



Mona Foundation Handbook

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Mona Foundation Handbook

Who we are, what we do, and how we do it at a glance

Introduction

This document provides a brief overview of Mona Foundation' history, our mission, core values, our approach, our guiding principles and how we measure our effectiveness.

Who We are

Mona Foundation supports grassroots educational initiatives that provide education to all children, empower women and girls, and emphasize character education and service to the community.

Our goal is to alleviate global poverty and contribute to creating a just and prosperous world for everyone such that no child ever goes to bed hungry, or is lost to preventable diseases, or is deprived of education for lack of resources. We believe that the keys to alleviating poverty are universal education, gender equality, and community building.

Since 1999, Mona has awarded more than \$11 million to 42 educational initiatives in 20 countries, providing access to quality education, empowerment programs and training for more than 429,000 students annually.

Mona was founded in 1999 by a small group of people who drew their inspiration from the Baha'i principles of justice and equality, universal education and indiscriminate service to humanity. We seek to work with like-minded people or organizations, locally, nationally and internationally, to demonstrate in action that people of all backgrounds can come together in the service of our common good.

The foundation is named after a 16-year old girl who was executed in 1983 in Iran for her beliefs as a Baha'i and for teaching children's classes. Mona loved children and had volunteered in an orphanage since the age of thirteen. Her courage to stand for what she believed, her youth, and her dedication to justice and service inspired us to name the foundation after her.

Our Core Values

We believe that the key to alleviating poverty and achieving positive community transformation lies in universal education and gender equality. Mona Foundation integrates the following universal values in all aspects of its operation:

Oneness and unity

- We are all created noble with capacity to learn, explore, create, and contribute to the building a better world

Service to all

- Regardless of gender, race, religion, ethnicity, nationality or economic status
- Supporting social and economic development projects focused on education and improving the status of women and girls

Fostering unity in diversity

- Preserving the diverse cultural heritage of the people we serve
- Building collaborative relationships & supporting others to develop themselves

Integrity, accountability and transparency

- Embodying trustworthiness and committed to operational excellence and meeting our commitments
- Operating in such a way that it is easy for others to see what actions are performed and results achieved

Consultation as a medium of decision-making

- Seeking and respecting the diversity of views
- Searching for truth. Arriving at, and rallying around the group decision

Continuous learning

- Engaging in continuous cycle of consultation, action and reflection to learn from experience and improve year-on-year.

Our Guiding Principles

Our framework and approach to development act as a guide and influences the way we think of social action and change. At the heart of this framework lie our beliefs about the nature of human beings. These beliefs are Baha'i inspired and universal in their nature and include:

Oneness of the world of humanity – That all men are created equal¹ and that each person, regardless of economic status, has the right, the capacity and the responsibility to be the protagonist of the process of their own development, and contribute to the betterment of their communities.

This view of human beings does not permit us to regard people as helpless victims nor as passive recipients of aid. Rather, development work based on this view tries to tap into the vast pool of capabilities of local people and to empower them to become the protagonists of their own development.

Coherence of material and moral/spiritual dimensions of human reality – that development should not only be defined by material goals, e.g. the building of the infrastructure or academic achievement, rather, and perhaps more importantly, by the degree to which the participants in the process have the moral capabilities such as integrity, trustworthiness, commitment to service and justice needed to improve their lives while contributing to the betterment of their communities.

Coherence between the material and spiritual does not imply that the material goals of development are to be trivialized. It does reject, however the definition of development as the transfer to all societies of the ideological convictions, the social structures, the economic practices, the models of governance—prevalent in certain highly industrialized regions of the world. When the material and spiritual dimensions of the life of a community are kept in mind and due attention is given to both scientific and spiritual knowledge, the tendency to reduce development to the mere consumption of goods and services is avoided.

Equality of men and women – that community development can only happen when men and women have and enjoy equal rights and opportunities and equally participate in this process.

This point of view on social and economic development is in clear contrast with the view that divides the world into “developed” and “underdeveloped” where development is considered a product to be delivered from those in one part of the world to the peoples in another.

A common example is for a government or a donor in economically prosperous country to provide funds to a local agency so that it can, in turn, implement an effort somewhere in the “developing world.” The recipient agency then finds ways to set up its activities either directly, or in collaboration with local counterparts. In such cases, development activities are often not managed at the grassroots, but by the funding agency that is far removed from the real work being carried out at the local level.ⁱⁱ

At Mona Foundation, development is seen as fundamentally spiritual in nature and a process, the main protagonists of which are the people themselves, irrespective of the degree of their material prosperity. We believe that development activity emerges from within a community and belongs to the people and institutions that are implementing the effort.

While social action is directed towards visible improvements of some aspect of life, its primary goal is to develop people’s capacity to make decisions about their development and then to implement them at increasingly higher levels of complexity as they learn through their own experiences.

