



**A Transformation Partnership
Supporting Systems Change
December 2023 Update**

Local, Institutional and Systemic Inequality

Gender inequity lies at the root of – and is compounded by – every major problem the world faces. So, gender must inform every solution, from creating sustainable business practices, to expanding opportunities for youth, to addressing ever-changing global health challenges.

For nearly five decades, ICRW has been uncovering these deep-rooted structural inequities and creating systems change in communities, institutions and governments. We know that the closer we get to the source of these inequities, shed light on them, and find out how best to disrupt them, the closer we get to fostering and sustaining gender equity worldwide.

Meeting That Challenge Through Partnerships

TOGETHER WOMEN RISE & THE INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN

Together Women Rise has embarked on a journey to fundamentally change the social systems and structures that perpetuate gender inequity around the world. In service of this laudable purpose, Together Women Rise is developing [Transformation Partnerships](#) with organizations that have systems change at their core.

The International Center for Research on Women is a 501©3 global not-for-profit institution with a mission to advance gender equity in policy and practice through research that elevates the voices, wisdom, and

experiences of those experiencing discrimination based on their gender or sexual identity. We seek to join hands with Together Women Rise, in common cause, to advance our shared vision of a world in which all people have equal opportunity to thrive. By Supporting ICRW's transition and new strategic plan, Together Women Rise can help ICRW shift power



and resources closer to those with the knowledge to use them most effectively to transform inequitable social systems toward equity for all.

About ICRW

Since its founding in 1976, ICRW has been uncovering and helping to transform social systems that create and perpetuate gender and other social inequities. As we find ourselves in a powerful moment of change in the international development sector and the world overall, ICRW sees a profound opportunity to do this work better, by interrogating, and fundamentally changing, the way we are structured organizationally. These changes, described further in the sections below, will allow ICRW to truly walk the talk of systems change, and to show up in the world – to our community, stakeholders, study partners and participants and supporters – in a shape and form that reflects our core institutional values of inclusion and equity.

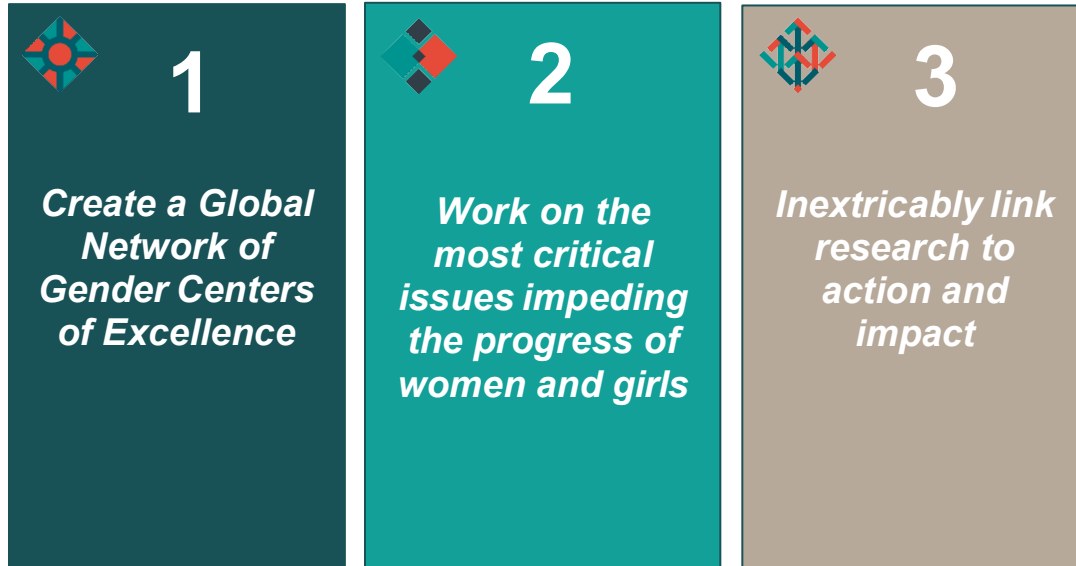
ICRW Today: Stepping into this Moment

The world is in a moment of profound transformation. A slow and stagnant process of

