Influence for good

How highly resourced individuals could work towards positive systemic change

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CATALYST 2030
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Preface

We are living in a time of multiple global crises—perhaps the most significant the world has faced in decades. These simultaneous challenges will require attention, effort, and transformative solutions.

This report is part of a series exploring how to limit suffering, promote flourishing, and minimize risk today and in the future through systemic change. This year, Ashoka and McKinsey joined forces with Echoing Green, Generation Pledge, and Catalyst 2030, an organization cofounded by Ashoka, to explore how highly resourced individuals (HRIs) can work toward systemic change.

This report is most relevant to individuals with considerable influence through wealth, networks, reputation, or a general ability to influence social, business, and political circles. Still, the findings can also apply to individuals with a lower net worth.

Solving society's most complex challenges will not be easy and will likely benefit from collaborative effort across sectors. HRIs could contribute toward systematic change in several ways: by supporting those who already do the work, such as the many social entrepreneurs represented by some of our report partners, or by doing the work themselves, informed by the expertise, evidence, and rationale provided by subject-matter leaders and those with experience of the issues.

The ideas outlined in this report are the first steps on a journey to learn about effective collaboration between stakeholders.

Table of contents

Executive summary

This report should be read by highly resourced individuals (HRIs) who want to help build a better future. Small steps may not be sufficient to address the compounding crises that strain our societies today. In this report, we examine how to strengthen personal capabilities for systemic change—the latest in our series aiming to equip stakeholders with tailored guidance.

This guidance is particularly targeted toward individuals with considerable resources through finances, networks, reputation, or a general ability to influence social, business, and political circles—defined here as highly resourced individuals, or HRIs. Even with this focus, most concepts are more broadly applicable: many of us can make a difference in the ways described in this report, scaled for our specific circumstances. As Ashoka puts it, everyone can be a changemaker.

This report is based on four years of research and more than 100 interviews with practitioners and those who seek to solve societal issues by changing the structures that hold them in place. The report also presents practical advice drawn from lived experience, and thus interviewed more than 50 HRIs, philanthropy advisers, philanthropy ecosystem experts, and scholars in ethics and philanthropy from five continents to understand how HRIs can maximize their positive impact. Collectively, the people interviewed have hundreds of years of experience working toward systemic change.

HRIs can provide crucial funding for systemic change work. But our report finds that they can be more influential and strategic if they consider the full suite of resources at their disposal. Throughout this report, real-world examples illustrate how individuals are already engaging in this work. Most HRIs featured are well along in their learning journey.

To make the findings of this report actionable, a Look – Envision – Build (LEB) model was created by co-publisher Generation Pledge, a network that mobilizes financial, social, career, and political capital to generate the greatest impact. HRIs working toward systemic change will find themselves continuously cycling through the three steps:

1. **Look with courage.** Acknowledge the current situation and engage in self-reflection regarding your contributions to it. Recognize your limitations, especially your understanding of social issues, and start to listen to proximate and subject-matter leaders (see Text Box 3: Essential expertise).

2. **Envision with rigor.** Develop the skill set you need to become a better change agent, as well as a clear vision and plan for change, in collaboration with proximate and subject-matter leaders (see Text Box 3: Essential expertise). In partnership with these leaders, create sound strategies and specific plans on how you can best support work toward change.

3. **Build with excellence.** Start now. Orient your contributions toward the maximum impact you can have, based on the best available evidence provided by proximate and subject-matter leaders.

In compiling this report, many HRIs shared their personal journeys to becoming systemic change agents (see "Examples of learning journeys" on page 50). These examples offer insight into various ways that individuals can support positive change and the self-reflection and development process that are needed to succeed. This report can help support HRIs on their journey toward positive and significant systemic change.
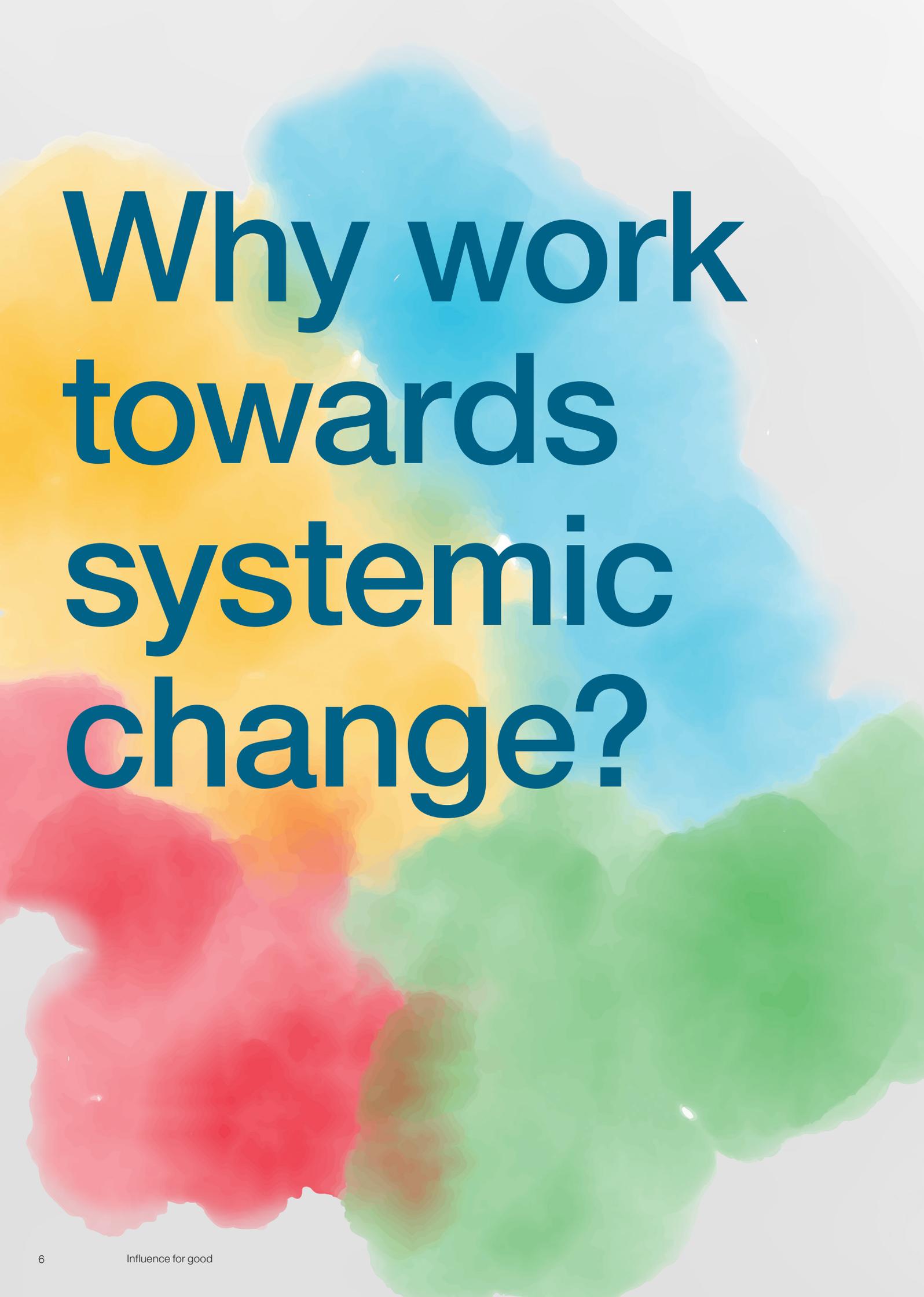
Why work towards systemic change?

The world is experiencing a series of compounding crises. To name a few: the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and its unevenly distributed impacts, and increasing global and local inequalities. Such crises are putting societal coherence at risk around the world. They are causing, or are likely to cause, immense human suffering and large-scale migration as people seek to escape their effects, further harming the most marginalized members of society.

Alongside these crises, many are concerned that society is falling short of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."[1] People are unequally distinguished by aspects including socioeconomic status, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, and mental or physical abilities. In a globalized world, this doesn't stop at national borders. While local and national inequity is a huge issue in most societies, we cannot forget about global inequity in everything this report discusses.

Equity means addressing imbalanced or unjust social systems by shifting resources and power from those privileged by the system to those marginalized by it. Sustainable change today supports equity for the future.

While equity today can be achieved through mitigating initiatives, sustainability demands more fundamental change (see Text Box 2: Types of social engagement), which we call "positive systemic change," or "systemic change" for short. The notion of positive change may seem context-sensitive depending on, for example, region, religion, experience, or individual and collective values and mindsets. However, over the past four years, our interviews with hundreds of people from around the world revealed a strong homogeneity in what we understand as "equity" (see Text Box 1: Focusing on equity).

Systemic change adopts a holistic view and addresses the causes rather than the symptoms of issues. It is the difference between teaching a person how to fish and revolutionizing the fishing industry to benefit everyone instead of a select few.[2] Among other things, systemic change is facilitated by adopting new policies, industry standards, social norms, societal mindsets, and ways to distribute power. If done right, these changes will eventually benefit not only the most marginalized but everyone, including those most privileged by the current system.

Human rights and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—which aim to "further advance the realization of human rights for all people everywhere, without discrimination"[3]—are enshrined in international and national law. However, the world is not on track to keep its promises: with current plans, the SDGs[4] are not expected to be achieved until 2082, more than half a century after the 2030 deadline initially set by world leaders.[5]

Types of social engagement

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Focusing on equity

This report focuses on equity—a position of fairness and justice that recognizes and accounts for existing imbalances—as one of the core goals of social systemic change. There is strong evidence that inequity plays a major role in the biggest crises of our time.[6] Other aims—including safeguarding life, ensuring dignified living conditions, and preserving the habitability of our planet—are also valid in the context of systemic change. While the focus of this report is helping individuals to pursue efforts to achieve greater equity, the findings apply to other goals as well.

There are two crucial dimensions within equity:

- **Equity across space.** Our propensity to empathize more with those closest to us socially (and often geographically) naturally narrows our focus.[7] Looking at equity from a moral perspective (see Text Box 4: Motivations for systemic change), society will benefit from shifting its thinking to see that a neighbor isn't morally more valuable than a stranger elsewhere on the planet.

