



2024-2025 Impact Report

DRIVING

BOLD

AcTION

for

**Gender
Equality**

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Dear Friends, Supporters, and Partners

This has been a transformative year for the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). Today, ICRW stands as a decentralized global network encompassing three autonomous regional entities—**ICRW-Africa**, **ICRW-Americas**, and **ICRW-Asia**—working together to advance our shared mission.

Internal and external shifts necessitated our transformation. Across the world, we are witnessing the dangerous resurgence of regressive forces threatening decades of hard-won progress for women, girls, and structurally excluded people. At the same time, ongoing calls for decolonization have rightly challenged traditional power structures. Internally, we needed to become more responsive and agile. **To enhance our impact, we knew that we had to evolve from the traditional, U.S.-centered, hierarchical NGO model and design a more equitable structure that responds to the diverse realities of the communities we serve and is resilient in the face of forces seeking to roll back gains.**

Our new model embraces the principles of shared purpose and shared power. Each region is led by an executive director and sets priorities based on its own settings. This approach strikes a balance between regional independence and global cohesion, enabling us to stay responsive to local contexts while partnering across borders to deliver lasting change.

As we implement this innovative structure, we are grounded in the same values that define who we are: equity, inclusion, integrity, courage, curiosity, and compassion. **We are learning as we go while staying true to our vision: to create an equitable, sustainable, and prosperous world where women, girls, and structurally excluded people lead and thrive.**

As we approach our 50th anniversary in 2026, we are reflecting on our history and mapping the way forward. For five decades, ICRW has been a pioneer, catalyst, and convener within the gender equality community. We have made incredible progress since 1976, and we know there is still so much to do. Over the past year, **we've continued to help make the invisible visible—from championing care work, to breaking the silence around menopause, to confronting harmful gender norms, and to advancing women's leadership in the health, climate, and creative sectors.** Yet, the work ahead demands even greater resolve. In this moment of growing global resistance and uncertainty, our mission is urgent.

Thank you for your continued support over the past 50 years. Your generosity and partnership have powered our progress. Together, we are changing the systems that sustain inequality from the grassroots to the global stage.

In solidarity,

Evelyne Opondo, Executive Director, ICRW-Africa

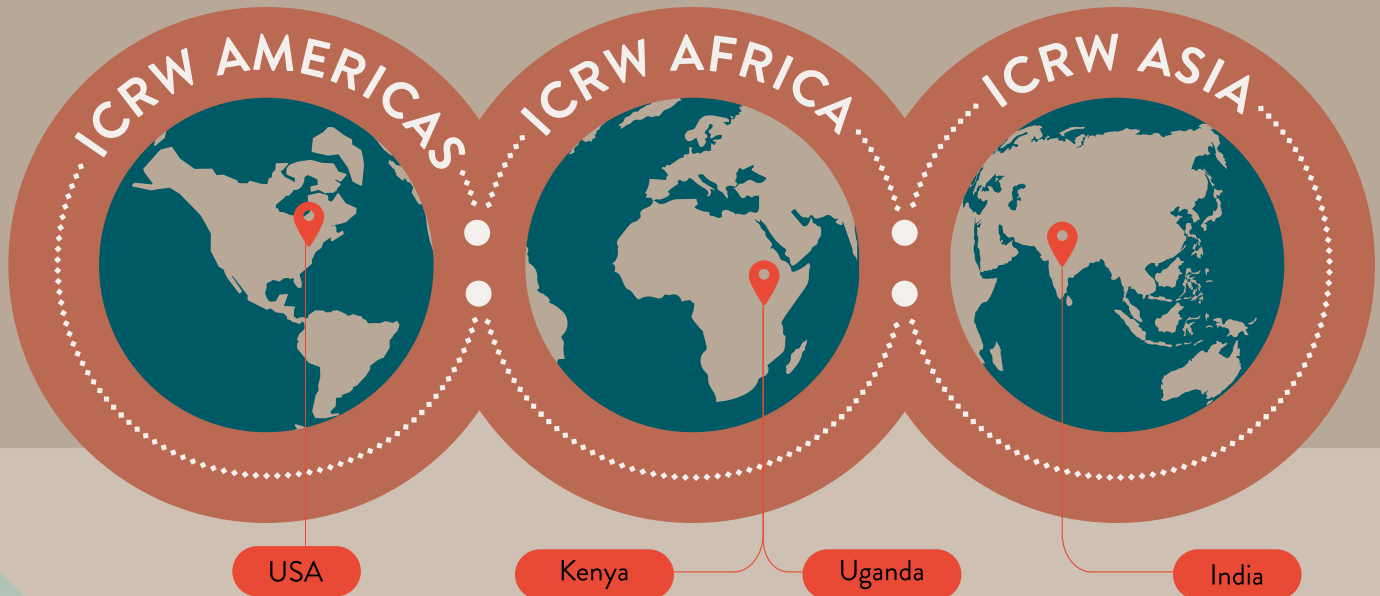
Ravi Verma, PhD, Executive Director, ICRW-Asia

