Background. Time and again, private foundations have sought to achieve impact by supporting the development of human capital. Emerging fields of medical practice have been opened, and human knowledge carried forward and built upon by talented recipients of philanthropic educational support. The New York Times has noted, for example, that “[g]raduate fellowships are a mainstay of philanthropy, an area in which there is consensus that an investment produces a social return...” The Ford Foundation once supported a number of such fellowship programs around the world. Most, however, were terminated in the 1970s, when economic concerns forced the Foundation to scale back its grant-making. According to Susan Berresford, Ford Foundation’s president, hindsight has since persuaded many Ford officials that these earlier graduate fellowships—which supported such future leaders as the young Kofi Annan—had, in fact, been highly successful and were worthy of reconstitution. “The focus of the Ford Foundation’s major new investment in global human capital would be easing the disparity between those who—by reason of wealth, geography, connections, or whatever else— are benefiting from today’s knowledge-based economy, and those who, through no fault of their own, are at highest risk of being left behind.

Strategy. To that end, the Foundation in November 2000 announced the largest grant in its history: a $330 million appropriation, to be paid out in one year and spent over a period of ten, for the Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program (IFP).“ The Program provides full support for up to three years of graduate study at any university of the individual fellow’s choosing. Fellows are chosen on the basis of three criteria: academic excellence, leadership potential, and commitment to a career of service at the local or national level. They are free to pursue a Masters, Ph.D., or professional degree in any field, so long as it relates to work conducted in one of the Ford Foundation’s three broad grant-making areas: Asset Building and Community Development; Knowledge, Creativity, and Freedom; or Peace and Social Justice. IFP recruits fellows from twenty-one countries and territories in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Russia.

But living in one of these places and meeting the three criteria mentioned above are not enough. IFP Fellows must be people who, despite their evident potential, would otherwise be least likely to ever have the opportunity for international study and membership in the governing class. This means different things in different countries. In one place, for example, IFP might seek out female grantees; in another, members of a persecuted ethnic minority. So, while the particulars vary according to local conditions, Fellows are always drawn from the most at-risk, deprived elements of local society. As Ms. Berresford explained at the November 2000 announcement of IFP, this will “broaden the talent pool from which decision makers will be drawn so that people who normally would not be at the table have a chance to be there.” The program, which will run until 2012, seeks to support at least 3,500 fellows, each of whom is encouraged to apply his or her talents to achieving progress back home by means of a $1,500 stipend given for work within his or her home community at the Fellowship’s conclusion.” $280 million of the Ford Foundation’s grant defrays the costs of the fellowships, and $50 million supports the development of pipelines within universities in the developing world to enable them to prepare qualified students for IFP fellowship.

Outcomes. To date, over 1,500 Fellows have been selected, and have studied, or are currently studying, at some 300 universities worldwide. As of the end of 2003, 51 percent of the IFP Fellows were women, 61 percent were from outside the capital cities of their respective countries, and 5 percent were physically disabled.” More than half of all IFP Fellows have fathers who did not
advance beyond primary school.” Each of these metrics describes a group that, in much of the developing world, is usually at an acute disadvantage in seeking higher education or any significant voice in government. At the same time, more than 85 percent of the Fellows who had completed their studies had, as intended, returned to work in their home country, while the remaining 15 percent were pursuing further study at their host university."

**Impact.** It is, of course, still too early to determine the role of the Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program in developing a network of change agents who can uplift their own communities and bring to local and national governance the perspective of those whom globalization tends to leave behind. The outcomes described above suggest, however, that the Program is, at least, living up to Ford’s high expectations. As Senator Richard Lugar said at the official launch of the IFP, “the scope of this new program is breathtaking but it must be to meet a challenge that is truly awesome.” The International Fellowships Program is certainly one of the largest such efforts history. It is not nearly large enough to change the course of globalization or third-world development directly. However, the leaders it supports, and the engagement it fosters, may yet move mountains. As Susan Berresford declared at the Program’s outset, “[p]eople matter, even in this time of globalized forces that can seem beyond the control of individuals.... And widening the talent pool also matters if we hope to build stable and just societies.” With this massive ongoing initiative, the Ford Foundation is helping to uplift a sizable corps of leaders whose prospects would otherwise be circumscribed by the conditions of their birth. In so doing, Ford, like many foundations, is aiming squarely at the fulfillment of that hope.

**Notes**

1347. It is worth noting that this huge commitment drove Ford’s payout rate for 2001 to 7.2 percent, significantly higher than the minimum payout required by law.
1351. Ibid.
1352. Ibid.
1353. Ibid.