



ILU WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM

REPORT



1. Executive summary

With the support of the USAID Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Hub program, the Ilu Fund developed the **Ilu Women’s Empowerment Program** to promote gender equality in Latin America and the Caribbean. The program sought to address key obstacles to the adoption of gender-smart investing and business practices in the region to drive systemic change.

Our multifaceted approach sought to expand gender-smart capital in the region while providing direct guidance and resources to both portfolio companies and the broader ecosystem through three main components:



RESULTS

1,085

Participants¹
Across the Americas

3

webinars that reached 534 participants across 23 countries, of which 92% identify as women and more than one-third who are entrepreneurs

5.8 MM

USD raised in blended finance capital, with 80% of transactions representing investors new to the Ilu Fund

14

regional workshops that reached 102 participants that reside in 16 countries and of which 75% identify as women

15

technical assistance projects in nine countries

9

investor education events sharing our gender lens investing approach that reached 841 people

17

tools featured in an open-source toolkit

3

case studies highlighting technical assistance in different project streams, countries, and sectors

¹ People directly impacted refers to those participating in training events in the technical assistance projects, investor education events, workshops and webinars. Duplicates were removed.

AS A RESULT OF THESE ACTIVITIES, THE ILU FUND TEAM CONCLUDED THAT:

1

There is a strong appetite for blended finance vehicles with a gender lens approach, but more innovation is needed in the instruments offered to align with the different risk-return expectations of a variety of investors.

2

Investors have an important role to play in advancing gender equity within the business community by motivating business leaders to act.

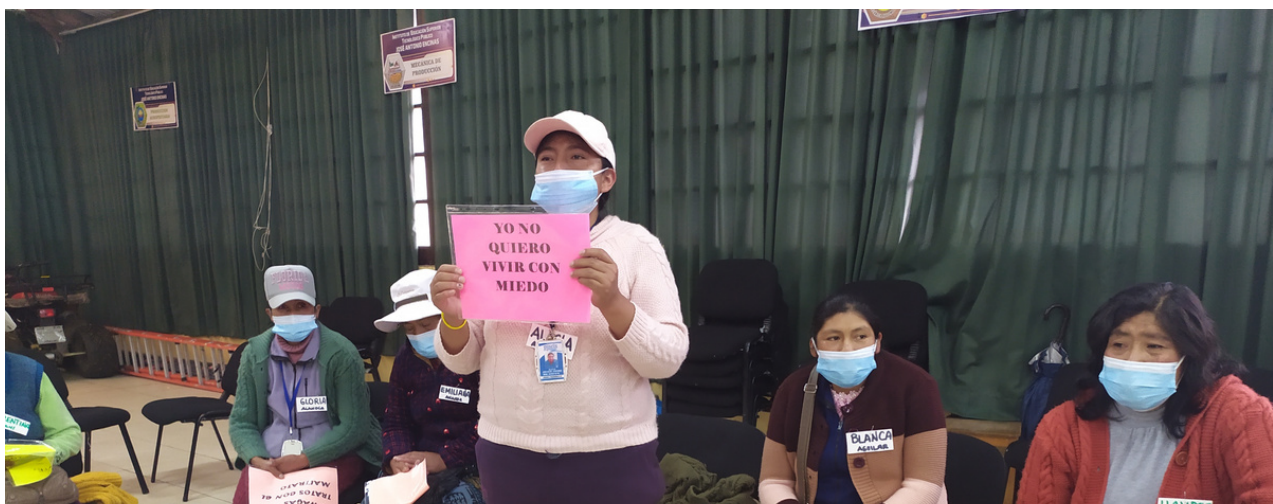
3

Gender awareness and knowledge is generally low amongst business leaders and employees in the region, evidencing the need to provide ongoing education.

4

Investors must continue to provide guidance to portfolio company teams in order to advance systemic and sustainable change while they build in-house gender expertise over time.

The program is catalyzing a profound transformation within companies and the region at large. And yet, existing gender inequalities highlight that widespread adoption of gender-smart investing and business practices is required to drive systemic change. We are all called to accompany commitments with action, collaborate across sectors to share expertise and capacity, and cultivate leadership to inspire our teams and communities.





2. Introduction to the Ilu Women's Empowerment Program

Today, it is abundantly clear that advancing gender equality is both, good for business and good for the world, as proven by a wide and growing set of evidence demonstrating that²

1

Women entrepreneurs deliver higher returns for investors.

2

Diversity drives improved profitability, innovation, decision-making, and employee satisfaction and retention.