Bama Athreya, PhD, Executive Director, ICRW-Americas

Our Transformation

ICRW has spent the last few years reimagining how we work to deliver on the promise of gender equality for women, girls, and structurally excluded people globally. After thoughtful introspection and careful planning, and in alignment with our 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, **we have now evolved into a global network model** that truly embodies the principles of equity, inclusion, and shared leadership we advocate for.

This purposeful transformation is the fulfillment of a strategic commitment we made together: to shift power closer to the communities we serve and build a structure that reflects the equitable world we seek to create.



Staying True to Our Purpose

Our new global network model encompasses three autonomous regional entities—**ICRW-Africa**, **ICRW-Americas**, and **ICRW-Asia**, each led by its own executive director and governed by its own independent board. Every region sets priorities rooted in its own context, ensuring decisions align with local needs, realities, and opportunities.

Together, these entities form the **ICRW Network**, interlinked by a common vision, mission, values, global strategy, and brand. We are committed to remaining a globally connected organization and have developed an infrastructure to support our alignment and collaboration.

Under our new model, we will no longer have a global CEO, a global governing board, or headquarters in the United States or elsewhere. Instead, the three regional entities will be united by a Global Advisory Board that will provide guidance and foster learning and information sharing. It will comprise an equal number of representatives from each regional board and several independent advisors.

A lean Global Coordinating Unit, staffed by a globally distributed team, will anchor network-wide operations and connectivity, providing shared services to accelerate collective impact.

- ◆ **We've created a network that fosters context-specificity at the regional level and shared purpose at the global level, strengthening local ownership, enhancing agility, and accelerating innovation to achieve gender equality for communities everywhere.**◆

◆ Looking Ahead

Our transformation into a decentralized global network marks a significant new chapter, one that reflects both who we are and who we are becoming. It honors our history, responds to the realities of today, and positions us to shape tomorrow with vision and courage.

Our new structure enhances our ability to provide insights and generate actionable evidence that reflects diverse contexts. It is designed to listen first and respond authentically, centering the experiences of communities to co-design scalable solutions and innovative policies that unlock opportunity and improve lives.

On the cusp of our 50th anniversary next year, we are carrying our legacy of impact forward, rewriting the rules of gender equality and working across borders, genders, and generations to change the systems that sustain inequality.

As a learning organization, ICRW is dedicated to sharing our progress and challenges on this journey to inspire others to reimagine what is possible. Together, we can disrupt the status quo and create the equitable and inclusive world we all need to thrive.