“localization” in international development – that is, shifting resources, and the control over those resources, from development organizations based in northern hemisphere rich countries, closer to the needs and grounded knowledge of those in low- and middle-income countries – began to accelerate several years ago. This acceleration was further amplified by the murder of George Floyd in the United States in May 2020, and the COVID-19 pandemic that unmasked intransigent structural discrimination the world over. ***It is no longer tenable to do business as usual.*** It is a long overdue moment to turn the mirror inward, reflect on our own organizational systems and structures, and courageously make the changes necessary to become a truly anti-colonial, anti-racist organization, and live into our feminist values and principles. ICRW is committed, not only to making these changes for ourselves, but to lead the way for other global NGOs to make these shifts as well. Because we know that making this transition will make us even more effective systems-changers, it forms the core of our Transformation Partnership with Together Women Rise.

In this report we highlight progress in our change journey to decentralize ICRW's business model and operations.

A New Strategy for a New Era



In November 2022, ICRW's Global Board of Directors officially adopted a new strategic vision, that would transform our traditional operating model of North-based "HQ" with South-based "Regional Offices", to a decentralized model, in which each of our offices will become independent, but connected, Gender Centers of Excellence that will nurture an enduring pipeline of gender scholars, advisors, and advocates in the Global South to lead international development for years to come. Building out the Gender Centers of Excellence and developing a strong pipeline of gender experts in the Global South will have a ripple effect cross-regionally. These experts will team up with universities and implementation partners, community members and policymakers, foundation, bilateral and multilateral partners to scale systems change efforts that advance gender equity. Through these collaborative efforts, and with a deep understanding of local context, the Gender Centers of Excellence will source and build deeply contextualized systems change solutions that work, share lessons learned, and lead the movement to sustainably eliminate institutional and systemic gender inequity.

It is important to preface this report with a note about the recent leadership change at ICRW. In August 2023 Peggy Clark stepped down, and the board appointed Ann Warner as interim CEO. Ann, who previously worked at ICRW from 2008 to 2015, started as Interim CEO in early October. Since that time, Ann has been working closely with the board, and leadership in our Africa and Asia hubs, to assess the current state of ICRW's organizational transition, and to develop a plan for

implementing this new framework. As we clarify our implementation framework, we are aware that some aspects of the strategy may need to evolve, and that this process will take additional time and resources to navigate.

In this report we share some examples of projects that ICRW is able to lead with the support of Together Women Rise and our other funding partners.

Progress Towards our Strategic Vision

Some of the key milestones achieved thus far include:

- A nine-month strategic visioning process led by consultancy firm Afton Bloom. The new vision articulated in the strategy has the following four core elements:
 - The strategy recommits ICRW to its vision of an equitable, sustainable, and prosperous world where women, girls and gender marginalized people lead progress and thrive; and our mission, to advance rights and opportunities for women, girls and gender marginalized people through actionable evidence and solutions.
 - It sets out four core issues around which our work will cohere: Climate action; Economic opportunity and security; Health and reproductive rights; and Equitable social norms and power dynamics.
 - It articulates four strategic outcomes: New programming and practice is designed to advance gender equity; global, regional and national policies and budgets advance gender equity; and the gender equity field and evidence base grows and diversifies.
 - It establishes our strategic approach and operating structure: Through an operating structure comprising a global network of Gender Centers of Excellence, we lead primary research, conducted in close partnership with other ecosystem actors and tailored to critical needs and opportunities they identify; and we lead secondary research, analysis and advocacy that lifts up key insights on priority issues in the countries in which we work.

In addition, senior leadership has retained and consulted with financial and legal experts to assess our current practices, including:

- Financial planning and accounting practices;
- By-Laws and governance practices; and
- Employment arrangements and practices.

