

Resilience Fund Expert Stakeholder Meeting

22–23 May 2019

An expert stakeholder meeting of the Civil Society Resilience Fund Against Organized Crime took place on 22–23 May 2019, preceded by a launch event for the new fund on 21 May. More than 40 stakeholders from five continents and over 25 countries took part, from diverse disciplines and of wide regional representation, including NGOs, government representatives, activists, journalists and media organizations.

The detrimental impact of organized crime is becoming felt increasingly, particularly in its capacity to penetrate and compromise states; warp the process of democracy, regulation and the rule of law; violently erode the safety, security and life chances of communities; and in its degrading impact on the environment. There are now a growing number of countries where the state has been compromised or replaced by criminal governance, both in remote communities and urban metropolises.

Although criminal governance does not manifest itself in the same form in all parts of the world, there tend to be common characteristics, including the use and threat of violence; the targeting of women, girls and young people; efforts to control economic activity and resources; and influencing citizens' access to political and judicial recourse.

One of the principal challenges of responding to organized crime has been the capacity of criminal groups to target and capture those agents of the state whose function is to prevent and proscribe their operations. Civil society and non-state actors have therefore become critical protagonists in the fight against organized crime, and protectors of the vulnerable in the absence of an effective state response. They are active in multiple ways and under different institutional guises – for instance, community groups, academics, the media, labour unions – everywhere in the world where organized crime is now present.

However, civil-society institutions and courageous change agents find themselves at great risk, working in dangerous environments and targeted by criminal groups. Nascent community and civil-society efforts to mount a response are often constrained by limited resources and face huge obstacles. Such initiatives, while calibrated to specific contexts, often also have common objectives, namely to reveal criminality and corruption; organize around community resistance and community protection; agitate to

have actors' voices heard on larger national or international platforms; and to call for attention, action and support.

With the support of the Government of Norway, the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime established in March 2019 the **Civil Society Resilience Fund Against Organized Crime**.

The goal of the Resilience Fund is to put the weight of the international community behind individual and collective community activists, journalists, youth groups and community-based initiatives.

The fund has been designed to support three inter-related resilience activities, which were identified during the inception phase to guide the process of identification and prioritization when it comes to selecting grant recipients. In this process of identifying recipients, there are no hard-and-fast rules, however, because criminal governance is an evolving phenomenon that does not manifest itself in the same way in every context, and dynamics may change or mutate over time.

Activities that the Resilience Fund aims to support fall under the three following windows; these are designed to complement and support each other, and, in some cases, grantees may fall into more than one category.

1. Counter-crime advocates

Actors with credibility who are prepared to speak out against injustice, and call for a response when human and economic rights and social norms and protections are violated are a critical force in addressing organized crime at all levels. Building up the evidence base by documenting and publishing data on organized crime is also a part of this agenda. The fund supports gang 'interrupters' who focus on mediating and reducing gang conflict, and community groups who seek ways to reclaim 'space' from organized crime, reversing or weakening criminal governance.

2. Independent investigative journalists

In many contexts around the world, independent journalists have proven themselves to be catalysts of effective responses to organized crime. Journalistic investigations of criminal networks have unseated the corrupt, revealed their egregious activities and encouraged calls to action. Grass-roots journalism is particularly important in parts of the world where criminal governance is high, or where state and mainstream media are suppressed and pressured into silence. Unfortunately, journalists the world over all too regularly pay with their lives for their commitment to their vocation and cause.

3. Community resilience initiatives

This window of the fund endeavours to identify, engage with and support civil-society groups, including women's and youth groups, as well as religious organizations, among others, that target those made vulnerable to organized crime. It can also outreach to and fund private-sector entities, where their involvement can catalyze responses to illicit economies, or build the resilience of communities with legitimate livelihoods.

INCUBATING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

The Resilience Fund was designed to identify, support and strengthen resilience activities at the community level. It aims to support those community-driven activities that are already proving their value in combating criminal governance, or protecting those most vulnerable to it. The fund endeavours to incubate such agents, thereby increasing their impact. The Resilience Fund is being carefully crafted in order not to replace resilience of local actors with dependence on outside assistance.

