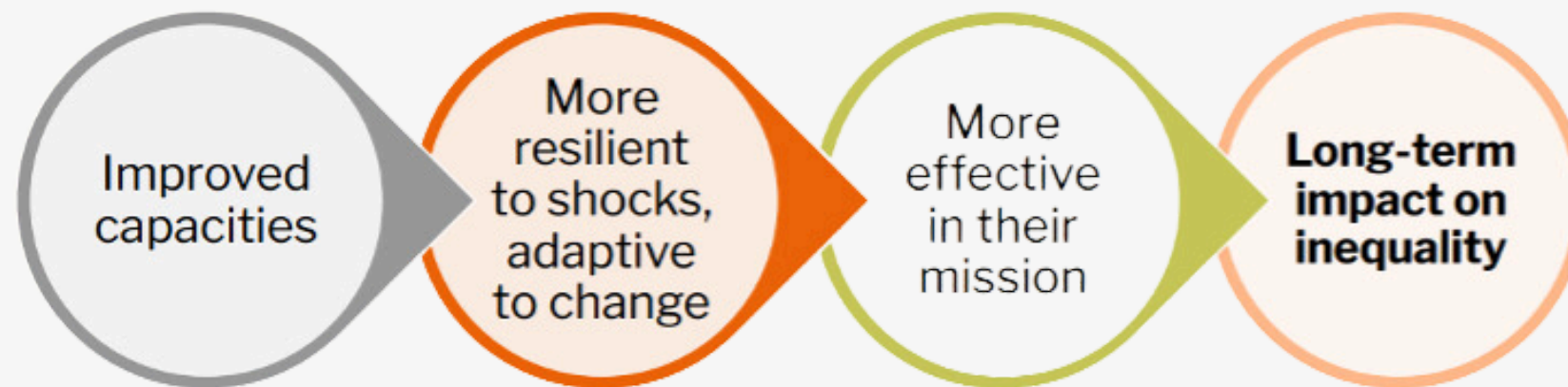
The program teams assess the socio-political-economic context. The Foundation sees itself as part of the ecosystem of actors that aim to achieve social justice. As such, Ford Foundation investigates its own role in this ecosystem and sees it as addressing inequalities.

BUILD is a 2billion USD program for a period of 12 years. So far, 1,6billion has been committed and it has supported more than 500 social justice organizations in 45 countries, 67% of them being women-led.

Through the program organizations get technical accompaniment to successfully address organization transition, leadership change, and create more adaptive financial structures. Organizations gain deeper understanding of their role in the social chain, political economy, and civic space constraints to run their mission more safely, creatively, and effectively.

BUILD's Theory of Change

Long term goal: Resilient civil society organizations and networks power lasting reductions in inequality.



To select partners for the BUILD Program, program staff assesses the role of organizations in the specific Ford Foundation's thematic portfolio – looking at organizations' experience and mission, and also their role promoting social justice, equity and democracy.

The program offers core support because in this way organizations have flexibility to invest funds where they most need it and adapt to rapidly changing contexts. For instance, in Indonesia, organizations working on anticorruption experience pressure from the government, military, police, and other stakeholders, and are often concerned about staff's safety. With the BUILD grant, organizations can provide physical and digital security training to their staff, purchase equipment, provide a more secure office, or contract staff they need.

When reporting about their work, the focus is less on the number of beneficiaries or concrete project achievements and more on assessing organizational improvements, e.g. how did the financial resilience of the organization improve.

Ford offers to its grantees an open source Organizational Mapping Tool (OMT), in several languages, including in Bahasa, and also available on mobile phone. With this tool grantees can assess their organization, involving staff, board, and communities they serve.

As areas for strengthening are identified, Ford can provide technical assistance through third party, called Resource Hub Supporters. In Indonesia there are three partners who can offer different types of support related to finance, resilience, communication strategy, and civil society. Through the BUILD program grantees can also have access to independent consultants, for instance to help build their stories.

Key Program Features

Grantmaking	Beyond the Grant	Evaluation	Philanthropy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi Year Commitments • Flexible Funding • Core support for institutional strengthening • Two POs (RPO + BUILD PO) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational Mapping Tool (OMT) to help you assess priorities • Cohorts, convenings and technical assistance (CCTA) Technical assistance, peer learning, cohort-building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does BUILD work? How? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influencing donors to give more multi-year, flexible support focused on institutional strengthening

Ford Foundation

The Learning component is key for the success of the BUILD Program.

Ford Foundation's program staff in New York and in the seven offices where the NRCC Program operates, set together the aims of the program and conduct regular grants checking.

The Foundation offer periodic possibility for BUILD grantees to convene and discuss their successes, challenges, and ways in which they can address these. Through these learning discussions partners also talk about the content of their work and how to adapt/change their strategies for better results. In Indonesia for instance, Maryati could see organizations expanding their strategies to also address the climate crises, give public opinion in the media on economic analysis based on data sources they share with each other.

These learning spaces are also an opportunity for coalitions of indigenous, environment, and grass root human rights defenders discuss strategies to address intimidation and criminalization by companies.

Learning is happening in many ways, through consultants but also through peer-to-peer exchange among partners and the Ford Foundations staff. The OMT helps organizations to identify challenges and describe risks, but with the constructive aim of strengthening the organization. Reporting back on progress made in this process is not very strict, except for the financial reporting to ensure sustainability of the grantee partners.

Moreover, exiting grantees of the BUILD Program can become (if they want) trainers of the new BUILD grantees. In this way and over time, trust is built among the program staff of the foundation, grantees and consultants.

Questions from participants included:

- 1 What are the outcomes in terms of grantee partners' confidence in the subject areas and their strategies becoming more robust and dynamic?

For the BUILD program success means that organizations are more resilient and can adapt. This means not simply surviving as an organization but becoming a stronger player advancing their mission and able to amplify their work, for instance by working in network.

- 2 What is the relation between the BUILD Program and the Waving Resilience initiative?

The latter is a result of the learnings drawn from the BUILD Program and based on the belief that vibrant civil society and robust civic space are the essential elements for a functioning and inclusive democracy.

- 3 As BUILD Grants only reach a selected number of grantees, are you including principles and learnings into program/project support grants?

Financial assessment and improving diversity and inclusion targets of the organizations is brought into the regular grants. The networks are also benefiting all grantees, and they are all part of the ecosystem, learning and brainstorming together – including across geographies.

For BUILD now comes the 2.0 phase, integrating learnings and developing BUILD exit strategy.

- ◆ If you want to learn more about the BUILD Program we invite you to read the [2022 BUILD Report](#)
- ◆ During the call we spoke about efforts by funders creating database of consultants with equity lens, one example being the [Nonprofit Builder](#)
- ◆ If you have more questions or would like TAI to share your experiences assessing core support grants please contact us at: efilippinyi@taicollaborative.org