- **Equity across time.** This dimension typically refers to the balance of equity between current and future generations, and may often feature in discussions about investments or risk, particularly in conversations about effective altruism. As with equity across space, it is important to recognize that the current generation doesn't hold a higher moral value than future generations.[8]

These notions of equity across space and time are particularly important in the current context. Centrally accumulated wealth, a key measure of inequity, is now created in a global context and has direct implications for future generations (for example, advancing climate change through fossil fuel investment or laying the foundation for even stronger central accumulation in the future). Every reader would do well to keep these notions in mind while going through this report and subsequent reflection.

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Types of social engagement

Figure 1

The ecosystem of social engagement

Breadth of contribution

	Mitigation	Change	Impact mode
Work towards	Ongoing engagement	Systemic engagement	
Financing	Episodic engagement	Supportive engagement	

Focus of this report ■ Focus of prior report: *Embracing complexity*
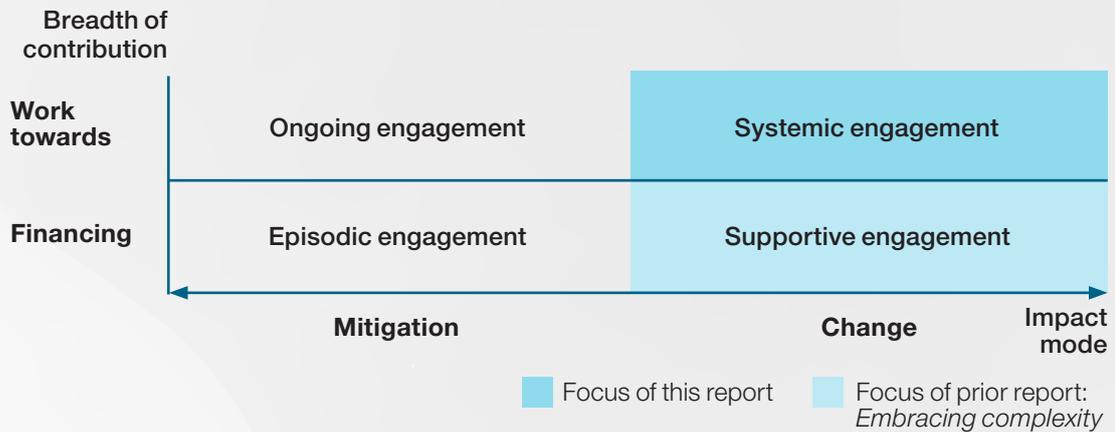
The term *philanthropy* isoften used to refer to financial transactions. Donations and investments are among the most significant ways that individuals engage with organizations seeking to make change.

This report focuses on a fuller suite of activities (figure). This includes funding systemic change as a core pillar but goes beyond monetary support to examine, for example, how individuals can dedicate time and leverage their connections. The idea of engaging beyond donations is not new, having been widely discussed in various forms, including volunteering, corporate social responsibility, and the power of role modeling.[9] However, strategically using many different forms of engagement to work toward systemic change is a concept that has not been broadly discussed in the research literature. This is not to say that those who prefer to engage with change only through funding are not doing valuable work. Our 2019 report, *Embracing complexity*, covers this topic and provides guidance on how monetary contributions can help bring lasting and significant change.

It is important to distinguish between mitigation and change activities. Conducting activities (financial or otherwise) that focus on alleviating symptoms and creating short-term impact is mitigation work. Much volunteering and crisis-related activism falls into this category. Mitigation promotes equity today, but failing to address the source of inequity, these adjustments will not last. Change engagements focus on addressing the root causes of issues and work toward creating a better future in the long term. An example of mitigation is providing crisis relief for an area devastated by landslides; a change engagement would be supporting local communities to grow sustainable forests that increase soil integrity and prevent future landslides.

Mitigation activities are an integral part of a functioning ecosystem of social engagement because they alleviate short- to medium-term harm. But these activities do not bring sustainable, resilient change without a healthy mix of mitigation and change activities in social engagement.
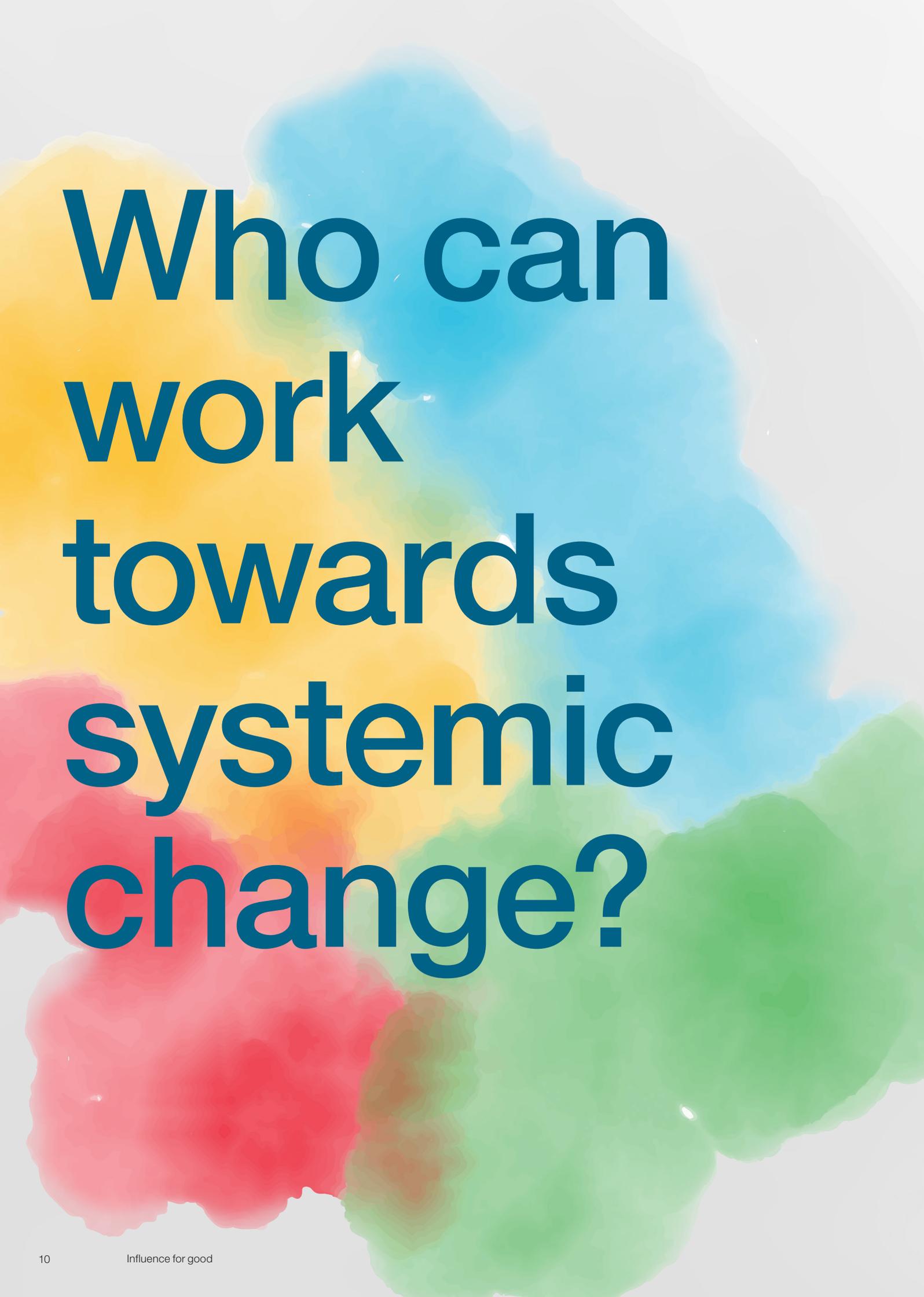
Who can work towards systemic change?

Working toward systemic change takes a communal effort. All actors in society can and must play their part. This report series on systemic change covers a variety of stakeholders in the ecosystem (see the appendix). In creating the series, a dialogue among stakeholders can be encouraged on how to work toward systemic change. Previous reports have explored foundations and other large-scale donors, governments and their contributions to a strong systemic change ecosystem, and the GDP upside of systemic change for societies, alongside societal benefits more generally.

This report shifts the focus to individuals and the ways they can contribute. While it specifically talks about individuals with disproportionate access to resources (HRIs), most concepts discussed are widely applicable.

For example, the successful American businessman Chuck Feeney used his Irish heritage and years of financial support of educational institutions and grassroots organizations in Ireland to build trust there. Based on this trust and his public prominence, he was also able to facilitate conversations between Sinn Féin and loyalist parties.

However, not all philanthropic or development activities—conducted by individuals or organizations—support systemic change. In the past, most philanthropic activities were directed at institutional causes and symptom alleviation, benefiting individual universities, hospitals, or cultural institutions.[10] While there is value in supporting these causes, systemic approaches better address issues for the long term and secure resilience beyond individual time and support.

Nearly 80 percent of top philanthropists say fundamental betterment of the system is a priority. According to recent wealth and attitudes analysis, philanthropy is now the number-one interest for HRIs, indicating a hunger for change.[11]

In recent years, there has also been an increasing academic focus on the role that HRIs play in creating and upholding inequity in society.[12] Evidence is growing that the increasing centralization of wealth causes harm to society by creating inequity. In the United States, for example, the impact of increasing wealth inequality includes the following:

- **increased political inequality,** which further reinforces and expands benefits for the privileged, reducing equity even further[13]

- **decreased social mobility,**[14] leading to the formation of social classes with significant gaps in longevity,[15] educational attainment,[16] and health[17]

- **hindered growth,** in part due to the inhibiting effect of inequality on entrepreneurship;[18] the OECD estimates that rising inequality reduced US GDP by 5 percent per capita from 1990 to 2010[19]

Equitable systems are those that balance the needs of all members of global society, giving greater weight to the needs of the most marginalized. Public legitimization, scrutiny, and accountability help ensure that society becomes more equitable, but these guardrails are hard to maintain with centralized wealth.

This report can help support those HRIs and their advisers who want to support systemic change in society and engage beyond donating money (see Text Box 2: Types of social engagement). Those who seek to play their part will need to navigate not only the complexity of major societal crises, but also the effects their own power and privilege have on the systems they operate in. As much as they can contribute, their presence and influence can also hinder systemic change, particularly if their activities obstruct communities striving for equity by obscuring their voices, for example.