Advocating for the Recognition, Redistribution, and Support of Care Work

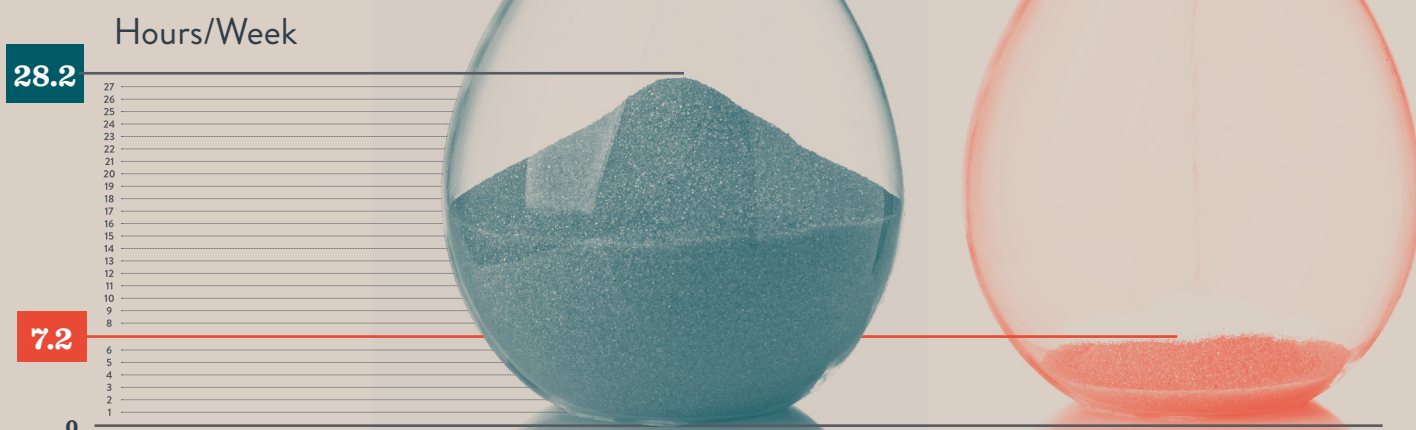
In Kenya, as everywhere, women and girls disproportionately shoulder unpaid care work that sustains families and communities. Unfortunately, it is also often at the expense of their own education, employment, and leadership opportunities.

On average, Kenyan **women spend 28.2 hours per week on unpaid care and domestic work compared to 7.2 hours for men**. This ratio of nearly 5:1 is not simply a statistic—it's an invisible tax on women's time, aspirations, and earnings. It determines who can pursue paid work, who can scale a business, and who is trapped in a cycle of informality. And while this reality is particularly stark in Kenya, it echoes across sub-Saharan Africa, where **women perform three times as much unpaid care as men**, locking them into low-paid, informal sectors.

Time Spent on Unpaid Care & Domestic Work in Kenya

Women

Men



For decades, ICRW has advocated to make care work visible, valued, and recognized as a *vital* resource for every economy, partnering with governments to design equitable care policies. This continues to be a major priority for advocacy across our global network. Strengthening care services reduces burdens on women and unlocks their potential to drive economic growth at every level.

This year, the Government of Kenya, through the State Department for Gender and Affirmative Action prioritized care as a critical pillar of the gender equality and women's empowerment agenda. With support from ICRW-Africa and a coalition of partners, **the government took a historic step forward by developing the National Care Policy, a framework that reimagines care as an essential social and economic infrastructure.** The policy marks a turning point in how care is valued in the country—not as a private responsibility but as a public good that fuels national progress.


If fully adopted and funded, the policy would expand care infrastructure, ensuring services for children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and the sick; introduce care-friendly employment policies; and support community-based initiatives.

This would open doors for women to seize opportunities, realize their dreams, and fuel economic growth. It also positions Kenya to become a model for other governments.


These gains are worth celebrating. They show what is possible when governments design for inclusion, when local realities drive decision-making, and when women's lived experiences shape national priorities. Investing in care is smart economics.

When women are freed from the constraints of unpaid labor, families thrive, communities prosper, and entire nations grow stronger.



Photo Source: Men in Caregiving: Insights from India Report 


Redefining Men's Role in Caregiving

ICRW-Asia's work on centering care and redefining men's roles in caregiving has taken a decisive step forward through a qualitative discourse-setting **study**  conducted with Equimundo in India.

The research drew attention to how traditional masculinity continues to shape caregiving, with unpaid care still largely seen as women's work, while men's contributions remain limited and often unrecognized. Yet the findings also revealed growing support among men for more equitable roles, opening opportunities for systemic change.

Building on these insights, ICRW-Asia convened a wide range of researchers, civil society actors, policymakers, media leaders, and international organizations to **reframe caregiving as a shared responsibility and a pathway to gender equality**. This collaborative dialogue has laid the foundation for stronger programming, richer evidence, and bold narratives that uplift men as caregivers, strengthening families and communities as India advances toward a more equitable care economy.