As an incubator, the Resilience Fund has been designed to:

- Position itself to provide sufficiently long-term commitment to support and enlarge efforts that are bearing fruit, envisaged on a progressive sliding scale, whereby grants increase in size over time as absorptive capacity is proven, coupled with technical and capacity support to make those initiatives sustainable independently.
- Provide technical assistance and 'matching' mentoring with other similar initiatives through a global resilience network, in order to promote peer learning, social innovation, experience sharing and best practice.
- Document, through a range of methods, and give voice to those to share their initiatives and needs on a broader platform, both to highlight their intrinsic value, and to attract further attention to their needs.

- Convene and connect successful resilience activities to longer-term sources of funding, including international, national, public, and private sector sources of funding. Where appropriate, the Resilience Fund may support the design of sustainable community cooperative funding models.

Whether it is to provide services, promote safety, raise awareness or change attitudes – or indeed design innovations born of local need that we may not yet have identified – the Resilience Fund will support such initiatives by allowing individuals and organizations to benefit from financial and/or capacity support. But, irrespective of the context, the fund will ensure that recipients can operate independently and thrive on their own merits.

OBJECTIVES OF THE EXPERT STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

The expert stakeholder consultation was intended as a first step to understand the nature of the challenge, to test the assumptions and design of the Resilience Fund, and to take stakeholders' guidance on how the Resilience Fund can add the greatest possible value to civil-society change agents working in contexts of acute criminal governance.

The main objectives of the meetings were to:

1. Identify where the fund can add best value in incubating and supporting community responses against organized crime.
2. Learn from experiences of a wide range of actors of the potential areas of work the fund can target.
3. Identify the main potential difficulties in implementing the fund.
4. Capture recommendations and strategic advice on the configuration of the fund.

The discussions were conducted over three plenary sessions, and then stakeholders were divided into two groups, one to discuss the resilience and activism priorities of the fund, and a second that focused on the media and journalism. The two groups had three rounds of discussions focusing on the specific concerns of both stakeholder groups, including a discussion on best practices and lessons learned; mapping the existing organizations and sources of funding; and finally exploring how the catalytic support of the fund can be made sustainable over the long term.

THEMATIC REPORT OF DISCUSSIONS

The following sections summarize the key points and themes discussed during the sessions.

1. Funding Categories and building networks

The funding categories proposed by the fund are not so clear-cut in practice. Participants said that the lines between who might be a journalist, an activist or a resilience worker are often blurred, and people can perform multiple, overlapping functions. For example, it was emphasized that a journalist's story on its own does not achieve change; it is only when civil society follows up and acts on it that real change can happen. This should be recognized in the implementation of the fund.

The advice of the expert stakeholders was not to segregate the windows, but to do everything we can to build up reinforcing multi-sectoral, inclusive approaches. For example, when supporting initiatives, the fund could prioritize joint grants between journalists and activists as a mechanism to bring both actors together and create visibility to communities' stories and leaders.

2. Engaging with state and local institutions

It is impossible to isolate civil society from state institutions. Although civil society plays an important role in combating criminal governance, for civil-society activities to be effective and sustainable, they need to work with local authorities and to reinforce them.

These points came through strongly in the presentation given by the International Committee of the Red Cross, from their experiences in Brazil, and the ensuing discussion. Participants made it clear that a level of cooperation and understanding with the local authorities is necessary in the delivery of impactful and sustainable community projects. At the same time, civil-society projects need to remain independent from the local authorities, and do not need to seek 'permission' to undertake their work. Police work also needs to be supported by community responses, including understanding the drivers and dynamics of violence, and why people get involved in criminal activities. In certain cases, it is necessary to understand how to replace the power of organized crime when it has been effective in providing resources and has been legitimized by the population.

The importance of understanding the contexts of local communities, including the local authorities, will be key to achieving success with the fund's grants. Overall, the need to integrate engagement with local

authorities should remain a key element of the grants' sustainability strategies. Even while supporting civil society, therefore, the Resilience Fund should aim to make connections and build up and reinforce state capacity to deliver where it can.

3. Existing resources and projects

It is imperative to use the resources that already exist, and to help organizations and entities make those connections to existing resources. The expert stakeholders advised against trying to create new initiatives, or to duplicate services that are already provided by other local or national actors, or by authorities themselves. They emphasized that there is no need to invent new ways of doing things, but that it is better rather to build up a sustainable capacity that is embedded in the local context. In allocating grants, there was a recognition that providing support, facilitation and space for grantees to plan, prioritize and connect to other actors may be more beneficial a service for the fund to provide, rather than just disbursing funding.

