

Co-Impact: How we Support Partners to Advance Just and Inclusive Systems

The change we seek

At Co-Impact, we envision a world where all people can live fulfilling lives and systems and societies are just and inclusive. We stand for gender equality, where all women¹ have the opportunity to exercise power, agency, and leadership at all levels. Across both of our Funds we expect our partners will have a positive impact on hundreds of millions of people by 2030. Our full vision, values, and approach are described in detail in our [Handbook](#).

Why focus on systems?

Why systems: Most of life – how decisions are made, funds allocated, leaders promoted, services delivered, justice ensured – is organized in systems. If we want to have impact at scale², and have it last over time, we believe that we need to change how major systems are designed and managed.

Key systems: Many systems are important. We focus on systems that provide services of health, education, and economic opportunity that are foundational to human flourishing. We also invest in advancing women's leadership in professional and academic institutions of law and economics because these domains have a huge influence on how systems are designed, resourced, and managed.

The problem: Many public and market systems do not work for people because of two problems: they use ineffective approaches, and they discriminate against women and other groups. As a result, despite spending billions, these systems fail to deliver outcomes, exclude women from leadership and decision-making, and reinforce unaccountable governance structures, denying millions of people a life of dignity, opportunity, and security.

Making systems work for people

Strengthening effectiveness: We support partners to help systems deliver better, at scale, by deploying more effective, evidence-informed approaches to achieving impact. Our partners identify key levers to shift public and market systems to achieve meaningful outcomes for millions of people, often by helping them put their existing budgets and infrastructure to better use.

Dismantling gendered and other discriminatory barriers: Making systems and institutions work for all people requires dismantling barriers to women's participation and leadership and creating a more inclusive [program approach](#). We support our partners to address how gender discrimination often intersects with race, caste, ethnicity, class, disability, sexual identity, and other biases to fuel exclusion and perpetuate inequality.

Women as leaders and agents of change: Power defines how systems function, who sets agendas and makes decisions, and who benefits. We support partners to reform the way that power is wielded and distributed, so that girls and women, particularly from excluded groups, can exercise their full share of voice, agency, and leadership. We do not see girls and women as merely beneficiaries, but as active participants and agents of change. That is why we see women's leadership as integral to systems change.

1. Our use of "women and girls" is meant to be inclusive of all those who identify as women and girls on the gender spectrum

2. See Co-Impact's [Approach to Scale](#).

What do we support?

Countries:

Our work is focused on the Global South. Our Foundational Fund was open to supporting efforts in a broad range of countries. Our Gender Fund concentrates our support in 6-8 focus countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America (list of countries will be finalized by early 2023). Our country and regional level grantmaking is now led by our teams based in the three regions.

Issues:

We support efforts to shift systems in health, education, and economic opportunity, and strengthen women in leadership in the professional and academic domains of law and economics. Within these broad areas, we support compelling initiatives designed by program partners. Across all, we support our program partners' leadership and vision for systems change (rather than see them as implementors of our strategy). At the same time, we recognize that issues such as unpaid care and gender-based violence are critical to gender equality and that advancing work in such areas will need proactive investments.

Diversity of approaches:

We invest in a diversity of approaches that drive systems change – including technocratic solutions, policy reform, advocacy and shifting norms. Some of our partners work closely with governments and systems actors, and others work outside it. Importantly, what's common is that all our partners have made a persuasive case for effectively shifting major systems and having impact at scale. This often requires a keen understanding of how governance and political economy work, how to build effective coalitions, and how to shift key institutions to be more inclusive and accountable.

Who do we support?

Global South partners, women-led:

Because we believe that rootedness in local context is crucial to building the trust and knowledge necessary for systems change, 100% of our country level grants go to Global South program partners based in the countries in which they work. Field building and organizational strengthening are critical, particularly to groups that have not had access to funds to build capabilities needed for systems change. That is why the majority of our grants go to organizations that are led by women, particularly from historically excluded groups.

Diversity of partner types:

We recognize that different types of organizations can contribute to achieving gender equality, and we seek to reflect this diversity across our portfolio. We support organizations that have worked on advancing gender equality for a long time, including feminist movements and women's rights organizations³. We also support organizations that bring reach, strategic relationships and other capabilities but are earlier in their journey to advance gender equality. Across all types what is common is a core commitment to achieving gender equality and women's leadership through systems change. Where appropriate, we also support coalition building and learning to advance shared goals.

Why learning is key

Systems change is complex, takes time, and needs a learning and adaptation mindset. That is why we support partners who bring curiosity, an open mind, and a learning mindset. Our partners seek to make a lasting difference in the world, and we support them to articulate powerful systems-, people-, and organizational-level outcomes, track their progress, learn, and improve practice. We provide relatively large, flexible, multi-year grants that build in learning and adaptability. We seek to learn together with our program and funding partners, drawing insights about what works and what doesn't and how it all adds up. Over time we seek to contribute to a body of knowledge of how to advance gender equality and women's leadership in the Global South.

3. As per our GEF commitment, at least 10% of our funding will go to feminist and women's rights organizations.