3

Women's purchasing power is growing rapidly, and their increase in discretionary spending represents a growth market larger than that of China and India combined.

Yet, a significant gender gap persists today, across business activities, sectors, and regions. This gap is preventing businesses, economies, and nations from realizing the outsized benefits of gender equality. To seize that opportunity, gender lens investing is increasingly recognized as a powerful vehicle of change within companies and society at large.

Deetken Impact is a Canadian impact asset manager that invests throughout a variety of sectors in Latin America and the Caribbean with a focus on women's empowerment and sustainable energy. Deetken Impact, in partnership with Pro Mujer, an international organization with more than 30 years of experience providing services to underserved women throughout Latin America to advance gender equality, launched the Ilu Women's Empowerment Fund to advance gender equality in the region.

With the support of the **USAID Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Hub** program, the Ilu Fund developed the Ilu Women's Empowerment Program to promote gender equality in Latin America through three main components:

² 1. Katie Abouzahr, "Why Women-Owned Start-ups Are a Better Bet," BCG, June 6, 2018, <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2018/why-women-owned-startups-are-better-bet>.
2. Vivian Hunt, Dennis Layton, and Sara Prince, "Why Diversity Matters," McKinsey & Company, January 1, 2015.

1. Incremental capital

Expanding the Ilu Fund with risk-adjusted blended finance capital.

2. Technical assistance

Engaging directly with portfolio companies in 15 customized projects to develop and strengthen gender-smart business practices.

3. Knowledge dissemination and advocacy

Developing an open-source toolkit, hosting regional workshops, leading investor education events, and sharing case studies.

The program was resourced with Ilu Fund staff (Deetken Impact and Pro Mujer personnel) with support from subject matter experts based in Latin America who contributed to content design and had focused roles in the implementation of program activities. Strategic partnerships played an important role in cultivating gender-smart business networks and expanding the reach of program activities.

The impacts of the program detailed below prove that gender-smart investing not only contributes to building more inclusive societies, but also contributes to better business performance. This approach on investing is catalyzing a profound transformation for companies and the region at large. Going forward, the Ilu Fund team will continue to support investees, investors, and partners in expanding and advancing gender-smart investing and business practices.

Additional reports and case studies can be found at: <https://iluwomensempowermentfund.com/impact>



The Ilu Fund team will continue to support investees, investors, and partners in expanding and advancing gender-smart investing and business practices.



3. Program Components

INCREMENTAL CAPITAL

The Ilu Fund team sought to expand the Ilu Fund by USD \$5 MM through fundraising of blended finance capital, including the design and implementation of a first-loss tranche of USD \$1 MM to provide added security to investors given the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as a virtual investor roadshow. These efforts were key to exceeding our fundraising target and welcoming a diverse set of new investors, including U.S. and Canadian family offices, foundations, religious organizations, and individual investors. For many, their contribution to the Ilu Fund was their first gender-smart investment.

RESULTS

22

transactions, of which 80% represent new investors to the Ilu Fund

USD 5.8 MM

USD raised, exceeding our fundraising target

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

As a gender lens investing fund, gender considerations are incorporated at every step of the investment process. For instance, based on the results from a comprehensive gender assessment conducted in the due diligence phase, the Ilu Fund team establishes specific gender objectives that companies are expected to achieve over the investment period.

However, throughout the first few years of capital deployment, the Ilu Fund team noticed that despite their commitment to gender equality, companies were lacking the expertise, capacity and resources to advance the objectives on their own. As such, the Ilu Fund team identified an opportunity to accelerate that process while building capacity within company teams through hands-on technical assistance.

Each technical assistance project was customized to the needs and priorities of each organization, in alignment with one of five project streams:

- ✓ **Inclusive Governance**
- ✓ **Women in Leadership**
- ✓ **Gender Smart Information Systems**
- ✓ **Gender Smart Products and Marketing**
- ✓ **Gender Sensitive Community Engagement**

As participating companies are investees of Ilu Fund, the technical assistance integrated with the Fund's broader gender lens investing framework, as exemplified in the following high-level approach to each project:

1. Assessment

A comprehensive evaluation of the company's gender practices across all areas of the business using Deetken Impact's Gender Scorecard.

2. Project stream alignment

Based on the Scorecard results, areas of improvement were identified and matched to project stream themes, in alignment with the company's key strategic goals.