A key objective of the fund is to ensure sustainability, and to incubate long-term solutions in communities.

4. Demonstrating impact

Ensure the ability to demonstrate impact. From participants' experience, civil-society initiatives are taken seriously only when their results and impact can be demonstrated. Having a data-driven approach, therefore, is critical.

There are a number of ways that the Resilience Fund can support civil-society actors in their efforts to demonstrate the impact of their work. Firstly, the fund could support projects that are building up civil-society data sources on relevant phenomena. Secondly, the fund should work with grantees to build in impact metrics and to undertake monitoring and evaluation activities of their projects. The Resilience Fund should think of providing tools for data gathering, impact measurement, identifying results, mapping and monitoring. Thirdly, the Resilience Fund should itself build up a strong monitoring system for impact and research support to measure its own results and ensure that promising practices that can demonstrate impact can be documented and disseminated. The Resilience Fund can itself demonstrate impact on a broader level, which will generate a body of evidence and lessons learned for these kinds of approaches, and model how other donors might provide similar support in other contexts.

5. Sustainability

Building long-term sustainability into Resilience Fund projects. The discussions under themes 1 to 4 above will all help create more sustainability for the projects supported by the fund. However, sustainability and scaling up impact need to be considered at the outset when designing projects supported under the fund. It was encouraged to provide tools to help projects achieve this from the outset.

Ways this could be achieved would include progressive funding tranches, where future funding would be considered not only on projects' operational performance to date, but also on the extent to which they had prepared for secure future sustainability. The Resilience Fund can offer its good offices to help its grantees connect to longer-term and sustainable sources of funding.

Stakeholders encouraged the Resilience Fund to broaden the donor base to ensure the future funding sources, working in concert with existing donors to bring in new ones.

6. Safety and security

The Resilience Fund needs to take safety and security seriously for all actors benefiting from the fund, tailoring approaches to the needs of the individual. The fund is already working with, and will continue to with, people who face threats and defenders in risk areas. Security training and risk-mitigation policies will continue to be developed for the Resilience Fund.

The stakeholders outlined many scenarios of danger and risk that present themselves to activists, journalists and others working in high-risk environments. It was clear the types of risk and danger that they face varies, according to the context, which means it is therefore necessary not only to develop optimum security awareness policies and practices, but also to be able to tailor these to particular circumstances.

For example, one observation made was that the fund might increase the public spotlight on grantees' activities. This could be a positive effect for journalists, for example, who wish to raise the profile of the harassment or persecution that they are facing, and they may actively seek to raise their profile through the fund. However, others may need to keep their links to the fund low profile, so as not to draw attention to themselves. Those managing the fund should therefore be conscious of these differing needs.

Specifically, for journalists, the dangers of investigative journalism are complex and vary according to the local environment. Due to the type of information they aim to uncover, there are sometimes restrictions on what they can publish on their platforms, which is something the fund could consider supporting.

Other actors in the journalism field were also mentioned as being susceptible to risk, albeit without the same recognition as journalists. For example, 'fixers', who sometimes do the most dangerous work, were highlighted as people who are low paid and sometimes vulnerable whilst not being often recognized as such.

SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The participants brought a wealth of experience in the areas of community responses to organized crime, delivering development programmes and reporting on organized-crime issues. The mix of perspectives from different fields and regions was diverse, but cohered into a set of useful recommendations that will help guide the work of the Resilience Fund:

1. The Resilience Fund should be flexible in the distribution of grants to the different categories of funding recipients and should encourage projects that work across those categories.
2. The Resilience Fund should develop its ideas for acting as a platform for networking among all those groups and individuals working on community responses to organized crime, based on its ideas for a resilience network.
3. The Resilience Fund should encourage projects to work in connected ways with civil-society organizations, and by engaging with state and local institutions in order to deliver more ambitious change.
4. The Resilience Fund should develop its objectives to incubate long-term solutions by working with partners with a proven track record of delivery, and to help them to make use of existing networks and resources to amplify and sustain their efforts.

5. The Resilience Fund should empower projects to demonstrate impact by providing guidance on monitoring and evaluation, and by ensuring that plans to demonstrate impact are embedded in its projects from the outset.
6. The Resilience Fund ensure sustainability not only through sound project design, but also as a standalone element to be considered in project design.
7. The Resilience Fund should tailor security and safety policies to individual needs and consider actors who are vulnerable but not traditionally associated with risk, such as media 'fixers'.

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