Systemic change cannot be the product of one agent—it necessarily involves the collaboration of many players with diverse interests and can take place on a local, national, and global level.

Philanthropy is diverse in terms of attitudes and preferences, and some HRIs may prefer to fund agents of systemic change rather than serving as change agents themselves. As described in the prior report, Embracing complexity,[20] funding systemic change is a legitimate activity and an ideal starting point to connect with those who are already working toward systemic change. In fact, funding systemic change is likely to be such an effective action that it should always be part of HRI engagements: it can be supplemented by other forms of engagement but never replaced by them.

The approach outlined in this report can help HRIs to develop a plan to work toward systemic change tailored to their situation. By tracking the journeys of several HRIs, showcasing the diversity of pathways to becoming agents of systemic change. From these examples emerge some common guiding principles that HRIs can put into practice. The cases show that these guiding principles are feasible and influential and can greatly benefit the HRIs who follow them (see Text Box 4: Motivations for systemic change).

The report's findings are based on surveys and more than 100 interviews, including some of the world's most renowned practitioners. These findings are supported by leading ethics scholars and more than 50 HRI voices from all over the world who already use these best practices (see the appendix for more on the methodology). This has enabled the development of a best-practice approach to systemic change and a hands-on guide on how to implement it.

Essential expertise

Proximate leaders

Throughout this report, proximate leaders are referred to as key experts, most notably with contextual and practical expertise.

Proximate leaders hold contextual wisdom, as they are part of the in-group of communities affected by the issues that systemic change aims to address. They share the same experience as their communities, providing contextual knowledge that cannot be acquired other than by living through it.

They also hold practical wisdom, because they are usually initiators or key drivers for systemic change. They have years of experience in their fields and are highly skilled and seasoned practitioners.

These leaders combine both types of wisdom with deep, trusting connections within their communities. Having clear visions for their communities, they are a powerful source for change if provided with the appropriate resources. The publishing partners of this report work in trusting relationships with proximate leaders in regions throughout the world. These partners are ideal contacts for HRIs who want to be involved in systemic change.

"To catalyze the conditions for equitable system change, we need to engage multiple perspectives and experiences in order to define both problems and solutions. In doing so, we draw on ancestral and cultural wisdom, intuitive knowing, and the insight of the arts with their ability to represent complexity, as well as what may be more familiar rationalist approaches rooted in theory, logic, and numeric analysis that are so often overprivileged in US-dominant culture."

Change Elemental (US)

"If you haven't slept a single night on the street, you don't know what it is like. Therefore, we don't fund organizations without people who have lived experiences in the offices and leading positions."

Neha (Europe) – CEO of a foundation serving vulnerable communities

"If you are interested in impact, you should support networks that govern and control themselves. If you think you can understand and evaluate what they are doing, you are wrong. You most likely lack the experience, the knowledge, and the competence to do so."

Mark (Europe) – Chairman of the Board at a major European company

Subject-matter leaders

To ensure a well-rounded approach toward impact, contextual and practical wisdom should be complemented by scientifically appraised evidence. This role can be filled by subject-matter leaders.

Subject-matter leaders engage in systematic collection of data and evidence. They are qualified by their rational and academic rigor, and need not be affiliated with universities or research organizations. They engage in enhanced reasoning by collecting data and making sense of it. Their results are scrutinized by a broad, qualified audience, usually the scientific community. Proposals and positions put forward are widely scrutinized and held up in the face of this critical, in-depth evaluation.

Through this, subject-matter leaders can provide an evidence-based picture that aims to illuminate the underlying drivers and interconnections at play. Therefore, they possess the tools to connect and reconcile differing demands and support the creation of effective solutions.

Subject-matter leaders can be part of the in-group, but they don't have to be. Those subject-matter leaders who are not proximate leaders are often close to proximate leaders who play a crucial role in providing the evidence that constitutes their expertise.

Some proximate leaders excel at using the best evidence available to address their respective topic areas. Similarly, several subject-matter leaders are experts on their respective topics without personal experience, often because they made collecting the evidence their profession. But not every proximate leader is also a subject-matter leader, and not every subject-matter leader is a proximate leader.

Some communities have no proximate leaders: for example, future generations who are likely to be harmed by climate change. In those cases, subject-matter leaders can play a crucial role in approximating the needs and experience of affected communities to design suitable measures to protect their rights and provide for their needs.

Motivations for systemic change

Researchers have identified eight motivations for philanthropic involvement: perception of a need, solicitation of help, assumption that costs are lower and benefits higher, altruism, social reward, contributing to positive self-image, alignment between causes and individual values, and the superior efficacy of gifts.[21]

The interviews conducted found that the contribution to positive self-image and the alignment of causes and values were the biggest motivations for working toward systemic change. Several HRIs mentioned that working toward systemic change became part of their identity, and they derived a sense of purpose, belonging, and liberation from their work. They reported very positive impacts on their well-being, especially mentally and emotionally.

Many interviewees also shared that they felt a moral obligation to change dysfunctional systems, though not all of the HRIs held this view. The intensity of this perception depended upon the extent to which an individual felt that the following four statements were true: that they benefited from dysfunctional systems, that they contributed to these systems, that they were able to change the status quo, and that it was urgent to do so— factors that have also been recorded by leading ethics and philanthropy scholars.

For several HRIs, these considerations crossed national borders, as they often benefited from or contributed to global inequity beyond their local impact. Many of the interviewees saw it as part of their work to shift the perspectives of peers, showing them what they win by embracing change and what they lose if they don't.

Benefit: "The more I benefit from unjust systems, the more I care about change."

The HRIs acknowledged that they benefit from social, financial, and historical structures that are skewed toward them and their needs above and beyond the average private citizen. This is generally the case: financial investments generate higher monetary returns than monetary returns from labor,[22] and educational and healthcare systems often discriminate across multiple dimensions (for example, socioeconomic groups, gender, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality).[23]

While there are clear personal advantages that come from being favored by systems, the advantages of overcoming inequity often outweigh those advantages. For example, more equal societies harbor higher scores for happiness and well-being for everyone, including the wealthiest share of the population.[24]

"Our liberation is tied up with the liberation of everyone else. In a world where black people are truly free, I will be more free. I believe that deeply."

Farhad Ebrahimi (US) – President of the Chorus Foundation

"I believe that living in a guarded community is neither safe nor free. A safe and free life means being able to step out on the street and not having to be afraid of being robbed. Many HRIs want to safeguard the status quo because it gives a false sense of safety and freedom. If the awareness that nobody is well until everybody is well sinks in, that would be a true gamechanger."

Verónica (Mexico) – Inheritor

"On Saturday, people have children and care for the future, and on Monday they make business decisions that destroy the environment. I invite everyone to have the courage to do what they already know is right."

André Hoffmann (Switzerland) – Vice Chairman of Roche Holding

Contribution: "The more I contribute to unjust systems, the more I feel responsible for change."

In many cases, interviewees were keen to change the systems to which they directly or indirectly contributed. To help understand their role in creating or maintaining systems, they reflected on the source and legitimacy of their wealth and how amassing even more causes harm, among other actions.

Ability: "The more resources and influence I have, the more I use them to work toward change."

HRIs don't have magic wands to solve the world's problems. But they have disproportionate access to resources, enabling them to be powerful change agents if they so choose. Furthermore, they have the potential to shift power through how they deploy those resources. Identifying ways in which they can make an authentic and positive difference is a powerful first step toward systemic change.

Urgency: "The more threatening unjust systems are, the more important it is that I start working toward change now."

Many of the cumulative crises observed now are highly urgent and threatening. Several have been brewing for decades, and action has fallen short of what would be necessary to overcome them. In this context, the perception of philanthropy as optional is changing. There is evidence that many philathropists are beginning to realize, collectively, that society must care for others out of sheer self-interest. With the breadth of crises ranging from the COVID-19 pandemic to climate change and its unevenly distributed impacts to growing global and local inequalities, mankind is likely to lose these battles if it fails to address them rapidly and appropriately.
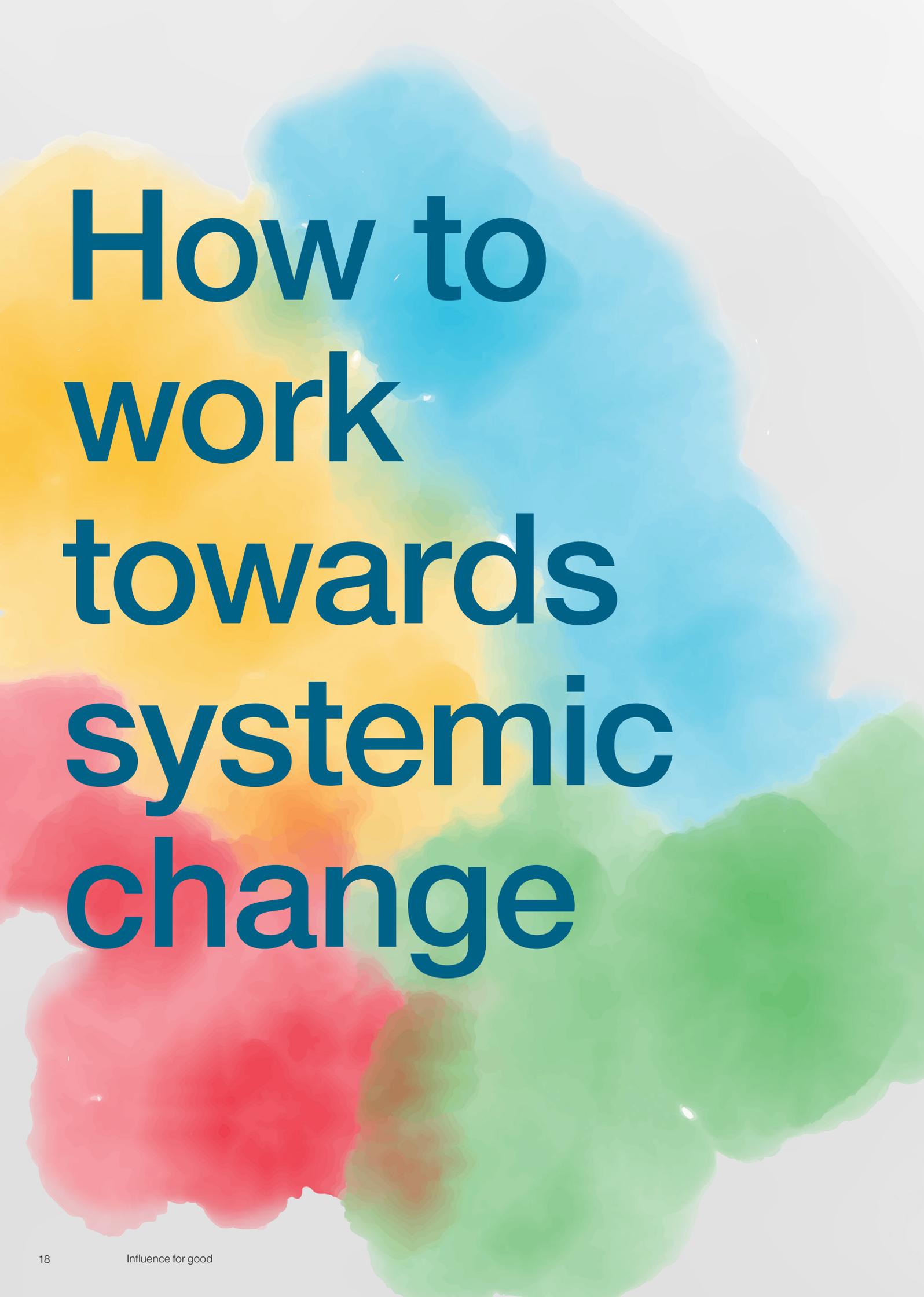
# How to work towards systemic change