3. Technical assistance project

Each project typically spanned a 12 - 16 week period during which the Ilu Fund actively engaged with company personnel on a weekly basis. The project methodology and activities were not just specific to each project stream but also tailored to each company's business model, country context, and needs. However, across all projects, we recognized the importance of training portfolio companies' key decision-makers and team members in fundamental gender concepts and diversity, equity, and inclusion best practices. As such, a transversal component throughout all 15 projects was building capacity within the team to lead activities within and beyond the scope of this engagement.

4. Road Map

Based on key findings from the project and initiatives under development, a detailed roadmap and action plan was developed with and validated by the leadership team.

5. Monitoring

The Ilu Fund team will monitor project results and gender impacts over the course of the investment period, including a quarterly monitoring of the roadmap and action plan; an annual Gender Scorecard review; and quarterly social and environmental impact monitoring.



RESULTS

The following outputs were achieved as a direct result of the technical assistance component:

15

projects in nine countries throughout Latin America and the Caribbean

474

total participants, of which

64%

identify as women

54

total workshops facilitated (average of four per project)

84%

of company executives participated on average

100+

hours of training in total (average of 7.5 hours / project)

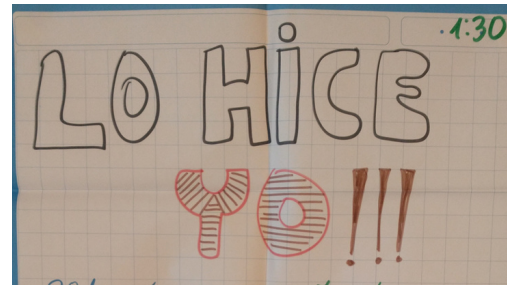
Participants consistently expressed high levels of satisfaction with the engagement, reporting an average of 9.13 / 10⁵



⁵ Based on results from exit surveys that were implemented upon completion and circulated to all project participants.

Additionally, project activities generated the following gender-smart business initiatives:

- 4** **products for women clients** in the design phase, accompanied with non-financial services
- 1,500** **people that participated in gender-sensitive market research** to identify differentiated needs, preferences, and opportunities
- 9** **human resources guides** for inclusive talent management processes
- 10** **policies** developed to incorporate and formalize DE&I commitments and practices
- 24** **tools, dashboards, and processes** developed to strengthen data management practices and integrate a gender lens throughout information systems



BUSINESS & SOCIAL IMPACTS

In addition to the direct outputs and results of the engagements, we identified the following broader business and social impacts as a result of the project:

1. Greater gender awareness and knowledge

Exit survey results evidence a meaningful change in participants' understanding of fundamental gender concepts, trends and opportunities, as well as the relevance of gender considerations for business performance.

2. Stronger business intelligence

With an increased focus on women clients, employees, and stakeholders, the research and assessments carried out in the projects generated significant market insights.

3. Improved capacity to develop and execute inclusive and equitable commercial, talent, and operational strategies

Participants consistently noted feeling better prepared to implement a gender focus in their work due to the knowledge acquired and practical guidance provided, positioning the companies to directly improve their business practices with a gender lens.

4. Implementation of business strategies with a gender perspective

Upon advancing and implementing the initiatives designed in the projects, companies are expected to strengthen positive impacts on women clients, employees, and beneficiaries.

5. Initiation of a holistic gender mainstreaming process across business areas

Despite participating in focused projects, the engagement sparked interest, commitment, and capacity to promote gender equity across operations, with expected compounding business and social impacts in the months and years to come.



"I did not know about unconscious biases related to gender. This program taught me that we need to increase the number of women in leadership in our organization, develop training and learning sessions, and have a clear career plan for women to advance towards decision-making positions when opportunities arise."

Participant, woman



"It was particularly enriching to learn about the role that we play as allies, and that it is not just about the policies that we implement in the company. I realized that relying only on the policies as a factor of change will not allow the strategies to really be carried out. Now I know that as a leader I must directly promote and inspire senior management to maintain this path of equality."

Participant, man



"This process brought a lot to all of us. When the sessions ended, we continued talking about the issues, and sharing our experiences on a personal level. The sessions started the conversation, it aroused curiosity in us, and we brought that to our homes as well, so we will see the impact of the project not only in the institution but also in our households."

Participant, woman

As a result of the Ilu Women's Empowerment Program's technical assistance component, the companies are expected to improve their gender practices and impact on women as employees, customers, and stakeholders. We expect portfolio companies to become agents of change for gender equality in their sector and inspire other actors in the region to create more inclusive business practices.

