



FUNDING THAT GOES FURTHER

A snapshot of how Freedom Fund partners are using unrestricted Elevate grants

November 2025



BACKGROUND

The Freedom Fund established the Elevate program in 2022 as a means of providing trusted partners with flexible funding that they can allocate according to their priorities. Elevate grants were to be the latest in a series of trust-based mechanisms that the Freedom Fund had rolled out to support partners' institution-building efforts, including its Organisational Capacity Analysis Tool and associated funding, flexible implementation grants, and investments in partner leadership.

The innovative aspect of the Elevate program was its fully unrestricted nature. There is a widespread recognition across the philanthropic sector that unrestricted funding can provide numerous benefits to non-profits, not least the ability to invest in their organisations. Nevertheless, frontline organisations in the Global South continue to receive the vast majority of their funding in the form of restricted, project-based grants. The Elevate program aimed to help remedy this for selected implementing partners by providing one-time unrestricted grants of US \$50,000.

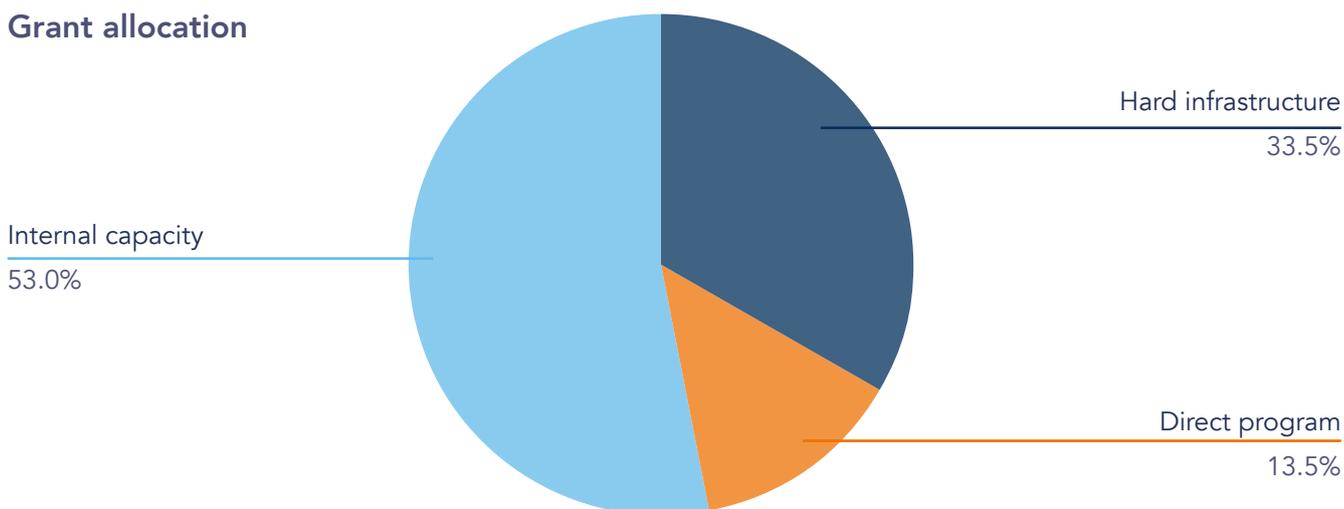
To date, the Freedom Fund has provided Elevate grants to 18 partners in Ethiopia, Nepal, Thailand and Myanmar. Of these, 7 have been fully spent down and the remaining 11 are in progress.

To get a sense of the difference that these grants are making, we interviewed ten partners across four countries and reviewed their grant documentation. The following offers some observations and case studies on the impact of the Elevate program thus far.

Front cover: Samundri is a member of a farming group, facilitated by Freedom Fund partner Community Improvement Center, made up of members of the Harawa-Charawa community who pooled their resources to lease a plot of land to grow fruits and vegetables. ©Eva Jew/The Freedom Fund

HOW HAVE GRANTEES USED THE FUNDS?