The remainder of this report presents practical guidance on how HRIs can work toward systemic change by using their full suites of resources. The report draws heavily on co-publisher Generation Pledge's LEB model, recognizing that its three-phase framework—"Look with courage," "Envision with rigor," "Build with excellence" (Figure 1)—is well suited to the complexity of this work. HRIs working toward systemic change should recognize the LEB model as a continuous sequence that starts anew after the completion of one full cycle, emphasizing that systemic change is a continuous task.

In places, the LEB model has been adapted based on specific lessons and insights from interviews and added an ethical self-reflection framework. These changes were introduced to help HRIs who specifically focus on systemic change. These proposals are drawn from four years of research and inspired by best practices put forward by practitioners and scholars who have long track records of working to understand and further social change. Also included are the experiences and guidance of HRIs who already adopted many of the suggested practices, showing only small excerpts of their experiences to illustrate what engagement can look like in different forms. Their engagement is always more complex than described in these instances, more in-depth examples are shared in the appendix.

Each chapter shares a practical three-step approach, important self-reflection questions, and additional resources. Every chapter includes a deep dive on one of the steps, supported by case examples showing what best practices look like in application. No individual presented can be a perfect change agent, but each one is actively contributing toward systemic change in the discussed capacity.

Figure 2

The LEB model

Look with courage

"Many people approach me and ask about technicalities of social engagement, almost never about the why. I insist that technicalities are the easy part and that the real work is an inner appraisal of why you do what you do. Be courageous enough to ask these questions and start the work now."

Chuck Feeney (US) – Co-Founder of the DFS Group

The "Looking with courage" phase requires an honest appraisal of the status quo. Recognizing that the world isn't perfect is a key step in systemic change, allowing individuals to appreciate how there could be less suffering, more flourishing, and reduced existential, environmental, and social risk in our shared world.

After looking outward, individuals must also look inward to understand their values and their motivations for pursuing systemic change. Once they have a clear view on both the world and themselves, it's possible to consider the broader question: How can one contribute to this world? This step encourages individuals to review the impact of their assets, investments, and conduct.

Envision with rigor

"Being prepared to transform yourself is a requirement for a better world, but you also do this work so that you might be able to transform into a truly free person yourself. It's a virtuous cycle."

Farhad Ebrahimi (US) – President of the Chorus Foundation

Once individuals understand where there is a status quo, they can turn their attention to imagining a better future. Accepting the evidence provided by proximate and subject-matter leaders is crucial for success at this stage—those leaders will have a vision for how systems need to change, and change beings with an understanding of what that looks like.

However, individuals can also choose to create a vision for themselves. This begins with an exploration of how to become a more effective change agent (for example, developing new skills or rethinking how to approach a network). Equipped with a vision and informed by a community of peers, practitioners, and proximate and subject-matter leaders, individuals can think about how to create an actionable plan to help move the status quo they see toward this better world.

Build with excellence

"Everybody likes handing out things or funding buildings, because that's tangible. But real value comes from systemic change, changed behavior, changed mindsets. The buildings you build might sit empty; mindset shifts keep impacting generations to come. Ask yourself what you have to do to create truly lasting positive change and act upon that."

Nihar Kothari (India) – Executive Editor and Director of Rajasthan Patrika

After working to understand the shared vision of what they want to impact, it is time to act. Individuals can then think about aims to help orient their contributions toward the most impact, as advised by proximate and subject-matter leaders. This work should produce real change that fundamentally moves toward solving challenges and addressing opportunities. For problems that can be solved within one's lifetime, this means aiming to ultimately remove the reason for involvement (of course, not all systemic problems can be addressed in this timeline). In service of this, individuals can begin to consider how to track progress and adjust approaches based on evaluations and honest feedback.

This three-phase LEB approach is a cycle. Thus, it is vital to go back to the "Look with courage" phase before embarking on the next round of change efforts.

Look
with
courage

Influence for good

Understanding the status quo and reflecting on how to work towards systemic change

Practical guide: How to look with courage

When working toward systemic change, individuals must first "look with courage." This entails conducting an honest appraisal of the world and ourselves, and how both relate. Community reflections are quite helpful here, especially with peers but also with practitioners and proximate and subject-matter leaders (see Text Box 3: Essential expertise).

For structure to start looking with courage, a three-step approach is offered, supported by questions from the self-reflection framework (see deep dive below) and additional resources.

The following details explain how to look continuously, introducing a self-reflection framework put together by experienced HRIs, practitioners, and ethics scholars. (To learn more about how the self-reflection framework has been received, see Text Box 5: Reactions to the self-reflection framework.)

Individuals can start thinking about what a better future might look like by **envisioning it with rigor.**

Look outward: Understand the world as it is, recognizing where there could be:

- less suffering
- more flourishing
- reduced existential, environmental, and social risk

Look inward. Have the vulnerability to look in the mirror, appraising:

- your core values and motivations to engage socially
- strengths and skills
- personal privilege

Look continuously. Reflect regularly on:

- one's contributions to the world, both positive and negative
- alignment of resources with personal values
- progress of work toward systemic change

This question supports the "Look with courage" phase (see deep dive below):

- Am I working towards trust-based relationships?

Supporting resources (examples):

Generation Pledge Workbook (Global): *Workbook for new pledgers*
APF video series (Africa): *Why Give – APF philanthropist profiles*
80,000 Hours (Europe): *Our current list of pressing world problems*
Abigail Disney article (North America): *I was taught from a young age to protect my dynastic wealth*
The Atlantic article (North America): *Cancel Billionaires*
Atlantic Philanthropies article (North America): *Top 10 lessons learned in hindsight*
SNEEJ article (North America): *Jemez principles for democratic organizing*
Sigal Samuel (North America): *Should animals, plants, and robots have the same rights as you?*

Deep dive

Look continuously: Regularly reflect on one's work toward systemic change

Almost all interviewees emphasized the importance of continuously reflecting on their own conduct while working toward systemic change. Two different motivations underpin this self-reflection. Several said they engage in this exploration to ensure ethical conduct, perceiving that their privileged access to resources creates a moral duty to engage responsibly (see Text Box 4: Motivations for systemic change). Others were more concerned with the effectiveness of initiatives. For example, working on oneself can be a powerful tool to help maximize impact and inoculate against inadvertently causing harm.

In both cases, most interviewees were very aware that their (intersectional) privileges can be powerful, positive enablers but also carry an innate risk of causing harm, intentional or not. They expressed caution when deploying influence. Some HRIs even asserted that their privileges were symptoms of dysfunctional systems and they were trying to dissolve them—for example, by giving away major shares or even all of their wealth.

A framework has been created for practice-oriented ethical self-reflection, drawing on experiences shared by HRIs and from consultations with world-leading practitioners and ethics scholars. Most HRIs emphasized the importance of continuous, communal learning, such as growing through exchange and dialogue as a guiding force for positive change in the world. Therefore, regular and repeated engagement with the questions outlined here is advisable. This can be done individually but may be more effective and revealing within a community of reflection partners (peers, philanthropy networks, or practitioner networks such as this report's publishing partners).

The framework consists of five groups of questions, each with its own intention. Different questions are particularly important at different stages of the LEB cycle and are presented at the beginning of each chapter. The questions introduced here can be seen as a reference sheet or process flow. The process begins with a focus on relationships. This guiding question should help prompt reflections on how relationships are formed and maintained: "Am I working toward trust-based relationships?" The following three groups of questions focus on strategic change: the work, structure of initiatives, and expertise that guides them. The last group holds more relationship-focused questions, emphasizing reflection on the work and listening to and implementing feedback.

By continuing to ask themselves tough questions, HRIs can be true collaborators, avoid inadvertent harm, and generate high impact

HRIs who engage systemically are on a learning journey in which they iterate on the following questions, which are endorsed by practitioners and leading, interdisciplinary scholars in the field

Figure 3

Self-reflection framework

Step 1
Relationship building

Am I working towards trust-based relationships?

Step 2
Technical refinement

Am I working towards positive, systemic change?

Am I working towards lasting change?
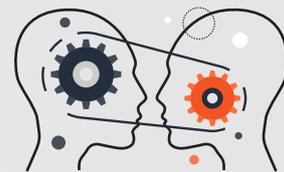
Am I working in service of change, based on evidence?

Step 3
Relationship building

How do I learn from experience?

Question 1: Am I working towards trust-based relationships?

What this means: While engaging in systemic change work, use this group of questions to prepare for the lessons ahead. Self-reflection here helps to identify motivations and values, understand willingness to listen, learn, and improve, foster authenticity, and lay foundations for trust-based relationships. Earning the trust of partners is essential to maintain coalitions working toward systemic change. Trust can be built by ensuring accountability, being open, sharing intentions, and making processes transparent. HRIs also reported that proactive transparency led to partnerships that generally were a better fit for their skills and goals.