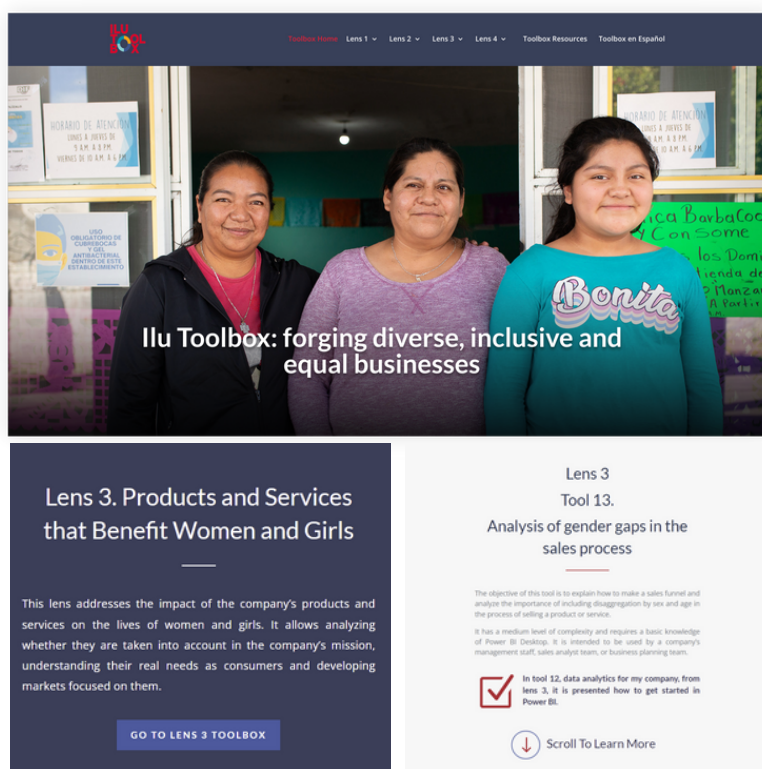
For more information regarding the technical assistance component, additional reports and case studies can be found at: <https://iluwomensempowermentfund.com/impact>

KNOWLEDGE DISSEMINATION AND ADVOCACY

In addition to directly supporting portfolio companies to become gender leaders, the Ilu Fund team identified the importance of sharing practical advice and guidance with the broader ecosystem to drive change beyond the Ilu Fund. As such, the knowledge dissemination and advocacy component sought to promote the broader adoption of gender smart business practices throughout the region by demonstrating the business case for gender-smart investing and business practices, communicating frameworks and best practices, and sharing outcomes in an open-source format.

1. ILU TOOLBOX

The Ilu Toolbox is a public, open-source resource providing practical guidance to SMEs⁶ for the implementation of gender smart business practices. It aims to address the persistent gender gaps that exist within companies in the region and is available to all that are interested in advancing gender equity across operations.



HOW DOES IT WORK?

The Ilu Toolbox, available in both English and Spanish, features the following:

1. Self-assessment: a series of questions to evaluate the degree of implementation of gender smart business practices within

internal and external operations. Based on the results of the questionnaire, the Ilu Toolbox provides an overall score (basic, intermediate, and advanced) and specific guidance as to what gaps are identified and therefore recommended tools to address those gaps.

2. Tools: The tools are categorized by four gender lenses: Women in Leadership, Workplace Equity, Products and Services that Benefit Women and Girls, and Value Chain Equity and Advocacy. Within each lens, the platform provides a series of tools featuring specific strategies and guidance to advance gender practices. The tools can be used on or offline, with the option to download as Microsoft Word documents. Templates are provided to put strategies into practice, such as a manifesto, human resources policies, market research guides, and A/B testing. Videos are incorporated when possible to complement and exemplify written guidance.

To celebrate and promote the launch of the Ilu Toolbox, two events were held on Zoom, as well as live streamed on Facebook and LinkedIn.

RESULTS

27

open-source tools across four gender lenses providing practical guidance, templates, and recommendations to advance gender practices

216

people participated in the live launch events

+8K

page views as of June 2022, indicating strong user engagement and uptick

2. WORKSHOPS & WEBINARS

Through dynamic and engaging workshops and webinars, Ilu portfolio company team members, SMEs business leaders, and women entrepreneurs throughout the region gained an introductory yet holistic understanding of how to advance gender equality practices and apply different gender focused frameworks into their day-to-day tasks in a practical and impactful way.

