

Co-Impact's Approach to Sourcing and Grantmaking in 2024



Introduction

Many public and market systems do not work for women and girls¹ because outcomes are inequitable and discrimination is (often unconsciously) baked into their design and delivery.

As a result, despite spending billions, these systems fail to reflect the needs of women and girls. Co-Impact advances just and inclusive systems change to achieve impact at scale by providing large, long-term, and flexible funding and support to locally-rooted organizations with proximate and representative leadership.

In March 2022, we launched our Gender Fund with the aim of raising and disbursing USD 1 billion to predominantly women-led locally-rooted organizations, in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The Fund's design was informed by consultation with our program partners, the gender equality and feminist community, our funding partners, advisors, and other experts.

Through several rounds of funding, we have committed over **\$353 million to more than 100 initiatives** across the Gender Fund and the Foundational Fund.

As we continue to build the portfolio of work supported by the Gender Fund, we're excited to share our sourcing approach and focus for 2024.



Photo credit: Jonathan Torgovnik/Getty Images/Images of Empowerment - Senegal

A Region-Centered Approach

In 2024 our Gender Fund sourcing approach will continue to be led regionally, in line with our core value of rooting power in the Global South:

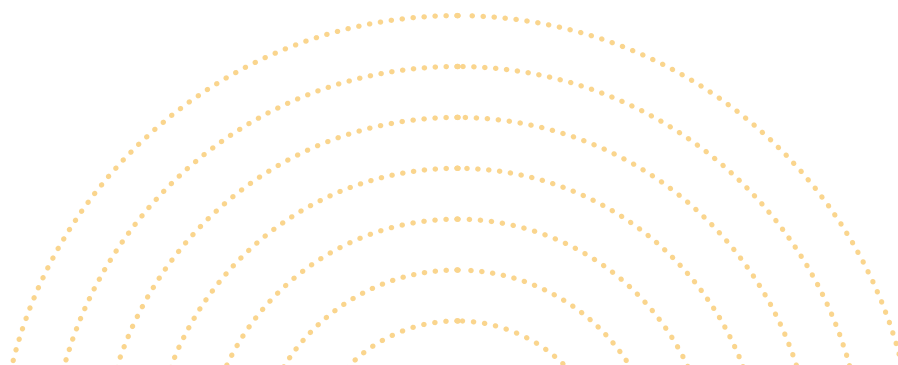
We will continue to accelerate momentum towards:

- Transforming systems to be more just and inclusive so that millions of people have better healthcare, quality education, and the opportunity to thrive – regardless of their gender, class, ethnicity, or race.
- Advancing women's power, agency, and leadership, so there are more women leading at all levels - from the household and community to institutions and government – influencing decisions that affect their communities and society, with a specific focus on law and economics.
- Shifting harmful gender norms that prevent progress towards gender equality.

Co-Impact's regional program teams based in Brazil, India, and Kenya have rich contextual knowledge, networks, and expertise. They understand and can respond to the political context of the problems and opportunities for systemic change within their regions. Therefore, each team conducts sourcing locally, guided by contextual research and regional scoping work, strategic guidance by our Board and Gender Fund Advisory Board, and taking account of inputs from advisors and experts (including women's funds, feminist networks and coalitions, and feminist funders) and our funding partners.

Through our sourcing, we aim to:

- Support organizations that address root causes and foster systemic change.
- Provide flexible and longer-term funding, and dedicated resources for organizational strengthening.
- Ensure that 100% of our country-led grants go to Global South rooted organizations, with the majority to women-led organizations.
- Prioritize an intersectional lens throughout our process.
- Respect that the organizations we partner with are in the driving seat and best placed to decide on the best approaches to achieve enduring change.



How do we understand systems change?

By systems we mean a government system (for example, public education or health), and/or a market system (for example, agricultural or economic) linked to education, health, and economic opportunity. Transforming systems is not possible if we do not apply an intersectional gender lens and analyze how gender, class, race/caste/ethnicity, sexual identity, disability, and other markers of exclusion within systems are preventing women and girls from thriving.

We identify and support program partners that focus on working with specific systems (health, education, and/or economic opportunity) who seek to build a strategy to address the root cause of why that system is failing women and girls. This requires addressing the underlying norms, laws, practices, sanctions, and decision-making processes that lead to systematic barriers and persistent discrimination against women and girls – as well as creating opportunities and support for women and girls to exercise leadership, voice, agency, and power.

We understand systems change initiatives as those that aim to solve the problem at scale (rather than scaling up).