Further questions:

- Am I prepared to truly engage with why I am motivated to work toward systemic change?

- Do I authentically engage with and listen to people?

- Am I willing to share my power? Why or why not?

- Do partners and the public understand my goals and the resources I am deploying toward them?

- Do I openly communicate my successes and failures?

- Do I disclose potential conflicts of interest?

Case example:

Zeynep Bodur Okyay (president and CEO of Kale Group, Turkey) came to realize that the socially prevalent "hero narrative" is faulty at its core. She now advocates for deep cooperation among various stakeholders instead of fragmented approaches. For Zeynep, this entails listening to communities and lending an earnest ear to their needs and wants, free from her own presumptions. This lays foundations to engage in long-term partnerships in which everything is co-created, co-designed, and co-implemented.

Question 2: Am I working towards positive, systemic change?

What this means: This group of questions goes to the core of systemic change. Several HRIs reported that the questions in this group are inherent to how they think about social engagement. For many, it marked the transition from donor-centric philanthropy to working toward systemic change, though a main challenge for HRIs in this area is power imbalances. This is especially the case when making decisions (how to allocate resources or shape policies), setting agendas (deciding which issues are publicly debated and determined), or shaping ideologies.[25] The potentially harmful effects of power disparities are discussed in the chapter "Who can work toward systemic change?"

Further questions:

- Do I select initiatives considering the needs and preferences of the most marginalized people and species in the world?[26]

- Do I honestly believe that systemic change is important for the world, and that promoting increased global equity will benefit everyone? Do I promote this idea among my peers?

- Do I consider all positive and negative impacts of my work?
- Do I understand how power is distributed in society when choosing my systems change goal?

Case example:

Marc Walder and Annabella Bassler (CEO and CFO, respectively, of Swiss media company Ringier) joined forces with the Ringier family to promote more equitable gender representation in the company's news articles. By collecting data on gender representation in Ringier's publications, they could encourage their journalists to be more mindful of the status quo. This brought media representation much closer to the share of women in their audience.

Question 3: Am I working towards lasting change?

What this means: This group of questions emphasizes the importance of establishing initiatives for long-term success and sustainability. This includes two dimensions: first, the deep inclusion of people and communities who are affected by an initiative to safeguard their interests, when engaging them is a possibility (other mechanisms must be incorporated to safeguard the interests of those who cannot be represented, such as future generations). This shifts the power disparity and contributes to equity in itself, as decision-making and agenda-setting power can then lie with these communities. Second, it includes the establishment of systemic structures that are self-supporting in the long run. Self-supporting systemic structures could be laws, public institutions, initiatives sustained by communities, self-sustaining business models, and others. Systems that are infinitely dependent on external support are not sustainable or ultimately equitable.

Further questions:

- Do these initiatives benefit the people who are affected by them?
- Are initiatives governed based on principles that ensure decision-making and agenda-setting power for affected communities?
- Do these initiatives build resilience in communities by equipping them with sufficient resources and skills to deal with unforeseen issues, even outside the original issue area?
- Are initiatives cocreated with institutions that ensure their long-term self-support, such as public institutions?
- If applicable, are we improving existing public structures instead of displacing them?

Case example:

Rohini Nilekani (author and philanthropist, India) has worked with nongovernmental organizations and others on various issues, including access to education, safe roads, and clean, sustainable water systems. She seeks to work with communities to develop the capabilities and resources to diagnose issues and self-manage change. This builds resilience in these communities, allowing them to identify emerging problems and formulate solutions for themselves.

Question 4: Do I work in the service of change based on evidence provided by proximate and subject-matter leaders?

What this means: This group of questions is about the kind of expertise needed for any initiative. Social issues are heavily complex and contextual, so it is necessary to include a broad range of expertise and evidence to guide action, instead of relying on gut feelings and hearsay. At the core, that includes proximate and subject-matter leaders to provide the evidence necessary for positive and effective change. The contextual knowledge needed to successfully change systems held by proximate leaders is a crucial source of evidence (see Text Box 3: Essential expertise). Furthermore, proximate leaders are important stewards of trust. While practitioners and HRIs often build trustful relationships with proximate leaders, it is usually the proximate leader who in turn maintains trustful relationships within their communities. This trust base is critical for success. The expertise of proximate leaders is best used when coupled with that of subject-matter leaders. Together, these leaders combine the best technical and operational knowledge available to create real impact.

Further questions:

- Do I work according to the expertise of leaders who have lived experience with the problem that I want to solve and have trust among people who have historically been excluded from power? If not, is it because these leaders are inaccessible or is it due to a conscious choice?

- Do I work according to the expertise of subject-matter leaders who have deep knowledge on the best available evidence on the problem and potential solutions? If not, what steps can I take to do so?

- Do I acknowledge proximate and subject-matter leaders as the real experts on the problem?

- Do I work with a diverse set of leaders (multidisciplinary, multisectoral, multicultural, multigender) who have different approaches and perspectives on the problem?

- Do I support networks and collaboration between sectors?

Case example:

Chuck Feeney (cofounder of the DFS Group, United States) and his foundation Atlantic Philanthropies became involved in a project to build rural health clinics in Vietnam. He developed a relationship with the US health attaché in Vietnam, who then provided several referrals to proximate leaders. These trust-based referrals enabled Chuck and the foundation to immerse themselves in local structures and communities and to identify proximate leaders who could inform their approach. Based on this guidance, Chuck broadened his original target and supported other health campaigns focused on tobacco control and helmet laws.

Question 5: How do I learn from experience?

What this means: This group of questions captures the continuous learning journey that all interviewed HRIs perceived themselves to be on. The HRIs emphasized the importance of learning from experience, especially after failure, and having trusted advisers with the courage to give candid feedback, while retaining an awareness that evidence is always contextual. While evidence and learning from experience are important, it is equally vital to acknowledge the complexity of social structures and that not all experience or evidence is transferable across social contexts.[27]

Further questions:

- Do I receive regular, in-depth feedback on my engagements from proximate and subject-matter leaders and my accountability partners?
- Do I constantly adjust my engagement based on that feedback?
- Do I openly communicate these changes?
- Do I learn from evidence and others' experience?

"Learn how to be OK with being uncomfortable, wrong, and failing. If we knew how to do this, it would already have been done."

Elissa Sloan Perry (United States) – Codirector of Change Elemental

Reactions to the self-reflection framework

The self-reflection framework was formulated based on the experiences shared by HRIs during the interviews we conducted. Reactions to the final piece were also collected to test whether it resonated and was regarded as useful for them and others.

The framework resonated with practitioners, ethics scholars, and most HRIs. Some disagreed with the content or framing of the questions. While some HRIs would have preferred more ambitious and demanding criteria, two worried that the questions were too demanding for some HRIs still on the fence. All feedback was welcomed, overall the reactions supported that the presented framework is adequate and useful for most HRIs interested in working toward systemic change.

Sharing the following reactions will open the floor for an extended and critical discussion on the questions presented, in which each voice has value and the space to be heard.

- I am unsure about the self-reflection framework. I am worried that people feel moralized by this, scaring away those who might be on the fence about working toward systemic change.

- I am unsure if the questions are too cautious. All too often I see people going through things like this performatively and not really living the reflection. I personally wouldn't have put these questions so diplomatically. Proper reflection on them is too important.

- If we think about long-term success, we have to think about public structures. There is no way I can establish and sustain an institution entirely based on private money that is indiscriminate and available at scale.

- I really loved the framework; it is so on point. I can't emphasize enough that HRIs should engage in this reflection. HRIs often have the perception that they benefit from the current state of the world but it will powerfully contribute to change if we dismantle this idea.

- I loved to see the point on feedback and learning and cannot emphasize enough how important it is. But I am worried that people might confuse a day at the spa, which is wonderful in itself and can spark great ideas, with actually doing inner work and confronting the sometimes ugly and uncomfortable truths that we collectively have to face.

Envision

with

rigor

Influence for good

Creating a clear vision and plan for impact

Practical guide: How to envision with rigor

The second phase in preparing for systemic social engagement is about imagining a better future. This means identifying ways to become an even more effective change agent and collaborate with proximate and subject-matter leaders (see Text Box 3: Essential expertise) to create a vision and strategy on how to support their work toward change.

It is particularly beneficial in this strategizing stage to draw on diverse perspectives and experience, combining the lived experience of proximate leaders with the best available evidence presented by subject-matter leaders. Based on a historical undervaluation of lived experience, the importance of proximate leaders is clear. Initiatives can bring together the best knowledge from all sectors but founder because they fail to match community needs. The "Envision with rigor" phase relies on engagement with the community, especially through proximate leaders. In looking for a starting point for connections, our publishing partners represent thousands of practitioners closely connected to proximate leaders in many domains (see the "How to get started" chapter).

In seeking structure to start the "Envision with rigor" phase, a three-step approach is offered on the next page, supported by questions from the self-reflection framework (see the deep dive in the "Look with courage" chapter) and further resources.

The deep dive below gives more details on how to identify resources, introducing the concept of "polycapital." This can assist in structuring self-assessment and identify where there is room for improvement in the performance of already deployed resources.

Once a vision for a better future is developed, it is time to **build it with excellence.**

Envision yourself: Work toward becoming an even more effective change agent by:

- assessing what you can offer the world

- seeing which contributions have the most impact in your context

- upskilling accordingly

Envision the world: Form your vision for involvement and then listen carefully to proximate and subject-matter leaders to:

- understand the needs of the causes you are addressing

- understand how systems would have to change to meet those needs

- formulate a vision and goal for change

Envision the change: Create a plan for how you can best contribute, seeking to be:

- guided by the best available evidence provided by proximate and subject-matter leaders

- focused on impact

- informed by evidence and reason (when evidence is limited or unavailable)

These questions provide support in the "Envision with rigor" phase (see the "Look with courage" chapter):

- Am I working toward trust-based relationships?

- Am I working toward positive, systemic change?

- Am I working toward lasting change?

- Am I working in service of change, based on evidence provided by proximate and subject-matter leaders?