The workshop series covered a wide array of topics and took place over the course of several months. Each workshop was conducted on Zoom in a two-hour session, and, in some cases, participants had the opportunity to participate in one-on-one consultations with the facilitators.

THEME	# WORKSHOPS	OBJECTIVE
Transformational leadership	3	For participants to discover their inner role models with an emphasis on self-reflection, problem-solving, and identifying gendered workplace patterns.
Inclusive Governance	3	To raise awareness about the fundamental and strategic role of inclusive governance and formalized policies to advance gender smart business practices.
Gender Smart Information Systems and Data Analysis	3	To reflect on the importance of making evidence-based decisions by collecting and analyzing quality gender disaggregated data to identify gender gaps and opportunities.
Gender Smart Products and Marketing Strategies	3	To learn different tools and skills to innovate in product design, creating gender-sensitive financial and non-financial products.
Inclusive Communication	1	To explore the power of communications to advance gender equality and to learn why and how to use inclusive language in marketing strategies.
Organizational and Cultural Transformation	1	To share elements and best practices to lead a process of cultural transformation that promotes new ways of working with diverse stakeholders.

Additionally, the Ilu Fund team led three webinars as part of the Gender Lens Investing forum hosted virtually by Pro Mujer in November 2021, with the goal of reaching a broader audience, particularly young women entrepreneurs.

THEME	# WEBINARS	OBJECTIVE
Product Design UX “A bridge of empathy”	1	To provide innovative and forward-thinking technical and strategic tools to create successful gender-sensitive products and services through user experience (UX) methodologies.
Product Design “An espresso of creative diversity, please!”	1	To harness the full potential of creativity to develop innovative solutions to customers’ problems while fostering inclusion and diversity.
Psychological Safety with FuckUp Nights	1	To build self-confidence as a young professional and create a space of psychological safety in the workplace.

RESULTS

14

workshops that reached 102 participants that reside in 16 countries and of which 75% identify as women and more than one-third have executive positions.

PARTICIPANTS

were highly satisfied with the workshops, with 92% mostly or completely agreeing that the workshops were relevant to their work, and 72% rating the workshops 5/5 on overall satisfaction.

3 WEBINARS

that reached 534 participants across 23 countries of which 92% identify as women and more than one-third as entrepreneurs.



"The most important for me was learning to see things from the other's point of view. I now understand that the whole can be greater than the sum of the parts if we generate adequate communications."

Participant, Man



"We've identified the institution's strengths in the different gender lenses, and the experience of interacting with the other institutions has been interesting and gives me an idea of some positive changes that we can implement"

Participant, Woman

3. INVESTOR EDUCATION

The Ilu Fund team designed and led a series of investor education events sharing our gender lens investing approach from a practitioner's point of view. These events emphasized the strong business case for integrating gender into investment decision-making, using the Fund and its portfolio companies as real-world examples.

The team selected events that would reach diverse audiences, reflecting a range of investor types and geographies, so as to have a wider reach and impact in the ecosystem. Participants learned about a variety of topics, such as how to develop and implement a gender lens investing strategy, how to put it in practice through interactive case studies, and the intersection with climate change and how to apply a gender lens investing framework in the energy sector.

RESULTS

The investor education series achieved the following outputs:

NINE

events that reached

841

people across the Americas

PARTICIPANTS

represented a diversity of actors, including: women investors, family offices, foundations, fund managers, development finance institutions, financial advisors, and impact sector professionals.



"We must create products and services with the beneficiaries involved and included, bringing them to the table and having them drive change, shape messaging, and develop intersectional investment guidelines"

**Senior Investment Manager,
Canada, SVX Impact United
event, February 2022**



IGNITE LEADERSHIP PROGRAM FOR WOMEN

June 2021

The IGNITE Leadership Program for Women, a collaboration between the Royal Bank of Canada and the Women's Enterprise Center, is a uniquely designed leadership program to educate and empower women leaders to build on their strengths and to expand their skills through the roles of Mentor, Investor, Advisor and Board Member.

The sessions took place over the course of 6 weeks, in which the Ilu Fund team led the session focused on investing. Participants received a packet of pre-session reading material on the importance of Gender Lens Investing and why it is a good business strategy. During the session, the Ilu Fund team first facilitated a workshop focused on practical guidance for how to directly support and engage with gender lens investors as individual women investors, and then moderated a panel discussion with four other women investors leading or supporting diverse and equitable investing firms and practices. Participants were highly engaged throughout the workshop, particularly during an interactive exercise where they were asked to come up with gender-informed questions to consider in various investment scenarios.