While we have undertaken some of the analytical exercises needed to evolve our operating model, there is more work to be done in the year ahead to move from vision to implementation. In early

December of this year, with the support from our Transformation Partnership grant, ICRW's Global Leadership Team met in Washington DC for critical meetings to solidify our strategy and begin to develop our implementation roadmap. The goal of the retreat was to *establish a common understanding of ICRW today, the ICRW we want to build and work in, and begin to map out our path toward that vision*. We discussed the status of Strategic Vision implementation in each office; defined the ICRW we want to build – our strategic and programmatic goals, our culture, our business model; articulated ICRW's value in a crowded gender marketplace; and reaffirmed the importance of ICRW remaining a locally grounded but *globally connected* organization, and the value of a global office in service of amplifying the impact of our contextualized research and advocacy. We also brainstormed the broad outlines of an ambitious global program of research that will inform and strengthen global gender equity and gender justice movements around the world that are currently experiencing push-back from powerful forces that would turn back the clock and prevent further progress for women and girls.

Metrics

Ultimate outcome is that our regional offices are strengthened and there is autonomy and equitable leadership across ICRW's global platform:

- 1) Implementation of strategic vision by the end of 2026, our 50th Anniversary year;
- 2) Development of a new global research program.

Global Partnerships: Project Highlights

Evaluating the Impact of Male Engagement Programming on Women's Economic Empowerment

With an initial investment from the Cartier Philanthropy, and further support from our Transformation Partnership grant, we have been working with Hand in Hand International (HiHI), and Women for Women International (WfWI) to design, implement, and evaluate a gender transformative program to understand the role of male engagement in women's empowerment (WE) efforts in Tanzania and Rwanda. HiHI and WfWI implemented evidence-based WE curricula in Tanzania and Rwanda, respectively, as well as male engagement components adapted to include best practices identified through ICRW research in male engagement programming (MEP). ICRW evaluated the added impact of the MEP component in both countries.

The full evaluation of Hand in Hand International's Tanzania program has been completed, and we have conducted the baseline and midline data collection in Rwanda. The plan is to conduct the endline data collection in the early spring of 2024, and to finalize the analysis by mid-summer.

So far, our findings indicate that MEP had a statistically significant impact on several key outcomes. For example:

- MEP had the strongest impact on gender equitable attitudes and norms around intimate partner violence (IPV). Both women and men in the treatment groups were more likely to hold gender equitable attitudes about women’s and men’s roles and responsibilities, and less likely to report that IPV is acceptable in any circumstances.
- MEP had some impact on partner communication levels, gender-equitable decision-making, and division of household labor. Some participants reported that the program gave them skills and opportunity to discuss things together and make decisions in partnership. In qualitative interviews, most women and men participants reported that they have started to share domestic chores more equitably, but that women still primarily lead this work, even when their partners assist.
- The least significant impacts we observed were related to women’s employment and income, incidence of IPV, and women’s self-confidence. In both Rwanda and Tanzania, women in both the treatment and control groups were more likely at endline to work outside the home, but there was no statistically significant additional benefit for those whose partners participated in the program. Likewise, women in both groups gained self-confidence during the program, with no additional impacts for the MEP group. MEP had significant impacts on IPV only in Rwanda, while women in both groups in the Tanzania study were more likely to report IPV at endline compared to baseline. This is likely due, at least in part, to a greater understanding at endline of what constitutes IPV and therefore more accurate reporting, as well as a reflection of the global increase of IPV during and as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and related lockdowns.

We are looking forward to finalizing the work with the endline research in Rwanda and look forward to reporting back to Together Women Rise on what we find.

Metric: Quantitative and qualitative endline data collection and analysis finalized, and final analysis synthesis completed.

What Works: Women and Climate. Building an Evidence-Base and Framework for Women-Led Climate Action

In 2023, with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, ICRW launched an applied research project to study the carbon and income effects of selected large- scale women led climate programs in Asia and Africa. This work will identify a research portfolio of large scale, women led climate projects, and implement series of dynamic, evidence- oriented multi- site studies over four years to assess the effectiveness and potential of these projects. Undertaken in partnership with leading women-led climate organizations, data from these studies will be actively oriented to informing major policy forums every six months to ensure the usefulness and uptake of the data to inform policy and practice.