Photo Source: Engaging Men and Boys: A Report on Pathways to Gender Equality in India 

Shifting Minds, Systems, and Structures

This year, ICRW-Asia, in collaboration with UNESCO, released **Engaging Men and Boys: A Report on Pathways to Gender Equality in India** .

Drawing from ten case studies across the country, the report highlighted local approaches that help men reflect on power, relationships, and responsibility. It called for **interventions that go beyond awareness campaigns to long-term, community-based efforts that transform behavior and social attitudes and position men as partners in gender justice.**

Our findings indicate that **gender-transformative work is most effective when it begins early and is grounded in empathy and dialogue.** Interventions in classrooms, peer groups, and community spaces, for example, help men and boys question traditional roles in an open and non-threatening way. We also found that change lasts when educators, community leaders, and policymakers work together to reinforce equity.

Across South Asia, **our insights are helping organizations design practical, inclusive approaches to gender equality, with a particular focus on engaging men and boys in transformative ways.**

Building on this foundation, ICRW-Asia is developing a toolkit that translates this research into action, shifting the focus from why we should engage men and boys in gender equality to how to do so effectively. The toolkit outlines core concepts and provides concrete strategies for initiating engagement, sustaining participation, contextualizing approaches, and ensuring intersectionality. It also includes guidance on monitoring and learning. Our aim is for this toolkit to become a living document, one that evolves as we gather evidence on what truly works when engaging men and boys for gender equality.



Unlocking Economic Opportunities for Women's Empowerment

At UNGA 2024, we spoke at the SDG Media Zone to highlight the systemic barriers that contribute to women's economic exclusion, including underinvestment in gender-responsive policies, underrepresentation of women in decision-making roles, discriminatory laws, and restrictive social norms. Our conversation explored what it will take to move from awareness to action and the meaningful interventions needed to ensure women's economic well-being.

Watch the Video 

Breaking the Silence on Menopause

Imagine a world where women's health is not tethered to their fertility but is instead celebrated at every stage of their lives.

For generations, stigma and shame have contributed to a veil of silence around a natural life transition that touches half the population—menopause—despite its profound social, economic, and health implications. While women's experiences in menopause are diverse, one aspect remains constant: the urgent need for recognition, support, and policies that ensure no woman navigates this life stage in silence or without care.

At ICRW, we seek to break barriers and illuminate pathways to comprehensive, affordable care for women throughout their lives. On August 20, 2025, ICRW-Africa and Reproductive Health Network Kenya hosted Kenya's first-ever National Conference on Menopause. This was a pivotal moment in the country's history, bringing dignity, awareness, and urgency to a long-overdue conversation.

In a landmark first, at the conference, Kenya's Ministry of Health recognized menopause as a neglected public health issue. It then committed to developing national policy guidelines and convening an expert committee—creating a rare policy window that demands immediate, coordinated action to secure lasting change.

Menopause is not a quiet footnote in a woman's life. It is a defining passage that needs visibility and understanding. The cost of silence and inaction is a diminished quality of life for women. Further, this issue extends beyond women's health. It affects families, workplaces, and economies, and should be a public priority.

As we continue to break the stigma and challenge the status quo, **there are three commitments that we can make to build systems that support women at every stage of their lives:**

- ◆ Center the lived experiences of women in all their diversity.
- ◆ Equip healthcare providers with the information and tools that they need to provide comprehensive healthcare throughout women's lives.
- ◆ Integrate menopause in policies and programs, and pilot and scale workplace policies that enable women to thrive.

Together, **we must raise awareness and demand action—because menopause is everybody's business.**

Evelyne Opondo on Redefining Menopause: A Call for Visibility and Dignity 



Investing in Gender-Responsive Just Transitions:

Building the Case for Evidence-Generation on Climate and Energy Resilience in India



Across the salt flats of Gujarat's Little Rann of Kutch area, women from the Agariya community are leading one of India's most compelling cases for gender-responsive climate action.

For generations, the Agariya community has relied solely on salt farming—a livelihood marked by harsh conditions, unpredictability, low returns, and minimal infrastructure. Women have historically borne a disproportionate share of this burden, navigating gruelling workdays and environmental precarity. Their challenging reality is compounded by climate change, which has made weather patterns increasingly unpredictable and temperatures more extreme, directly impacting their work and lives.