Grant allocation



The above chart gives a rough breakdown of how the ten grantees that were interviewed have allocated their funding on average.

- **Internal capacity** denotes anything to do with strengthening organisational policies and systems, hiring consultants (including for fundraising), and training staff.
- **Hard infrastructure** refers to building offices or other structures, such as for training or income generation; rent, furniture and electronic equipment such as laptops, machinery (again for income generation, see case studies below); vehicles and motorbikes, etc.
- **Direct program activities** includes providing emergency support to victims, expanding or covering gaps in existing programs, and innovation.

IMPROVING FINANCIAL STABILITY

The strongest theme to emerge from partners is their use of Elevate funds to improve their organisations' financial sustainability. This takes many different forms. Several partners are using Elevate grants to **diversify their funding**, including through generating new, non-grant sources of income. For example, in Nepal, **Community Improvement Center** (CIC) has used the funds to construct a bamboo treatment centre to generate income for its activities and **Shripurraj Community Development Center** (SCDC) is building an agricultural training centre. In Ethiopia, **Organization for Prevention Rehabilitation & Integration of Female Street Children** (OPRIFS) has purchased sewing machines and created a garment production facility.

Other organisations have invested the funds in consultants to help them develop **new funding proposals**. In Thailand, **Stella Maris Seafarer's Centre** used the grant to develop several proposals, leading to new funding from the ILO. In Nepal, SCDC has recently been shortlisted for two grants, both of which came from Elevate-funded proposals.

Two organisations invested Elevate funds in developing videos, pamphlets, impact documentation and other materials to help them promote themselves to new donors.

STRENGTHENING ORGANISATIONAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES

A number of organisations are using Elevate funds to strengthen their internal policies, practices and systems. In Ethiopia, **Beza Posterity Development Organization** (BPDO) realised that many of their organisational policies were outdated. To help them comply with both donor requirements and local government regulations, they have hired consultants to help upgrade and train staff on a whole array of policies, including on procurement, finance, human resources, grant management, safeguarding, and logistics and transport. "This will help us line up with global changes, and get our organisation in a position to raise new funding," said Ayene Retie, BPDO's Program Director. Other organisations are following suit. In Nepal, for example, CIC has invested Elevate funds in developing new financial and human resources policies.

INNOVATION AND “HARD TO FUND” ACTIVITIES

Raks Thai decided to use the Elevate grant to support a project that they could not fund from other sources. Leveraging their existing infrastructure of field offices around the country, which serve vulnerable communities on issues like health and child welfare, they launched a new service providing labour rights advice, legal aid and a hotline for labour abuse cases. This service built on a previous Raks Thai project on labour rights, supported by the Freedom Fund, which ended in 2023. Also in Thailand, **Foundation for Education and Development** (FED) used some of their Elevate funding to pay for activities that they struggle to raise money for from other donors, such as advocacy with the provincial government.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND SURVIVOR CARE

The flexibility of the Elevate grant has enabled organisations to plug gaps and respond to emergencies. In Myanmar, both **Kachin Women’s Association Thailand** (KWAT) and **HTOI Gender and Development Foundation** have used the funding from Elevate to keep safehouses going and provided emergency care for trafficking victims. In Ethiopia, OPRIFS has particularly valued being able to “respond to urgent needs of survivors without waiting for the donor”. In Thailand, FED responded to the severe flooding that affected southern Thailand in November 2025 by re-allocating 50% of its remaining Elevate funds toward providing emergency relief to migrant workers in the region.

OTHER IMPACTS

Perhaps the most striking finding to emerge from the conversations is how rare unrestricted funding is among the Freedom Fund’s partners. **Eight out of ten partners had never received an unrestricted grant before.** The two organisations that had received unrestricted funding before—KWAT and HTOI—said that those other grants operated differently from Elevate grants; they could choose how they allocated the funding, but had to submit a plan in advance and then stick to it. This differs from the total flexibility afforded them under the Elevate program. In effect, the Elevate program is completely unique among Freedom Fund grantees operating in these four countries.

