

Co-Impact's Approach to Gender Equality and Intersectionality

Co-Impact's goal is to ensure systems that provide the most fundamental services of health, education, and economic opportunity result in improved outcomes for millions of people. We believe that effective systems change requires a resolute focus on human rights, equality and inclusion – and needs to explicitly address discrimination and barriers on the basis of gender, and other socio-contextual issues such as race, caste, ethnicity, class, disability and sexual identity.

A major reason that systems do not work for people is that discrimination and exclusion are baked into their design and execution, often unconsciously. Where these forms of discrimination compound, it makes it particularly difficult to access opportunities and supports and live life to its full potential.

At Co-Impact, we use this intersectional lens to identify and understand the ways in which segments of the population are adversely affected by inadequate or perverse policies, misaligned incentives, and insufficient allocation of resources. This framing provides insights into ways in which certain groups based on gender, race, caste, ethnicity, class, disability, sexual identity, and other context-based drivers of marginalization are systematically underrepresented in the control and management of public (and often private) resources and excluded from exercising voice, setting agenda, and making choices. By understanding how a system fails certain constituencies, we can identify how to strengthen the system for everyone.

We apply this lens across our approach – in the problem analysis, program design, outcomes definition, measurement, and representation of women in leadership and governance. We also recognize that support for strengthening organizational capabilities to effectively design and promote gender transformative programs that work for all people, especially women who face multiple barriers to advancement. Accordingly, we expect and support our program partners to grapple with intersectionality as follows:

- 1. Problem Analysis:** As structural barriers against and exclusion of women are major and systemic drivers of underdevelopment and inequitable outcomes, we seek to understand the ways in which gender discrimination is baked into the system. As all inequality is not created equal and as these gendered systems intersect with other forms of discrimination. We support our partners to address how these overlapping elements compound to curtail opportunity. In the problem analysis, this includes a deeper, context-based understanding of specific manifestations of the problem, as well as the root causes of why the problems exist and persist. This includes who gets to define agendas, determine priorities, set norms, and enforce actions.
- 2. Program Design:** Consequently, to ensure a comprehensive and successful response, we expect that the root causes of discrimination driven by gender and other intersecting factors will be substantively and meaningfully addressed in the design of the systems change and leadership initiatives, including by addressing questions of voice, power, agency, representation, and accountability.

- 3. Outcomes Definition:** Co-Impact seeks to simultaneously advance three types of outcomes: people-level, systems-level, and organizational-level. For each of these levels, we encourage program partners to articulate and determine target outcomes that are disaggregated by gender, race, class, and other context-relevant categories to ensure that no one is left behind.
- 4. Measurement:** Because metrics drive behaviors by creating accountability and incentives, we support our program partners to construct, collect, and analyze measures of progress in relation to outcomes and overlapping dynamics, as well as representation and leadership, disaggregated by factors such as sex, race, and class. We support partners, for themselves and their institutional counterparts, to interpret and use this data to adapt and improve program design, practice, and ensure inclusive decision-making. An important element of our commitment includes integration of listening and responding to constituency feedback, particularly of those groups that lack voice and agency, in a systematic, ongoing, and meaningful way.
- 5. Leadership:** Patriarchal, racial, and other discriminatory norms and structures squeeze out talented people from leadership and decision-making. We therefore pay close attention to representation, leadership, and power as well as active and meaningful participation of women and other underrepresented constituencies at all levels in initiatives, partnerships, and institutions. This is particularly relevant to the senior management teams and governance positions of the organizations we support, in the choice of experts we consult, public meetings we convene, research and evidence we share and in how we communicate about our work.
- 6. Organizational Strengthening:** We recognize that many organizations, and particularly those based in the Global South and/or led by women, have been excluded from accessing adequate resources to invest in organizational priorities. For that reason, our systems change grants include a substantive amount to support our partners to strengthen critical capabilities and attain strategic coherence. In most cases, this will include support to partners to strengthen diversity and inclusion on their boards and leadership and build a more inclusive approach across program design and execution.
- 7. Internal Principles, Processes, and Products:** Gender equality and equity, using an intersectional lens, serve as a bedrock of Co-Impact's values, outlook, and practices. We use it to guide our internal processes in sourcing, vetting, due diligence, grantmaking, and support to our program partners. Gender and inclusion are strongly called out in how we select our partners, including our Open Calls process. Our review and selection process places significant weight on how marginalization on the basis of gender, race, caste, ethnicity, class, disability, sexual identity and other contextual factors is addressed, particularly in relation to representation, voice, agency, and decision-making. We seek to bring an intersectional lens to how we measure and evaluate success. Finally, we also seek to strengthen representation in our staffing and governance, in creating an inclusive and supportive environment in our organization, and how we engage with all our partners.