- **For example:** If the problem is that women don't have access to abortion services, we encourage program partners to address the problem at the level of "how many women don't have access to abortion services". If it's 2 million women, then that is the scale we refer to – but this does not mean we expect the initiatives to provide the service to 2 million women; if the system is a public system, we expect the government to deliver that. However, we do hope that program partners can design their systems change initiative so that the system can eventually deliver for those 2 million women.

We encourage program partners to move beyond scaling up - developing a model that works and simply replicating it many times - towards a model that works at scale, so that the government or the private sector (i.e. the system) can ultimately adopt the model as a means to address the overall need.



Photo credit: Jonathan Torgovnik/Getty Images/ Images of Empowerment - Ghana

What We Fund

1. **Just and inclusive systems change in the areas of health, education, and economic opportunity.**
2. **Organizations or coalitions working towards institutional change² for Women in Leadership in Law and Economics³:**

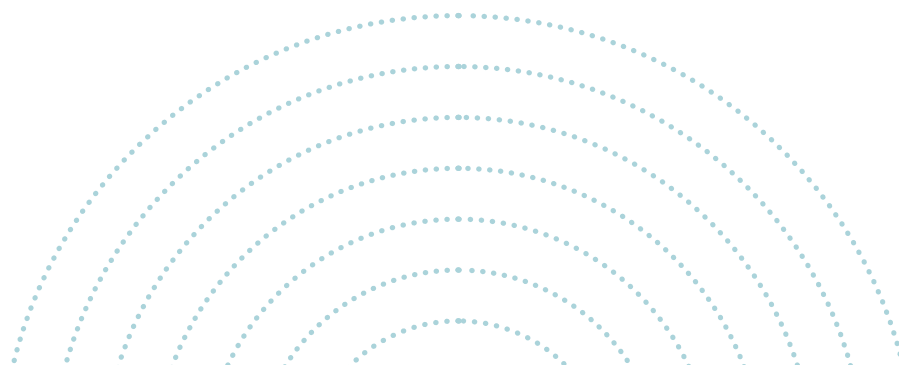
By institutional change we mean addressing the structures, systems, rules, incentives, narratives, and social norms that prevent women from entering, growing, and thriving in these professional fields.

Within these areas we focus on organizations that are:

- Strengthening pathways for women to rise to leadership positions in academic and/or professional domains.
 - Transforming the rules of the game within key institutions, including support for women to enter, thrive in, and advance in leadership.
 - Working to make positive shifts in the narrative on the role of women as decision-makers.
 - Identifying mechanisms through which more women can exercise power, agency, and leadership.
 - Promoting inclusive and feminist leadership models.
3. **Organizations or coalitions helping to shift social norms and narratives**, by demonstrating what an inclusive system looks like, and what it takes to establish a supportive pathway for women's leadership.
 4. **Practitioner-Oriented Research to generate and share evidence** of what is effective for advancing systems change and women's leadership to primarily serve the needs and interests of practitioners⁴ (including but not limited to our program partners).

We are focused on:

- Improved evidence of how to advance women's leadership and gender transformative programs at scale.
- Increased use of evidence for advocacy and influence.
- Improved learning among program partners.
- Increased participation of women in research production and dissemination.



In addition to our core areas of focus, we are sourcing initiatives in:

Africa: focused on the Care Economy⁵ and Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Ghana and Nigeria; Women's leadership in law, economics and community health in Kenya and Nigeria.

Asia: focused on the Care Economy and ECD; Women's leadership in law and economics, and community health in India.

Latin America: focused on the Care Economy; intersection of Climate and Gender; social norm change.

The Care Economy is an area that cuts across our core of health, education, and economic opportunity and affects more than a billion women in the world - yet has received very little attention. We are focusing on this area because the burden of unpaid care disproportionately falls on women, including issues of dignity and psycho-social security related to it. The manifestations and opportunities to advance work on it will vary by contexts, and each regional team will tailor their focus in ways that make sense for the region. We hope to make up to 4 grants per region focused on Care Economy.

Women in Leadership

Ensuring women have equal opportunity for representation and leadership is critical across all our systems change efforts - both because it's important in itself and because we believe that representation in any policy or decision-making space allows women's concerns and ideas to be better advanced than would be the case otherwise. Evidence shows that representation is insufficient on its own; to ensure that systems understand and respond to women's needs, we also encourage inclusive and feminist leadership.

We need to lay the pathways for diverse and/or feminist leadership so that millions of women reach their fullest potential as leaders. Co-Impact aims to advance women's power, agency, and leadership, so there are more women leading at all levels from the household and community to the highest levels in key sectors, institutions and government.

