More than 50 Canadian SMOs’ Innovative Solutions to Advance Gender Equality Supported in Five Intakes Within Three Years

Winnipeg, MB – The Fund for Innovation and Transformation (FIT) has awarded funding to an additional 10 small and medium organizations (SMOs) from across Canada who are using innovation to improve the lives of women and girls around the world.

Each organization will receive up to $175,000 to test their innovative solutions in partnership with local organizations in the Global South over a 10-to-12-month period. Testing projects address themes such as gender-based violence, community engagement, WASH, gender and disability, gender-sensitive education, among others.

The program is a five-year, $16.5 Million initiative of the Inter-Council Network of Provincial and Regional Councils, funded by Global Affairs Canada and administered by the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation (MCIC). This marks FIT’s fifth funding intake since its launch in May 2019. In just under three years, the national program has awarded $11 Million to over 50 projects.

FIT is unique in that it supports solutions at the testing phase. It provides Canadian SMOs from different sectors the opportunity to test new or improved practices, policies and approaches with local partners. The fund also provides a platform for selected organizations to share their learnings with each other and eventually others in the innovation and international development sectors.

As several of FIT-funded innovations have now completed their testing, Christina MacIsaac, FIT’s Director of Innovation, says SMOs are sharing some interesting outcomes.

“We are at a point in the program where we have started to showcase the learnings and stories of SMOs and local partners with the wider development community. Our aim is to help the sector learn from these testing results, and potentially adapt practices and approaches to gender equality and women’s empowerment.”

With five intakes launched and decided on in less than three years, Janice Hamilton, Executive Director of MCIC, believes the program is achieving what it set out to do – cultivate an environment where SMOs and their local partners test new solutions and share their acquired knowledge with the greater development community.
“With each intake we have seen well-researched, thorough and culturally-sensitive applications from Canadian SMOs keen to test innovative ideas to advance gender equality,” said Hamilton. “Canadian SMOs are well positioned to test ideas on the ground with their partners in the Global South. They remain nimble and can adapt to changing environments and needs.”

There are no further FIT intakes to announce at this time. Stories and Learnings are being shared with the sector on a regular basis.

For more information about intake five projects and recipients, please see the attached backgrounder. Stories and results from FIT SMOs can be found on FIT’s website.

The Fund for Innovation and Transformation is a 5-year, $16.5 M initiative of the Inter-Council Network of Provincial and Regional Councils, funded by Global Affairs Canada and administered by the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation (MCIC).

The Inter-Council Network of Provincial and Regional Councils for International Cooperation is a coalition of the eight Provincial and Regional Councils for International Cooperation. The independent Councils are committed to global sustainable development, social justice and social change. They are rooted in communities across Canada and represent over 350 diverse civil society organizations from across Canada. Council membership varies from locally based cultural community civil society organizations to highly recognizable international organizations.

The Manitoba Council for International Cooperation (MCIC) is a coalition of Manitoba-based organizations involved in international development. Its mission is to support, connect and amplify the work of its members and partners, while directly engaging and collaborating with Manitobans for global sustainability. MCIC encourages dialogue on global issues and helps empower Manitobans to become active global citizens — individuals who understand that their actions here make a difference around the world. MCIC is also responsible for distributing Government of Manitoba and Government of Canada funds designated for international development and humanitarian projects.

Global Affairs Canada manages Canada’s diplomatic relations, provides consular services to Canadians, promotes the country’s international trade, and leads Canada’s international development and humanitarian assistance. FIT is a program undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada provided through Global Affairs Canada.
Backgrounder

FIT Funding Announcement Intake 5: FIT has selected 10 Canadian small and medium-sized organizations (SMOs) to date to receive funding. Each SMO will receive up to $175,000 to test their innovative solutions in partnership with local organizations over a 10–12-month period.

Alitus Femina

Sexually Transmitted Grades – A Danger for the Future of Girls and Women  
Country: Burkina Faso  
Local Partner: BURCASO  
Testing Period: 12 months  
Amount: $174,190  

Alitus Femina is working to reduce Sexually Transmitted Grades (STGs) – sex in exchange for positive grades – a practice that adversely impacts women’s and girls’ education in discriminatory and harmful ways. This testing project will conduct a series of longitudinal, inclusive, and gender-sensitive pilot tests to develop a locally adapted and effective strategy for addressing the problem of STGs and create a reliable and secure database of evidence. Establishing a comprehensive database will play a key role in facilitating an environment of exchange among stakeholders to better formalize monitoring practices and inform public policy decisions that seek to address the problem of STGs.

