



Environment and 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 ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT FIELD supports community development strategies that convert natural resources and environmental services into assets that benefit low-income people. Natural assets include the forests, farmland, fisheries, water, and air that are crucial to sustaining life, livelihoods, and local economies in rural and urban communities. Environmental services range from promoting clean air to carbon capture and storage, maintaining biological diversity, and contributing to the capacity of watersheds to replenish and purify water. Respect for indigenous cultural values is an important component of these strategies.

A key aspect of this field is assisting partners in responding to changing contexts for their work. This includes support for community-based groups, technical assistance and policy analysis organizations, and mainstream conservation organizations that address socioeconomic needs of impoverished residents. The Foundation also helps enhance collaboration among grantees and other institutions to ensure that effective policies are implemented, as well as to develop the social capital that supports sustainable development in a range of contexts from industrial economies to rural enterprises in developing nations.

THE CONTEXT

In much of the world, low-income people lack access to vital natural resources and they are disproportionately exposed to pollution, toxic contamination, and other environmental hazards. Unsustainable patterns of development, production, consumption, and distribution have exacerbated inequity, threatened cultural values, and degraded vital environmental resources. Since ecosystem products from developing countries are underpriced, wealthy countries continue to increase consumption, compounding environmental problems and inequities.

The environment and development field is at a critical juncture. On the one hand there is growing understanding of the importance and feasibility of simultaneously achieving economic prosperity, social equity, cultural integrity, and environmental protection, but on the other hand we see increased disparities and economic pressures that undermine opportunities to adopt policies to support integration of social and environmental goals. There are growing networks among community-based groups working on the ground, but the task of helping them face the growing challenges at the global level is critical.