With unrestricted funding being such a rare commodity, it is not surprising that grantees talk about it in glowing terms. They describe not only the substantial benefits they have accrued in terms of financial sustainability, organisational strengthening and quality, innovation, and ability to respond to emergencies, but also some less tangible impacts.

Several mentioned that they were able to **leverage the Elevate grant in conversations with other donors**; that the fact that they had been granted unrestricted funding by a respected donor increased the credibility of their organisations. This led to further opportunities, such as BPDO receiving 5,000 Euros from GOAL for capacity building work that builds off the Elevate grant. In Nepal, CIC used the Elevate grant to engage in conversations with three of their existing donors regarding whether these donors could provide similar funding.

Other recipients of the Elevate grant describe significant positive changes to staff morale and wellbeing as a result of the grant, as they see their senior management investing the funds in the financial sustainability of their organisation as opposed to living “project to project” as many are forced to do. In Myanmar, KWAT describes the relief and peace of mind that staff feel knowing that they have the security of the Elevate funds in their bank account in case of emergencies.

In at least one case, a partner affected by USAID cuts was able to retain key staff members thanks to the Elevate grant.

CASE STUDIES

The following case studies illustrate the diverse impact of the Elevate grants.

Case Study 1: Organization for Prevention Rehabilitation & Integration of Female Street Children (Ethiopia)

Elevate Focus: Income generation / Financial diversification

Summary: OPRIFS invested the majority of their Elevate funding in establishing a small-scale business involving a mini garment production facility. The business produces clothing for youth in shelters and sells to the local market, generating consistent revenue to support OPRIFS' programs for supporting survivors and vulnerable children. The funds were used to purchase modern sewing machinery, and the sewing work is done by domestic worker returnees from the Middle East on a paid contract basis. Over the next 2-3 years, the goal is for the facility to generate profits covering 20-30% of OPRIFS operating expenses.

"We knew it was important to diversify our income away from grants, but we couldn't find the funding to invest," said Habledengil Takele, OPRIFS focal point on the Elevate grant. "The Ethiopian government changed the law in 2019 to allow NGOs to generate their own income, but it wasn't until the Elevate grant came along that we could do it. We actually had no idea unrestricted funding existed before the Freedom Fund [offered us this grant]."

Impact:

- **Diversified income:** Planned 20-30% of operating expenses covered by garment production.
- **Staff morale boost:** Elevate created a sense of ownership and motivation among staff, also excitement that OPRIFS is taking practical steps toward sustainability.
- **Institutional learning:** Staff gained experience in business planning and social enterprise development.
- **Community benefits:** Garment facility created small scale employment for returnees, as well as new partnerships with government, local organisations and private sector.





Case Study 2: Kachin Women's Association Thailand (Myanmar)

Elevate Focus: Emergency funds / General organisational stability

Summary: At a time of funding cuts from a number of donors, KWAT used its Elevate funding to conduct a restructure of its staffing, phasing out certain positions in a responsible way. KWAT also used the funding for strategic planning ahead of its 13th congress next year, and to provide emergency funding for staff at one of its safehouses. Approximately half of the grant has been converted into a reserve fund to be saved for emergencies, giving the organisation much needed peace of mind at a time of crisis both in Myanmar and across the NGO sector.

According to Jessica Nhkum, KWAT's General Secretary, KWAT made the deliberate decision not to use the Elevate funding for program activities. "We have lots of needs right now," said Nhkum. "Conflict, rights defenders [under pressure], displaced people, but we can get funding for these emergencies from other funders. The unique thing about the Elevate grant is that we can use it for our own emergencies, if we have troubles. That gives us security."

Like many NGO staff supporting communities in Myanmar from a base in Thailand, Nhkum and her team face constant risks. "It's very risky without long term visas," said Nhkum. "They can send us back to Myanmar [at any time]. But if we have an emergency now, we can use Elevate to secure expensive travel documents." Nhkum notes that for some other donors, funds may be flexible, but they still need to be spent every quarter, so this does not provide security. Having some funding in reserve reduces anxiety among staff.