The Bhutan Canada Foundation

Democracy Beyond Elections: Participatory Policy Through Design Thinking  
Country: Bhutan  
Local Partner: Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy  
Testing Period: 12 months  
Amount: $147,004  

This innovative solution will use a Design Thinking methodology to engage and encourage collaboration among groups of marginalized women, vulnerable youth and People with Disabilities (PWD) and policymakers to identify social protection issues and resultantly develop practical policy solutions to positively impacting the Bhutanese people. This approach to the policy process is unique within the Bhutanese context, where historically, policy design has very much been a top-down, government, expert-driven and isolated approach. The proposed solution will engage women and other marginalized groups to promote a cross-sectoral collaboration allowing for an effective and inclusive impact on the policy process. This will empower women as their voices are directly incorporated into the policy process in a manner that has not occurred before. This testing project will look to achieve a more inclusive and participatory policy process that will lead to better-informed policies and programs that address real needs and issues.
Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief (CPAR)

Freedom to Learn for Girls in Rural Malawi – Addressing the Menstruation Barrier

Country: Malawi
Local Partner: Freedom from Fistula
Testing Period: 12 months
Amount: $174,938

Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief's testing project is examining the comparative effectiveness of menstrual cups and reusable menstrual pads in empowering girls and women in selected schools in rural Malawi to manage their menstrual health and thereby reduce absenteeism which contributes to poor educational outcomes. This innovative solution proposes to target girls from the time they begin to menstruate and provide the tools they need to manage their menstrual hygiene.

Canada SOS: Students Offering Support

Lights + Camera + Action for Equality (LCAE)

Country: Guatemala
Local partner: Semillas de Innovacion y Desarrollo Sostenible (SIDS)
Testing Period: 12 months
Amount: $165,445

Canada SOS will test an innovative, transformative, and scalable approach to increase civic leadership and participation of Mayan communities in rural regions of Guatemala, with a focus on Indigenous girls and women. This innovative solution will cultivate the leadership of young Mayan women (aged 16-23) to empower beneficiary communities to produce and share digital stories (including podcasts, videos, and photo essays) that showcase locally identified, actionable insights related to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Canada SOS's innovative approach will also engage policymakers (duty bearers) with content creators (rights holders) and their digital artifacts to improve decision-maker's knowledge, attitudes, and practices relating to gender equality and Indigenous peoples’ rights.
**CAUSE Canada**  
*Wi Lead by Sabi (We Lead by Example)*  
Country: Sierra Leone  
Local Partner: CAUSE Canada Sierra Leone Partnership  
Testing Period: 12 months  
Amount: $174,089

CAUSE Canada is testing an innovative solution that aims to address discrimination at the intersection of gender and disability. Women with disabilities will be at the center of this solution, directly working to transform the negative pattern of exclusion they endure into a positive one, by directly implementing sustainable changes in their communities.

During the testing period, women with disabilities will be appointed as Champions in rural communities of the Koinadugu and Falaba districts of Sierra Leone. The Champions will support out-of-school girls with disabilities, their parents and families, and the entire community to identify and plan specific strategies toward improved access to rights. Champions will be empowered with knowledge on the rights, needs and risks faced by women and girls with disabilities and methodologies for raising awareness, capacity building and leading change.

**Change for Children**  
Local Knowledge: Global Goals  
Country: Nicaragua  
Local Partners: University of the Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast (URACCAN) and the Territorial Indigenous Government of the Miskito Indian Taisbaika Kum (GTI-MITK)  
Testing Period: 12 months  
Amount: $175,000

Improving the sustainable management of the BOSAWAS Biosphere Reserve is essential to the survival of Indigenous peoples in the face of climate change. This innovative solution will test the impact of prioritizing local Indigenous knowledge and gender equality while strengthening the three pillars of comprehensive community planning (CCP): Sustainability, Self-Sufficiency, and Improved Governance Capacity.