Yet, amidst this hardship, a powerful transformation is underway. Through the Self-Employed Women's Association's (SEWA) *Cleaner Sky* (Swacch Aakaash) campaign, thousands of women have been transitioning from diesel to solar-powered water pumps. This shift is more than a technical upgrade; it represents women taking economic control and embedding gender-inclusive solutions into local climate resilience. It demonstrates how renewable-energy access, paired with collectivization, capacity building, and market linkages, can strengthen livelihoods, reduce emissions, and pave the way for women's economic empowerment.

The ongoing collaboration between ICRW-Asia and SEWA, under ICRW's **What Works: Women and Climate** portfolio, seeks to document and analyze these experiences, generating evidence on how women-led climate action initiatives, embedded within models of economic empowerment, can contribute to carbon reduction and climate resilience.

◆ Building Resilience Through Collectivization

The ICRW-SEWA research is designed to capture how the *Cleaner Sky* campaign's approach goes beyond a technical solution, focusing on the broader power of collectives and organizing women from a once-scattered community.

This intentional building of collective structure has reinforced positive local changes. It fosters a sense of shared purpose and creates a platform for women to address challenges together. By generating evidence on women's leadership and participation in these collective bodies, our current research aims to demonstrate that empowering women to lead not only strengthens communities but also makes climate interventions more effective and sustainable in the long run.

The SEWA initiative has also challenged traditional gender norms by training women as solar technicians. This has equipped them with new skills and opened pathways into the renewable energy sector—a field where women have historically been underrepresented. In this context, the shift to renewable energy is not only an environmental or technological advancement, but also a source of financial empowerment for women as it offers alternative livelihood opportunities.

The initiative's success reflects the goals of the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals, proving that climate justice and gender equality are inextricably linked.

◆ Urgent Need for Action and Investment

While the *Cleaner Sky* campaign provides a powerful model, it also highlights a critical global challenge: despite being disproportionately impacted by climate change, women and women-led climate initiatives are consistently sidelined in climate finance discussions.

According to UN Women, only **0.01% of global climate finance supports projects that address both climate change and women's rights.**

Another study revealed that **climate-related development assistance, with gender equality as a principal objective, accounted for only 1.5% of total climate action spending.**

The disconnect between rhetoric and resources underscores the urgency of generating robust, localized evidence to shift policy and funding priorities.

◆ Building the Case for Evidence Generation

The ICRW-SEWA collaboration aims to document a successful project and generate the evidence needed to influence climate finance and policy decisions at scale.

The *Agariya* women’s journey shows that investing in women is both a moral imperative and a strategic decision. When women are equipped with technology and united in shared purpose, they become active agents of change who can transform their lives and their communities.


Our research in this community systematically examines what works and what doesn’t, generating insights to guide policymakers, funders, and development actors toward investing in solutions that are locally led, gender-inclusive, and sustainable.

Ultimately, bridging the gap between global climate ambition and the on-the-ground realities requires evidence that women’s leadership is indispensable to just transitions. The *Agariya* women’s story—from diesel dependency to solar innovation, from marginalization to leadership, offers inspiration and a roadmap for a more resilient and equitable world for all.

A section of the salt flats of Gujarat’s Little Rann of Kutch



Advancing Reproductive Justice Across Borders

This year, through our *VITAL* initiative, ICRW's US office (now ICRW-Americas) continued to advance reproductive freedom. At a time of rising backlash, we brought together activists, academics, legal experts, activists, and others to learn and exchange insights and strategies to strengthen abortion rights movements in the Americas. Our collaborative cross-border approach underscored what we know to be true: **the fight for reproductive rights is part of the broader fight for bodily autonomy and social justice.** 

In June, we held a webinar to foster a living community of practice. Participants from across the Americas joined an engaging conversation with Dr. Laura Gil, Medical Co-Founder of Grupo Médico per el Derecho a Decidir (Medical Group for the Right to Decide), Colombia; Raven Freeborn, Executive Director, Avow Texas; and Maria Elena Perez, Director, Ipas, US.

Together, the panelists reframed intersectionality as an analysis of power, not just identity, linking reproductive justice to broader systems that impact our lives: white supremacy, colonialism, and heteropatriarchy. They urged movements to go beyond “reproductive justice-informed programs” and instead govern through reproductive justice, contending for power locally and transnationally to transform material conditions.