Through participation in IGNITE, the Program reached a unique audience of women business leaders who are poised to "ignite" their potential as investors.

4. CASE STUDIES

Finally, the **Ilú Fund team developed and published three case studies** to share key learnings, insights, and actionable best practices from our experience providing technical assistance to portfolio companies in the development of gender smart business practices. A total of three case studies were developed, highlighting different project streams, countries, and sectors.

GENDER SENSITIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

with PHP Energy, a company that manages a run-of-river hydroelectric project in Honduras.



GENDER SMART PRODUCTS & MARKETING

with Centro Financiero Empresarial (CFE), is a Panama-based institution focused on SME lending.



GENDER SMART INFORMATION SYSTEMS

With three financial institutions serving MSMEs throughout the region: INSOTEC, Conserva, and Finca Haiti.



The case studies can be found at: <https://iluwomensempowermentfund.com/impact>



4. Insights & Lessons Learned

In leading this program across a wide array of activities with diverse actors in Latin America and the Caribbean, we accumulated numerous insights as to the state of gender-smart investing and business in the region, as well as what is needed to continue to move the needle forward.

- **There is a strong appetite for blended finance vehicles with a gender lens approach, but more innovation is needed across the risk-return spectrum.** By exceeding our fundraising target and welcoming a diverse set of new investors to the Ilu Fund, it was clear that there is more interest than ever in ensuring capital intentionally addresses gender equality and women's empowerment. Nonetheless, we also identified a need for more practical guidance on how to integrate gender considerations into the investment process, as well as greater innovation in the instruments offered to align with the different risk-return expectations of a variety of investors.
- **Private capital has an important role to play in advancing gender equity within the business community.** As existing and new investors call on companies to meet gender objectives and guidelines, business leaders are motivated to act. As such, the widespread adoption of gender-smart investing practices is essential to addressing gender gaps in the region.
- **Ongoing gender training for business leaders is essential to address widespread bias and advance gender objectives.** Broadly speaking, we observed a low level of gender awareness and knowledge amongst business leaders and employees in the region. Many participants had not been exposed to fundamental gender concepts, meaning that unconscious biases are still widespread. This needs to be addressed not only within the private sector through continued training, but also explored in other sectors and aspects of life such as early education and media.
- **Investors must continue to provide guidance to portfolio company teams in order to advance systemic and sustainable change while they build in-house gender expertise over time.** Although we focused on building capacity within company teams to develop and lead gender-sensitive initiatives, we identified a need for ongoing support and advisory. Gender expertise is not built in a matter of months, but over time with continued exposure, learning, and practice.



5. Conclusion

Amongst many of the lessons from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is the fact that our progress toward gender equality is slow and vulnerable. The pandemic set back gender equality by nearly four decades, increasing the amount of time it will take to achieve parity from 100 years pre-pandemic to 136 today.⁷ As such, business leaders must not only express but also act on a genuine commitment to dedicating resources and efforts to advancing gender equity within their organizations. Intentionality is important, but alone is insufficient, and must be accompanied with action to address this pressing challenge of our time. Collaboration across sectors will be essential to sharing expertise and capacity, providing services that might otherwise be unavailable to companies and investors. And, lastly, leadership is required to inspire and motivate. We need more gender champions that are willing to lead cultural transformation within their teams, companies, homes, and communities.

The Ilu Fund team commits to cultivating this change beyond the program and throughout our fund activities going forward.



The Ilu Fund team would like to thank the subject-matter experts that contributed to the program: Agostina Coniglio, Constanza Connolly, Soledad Noel (Keidos Legal Impact); Aida Cerda (independent consultant); Brian Berry Rhys, Gina Ballaben, María Agustina Budani, Olivier Cecillon, Stephanie Lerner, Tania Goedhart (Zigla Consulting); Cassandra Maldonado (independent consultant); Cecilia Alvarez, Fabiola Bolaños (Shift506); Doraly Mayorga (independent consultant); Glory Thorpe (web developer); Juan Mejía-López, Ridel Morales (independent consultants); Margarita Jarava (translator); Marta Cabañas, Ana Cristina Hernández (FuckUp Nights Mexico); Naldi Delgado (independent consultant); Pamela Conzález (independent consultant); Rachel Pierre-Champagne (Innovators for Change); Sandra Caballero (independent consultant); Vanessa V. Vidal (independent consultant).

⁷ World Economic Forum (2021). Global Gender Gap Report 2021