Supporting resources (examples):

APF report series (Africa): *Toolkit for African philanthropists*
West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) article (Africa): *Why international development projects fail in Africa and what we can do differently*
Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (Asia): *Evidence to policy*
Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies approach (Asia): *Public goods for public good*
Charity Entrepreneurship (Europe): *Weighted Factor Model*
Founders Pledge (Europe): *Impact investing report*
Julian Kölbel et al. (Europe): *Can sustainable investing save the world?*
Resource Generation article (North America): *Transformative investment principles*
Atlantic Philanthropies article (North America): *Operating for limited life*

Deep dive

Envision yourself: Assess what you can offer the world

To maximize the impact in working toward systemic change, individuals could assess which of their resources could be helpful in this work. This step would not only be more strategic in approach but it would also reveal skill and resource gaps to be addressed.

A useful framework for thinking about the ways in which HRIs can make a difference is Generation Pledge's polycapital approach. The polycapital approach refers to using four major sources of influence, or "capital," that HRIs have access to: career capital, social capital, economic capital, and political capital.

Why take a polycapital approach?

Donations can be one of the most effective ways to create change. However, more resources are often needed to achieve systemic change. Just reaching the SDGs would cost $2.5 trillion annually.[28] Philanthropy plays a key role here, but is not sufficient alone. Given the substantial challenges facing the world, it is essential that HRIs who want to do good use all of the levers at their disposal.

In this section, a definition for each of the different forms of capital is provided and considerations offered on how HRIs might use them to improve the world. Some case studies are shared for how HRIs are using these forms of capital in their impact work.

In Text Box 6: Deploying capital to support social entrepreneurs, we also explore examples of how HRIs can use their polycapital to support social entrepreneurs working toward systemic change.

Career capital

Ability to influence from a professional position or experience (for example, a high-ranking person in an organization or expert within an industry), and ability to dedicate time and energy to a cause. Career capital sometimes resembles social capital, because the difference is not always clear when it comes to professional relationships.

While HRIs are identified by their high levels of economic capital, they often have sizable impact through their careers as well—for example, as entrepreneurs or as employees of organizations addressing the world's most pressing problems. HRIs who choose to use their resources to do significant good in the world can do so in many ways, including using their knowledge or expertise, leveraging the prestige of the company in forming or maintaining relationships, and using the company itself to drive change via business decisions.

Career capital case studies

Nancy Birkhölzer (global sustainable innovation lead at PwC, Germany) joined PwC when it acquired her design and innovation studio. Now, she supports her clients in repositioning sustainability from a risk-focused discussion to an opportunity-seeking topic, and develops new, open-source models to help businesses assess their impact on stakeholders.

Tania Rodriguez Riestra (cofounder and managing partner of CO_Capital, Mexico) equipped herself with financial fluency through years of investments in early-stage ventures to develop the Mexican social enterprise ecosystem. Today, she passes on her knowledge and experience to peers by running programs such as a program for female investors.

Social capital

Ability to use one's strong private or professional network of peers to mobilize other influential private citizens and the ability to reach a wide public audience to form and inform the public opinion of many people. The influence stemming from social capital is the value generated from these connections and the ways in which audiences (wide or focused) go on to change the world.

HRIs often have access to broad and deep social connections. Their networks often include individuals who have significant influence in society, such as other HRIs. By connecting with other highly influential individuals in their networks, HRIs can bolster impact. By recruiting other HRIs to join their impact journey, HRIs can seek to multiply their impact several times over.

Social capital case studies

Karen Spencer (founder and CEO of Whole Child International, United Kingdom) invites her network to discuss social impact and how they can advance their engagement from small to systemic.

Fabian Heilemann (partner at Earlybird and serial entrepreneur, Germany) is an originator of the Leaders for Climate Action initiative, which brings together digital companies to work toward more ecological sustainability. By building a community of like-minded tech entrepreneurs, the initiative catalyzes measurable climate action in tech companies. Fabian and his cofounders convene previously underengaged and high-level stakeholders and connect them with leading climate scientists in Germany to tackle the climate crisis using the best evidence available.

Rati Forbes (director at Forbes Marshall, India) uses the opportunity to speak publicly and privately whenever she can to plant seeds of change in people's minds regarding prevalent issues. This has included speaking to CEOs of companies of all sizes, stakeholders of corporate foundations, and more generally, decision makers in the ecosystem about how to survive during the COVID-19 pandemic and secure the livelihoods of entire communities.

Economic capital

Ability to mobilize economic forces, either via direct funding or economic activity.

While the most straightforward path between capital and impact is philanthropy, HRIs can use other aspects of economic capital, such as their investments, to seek to have even greater impact on the world.

Economic capital case studies

Jean Case (chairman of National Geographic and CEO of the Case Foundation, United States) believes philanthropy should be seen as a tool that can be deployed on higher-risk projects on which others, such as governments, are unable to take the necessary risks. This demonstrates that philanthropy can play a role alongside other institutions, spurring new ideas or creating spaces and support for new ideas that would not otherwise flourish.

Sapphira Goradia (executive director at Vijay and the Marie Goradia Foundation, United States) is a grant maker and uses philanthropy as a tool for social change. She was an early adopter of grantee-led funding. Joining her family foundation in 2013, she introduced multiyear grants that recognized the expertise and autonomy of grantees.

Political capital

Ability to influence policy and public governance.

Policy reform is often an important lever for addressing the world's biggest issues. The ability to achieve the SDGs, prevent suffering, and reduce risk is directly affected by how governments act and will be especially important in the coming decade. HRIs may possess unusually high levels of political capital. Moreover, it is important for HRIs to understand such political networks and their ability to convene key contacts when needed in the political process.

Political capital case studies

Marlene Engelhorn and Antonis Schwarz (coinitiators of #taxmenow, Germany and Austria) cofounded the #taxmenow initiative in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland with a wider group of wealthy individuals to advocate for fair taxation of private wealth. Using mainstream and social media, they support fair taxation on wealth and inheritance, and further taxes that support wealth redistribution, cooperating with grassroots and expert networks such as Bürgerbewegung Finanzwende and Netzwerk Steuergerechtigkeit.

Piet Colruyt (impact investor, Belgium) has been deeply invested in working toward social change since he was introduced to Ashoka. Besides his impact investing, he also focuses on democracy and the climate: he has heavily supported initiatives seeking to strengthen Belgian democracy by adding deliberative elements. Furthermore, he has been instrumental in the landmark Belgian climate case, one of the few instances globally where a government was sued by its citizens for taking insufficient climate action and therefore neglecting its stewardship. In June 2021, the Belgian High Court ruled in favor of the prosecution.

Figure 4

The four types of polycapital

While this report has discussed each form of polycapital separately, they often overlap. Therefore, it can be helpful for HRIs to consider whether any particularly promising opportunities lie at the intersection of their social, political, economic, and career capital. While social, economic, and career capital have distinct sources, political capital stems from a combination of the other three, making it a distinct form of capital.
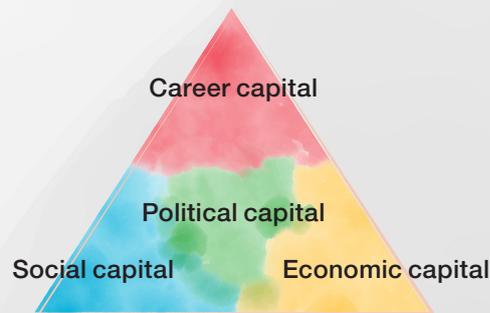
Form of polycapital	Personal influence stems from four forms of capital (polycapital)	Potential examples, not all directly applicable
Career	Ability to activate professional experience and position, or dedicate time and energy	Changes enacted in or via companies, e.g., a commitment to protect the climate beyond state regulations via the Science Based Targets initiative
Economic	Ability to mobilize economic forces, either via direct funding or via economic activity	Engagement in alternative funding models, e.g., investment into the Catalyst 2030 fund
Social	Ability to reach a wide public audience and activate polycapital in personal or professional networks	Public spokesperson for a cause, e.g., Leonardo DiCaprio for climate protection
Political	Ability to influence policy and public governance	Advocacy for higher wealth taxes, e.g., #taxmenow in Germany

Deploying capital to support social entrepreneurs

Social entrepreneurs can be powerful agents of change. One option for HRIs aiming to work toward systemic change can be to support social entrepreneurs across a variety of causes by deploying their polycapital. Here, four topic areas are discussed that social entrepreneurs (all Ashoka Fellows) are currently working on, and offer examples of how HRIs could use their resources.

Career capital: Companies may directly or indirectly contribute to major global issues such as income inequality or environmental pollution through their value chains. While there is no fail-safe rubric for overcoming these issues, competitive advantage is a motivation for business change. Social entrepreneurs such as Roberto José Montesinos Bruni (Venezuela), Amanda Kiessel (United States), Vincent Lagacé (Mexico), Alison Lingane (United States), and Mabel Gisela Torres Torres (Colombia) are developing new, competitive models that reduce or remove a company's contribution to an issue. As business leaders, HRIs could help support the scaling of these models by functioning as early adopters.

Economic capital: Several medical conditions lack sufficient research in proportion to their impact, often because these conditions mostly affect marginalized groups. In this environment, social entrepreneurs such as Dorica Dan (Romania), Jeesun Lee (South Korea), Kristina Saffran (United States), and José Marmo da Silva (Brazil) are stepping up to revolutionize local or global healthcare practices. Despite huge successes and receiving high endorsement rates from experts, medical progress relies on diligence and long-term studies. With their monetary resources, HRIs could fund these studies to enable healthcare systems all over the world to benefit from ongoing innovation.

Social capital: Conflicts are often rooted in intersectional discrimination, which is deep-seated within stable structures. Suffering is often the most acute among the most marginalized: those furthest away from being able to overcome these structures. Social entrepreneurs such as DeVone Boggan (United States), Helena Puig Larrauri (Spain), Marinalva Santana (Brazil), and Baihajar Tualeka (Indonesia) are local or global brokers for peace who build bridges across patterns of discrimination and make their voices count for those most marginalized. With their public recognition, HRIs who stem from local contexts could support these social entrepreneurs by building bridges together, acting as role models for others to follow.

Political capital: All over the world, people with disabilities struggle to fully participate in public life simply because many public spaces are not designed for them. About 15 percent of global citizens experience some form of disability and are thereby more likely to be excluded from public life in some capacity.[29] To ensure equal participation in public life, social entrepreneurs are working hard to bring about greater inclusion of people with disabilities—for example, by eliminating barriers in public infrastructure. Social entrepreneurs such as Lizzie Kiama (Kenya), Raúl Krauthausen (Germany), John Paul Maunes (Philippines), and Rodrigo Hübner Mendes (Brazil) are working to form these coalitions of actors from different sectors. Through their peer networks, HRIs could support this coalition-building by engaging and bringing more stakeholders on the journey to work for change.