At the level of practice, this framework translates into the following essential requirements for sustained social and economic developmentⁱⁱⁱ:

Organic growth - Development is a long-term process. Any development effort must originate at the grassroots level by members of the local community. Over time, through a process of consultation, action and reflection, the community builds its own capacity to implement projects of increased complexity.

Capacity building - Capacity building is directly related to learning how to work towards goals in a disciplined way, how to foster openness in decision-making by engaging in community consultation, how to build relationships based on collaboration and service to others, and how to develop the skills a commitment necessary to generate and apply lessons learned to build even more capacity.

Fundamental to this belief is the conviction that every person has a part to play in building a prosperous and just society. At the level of the individual, capacity building implies developing a number of interrelated capabilities—scientific, artistic, technical, social, moral, and spiritual. They

will need to understand not only concepts, but also master the methods, and have the skills, attitudes, and qualities required to lead a productive life.

At the level of organization, capacity building implies Institutions acting as channels through which the talents and energies of individuals and groups can be expressed in service to humanity.

AT the level of community, capacity building implies creating an environment where individuals can come together in collective action to serve the best interests of their communities to larger numbers in more complex and sustained ways.

Local ownership, local solutions - Every community has their own set of unique challenges and solutions. For every community and every country development needs to be responsive to local aspirations and initiatives. Development ideas and projects should not be imposed from outside the local community. National or international knowledge about proven and well-conceived development approaches can be shared as long as the local community remains owner and creator of their own solutions.

Action learning - As with any new skill, engaging in learning through a systematic and ongoing process of consultation, action and reflection designed to bring about consistent patterns of change, is essential to developing the capacity and skills we need to build a better world together.

Service - Development is sustained and sustainable when service to others is the core value that drives our everyday actions as individuals and as community members. Service to others helps us be the best we can be and exponentially increases our impact in whatever step we take for the betterment of ourselves, our communities and our nations.

Our Focus

Universal education, gender equality and community transformation remain the focus of all Mona Foundation activities.

Universal education: Learning is intrinsic to human reality, and everyone deserves the opportunity to receive a quality education. Mona Foundation finds locally operated programs that educate people of all backgrounds and raise the status of girls and women.

We believe that sustainable development is a process in which individuals, communities and institutions build capacity and are the protagonist of their own development plans. Educated communities are healthier, more sustainable, and less vulnerable to economic volatility.

Gender Equality and women and girls' empowerment: Providing equal educational opportunities to girls and women yield a higher rate of return than any other investment that can be made in our communities. Equality not only guarantees basic rights, it is also vital to promoting the robust, shared growth needed to end extreme poverty. World Bank data demonstrates that gender equality and economic development are inextricably linked and increasing education specifically for girls and women has a direct effect on a nation's economic development. ^{iv}

There is also a multiplier effect to educating girls and women. More educated women tend to be healthier, participate more in the formal labor market, earn more income, have fewer children, and provide better health care and education to their children, all of which eventually improve the well-being of all individuals and can lift households out of poverty. These benefits also transmit across generations, as well as to communities at large. (World Bank report on education of girls, 2016.)

Community building: All people have the right and the responsibility to lead their own lives and to contribute to the betterment of their own communities. The individuals most affected are the ones most ready to affect change.

Supporting communities in their own self-advocacy promotes empowerment, rather than dependency. Many students we support work with their communities to establish literacy programs, women health centers, parental trainings, cleanliness drives, tree plantations, and many other programs that stimulate harmony and community building in their communities.

Our Approach

We partner with community-led organizations that educate and serve everyone, empower women and girls, improve economic opportunity for all, and catalyze individual and community transformation.

Our Philosophy of Education

Our view of education is informed by our understanding of nature of human reality - multifaceted and endowed with hidden potential – an ongoing process of learning and experiencing to develop its three inherit and interconnected capabilities:

- **The capability to reason** (rational faculty), learn, think, explore, innovate, and discover
- **The capability to acquire attributes** such as justice and empathy, and create beauty as in music or fine arts
- **The capability to love, care, serve the social good, and search for meaning beyond the obvious**

This view of education is reinforced repeatedly by the experience of the projects we support as the key lever in creating and sustaining positive change and shaping more just and equal communities at the grassroots level.

Our Reach

Since 1999, Mona has granted \$11 million to 42 projects in 20 countries, supporting the education of 429,000 students, teachers and parents annually. In 2018 we supported partner organizations in US, Haiti, Panama, Brazil, Vietnam, China, Mongolia, Gambia, Sierra Leone and India.

Channeling Financial Resources

Our relationship with the development organizations we support is naturally governed by the core values that inspire us, and the principles that guide our work. As such, we believe that the responsibility for managing all aspects of implementing the project being funded rests with the project.

We see our role as the representative and voice of the project, and act as its advocate before our donors. We do so while honoring and meeting our full fiduciary responsibilities to our donors by following our grant proposal submission, approval, and reporting guidelines, and provide full transparency and accountability for all our actions and decisions.

