



Building resilience in a shifting political climate

Taso Foundation

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- › **Case study focus:** Resilience Grant
- › **Participation in collaboration groups:** Feminist Fund Database; Participatory Feminist Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
- › **Country:** Georgia
- › **Region:** Eastern Europe/Central Asia
- › **Type of fund:** National
- › **Size of fund:** Small
- › **Fund programme areas:** Mobilization of rural communities, awareness building, capacity strengthening for local activism and economic resilience, intersectional collaboration across the country

Executive summary

This case study highlights how the Fenomenal Funds Resilience Grant helped strengthen **the operational and strategic resilience of the Taso Foundation**—a small national women’s fund operating since 2007 in Georgia, a country fraught with political volatility and regional insecurity. The grant provided the Taso Foundation with the **critical flexibility** to invest in its internal capacity, adapt to external internal and external challenges, and continue supporting marginalized communities in a complex environment.

With the grant, the Taso Foundation transitioned to a more **collaborative governance model, developed key organizational strategies, and expanded its monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices**. These internal shifts enhanced the fund’s ability to mobilize resources and sustain operations during a challenging period marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, economic hardships, and heightened geopolitical pressures following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

This investment highlights the critical importance of flexible funding in supporting women’s funds to thrive amid uncertainty, strengthening their role as pillars of resilience for their communities.

Additionally, the Resilience Grant facilitated opportunities for the Taso Foundation to focus on collective care and build a robust foundation for long-term sustainability by addressing immediate needs—such as ensuring staff wellbeing, maintaining salaries, and enhancing communication strategies. The grant also assisted the fund in **enhancing its knowledge-sharing and participatory processes**, allowing it to foster stronger team cohesion, create space for strategic growth, and sustain its partnerships with grassroots organizations. As well as receiving the Resilience Grant, the Taso Foundation joined two collaboration groups—**Participatory Feminist Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning and the Feminist Fund Database**—providing it with further opportunities for knowledge-sharing and communication.

The case of the Taso Foundation underscores how adaptable, well-supported women’s funds are essential to fostering collective action, advancing gender equality, and responding to the evolving challenges of volatile regions.

Introduction

This case study tells the story of how the Fenomenal Funds Resilience Grant supported the work of the Taso Foundation in Georgia. A membership-based national women’s fund that contributes to the feminist and social justice movement in the country, it is focused on grantmaking, educational, and capacity building programmes. These programmes directly focus on mobilizing rural activists and communities, raising awareness, building skills and competencies for local activism and economic resilience, and fostering strong intersectional collaboration among diverse groups in the country.

We begin by setting the sociopolitical scene in which the Taso Foundation conducts its work. Then,

we present three key aspects of its journey with the Resilience Grant:

- 1. Investments in internal capacity strengthening:** How the Taso Foundation used funds from the Resilience Grant to invest in its staff, in terms of competencies, wellbeing, and salaries;
- 2. Implementation of new strategies and enactment of a leadership transition:** The changes the Taso Foundation made to its governance structure and some of its internal strategies;
- 3. Strengthening their relationships with their partners:** How internal investments have allowed

the Taso Foundation to improve relationships with their partners and sister funds.

The case study concludes with a reflection of the effects of the Resilience Grant on the Taso

Foundation, particularly affording it a sense of confidence despite the political turbulence surrounding its work. Finally, we outline some of the fund's plans and aspirations for the future.

Operating in an increasingly unfriendly environment for feminist funds

The start of this decade marked a critical turning point for the Taso Foundation. First, the COVID-19 pandemic struck, during which partners from rural areas faced significant issues related to accessibility, including limited internet access and a lack of owning devices and gadgets. Furthermore, the Taso Foundation suffered from a technical glitch which it then lost all of the data from its website. Amidst all of this, the foundation was attempting to move forward with a leadership transition that would result in a more horizontal working culture.

Since 2022, the geopolitical situation in Georgia has brought about further challenges. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Georgia has faced increased insecurity and pressure from the Russian government. Further, the pro-Russian Georgian government has intensified challenges for civil society through its policies, and the country has seen a rise in anti-human rights policies that threaten the work of feminist funds.

Locally, communities are becoming more polarized, with specific challenges emerging in different villages and regions. The situation worsened in 2024

when the Georgian parliament adopted the 'Foreign Agents Law' (first introduced in 2023), which categorizes Western-backed non-governmental organizations (and media) as 'foreign agents', modelled after a similar law in Russia. During these two years, massive protests were held in Georgia's capital, Tbilisi, and other big cities for many months, which escalated further in November 2024. The awareness about the impacts of the law and its influences became the most relevant and valuable work for the Taso Foundation to do in the country's regions, so it modified its activities to focus on democracy building and independence.

At the time of writing this case study (December 2024), Georgia is experiencing a critical political crisis following a stolen election and the Georgian Dream party's decision to stop the process of European Union integration. These developments have sparked massive, ongoing protests in the streets, which have now been occurring for more than 20 days. As citizens demand a new election, the demonstrations have been met with widespread rights violations, including mass arrests.