This testing project will evaluate strategies for improving the local population's conservation capacity to protect traditional territories and mitigate vulnerabilities. Sustainability efforts will focus on implementing Citizen Science as a conduit for Indigenous and local knowledge in ecosystem stewardship and conservation. Women students will gain experience in conservation activities, previously offered only to men.

Change for Children will implement strategies to improve self-sufficiency by supporting local Indigenous agricultural innovators and natural medicine practitioners and measuring the change in their ability to apply local knowledge in field-testing drought-resistant hearty seeds, collecting and cultivating natural medicines, and operating “living pharmacies.” The testing project also includes the introduction of a process focused on institutional strengthening of the Indigenous government, with activities focused on gender equality, community planning and risk management in an effort to localize and decolonize Indigenous governance.
Emmanuel Relief and Rehabilitation International of Canada

Empowering Women Farmers in Tanzania with an Agricultural Technology Hub (ATH)

Country: Tanzania
Local Partners: Emmanuel International Tanzania, Action for Women Organization (AWO)
Testing Period: 10 months
Amount: $159,792

Emmanuel Relief and Rehabilitation International of Canada is testing a solution in Mwanza to improve the condition of women and the sustainability of farming innovation. Several women will be identified as lead farmers and trained as Master Trainers (MTs) to run and operate three cost-effective and grass-roots Agricultural Technology Hubs (ATH). The ATH will provide access to information technology, the latest farming practices, technology solutions in irrigation, and training opportunities. MTs will learn the scientific rigour of testing, practice decision-making and leadership (within ATH environments), share knowledge and support other farmers.

Girls of Tomorrow (GOT) Foundation

Combatting Menstrual Stigma Through Female-Centred Permaculture Gardens

Country: Uganda
Local Partner: St. Jude Family Projects
Testing Period: 11 months
Amount: $159,792

This innovative solution will test a Female-Centered Permaculture Garden as a unique and effective way of combatting menstrual stigma and increasing female empowerment. Local experts will teach permaculture to participants through a female lens to address girls’ menstrual health and hygiene needs. Each crop planted will be tied to lessons focused on female health, anatomy, and experience. Male and female participants will also learn how to create reusable menstrual pads using banana fibre grown from the gardens—providing a more sustainable and empowering way of ensuring females have access to supplies and undermining the narrative that menstrual supplies should be hidden. Girls of Tomorrow’s objective is to improve girls’ psychological health (increased self-esteem and confidence), physical health (increased nutrition), school attendance rates and rates of social participation, all of which will increase their ability to participate equally in society.

Each Centre will have a female teacher engaged specifically to support out-of-school girls and young women with individualized learning plans through Tusitawi. The innovative element of Tusitawi is that it enables remote and blended learning, whereas Recuperation Centres have only been equipped to support in-person attendance. This solution is expected to empower marginalized girls and young women to continue their education without interruption even when unable to be away from home, reduce dropout rates and increase the likelihood of re-enrollment.
Learning for Humanity Inc.
Technology Supported Education for At-Risk Girls in the Democratic Republic of Congo
Country: Democratic Republic of Congo
Local Partner: Communauté Baptiste Au Centre de l’Afrique (CBCA)
Testing Period: 12 months
Amount: $168,409

This innovative solution will test technology-supported access to gender-sensitive, self-paced, digital learning materials to the most vulnerable girls for whom gender constraints are already keeping them out of the classroom. Tusitawi is a unique platform that is open and affordable with a User Interface appropriate for use in low-resource settings and where technological literacy is a challenge. Tusitawi will be deployed in two of its partner’s (Communauté Baptiste Au Centre de l’Afrique) Recuperation Centres where out-of-school youth can access in-person alternative learning opportunities.

Wellspring Foundation for Education
Blended Digital Learning for Teacher Professional Development
Country: Rwanda
Local Partner: Wellspring Foundation for Education-Rwanda
Testing Period: 12 months
Amount: $168,470

Wellspring will adapt its teacher training module on Inclusive Lesson Planning into a blended digital learning model. This project will test whether a digital approach can effectively support rural teachers (particularly women) to cultivate a positive mindset towards the use of information and communication technology (ICT) for professional development and strengthen their ICT skills so they can more effectively integrate inclusive, learner-centred, and gender-responsive pedagogy in the classroom. It is expected that improvements in pedagogy and practice will result in more welcoming and supportive classroom environments that are more receptive to the needs of all students, especially girls.