



Community Development

THE ASSET BUILDING APPROACH

The Asset Building and Community Development Program of the Ford Foundation makes grants in four fields that provide a focus for comparative and collective work to reduce poverty and injustice in diverse political, economic, social, and cultural contexts worldwide. The four fields are: Community Development; Development Finance and Economic Security; Environment and Development; and Workforce Development. The Assets Program also supports the field of Sexuality and Reproductive Health in collaboration with the Foundation's other two programs, Peace and Social Justice and Knowledge, Creativity and Freedom.

The fields within the Assets Program operate on the understanding that the poor are most likely to make durable improvements in their lives and communities through the cultivation of assets – financial, human, social, and natural resources – that enable them to exert more control over their lives and participate in society in meaningful ways. A healthy field includes a critical mass of people and organizations working in a variety of ways on a common problem. Emphasis is placed on strategic collaboration that encourages information exchange about best practices and lessons learned across differing contexts around the world.

OUR FOCUS

THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FIELD works to foster healthy, equitable communities with a strong civic culture where low-income people have opportunities to build a spectrum of individual and collective assets. The residents of poor urban and rural communities build assets through organizing efforts and political mobilization, increasing the availability of goods and services, locating employers, initiating physical and infrastructure improvements, strengthening social bonds, enhancing cultural knowledge and practices, and cultivating opportunities.

The Foundation's work reflects recent advancements in policy and approach developed by academicians, practitioners, and public sector and business leaders who recognize that effective community development focuses on the benefits of diverse, inclusive, mixed communities. The community development field is evolving toward innovative methods for tapping into the rich resources and creativity of residents and leaders in low-income communities. Successful community development encourages people's initiation of and participation in social change within their communities, and establishes new relationships with other communities and with institutions and agencies outside their boundaries.

THE CONTEXT

Impoverished urban and rural communities around the world struggle with disadvantages rooted in structural inequalities, including social isolation, fragile institutions, and lack of resources. Chronic under-investment by the public and private sectors, increased concentration of wealth, and the failure of governments to improve conditions in poor areas have contributed to the fragility of low-income communities. Migration trends in both developed and developing countries exacerbate problems, draining communities of upwardly mobile residents, triggering conflicts, or placing additional burdens on service delivery systems.

In many settings around the world, institutions that could facilitate asset building are weak and face a hostile or weak policy environment. Cultural issues can hamper community development efforts, either because western assumptions intrude in other local contexts, conflicts erupt between recent and established residents, or exclusionary and rigid indigenous cultures prohibit equity and full participation.