Build

with
excellence

Influence for good

Creating the change now

Practical guide: How to build with excellence

The final stage in the cycle of working toward systemic change is to "build with excellence." Excellence should not be confused with perfection or regarded as a barrier to action. A mindset of doing your best today to set up a better tomorrow and every day after is helpful. This is how intentions are brought to life, so individuals can help bring change by beginning as soon as possible.

As with the "Envision with rigor" phase, it's crucial to work in a community at this stage, particularly relying on proximate and subject-matter leaders (see Text Box 3: Essential expertise). Their guidance and feedback can support efforts to maximize impact and work toward substantive change.

For those seeking structure to start building with excellence, a three-step approach is offered on the next page, supported by questions from the self-reflection framework (see deep dive in the **"Look with courage"** chapter) and other resources.

The deep dive below gives more details on how to deploy resources strategically. To that end, five different impact approaches have been sketched out that can be combined to deploy all types of capital to maximum effect.

When work has commenced to bring the vision to life, it's time for the next cycle of change by going back to the "Look with courage" phase.

Build in service. Deploy resources strategically in service of the desired impact by:

- caring deeply about the impact, even though it might not always be immediately visible or even measurable

- working in community with others

- grounding work in the best available evidence and rationale

Build to transform. Work to fundamentally solve challenges and opportunities by:

- being bold enough to try

- working toward redundancy (for efforts that can be solved within one's lifetime)

- starting now

Build to learn. Track progress and improve based on evaluations and honest feedback by:

- constantly assessing the impact of the work

- being humble along the learning journey

- sharing knowledge and experience

These questions bring support in building with excellence (see the "Look with courage" chapter):

- Am I working toward trust-based relationships?

- Am I working toward positive, systemic change?

- Am I working toward lasting change?

- Am I working in service of change, based on evidence provided by proximate and subject-matter leaders?

- How do I learn from experience?

Supporting resources (examples):

Co-Impact (Global): *Handbook*
AVPN article (Asia): *Tool kit for impact measurement and metrics*
Resource Generation article (North America): *RG's redistribution guidelines*
The Whitman Institute article (North America): *Trust-based philanthropy*
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (North America): *Types of evaluation*

Deep dive

Build in service: Deploy your resources strategically in service of the desired impact

Once the capital is identified, individuals can plan how to use and implement it for maximum effect. To that end, we have devised five distinct impact approaches. They show that HRIs don't usually deploy just one type of capital, but several in combination. These approaches are not mutually exclusive. Most of the HRIs interviewed use some or all approaches at different times to great success, tailoring their approaches to their collaboration partners, the cause, their position in the situation, the intended outcome, and the stakeholder group. Though they remain flexible, most HRIs have one or two approaches they enjoy using consistently to the greatest effect.

These approaches are intended as a mix and match menu to capture both the variety of different ways to achieve impact and differences between HRIs in terms of strengths, passions, and means.

The financial approach

Leading type of capital: Economic capital

HRIs using the financial approach leverage their economic capital to fuel systemic change. Our report Embracing complexity describes how to fund systemic change in more detail, a cornerstone of the financial approach.[30] However, the financial approach goes beyond monetary contributions and also focuses on financial decisions more generally. Several HRIs using this approach emphasized that an investment decision is tied to their vision of the world. Therefore, actively divest from assets that conflict with their vision and ensuring they cover funding gaps for those working toward this systemic change.

The financial approach is the most widespread form of social engagement and has not lost relevance in modern times. In fact, there is significant evidence that despite its prominence, the social sector still faces a severe funding gap. Many HRIs reported that the financial approach was their entry point into social engagement and remained central throughout their career as a change agent. Others reported that the financial approach enabled them to use other approaches more effectively, and vice versa.

When using the financial approach, HRIs found it helpful to think about how their investments would displace other sources of funding. In this way, they try to identify channels or recipients that are underfunded, with many recognizing that they wanted to take more risks with their capital than other actors.

To read more about HRIs using the financial approach, see the "Examples of learning journeys" section.

Chuck Feeney (cofounder of the DFS Group, United States) donated more than $8 billion in grantee-led formats, giving away more than 99 percent of his wealth.

The business approach

Leading type of capital: Career capital, economic capital

HRIs using the business approach support systemic change in a professional capacity, such as in their own company or where they work. They could be setting new standards for their sector, working toward systemic change through their product or service offering, or forming impact alliances with other organizations. The business approach integrates systemic change activities into the everyday lives of many HRIs, primarily deploying career and economic capital.

Using the business approach, several HRIs emphasized the importance of focusing on the core business. For them, enacting change is not about applying Band-Aid solutions to society for harm caused by the business, but instead positioning the business in ways that minimize harm in the first place. The business approach can incorporate elements that have already been developed and implemented in an environmental, social, and governance (ESG) or corporate social responsibility context, but fundamental systemic change can go far beyond that.

To read more about HRIs using the business approach, see the "Examples of learning journeys" section.

Samira, a sustainability professional in consumer goods, underwent a rapid learning journey. Starting out by focusing on how she and her family could use their wealth to work toward systemic change, she now focuses on integrating that mission into her family business itself.

The peer influence approach

Leading type of capital: Social capital, political capital

HRIs using the peer influence approach tend to be exceptional connectors. Whether they convene groups to work on a common goal, coach peers on how to be more effective, or open doors for change communities, they leverage their personal and professional networks or their reputation to facilitate change. Peer influence is about working in small groups or one on one.

In interviews, several HRIs emphasized peer advice or reflection with peers as among the most formative experiences on their learning journey, often serving as powerful inflection points. In several cases, HRIs stated that they act as sparring partners for peers: setting aside their own ideologies, hearing peers out, and helping them explore personal values and how they want to engage with global realities.

Using the peer influence approach, several HRIs said they sometimes struggle to strike a balance between full transparency on their position and conveying it in nonthreatening ways. HRIs who were most comfortable with deviating opinions perceived themselves as most successful in the peer influence approach.

> **To read more about HRIs using the peer influence approach, see the "Examples of learning journeys" section.**
>
> Farhad Ebrahimi (president of the Chorus Foundation, United States) felt motivated by personal beliefs to act on the concept of consolidated wealth, leading him to give away his entire inheritance. This has attracted the attention of many others who feel uncomfortable with their role in increasing or upholding inequality. He perceives himself primarily as an organizer, but also as a companion on common learning journeys and a reflection partner.

The public approach

Leading type of capital: Social capital

HRIs using the public approach in their messaging are able to address a broader audience beyond their peers. They use public platforms that are linked to their personal or professional position and use formats including interviews, public events, books, and social or other media to engage with their audience. HRIs using this approach can raise awareness for a cause, use their credibility to disseminate information, or act as a role model.

The public approach can amplify change to great effect, for example, by inspiring people to make different choices or creating visibility for experts. However, it can be hard to assess the impact of these activities or receive objective feedback. These factors make it even more important that HRIs using this approach establish mechanisms for accountability (see the "Envision with rigor" chapter).

HRIs using the public approach were most concerned about amplifying voices from historically marginalized demographics or communities. In all cases, there's a fine balance to strike between HRIs using their own voice in public to amplify the most expert voices instead of drowning them out.

The all-in approach

Leading type of capital: Career capital, economic capital

For all-in HRIs, social engagement is their primary profession. While the most dedicated HRIs we spoke with took ultimate measures such as discontinuing the cycle of wealth accumulation or even channeling their entire wealth into social causes, all HRIs using the all-in approach invest significant time and energy in their social engagement in models that are not creating profits or even mentionable revenues.

In some cases, the all-in approach can work hand in hand with the financial approach because some HRIs make it a full-time job to distribute their wealth, for example, through their family foundation. Among all approaches, it is the one that most typically draws on all forms of capital: career capital and economic capital, in particular, but social and political capital too if these are the individual's strengths or preferences. When going all in, HRIs should also think about how to strengthen their commitment to responsibly deploying influence (see the "Envision with rigor" chapter).

How to get started

For many HRIs, the biggest challenge in working toward systemic change is their inner work. The HRIs interviewed put an emphasis on learning and growth to become better change agents each and every day.

For those interested in working toward systemic change, a good first step is to get in touch with those who are already doing the work. This could be done by contacting experts, proximate leaders or one of our publishing partners. Most are part of networks of people who work toward systemic change. They will be happy to:

- act as sparring partners on a mutual learning journey and provide HRIs with material and reflection starters

- put HRIs in touch with practitioners and proximate and subject-matter leaders (see Text Box 3: Essential expertise) in any region or topic area

- connect HRIs to like-minded individuals or networks that best suit them

Throughout this journey, it is common to constantly shape and refine uniquely tailored ways of working toward systemic change—at least, that has been true for the more than 50 voices in our research. In addition, there is cohesion within the large and growing community of peers that works toward a better world for all of us. For more inspiration on what some of these journeys look like, see the appendix.

The following pages provide a short summary and point of contact for each partner organization.

Ashoka

Founded in 1980 by Bill Drayton with the belief that the most powerful force in the world is a big idea in the hands of an entrepreneur, Ashoka applies insights from the world's leading social entrepreneurs to set in motion profound societal transformation. Ashoka is leading the way to an Everyone a Changemaker (EACH) world in which each person actively shapes society. We are building a community of highly resourced individuals and business leaders who understand that no single individual, intervention, or organization can scale social change alone and that effective collaboration in this environment is necessary. We invite you to join us on this journey.

Njideka Harry (Engagement Global, njidekah@ashoka.org)
Marie Ringler (Engagement Europe, mringler@ashoka.org)
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Catalyst 2030

Launched in 2020 at the World Economic Forum, Catalyst 2030 is a global movement uniting over 1,400 social impact actors to catalyze change and achieve the SDGs by 2030. Current predictions estimate that the SDGs will not be achieved until 2092 – more than 60 years after the 2030 target date. Our members are committed to radically changing the systems that are delaying this progress and paving the way to a safer world for people and the planet.