Our project selection criteria ensures that Mona Foundation only supports local educational institutions who have a proven capacity to utilize funds effectively, and the ability to interact well with outside donors.

- ✓ The program is founded and operated by residents
- ✓ The program addresses a vital and significant deficit in the basic needs of children, needs which prevent the full development of their capacity as productive members of their society. These needs must include education, but also may include housing, food and basic health care.
- ✓ The program serves children of all backgrounds, regardless of age, gender, race or ethnicity, religion, and economic status.
- ✓ The program has a focus on education of girls and women.
- ✓ The program seeks to develop human resources for the community.
- ✓ The program has a historic rate of success, having been established and functioning for a significant period and not less than three years.
- ✓ The program enjoys the support of the local community.
- ✓ The program administrators of the school have shown a long-term commitment to the development of the program
- ✓ The program administrators have the capacity to effectively manage receiving funds from external agencies.
- ✓ The program administrators are active participants in developing and implementing plans and require and enjoy the participation of the community.

We rely on the International Baha'i Development Organization (BIDO) when we select projects founded by the Baha'is¹. BIDO was established in 1983 by the Baha'i International Community to facilitate learning about social and economic development. BIDO helps to strengthen institutional capacity in countries where Baha'i inspired development efforts exist by fostering and supporting the learning process through community consultation, action, study and reflection, and through systematization of experience and training

¹ Baha'i activity in the field of social and economic development seeks to promote the well-being of people of all walks of life, whatever their beliefs or background. It represents the efforts of the Baha'i community to effect constructive social change. Its purpose is not to teach the Faith nor convert, rather, as an expression of a deeply held set of beliefs, to engage in indiscriminate service to the world of humanity for the betterment of our collective world.

BIDO has been our trusted advisor to Mona Foundation since our inception. They are in touch with local grass-roots NGOs implementing the development projects and monitoring their activities and progress and know when these NGOs have the experience and the institutional capacity to receive and manage funds from external sources. Thus, we have the advantage of working together with local partners who have a positive track record, have demonstrated trustworthiness and reliability and have the capacity to collaborate with external funding agencies.

What Distinguishes Mona

- ✓ We focus on education and gender equality as the root causes of poverty and the key levers of progress
- ✓ We are a bottom-up organization. We believe that development happens when the local community owns and leads the change by analyzing, diagnosing and addressing their own issues to catalyze sustained community transformation.
- ✓ We partner with local organizations that build capacity at the grassroots, and establish long term relationships with them to sustain community-led positive impact
- ✓ We support character education and ethics to develop citizens who contribute to the betterment of their own communities and ultimately their nations.

How We Measure our Effectiveness

In the past two years we have worked with each of our partners in the field and an advisory committee to identify field-relevant indicators of sustained positive change.

The Mona Foundation's field-generated evaluation and monitoring framework reflects their experiences and input and measures our partner's progress as indicated by:

Program Outcomes: Improving access to education as indicated by improved infrastructure and sufficient supplies; increase in number of students enrolled; and increase caregiver and community engagement in education.

Student Outcomes

Improving teaching and learning as indicated by increase in teachers' skills and knowledge; increase in number of students who pass national exams and increase in number of students who transition to the next level of education or into work.

Social Outcomes

Transformed communities, as indicated by most significant change stories as qualitative examples of sustained change, realized a result of improvement in students' character development, life skills and service to community.

These indicators align with 2018 World Bank report on "LEARNING to realize education's promise". Evidence to-date shows that change is sustained when:

1. Through the development process Individuals become change agents in the development of their communities,

2. Women and men enjoy gender equality, and
3. Resilient grassroots organizations catalyze social change.

Our Exit Strategy

We believe that our uncommon strategy of long-term support of our partner projects is the key to sustained positive community change at the local level. The effect of this strategy has been dramatic. Several of our partner projects have been built from quite humble beginnings to effective and well-recognized educational institutions.

Our exit strategy is equally grounded in a relationship of trust and mutual respect and is arrived at in collaboration and consultation with our projects to optimize their continued growth to the next level of development.

The Foundation however will reserve its prerogative to cease funding of a project if:

- The project requests cessation of funding to focus on internal consolidation or development.
- Clear evidence is provided to the Board that the project does not have the capability to effectively manage funds received and the instance of fund mismanagement is proven.
- The project leadership or management is changed, shifting the focus of the project away any of the qualifying criteria mentioned above.
- Mona Foundation Board decides that for a variety of reasons that its funding does not make a material impact on the overall social or economic development of the individual, the organization, or the community.

ⁱ Reiterated in the Declaration of Independence of the United States, *“that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights....”*

ⁱⁱ BIDO, Channeling Financial Resources, February 2009

ⁱⁱⁱ BIDO, Social Action 2012

^{iv} Brookings Institute, Center for Universal Education, December 2016