



Fund for Innovation  
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# Empowering Women and Girls Through Innovation

## FIT Announces Latest Funding for Canadian Organizations Testing Solutions in Global South

Winnipeg, MB – The Fund for Innovation and Transformation (FIT) is awarding close to \$2 Million in funding to 12 small and medium organizations (SMOs) from across Canada who are using innovation to improve the lives of women and girls around the world. This includes looking at gender-based discrimination, community engagement, women's health, education and more.

This is FIT's fifth round of funding. Since the program launched in 2019, it has awarded \$11 Million to over 50 projects – many of which are seeing promising results. Made possible through Global Affairs Canada, funding supports the testing of innovative solutions to challenges in the Global South that aim to advance gender equality.

FIT Director of Innovation, Christina MacIsaac, says FIT is about creating opportunity, exploring possibility, and learning and growing in collaboration.

"Since its start three years ago, FIT has created a space for inclusive innovation in international development. This has meant cultivating an environment where SMOs are empowered to experiment and adapt. In an ever-changing world, innovation is critical for developing sustained, scalable solutions to complex problems."

MacIsaac adds that supporting ideas at the testing phase sets FIT apart from other funding programs.

"FIT provides a rare opportunity for Canadian small and medium-sized organizations from different sectors to test new or improved practices, policies and approaches with local partners around the world – all with the intention of advancing gender equality. The fund also provides a collaborative experience for funded organizations to share their learnings with each other and the wider innovation and international development sectors."

Janice Hamilton, Executive Director for the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation (MCIC), which administers the FIT program on behalf of the Inter-Council Network, says the key learnings coming out of these tests have the potential to impact the work of SMOs by virtue of providing funding to try solutions with communities before committing to long term projects.





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"FIT's unique approach positions these SMOs and their partners as catalysts for transformative change. Part of our mandate is to share their results – both the successes and the failures – so those working in similar areas can improve or modify their own practices."

Intake five will see 12 SMOs test several solutions that empower girls and women, with projects in communities in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Some of the projects being tested include using permaculture gardens to reducing the stigma around menstrual health; the prioritization of local Indigenous knowledge and gender equality to address conservation and climate change; and improving financial literacy and numeracy.

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](#).

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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.





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## 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: \$169,100

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.



### **The Governors of the University of Alberta**

Building Formal Financial and Health Numeracy Among Poor Women in Northern Pakistan  
Country: Pakistan

Local Partner: Aga Khan Foundation-Aga Khan Rural Support program

Testing Period: 12 months

Amount: \$174,956

The University of Alberta's has an innovative solution to economically empower women in rural Pakistan, which will contribute to the development and expansion of women's rights and support progress towards achieving the United Nation's sustainable development Goals.

Women's financial inclusion in Pakistan is very low, with a Labour Market Assessment revealing that only 17% of women participate in paid labour and 50% of women are entirely illiterate. This testing project will implement Oral Information Management Solutions to develop women's financial and numeracy skills through a combination of by introducing images and other visual cues and building on women's existing oral communication abilities by. Oralized savings passbooks will be designed—using relevant images and icons drawn from the local context will guide users when recording their transactions.

Additionally, an oralized maternal health and child growth calendar will be created to support improved women and child health outcomes. The ultimate goal of the financial and health numeracy training is to equip illiterate, innumerate rural women and adolescent girls with appropriate financial skills and tools that will empower them economically and raise their capacities to pursue improved health outcomes.



### **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.

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.



**Liss Technologies Inc.**

Improving Breastfeeding Rates in Somalia Through Low-Cost, Solar-Powered Electric Breast Pumps

Country: Somalia

Local Partner: Nobel Health Consultancy (NOHEC);  
Benadir Maternity and Children's Hospital and The School of Public Health and Research, Somali National University,

Testing Period: 10 months

Amount: \$174,945

LISS Technologies will test its novel breast pump with mothers living in Somalia to identify whether electric breast pumps developed specifically for mothers living in low resource contexts, will increase breastfeeding initiation rates as well as breastfeeding duration when compared to mothers who are not given the breast pump. Liss Technologies seeks to ensure that mothers in Somalia, regardless of their socioeconomic standing, have access to this lifesaving and life-preserving tool.



**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.