"This kind of flexible grant, it impacts the whole organisation," said Nhkum. "Like if your finger is hurt, the whole body hurts, so this type of support keeps the whole organisation healthy, filling the little gaps that would cause pain."

Impact:

- **Organisational efficiency:** Facilitated a staffing restructure and responsible phase out of positions.
- **Strategic planning:** Created time and space—and met meeting costs—for long term thinking.
- **Emergency support:** Provided small amounts of funding for shelter staff salaries.
- **Security fund:** Contributed to peace of mind and reduced anxiety by giving staff the knowledge that funds were in the bank to cover emergencies.

Case Study 3: Foundation for Education and Development (Thailand)

Elevate Focus: Fundraising / Organisational development / Emergency relief

Summary: FED, which works with migrant fisher communities in Thailand, allocated its Elevate funding across several areas, including staff salaries, advocacy, strategic planning, safeguarding and other training, and office equipment. It also created a series of informational videos for Facebook providing critical information about health and other issues to migrant communities, garnering over 8 million views.

“This is the first time that FED has received unrestricted funding,” said Min Oo, Elevate Focal Point at FED. “The grant’s flexibility allowed us to pay for advocacy meetings and transport that we would not have been able to pay for with other types of funding. It provided relief after recent cuts and HR challenges that we have gone through.”

In November 2025, FED decided to re-allocate 50% of its remaining Elevate funds to provide emergency relief to migrant workers severely affected by flooding in southern Thailand.

Impact:

- **Organisational development:** Five training events with FED staff and local network partners on issues such as safeguarding.
- **Videos and information pamphlets for migrant communities:** 24 videos receiving a total of more than 8,000,000 views.
- **Advocacy:** Five advocacy meetings with the provincial government.
- **Emergency aid:** Provided emergency relief to migrant workers in southern Thailand.





Case study 4: Shripurraj Community Development Center (Nepal)

Elevate Focus: Infrastructure / Income generation / External comms

Summary: SCDC is investing its Elevate grant in three areas: an office building and training hub, proposal development, and communicating about the organisation's impact.

The largest share of their budget is allocated to a new office building. This will be a multi-use facility that will include a training hall and small business rental spaces. As the local area is a centre of mango cultivation, SCDC's vision is to develop the facility into a "Mango Hub" where raw materials can be processed and marketed, creating a sustainable funding stream and contributing to organisational resilience.

The organisation has developed a fundraising strategy that involves preparing 18 proposals over 2025 and 2026. The Elevate grant has already helped SCDC pay for consultant support on eight of these proposals, of which two have resulted in SCDC being shortlisted for the grant (as of late 2025 they are still waiting to hear on the six others).

In 2026, SCDC plans to allocate the remaining Elevate funding toward developing promotional videos. SCDC has been working in the community for nearly four decades, but newer officials and donors, and some in the community itself, are unaware of their historical achievements. They intend to hire consultants to prepare video clips about the organisation and its past work for fundraising and marketing purposes.

"Since 1991 we have never had [unrestricted] funding like this," said Binod Chaudhary, Team Leader of SCDC. "Once we were given 65,000 rupees (US \$450) for constructing an office, but we had no land to build on so we had to return it. Our Board gave us land 15 years ago, but because of lack of resources we couldn't use it. The Elevate grant helped to fulfill our long-held dream. We are deeply grateful for this support."

Impact:

- **New permanent office and training centre:** Goal is to use this centre to generate income for the organisation's work in the community.
- **Proposal development:** Consultant support to generate up to 18 funding proposals over two years.
- **Promotional videos and impact story:** Video development planned for 2026 for use in fundraising.

VISION

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MISSION

We invest in frontline organisations and movements to drive a measurable reduction of modern slavery in high-prevalence countries and industries.

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