The first two organizations we are partnering with for this project are The Self-Employed

Women's Association (SEWA), and Solar Sister, both award winning and globally recognized institutions. SEWA's component of the study will focus on 7,000 salt pan workers in India who have converted to solar energy and solar farming, and Solar Sister's component of the study will focus on 4,000 solar entrepreneurs in Tanzania, Kenya and Nigeria. We are actively working to identify a large-scale women led energy project in Southeast Asia as well to add to the portfolio, and we anticipate that the portfolio will grow to include other programs as well.

Enhancing evidence-informed decision-making for improved childcare ecosystem in Kenya: A participatory research and policy engagement initiative

The persistent lack of actionable evidence and data on childcare issues has created policy inertia, contributed to the lack of sustainable interventions in the sector, limited the ability of relevant agencies to supervise, support, and assist childcare businesses, and prevented the emergence of strategies and policies to address the needs and burdens of childcare for poor households and women at both the national and county levels. With funding from Co-Impact, and in partnership with Uthabithi Africa, ICRW will undertake research to answer the question: "How can the services of women-owned childcare enterprises be strengthened and access to childcare services improved for marginalized households and women in Kenya?" Our guiding hypothesis is that 1) engaging and supporting relevant government policy actors to understand system changes required to improve the quality of and access to childcare services, the barriers to these changes, and how these barriers can be overcome; 2) enhancing the evidence base on the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs providing child care services to marginalized households; the quality of these services; and options for affordable high-quality childcare among marginalized households and women in Kenya; and 3) working with key policy players to leverage emerging evidence to effect necessary changes (which could include policy modifications, budget allocation, standard-setting, monitoring procedures, and so on) will boost the quality of women-owned childcare services, enable more marginalized women to work, reduce unpaid work, and improve children's health and social outcomes.

As part of the proposed project, ICRW and Uthabithi will map women-owned childcare enterprises, their services, needs, and challenges, and document the magnitude, dimensions, and implications of the unmet need for childcare among marginalized household and women. We will also chart the evidence needs of relevant government system actors and agencies in relation to improving the quality and accessibility of childcare services, as well as their understanding of what the evidence would allow them to do, perceptions of barriers to using the evidence, and ideas for overcoming these barriers.

Addressing the above-mentioned overarching research question will furnish relevant national and county officials with the evidence they need to support women-owned childcare

businesses while also increasing the availability of affordable childcare services for Kenya's poor women and households. Engaging and assisting relevant government actors to understand the system changes required to improve the quality and accessibility of childcare services, the barriers to these changes, and how these barriers can be overcome will position them to plan for and navigate the political economy barriers to needed changes. Further, working with these players to understand and deploy emerging evidence for transformation will result in system changes, such as policy revisions, funding allocation, standards, stronger monitoring and support mechanisms for childcare services, training programs, and so on. Overall, the project's activities will improve national/county support to and investment in women-owned childcare businesses, increase access to low-cost childcare services for marginalized households and women, enhance the involvement of women and caregivers in economic activities, increase gender equality among vulnerable households, and improve educational, safety, and health outcomes for children in vulnerable households. The sustainability, clientele, and revenues of women-owned childcare micro-enterprises will also increase with improved quality and capacity. The work will be undertaken in eight counties in Kenya: Nairobi, Kisumu, Mombasa, Busia, Kajiado, Nakuru, Machakos, and Vihiga.

Theory of Change: Providing high-quality data to policymakers, childcare service owners, households, and other key stakeholders in Kenya, and supporting them to understand and use the data, will improve the quality and accessibility of childcare services, which will enhance socioeconomic, educational, and health outcomes for women, children, and marginalized households in the country.

ANTICIPATED PROJECT OUTCOMES:

- Improved quality of services among women-owned childcare enterprises
- Sustainable women-owned childcare enterprises
- Improved patronage and profits for women-owned childcare enterprises
- Greater national/county support and investment in women-owned childcare enterprises
- Improved access to childcare services among marginalized households and women
- Greater participation of women and caregivers in economic activities
- Improved gender equality among vulnerable households
- Reduction in school dropout among girls from poor households
- Improved educational and wellbeing outcomes among children in vulnerable households.

Metrics:

- 1) MLE Framework completed
- 2) Research protocols developed