Across contexts, their message was clear: legality does not guarantee access. Criminalization, fear, legal ambiguity, provider stigma, misinformation, and logistical barriers—from transportation to funding silos—keep care services out of reach for many. That is why shifting culture matters as much as policy reforms. The panelists shared strategies from their experience, including:


- ◆ Leverage local governance and community building opportunities to dismantle stigma and disinformation.
- ◆ Center rights and justice in public discourse about abortion as a precursor to legal challenges.
- ◆ Reframe local priorities, such as transportation, migration, or health insurance as reproductive issues to ensure people can access care.

Raven Freeborn reminded us that, **“Human relationships, collective care, and transnational solidarity are movement ‘currency’.”** True and lasting progress demands funding reform and investments in cross-border learning, grassroots organizing, and cross-movement collaboration to break down the siloes between democracy, climate, and reproductive justice.

Through *VITAL*, we helped weave a web of solidarity to move us closer to a world where everyone has the power and resources to make decisions about their bodies, and where those who choose to have children can raise them in a healthy and safe environment.



Chingaari: Strengthening Feminist Leadership in Health

ICRW's research on women in leadership  in India's health sector underscored a shared global truth: women are the backbone of the health system yet remain locked out of leadership roles. They are on the front lines of care in health settings and communities. Yet, they are often underpaid, overburdened, ignored, and left out of decision-making processes.

To address these gaps, ICRW-Asia and Women in Global Health launched *Chingaari*: A Gender Transformative Leadership Development Program in April 2025. It is designed to **equip grassroots health workers with the perspectives and skills needed to challenge the inequitable structures that hold them back.**

Chingaari brought together a cohort of 46 women, non-binary, and intersex persons from 15 states and Union Territories, working on issues ranging from domestic violence to menstrual hygiene and reproductive health to palliative care and community mental health. Anchored in feminist pedagogy, ***Chingaari* created a counter-space, a place where women's everyday struggles are contextualized as part of broader systemic inequities.**

For six months, participants gathered online every fortnight to talk about patriarchy, power, and marginalization. They unpacked how India's health system treats them as “workers” but rarely as leaders. They reflected on intersectionality, learning how gender, caste, class, and geography shaped their lives and experiences as women and as health workers. Through conversations, case studies, and comics, **they explored how to challenge harmful norms and what it means to practice power differently, by uplifting rather than dominating.**

A nurse, inspired by a session on gender and health outcomes, for example, directly challenged a family's neglect of a woman patient. For the first time, she named gender discrimination as a health issue in front of colleagues and patients' families. Another participant used program learning to lead a gender equality training for her state's disaster management authority. She described it as a “golden opportunity,” made possible because *Chingaari* gave her the confidence and language to intervene in a space where gender had never been discussed.


In group sessions, participants spoke of the relief and solidarity they felt:

“When I hear others share, I know my struggles are not just mine. It gives me strength to keep going.”

Chingaari is not just about personal growth. **It is about catalyzing change in organizations and communities.** Participants returned to their workplaces equipped to train peers, run local campaigns, and initiate conversations that were once unthinkable. Additionally, the supervisors who participated in *Chingaari*'s parallel workshops have begun to reflect on their roles in dismantling workplace barriers and supporting women's leadership.

One of *Chingaari*'s most profound contributions lies in the simple yet radical act of bringing people together. Women, non-binary, and intersex health workers, many from rural areas and marginalized communities, sit in conversation with each other across states, languages, and lived experiences. They prove that **feminist leadership development is not an abstract concept but is both necessary and possible.** Together, they can transform the systems they are part of, and ensure that equity, justice, and dignity become non-negotiables in the health sector.



Photo Source: Women and the Creative Sector in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Scoping Review 



Flipping the Script on Africa's Creative Economy

The creative industry in sub-Saharan Africa is booming, contributing substantially to the region's economy and providing diverse opportunities for employment and prosperity. However, its full potential remains untapped as persistent gender inequities limit African women from fully participating in and benefitting from the sector.

