



Better Funding Case Study

Towards an ecosystem of trust: Rebuild India Fund's model for collective resilience

CONTEXT

The Rebuild India Fund was launched as a relief initiative at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in India, in April 2021. Recognizing the long-term impact COVID will have on India's vulnerable communities and the need to stand in solidarity and support community-based organizations (CBOs), Dasra and Tarsadia Foundation expanded the scope of the Rebuild India Fund to be a platform that champions proximate leadership.

The Rebuild India Fund focuses on building and fostering India's vulnerable communities with flexible funding and need-based capacity building support.



This case study was developed in close collaboration with the Rebuild India Fund team to offer a deeper look into their model, values, and the practices behind their work.

While the insights were gathered through a Q&A format, we have organized them into key themes to make the lessons more accessible and actionable for peers in the field.

Together, these reflections shed light on what it takes to support community-rooted organizations with trust, flexibility, and care.

| Why Rebuild India Fund was created



In the wake of COVID-19, it became very clear that the organisations standing closest to their communities were not the large, visible NGOs. They were the smallest groups with the smallest budgets: often invisible on Google, led by people from the very communities they served, and doing the most critical and context-driven work.

When we looked deeper, we saw a long-standing pattern. Locally led organisations had been historically underfunded, despite carrying the deepest community trust and the strongest understanding of local needs. Their proximity allowed them to move quickly, adapt, and hold nuance in ways traditional approaches often miss.

The Rebuild India Fund was created to shift this reality: to back these organisations with the kind of flexible, long-term support they have always needed. The fund draws inspiration from the Global Fund for Children, the Ford Foundation's BUILD program, and the Orange County Community Foundation, all of which champion smaller, community-rooted organisations through trust-based support at scale.

| Their model and goals

The Rebuild India Fund aims to build resilience in India's most vulnerable communities by strengthening locally led, community-rooted NGOs through multi-year flexible funding, capacity building, and visibility support. Our portfolio decisions are guided by an equity and inclusion lens: focusing on organisations that work with historically, socially, and systemically marginalised communities.

Our understanding of **resilience** includes three elements:

- 1. Organisational:** stronger teams with lower turnover, healthier cultures, clearer succession plans, and leadership beyond the founder.
- 2. Programmatic:** interventions that can go deeper in impact while expanding to reach more communities.
- 3. Financial:** the ability to move away from short, project-based grants toward predictable, multi-year funding that allows for long-term planning, innovation, and sustained work.

Ultimately, the goal is to help organisations outlive their founders and create lasting, systemic change.

| How they find partner organisations



Our cohort represents a pan-India, community-led portfolio. We fund organisations working across rural and tribal geographies, urban informal settlements, climate-vulnerable regions, and hard-to-reach pockets that are largely invisible to mainstream philanthropy.

The issue areas include:

- livelihoods
- gender rights
- education
- health access
- climate and natural resource management
- mental health
- forest rights and tribal governance

Most are small NGOs with annual budgets under INR 1–2 crore (approximately \$110,000 to \$220,000 USD): low online presence, limited fundraising capacity, but extremely high trust and impact within their communities.

Instead of open applications, we use a network-led discovery model. We tap into Dasra's 25 years of sector experience and work through nodal partners who deeply understand grassroots ecosystems.

From cohort three, we also began a **peer recommendation model**: organisations already in our portfolio nominate others doing important, locally led work. This helps surface groups that are highly trusted locally but may not have the digital visibility or bandwidth to enter competitive selection processes.

| Reporting and accountability



Our reporting approach is simple, supportive, and designed for learning.

1. Annual reporting:

Once a year, we collect information on fund utilisation, organisational strengthening, programmatic outcomes, and stories of change. This helps us understand how flexible funding is being used: from covering core costs to investing in fundraising systems to rolling out employee wellness programs that shift how philanthropy thinks about impact.

2. Quarterly check-ins:

These are informal conversations to understand each organisation's resilience journey, offer troubleshooting support, and respond to evolving needs. The focus is on partnership and learning, not compliance.

| Advice to funders

To work with grassroots, proximate organisations, funders must start from a place of participation and trust. These leaders already hold deep trust in their communities: they carry lived experience, social capital, and credibility that cannot be replicated through external frameworks.

Funders need to mirror that trust in how they give. This means:

- Offering multi-year flexible funding.
- Trusting leaders to know what their organisations and communities need
- Funding institutional and people-related costs without hesitation.
- Reducing administrative burdens that take time away from community engagement.
- And, importantly, using your own networks and influence to champion these organisations and help shift power outward.

When funders participate meaningfully, trust organisations fully, and actively open doors for them, it transforms not only the organisations but the entire ecosystem surrounding them. This is how philanthropy can move from transactional support to long-term, community-led change.



| Open invitation for Collaboration

The Rebuild India Fund is one of the few large-scale initiatives in India working to mainstream flexible, multi-year, trust-based giving for grassroots organisations.

We are committed to learning from other funders and are always open to conversations on collaborative philanthropy, shared learning, and reimagining power dynamics in funding.



To connect with the Rebuild India Fund or any of its partner organizations, reach out to:

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