Uses and effects of the Resilience Grant

Investing in human resources and internal capacity strengthening

For the Taso Foundation, the Resilience Grant offered opportunities for **organizational growth**. Unable to regrant the funds to their programmes, the

fund shifted its focus on building resilience. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it used part of the grant to cover staff insurance, provide flexible working conditions, and maintain strategic communication during lockdowns by equipping team members with Zoom accounts, paid mobile services, and new laptops. "During this turbulent time, our organization

kept operating with ongoing projects and our capacity building activities across the regions,” one foundation member shared.

“We didn’t know what the future held, but the grant allowed us to retain staff and keep paying salaries, especially when we shifted to virtual activities. This was crucial for us.”

The grant also helped the Taso Foundation **expand its team and invest in staff capacity building**. It secured training in M&E, accounting, and language classes, while also supporting financial staff in learning accounting programmes. Part of the grant was also used to engage in **collective care practices**—such as wellbeing training on physical and psycho-emotional safety, reflecting on how stress manifests within the organization. Other practices, such as breathing exercises, open discussions on anxiety, and a dedicated chat during demonstrations to ensure staff safety, have also become integral to the team’s work.

Enabling cultural transition around governance and decision-making

As the Taso Foundation grew, its members revamped several strategies, including governance, resource mobilization, and M&E. A key priority before receiving the Resilience Grant was to update the internal governance structure, which had been challenging due to contextual and financial constraints. Previously, the foundation was led by an executive director—but the Resilience Grant facilitated it with the space to transition to a shared governance model involving a board of five women, two heads, and a constituency assembly, creating a more horizontal management structure.

The shift to a **participatory leadership and governance model** led the Taso Foundation to prioritize collaborative processes both internally and in its programmes. They now engage in joint

planning, ensuring team input on strategic direction and project development, and fostering synergies and shared ownership across the organization.

With the grant, the Taso Foundation also **developed key organizational documents, updated work manuals, and created a strategy for its growth**.

The team invested time and resources in creating a comprehensive M&E strategy and practices, and hiring an M&E consultant to support the process. Fundraising and communication strategies were also updated as part of the overall organizational development.

Communication, a previous area of struggle for the foundation due to lack of capacity, received significant focus. Rather than just disseminating general communications, the team created a **comprehensive communication strategy** to ensure key information reached all relevant audiences—including women, grantee partners, donors, and the government. To achieve this, the Taso Foundation now uses diverse formats like storytelling, infographics, and videos. One of its most successful campaigns involved rural women producing three-minute films on the foundation’s programmes, which were shared on the fund’s social media.

Supported by the Resilience Grant, the redevelopment of the fund’s website was another major achievement, helping to strengthen its operational, resource mobilization, and communications work.

Better supporting partners

The Taso Foundation’s programmatic work focuses on strengthening and building the capacity of its partners through knowledge and resource sharing. It also provides learning opportunities to women and organizations in remote villages and regions. For example, in 2021, around 10 community organizations and funds engaged in four training modules led by the foundation on strategic planning, communications, fundraising, and M&E. After receiving the Resilience Grant, the foundation was able to better support partners in these areas.

The Taso Foundation also used part of the grant to organize its resource library—including feminist books, women’s oral histories, and various foundation-supported publications—that it shares with its partners. This was critical, as supporting the creation of and sharing feminist knowledge is central to the foundation’s work.

Finally, **the Resilience Grant assisted the Taso Foundation in renewing its approach to relationship-building, emphasizing the importance of multi-ethnic connections and networks for intercultural and intersectional movements.**

The grant facilitated their participation in two collaboration groups, allowing the team to connect with women’s funds worldwide and engage in mutual learning opportunities.

Conclusions

When the Taso Foundation received the Resilience Grant, it was able to complete a leadership transition, invest in a number of institutional facets (such as communications, resource mobilization, and M&E strategies), expand staff numbers and provide better packages for them, prioritize internal capacity building, and follow through on operational projects. Thanks to the grant, its programmes in various regions “were made possible”.

Overall, the Resilience Grant was an opportunity for:

› **Internal capacity strengthening**, through the guarantee of salaries, insurance during the pandemic, new trainings for staff, and prioritizing care and wellbeing activities;

› **Enacting a more horizontal leadership transition and updating multiple strategies** around governance, communications, resource mobilization, and M&E;

› **Strengthening its relationships with partners and sister funds**, as investments in its team, capacity building, and governance and strategies, have put the fund in a stronger position to support and connect with others in the ecosystem.

Despite the contextual barriers and current volatile political situation, the Taso Foundation is becoming more resilient as time passes. As one team member revealed, “the Resilience Grant was a wonderful opportunity for us to teach, to learn, to provide.”

What are the next steps for the Taso Foundation?

Looking ahead, the Taso Foundation is prioritizing the mobilization of additional funds to sustain and expand its work in an increasingly volatile region. The Resilience Grant has supported the foundation in strengthening its resource mobilization capacity and developing a comprehensive fundraising strategy, addressing past challenges in securing support from larger donors. As its work continues, further investment will be crucial to build on these gains.

The foundation is committed to fostering collaboration and creating a holistic working environment that prioritizes collective care. The team emphasizes that meaningful, collective action requires both time and resources.

Resilience, they argue, is best achieved through flexible funding and collaborative efforts—underscoring the critical and transformative role of continued investment and support for organizations operating in challenging geopolitical contexts.

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