Through the *Behind the Scenes Project*, ICRW-Africa is uncovering and tackling these barriers head-on. We've partnered with African women creatives in Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, Senegal, Nigeria, and Uganda to explore how gender norms and practices shape their journeys.




Emerging findings reveal that women in the sector face deep-rooted systemic and institutional constraints, including cultural expectations, unsupportive policy contexts, male control of critical infrastructure, and gender bias. These issues result in job insecurity, gendered pay gaps, unequal access to opportunities, unsafe working conditions, exploitation, limited funding, and lack of mentorship. Consequently, women creatives are often underpaid, underfunded, undervalued, and underestimated.

Despite these challenges, women across the region are making critical strides, flipping the script and rewriting the rules to drive change within the sector. They are opening studios, partnering with each other, mentoring the next generation, owning their narratives, using digital tools to expand reach, and redefining the creative industry on their own terms.

Together with our project partners, **we are translating evidence into action to ensure women creatives have the support they need, are recognized for their talents and contributions, and can thrive.**

Behind the Scenes has become a platform for engagement with creatives, policymakers, guilds, funders, and employers. **We are igniting critical discussions on and advocating for inclusive policies, equitable funding, and safer work environments.** By centering women's lived experiences, we are providing key stakeholders with insights needed to design gender-responsive targeted interventions—from business development to financing to mentorship programs—that position women as architects of Africa's creative future and ensure they fully benefit from the sector.

Gender equity in the creative economy is essential for sustainable growth. **Through improved governance, strategic policy, programmatic responses, and bold investments, we can build a more inclusive and resilient creative ecosystem.**

Africa's Creative Goldmine: Unlocking Growth Amid Gendered Challenges 
Women and the Creative Sector in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Scoping Review 
Behind the Scenes: Young Women Creatives in Africa's Sector 

Financing Feminist Futures: Our Presence on the Global Stage

Even as geopolitical shifts destabilized multilateral institutions and longstanding alliances, ICRW persistently advocated for women and girls, maintaining a strong presence in major global forums where gender equality was on the agenda. As the world transitioned from a period of historic highs in commitments to gender financing in late 2024 to their rapid dismantling in early 2025, our US-based global team continued to show up—with evidence, clarity, and purpose.

From CSW to UNGA in the U.S. to the International Conference on Financing for Development in Spain to OECD GenderNet to W20 in South Africa to the Feminist Foreign Policy Ministerial in France and the World Social Summit in Qatar, ICRW shaped conversations and informed outcomes. We contributed to communiqués, helped organize side events, and elevated evidence in the main venues. In a time defined by rapid and unpredictable change, we borrowed a motto from the musical, *Hamilton*: **If you’ve got skin in the game, stay in the game.**

We remained deeply engaged in key coalitions including Feminist Foreign Policy Collaborative, Women’s Major Group, the Global Alliance for Care, and the International Family Planning Coalition. We partnered with allies to analyze the shifting landscape and co-create strategies to enhance our impact. Our collective efforts gained new momentum in October 2025 at Walking the Talk’s Financing Feminist Futures Conference in Spain.

Throughout this year, we’ve continued to use our voice to contest efforts to roll back rights or reassert colonial dynamics, protesting, for example, the U.S. government’s decision to destroy urgently needed contraceptives. **We monitored anti-gender actors and consistently used evidence to remind policymakers that investments in gender equality are the most cost-effective way to drive social and economic progress.**

Fifty years after the First World Conference on Women in Mexico City, and thirty years after Beijing, 2025 underscored the relevance of the rest of that *Hamilton* lyric: You’ve got to stay in the game, if you want to play in the game. With ICRW’s new structure and strengthened regional presence, **we are emerging from this year better positioned to weather global shifts, seize opportunities for progress, and amplify our voice even more strongly in 2026.**

Reflection on Care: Lessons from the Past, Demands for the Future 

There Will be No Progress on Gender Rights Without Political Will and Accountability 

The Real Economy: Reflection on Care, W20, and Beyond 

Thank you for your commitment to ICRW.

Your support enables us to work across borders and generations to transform the systems that sustain inequality and limit opportunity. Together, we can achieve gender equality for communities everywhere.

For more information, please contact us at: communications@icrw.org  or visit our website: www.icrw.org 