Whilst women's leadership is integral to all that we do, we also specifically support initiatives in law and economics because of the inordinate influence and power they have on policy-making and decisions which lay the foundations for equality for all.



Photo courtesy of The Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) Promise of Commons initiative. Photo credit: Mark Katzmann

Where We Fund - Countries of Focus

Our work focuses on **8 countries**, selected based on their demographic and social contexts:

- **Africa:** South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, and Ghana
- **Asia:** India and Indonesia
- **Latin America:** Brazil and Mexico

In specific circumstances, where there is a rationale to do so, we will also consider making regional, cross-regional and/or global grants.



How We Will Identify Program Partners

We aim to identify program partners and initiatives through regular engagement and consultation with our Gender Fund Advisory Board, funding partners, feminist and funding networks. In doing so, we will also:

- Consult in-country and regional advisors and sector experts.
- Leverage memberships of relevant associations and alliances.
- Commission and conduct research and/or scoping studies.
- Revisit applications received under previous sourcing rounds.

Who We Fund - Main Characteristics

As represented below, our focus is on funding organizations which are:

1. **Pre-Late Stage:** Organizations who are earlier in their own systems change journeys and contributing to an enabling environment for systems change. They can explore, test, and develop system change strategies for deeper and more sustained impact.
2. **Late Stage:** Relatively mature organizations and groups that have strong innovations and relationships and are poised to take their work to the next level.



Photo credit: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images/Images of Empowerment - India

We are looking for program partners with the following characteristics:

- **Global South rootedness:**

Lead organization is rooted in one of our countries of focus:

- Global Head Office and the majority of staff presence is in a Global South country.
- Leader and at least 50% of senior leadership are from the Global South.
- Lead organization has long-term roots in the region, and a commitment to investing in local talent for leadership positions.

- **Predominantly led by women:**

Primary leader and a significant portion of the senior leadership of the lead organization or initiative are women; governance structure (e.g. Board) has significant and/or increasing representation of women.

- **Feminist approaches:**

Can articulate how the initiative addresses structural gender discrimination and exclusion, enhances power and agency among women and girls, and advances women's leadership. Applies an equity lens in any measurement, evaluation or research work.

- **A track record:**

Of working on strengthening systems and commitment to working towards gender equality (with an intersectional lens) including women's leadership. Long-term and/or substantial partnerships with local actors and national or state government. For research partners, a track record of collaborating with systems actors and ensuring data and information is used to improve practice. Basic organizational capabilities, such as incorporation/registration, a board, organizational policies, finance and accounting system, audited reports, and a capable core team poised to take their initiative to the next level.

- **A focus on enduring change in the system:**

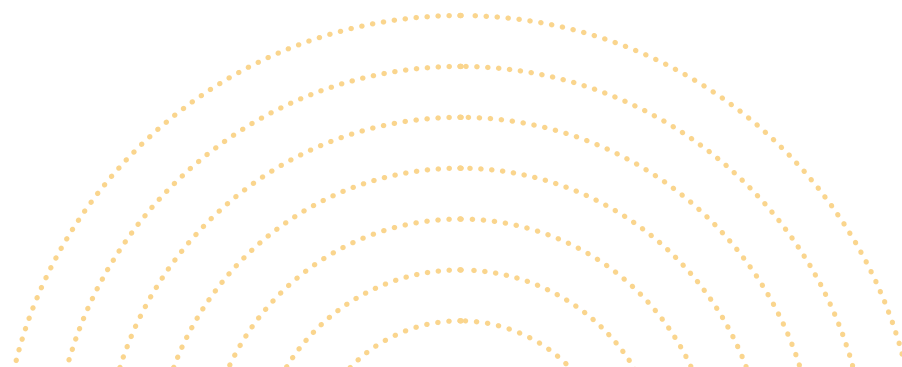
Can articulate what improvements in the system mean for the scale of the problem which exists, and can present a credible opportunity for the change proposed, based on objective analysis.

- **Relationships with governments:**

Politically astute; relatively well known to and respected by key government officials. Can navigate strategies and articulate demand for openness from government.

- **A learning orientation:**

A learning orientation, focused on testing ideas, adapting, and improving.



What we will NOT fund

- **Service delivery projects:** Co-Impact recognizes the importance of this work. However, our focus is on systems change and we therefore do not fund initiatives that only involve direct service delivery.
- **Initiatives without a feminist lens:** Co-Impact believes that a feminist approach is critical to the success of a systems change initiative.
- **Nascent idea or pilots:** Nascent ideas or early development of a model.
- **Individual-level interventions:** While recognizing that many interventions tend to have both individual- and institutional-level impacts, Co-Impact is interested in organizations that most effectively frame and design their interventions around institutional change. Purely individual-level interventions (skill building, scholarships, etc.) will not be funded.
- **Scaling up:** Co-Impact's approach to systems change does not include funding to "scale up" proven interventions.

How We Fund

1. **Design Grant:** For organizations or partnerships / coalitions that have already been developing a systems change strategy in the fields of **Health, Economic Opportunity and Education** or are working towards institutional change for **Women in Leadership** in the **academic or professional fields of Law or Economics**. The purpose of a Design Phase is to provide the space, resources, and expertise over an 8-12 month period, for organizations to refine ideas and strategy, consolidate partnerships, strengthen an evidence base, improve internal processes, and/or create an overall budget and resource mobilization plan for the systems change initiative. Successful applicants will each receive a one-off Design Grant of \$300,000.
2. **Systems Change, Women In Leadership or Practitioner-Oriented Research Grant:** Organizations or partnerships / coalitions who have been through our Design Phase may be invited to participate in a selection process to receive a systems change grant (or institutional change grant for Women in Leadership). On average, systems change and women in leadership grants are for a duration of 4-5 years; the value of the grant is determined as part of the evaluation process.
3. **Ecosystem Grant:** We also have the opportunity to make grants that enable Co-Impact to support organizations who contribute to our system change approach, but don't quite fit the qualifications for current grant-making (systems change or institutional change initiatives). This type of funding should support groups who contribute to an enabling environment for systems change to occur, and allow certain underfunded groups to explore, test, and develop system's change strategies for deeper and more sustained impact. These grants will allow Co-Impact to explore **emerging topics** and **windows of opportunities**; to **build a pipeline** for future systems funding; and/or support convenings; or co-fund with other funders in the region. We see this type of grant as an important step towards contributing to our [Generation Equality Forum commitment](#) of funding women's rights groups and movements. Some of these grants could include support to women's or feminist funds, and grants that could have a catalytic effect with funding.

How Can You Help?

We are keen to hear about potential program partners who meet the requirements described⁷.

Please get in touch if you:

- Have recommendations for organizations that may be a good match with what we've described.
- Know funders, networks, experts, and others we should engage with to identify potential organizations.
- Are interested in co-funding opportunities for systems change in the areas of health, education, economic opportunity, or care economy; institutional change for women in leadership in law or economics.

Please email us at: info@co-impact.org

Links to Useful Resources

- [Co-Impact's 5-year anniversary report](#)
- [Co-Impact approach to Gender and Intersectionality](#)
- [Co-Impact's handbook](#)
- [Organizational Strengthening handbook](#)
- [Learning, Measurement and Evaluation guidebook](#)
- [Just and Inclusive Systems Change](#)
- [Approach to Scale](#)

End Notes

1. Co-Impact uses the term 'woman', 'women' and gender as encompassing the whole gender spectrum.

2. Co-Impact understands Institutional Change as shifts in institutions, which may consist of creating new institutions to displace old ones; creating new institutions alongside existing ones, or changing environments so that the same institutions have new meaning and particularly a new gender order. By changing the rules and practices that shape individual and collective behavior, successful institutional change shifts both short and long-term behaviors.

3. Because these two domains exercise huge influence on agenda setting, resource allocation and decision making, and women are inadequately represented in them.

4. Who is "a practitioner"? By practitioners we mean an organization or entity that is dedicated to implementing initiatives to promote gender equality. It includes but is not limited to civil society, government, women's groups, feminist movements, and activists.

5. ILO definition: "The care economy is growing as the demand for childcare and care for the elderly is increasing in all regions. It will thus create a great number of jobs in the coming years. However, care work across the world remains characterized by a void of benefits and protections, low wages or non-compensation, and exposure to physical, mental and, in some cases, sexual harm. It is clear that new solutions to care are needed on two fronts: in regards to the nature and provision of care policies and services, and the terms and conditions of care work." <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/care-economy/lang-en/index.htm> See also <https://www.the-care-economy-knowledge-hub.org/>

6. We may also use this allocation to support funds/re-grantors who are better placed to support groups that are critical to the ecosystem, such as women's funds who support grassroots work and human rights defenders.

7. Please note that we may not be able to respond to all emails received.

For more information please contact:

info@co-impact.org



co-impact.org