We are developing an alternative funding model to connect innovative funders with social entrepreneurs who have proven systems change solutions and proximate expertise to some of the world's greatest challenges. Our aim is to contribute to a growing movement to "shift the current funding paradigm" and create a funding ecosystem grounded in equity, partnership, and collaboration. Together, we believe we can influence the changes required to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

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Echoing Green

Echoing Green discovers emerging social entrepreneurs and invests deeply in the growth of their ideas and leadership. For 35 years, we've been building a broad, dynamic ecosystem to support these leaders as they solve the world's biggest problems. We believe that transforming the world for the better requires an intentional, explicit, and sustained focus on advancing racial equity. For too long, racial inequity has permeated spaces that are supposed to achieve social progress and change systems, and social innovation is no exception. At Echoing Green, we are building upon our existing commitment to invest in next-generation leadership to ensure that the social innovation field is an essential actor in the long-standing racial justice movement.

To learn more, visit echoinggreen.org or reach out to:
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Generation Pledge

Generation Pledge is a growing global community of inheritors from ultra-high-net-wealth families who commit to doing the most good with their resources. To join, they pledge to give at least 10 percent of everything they will inherit within the first five years of inheriting, and to use all their other forms of capital (economic, social, political, and career) for greatest impact, before and after inheriting.

Our goal as a community is to repurpose multigenerational wealth. We are transforming the conversation in ultra-high-net-wealth families from one of wealth preservation to one about using our wealth in line with our deepest values. We look for inheritors who want to use their ample resources to reduce suffering, increase flourishing, and reduce existential, environmental, and social risk.

To learn more, visit generationpledge.org or reach out to:
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Sid Efromovich (Co-Founder, sid@generationpledge.org)

McKinsey & Company

McKinsey is the trusted adviser and counselor to many of the world's most influential individual and institutional philanthropists, leading more than 500 philanthropy engagements for foundation and nonprofit clients in more than 45 countries during the past five years. We are honored to support our clients, particularly HRIs, in embarking on their journeys to determine their personal strategy and operating model for having the greatest social impact they can. We have worked with HRIs at all stages of this journey, from facilitating their initial exploration and self-reflection to designing and launching their philanthropic and social change entities and developing strategic plans for their most transformative initiatives and investment plays.

We believe that the days when economic growth, sustainability, and inclusion were seen as trade-offs have come to an end. Today's leaders need to achieve all three. This new paradigm of growth will be more sustainable, driving innovation while reducing environmental impact. It will also be more inclusive, creating access to opportunities for people across the globe.

This is no easy task, but our ambition is to help organizations and individual leaders make it a reality.

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Examples of learning journeys

From the HRIs interviewed, we selected ten to represent the variety of approaches to working toward systemic change. These examples, presented below, cover all five of the impact approaches introduced in the "Build with excellence" chapter (see page 40) and show the broad spectrum of backgrounds and experiences we encountered throughout our interviews.

Neha: Embrace the learning journey

CEO of a European foundation focused on serving vulnerable communities

Primary impact approach: The financial approach

Primary polycapital: Economic capital, career capital

Neha's approach is to listen to those with experience and expertise and act on their guidance. With this approach, Neha is pioneering the principles of grantee-led grantmaking.

> **"If you haven't slept a single night on the street, you don't know what it is like. Therefore, we don't fund organizations without people who have lived experiences in the offices and leading positions."**

Neha grew up in a spiritual family. For her, the desire to make the world a better place is deeply rooted in the notion that all individuals are interlinked and share both joy and pain. Her parents became wealthy from a nursing home business but were uncomfortable with their fortune. Now a mother herself, Neha says her legacy is not money but rather love and support for her children.

Neha started her career as a strategy consultant with a leading consultancy focused on private equity, but soon realized that lifestyle was not compatible with relationships, her marriage, or her general aspirations. So she joined the family business.

No one was paying attention to the recently established family foundation, so Neha took it over. When she first entered the nonprofit space,. In some cases, her initial attempts to utilize her private sector toolkit to simplify complexity were more harmful than helpful, so she adapted her approach.

Turning to seasoned practitioners and experts with lived experience with these issues, Neha started to model cutting-edge approaches in grant making. First, she conducts initial due diligence and then awards a one-year grant. Throughout the year, she gets to know grantees and builds personal relationships. Her approach to philanthropy is trust-based and focuses on grassroots organizations, viewing people with lived experience as true experts. This working relationship can then become the foundation for unrestricted ten-year grants that cover anything directly related to impact, including rent, electricity bills, salaries, or marketing costs.
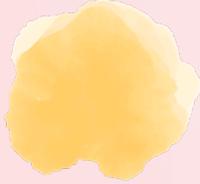
Chuck Feeney: A pioneer of US philanthropy

Cofounder of the DFS Group, founder of the General Atlantic and Atlantic Philanthropies, United States

Primary impact approach: The financial approach

Primary polycapital: Economic capital

Chuck is a philanthropic role model for many HRIs, including Bill Gates and Warren Buffet. He dedicated the vast majority of his wealth to supporting and actively listening to communities.

"The most important thing to have is clarity on yourself, your values, what you aim to achieve. And your respect for those you want to support. You are probably very smart, that's how you made your money. But you are not necessarily the smartest person in the room, especially when it comes to the valuable knowledge stemming from lived experience with an issue."

Chuck grew up in an Irish immigrant community in New Jersey. Going to university after serving in the Korean War, Chuck benefited from government funding that paid college tuition for war veterans. This shaped his appreciation for free education, one of the cornerstones of his engagement. During his studies, he started selling tax-free liquor to US Navy soldiers. This laid the foundation for the DFS Group, a global chain of duty-free shops that made Chuck and his cofounder billionaires.

Chuck enjoyed his wealth for a few years but continued to recognize the disparity created by his wealth. Through his Atlantic Philanthropies foundation, he donated more than $8 billion to various causes, representing more than 99 percent of his entire wealth.

A child of the Great Depression and inspired by history's well-known philanthropists, such as Andrew Carnegie, Chuck was not always aligned with systemic approaches. His engagements typically focused on causes close to him, most notably education. He supported Cornell University, his alma mater, and several other universities.

In philanthropy, Chuck's approach is to allow proximate leaders to shape the topic. Through initial funding, he built trust locally, enabling him to move down communication lines and meet grassroots leaders and community representatives. Atlantic Philanthropies also provided full transparency on successes and failures from which others can learn, supported by independent external assessments published on its website.

Chuck continues to inspire many American philanthropists, including Bill Gates and Warren Buffet, who say Chuck's example was central to launching The Giving Pledge.

Samira: Move beyond the Band-Aids

Sustainability professional at an Asian company

Primary impact approach: The business approach

Primary polycapital: Economic capital, career capital

Samira, a sustainability professional, underwent a rapid learning journey, pivoting from a focus on how she and her family could use their wealth to work toward systemic change to a focus on integrating that mission into her family business itself.

> "I don't want us to just make money and use philanthropy as a Band-Aid. I am trying to work with our family and business professionals to move from thinking about how we spend money to thinking about how we make it in the first place."

Samira is a fourth-generation member of a wealthy family. Born in Asia, Samira moved to Africa at an early age. She grew up there and says she feels a great affinity for the continent.

Like her siblings, Samira started a professional career outside of her family's business. Despite working in healthcare, she felt that she was making minimal impact in her role. Instead she decided to join her family's foundation, eventually assuming a leadership role.

Since then, Samira has directed the foundation's strategy toward forming trusting, long-term local partnerships that can enable systemic change. She says that by listening to the voices of the communities, the foundation is more likely to respond to the community's needs in meaningful ways. For Samira, every dollar spent represents a decision about how to envision the world—not only for the foundation's spending but also for her family's other assets and investments. She now considers the range of family assets, including investment portfolios and the core business, as potential vehicles for impact.

Samira understands that the family business is the largest asset and main source of wealth generation. Soon after joining the family foundation, she decided to focus her attention beyond how money is spent to influencing how money is created in the first place. In her new role as a sustainability professional within the business, she works with teams to think through how to solve issues at their roots rather than just compensating for negative impacts through philanthropy, impact investing, or corporate social responsibility.

Marina Feffer Oelsner: Build strategic networks

Cofounder of Generation Pledge, Brazil

Primary impact approach: The business approach

Primary polycapital: Career capital, economic capital, social capital

Marina leverages her main strengths to be a catalyst for change. She strategizes about how to create systemic change and co-founded Generation Pledge, a global community of inheritors committed to doing the most good.

> "Money is energy, it is potential. If it is stuck in the family in a way that does not represent their values and aspirations for the future, it cannot pursue its potential anymore. Ensuring that as much money as possible is working toward systemic change is my mission."

A fourth-generation representative of one of the largest family businesses in Brazil, Marina grew up with tremendous privileges in a country with extreme inequality. Marina developed a passion for human development and social impact at a young age.

After graduating as a social psychologist, Marina worked with grassroots organizations and served vulnerable populations through public policy for five years. But she soon realized that she wanted to aim for greater impact in her contributions to society and began to look at her role as a catalyst in the family business space. First she transitioned into the corporate world, working at a multinational company and learning how sustainability policies are implemented across different industries. She also entered her own family's governance structure, serving on the Shareholders Board and Philanthropic Board.

Eventually, Marina doubled down on her social engagement, venturing beyond her role in the family business and focusing her work on money and power. As a cofounder of Generation Pledge, a global community of inheritors committed to doing the most good, she connects with like-minded people who have similar privileges to her own. With a belief that working toward systemic change requires taking others along, she says she values networks immensely—both for the ideas they generate and for the reach they provide.

Through her work at Generation Pledge, Marina is rethinking how wealthy families can use their assets for doing good. Creating a shared vision of the future based on deeply-held values, inheritors and their families then examine how they are currently working toward or against their impact goals, and identify ways to build towards a better future for everyone.

Farhad Ebrahimi: Take peers along the journey

President of the Chorus Foundation, United States

Primary impact approach: The peer influence approach

Primary polycapital: Economic capital, social capital

Farhad has both a deep-seated discomfort with and an ideological critique of the concept of consolidated wealth, leading him to give away his entire inheritance. This action and others have attracted the attention of many individuals who feel uncomfortable with their role in increasing or upholding inequality.

> **"I would make the case that all the ways in which the wealthy and powerful do good things are at best a transitional thing unless we're addressing the root causes of how they got wealthy in the first place."**

Farhad was granted an early partial inheritance of more than $50 million at a young age. Feeling deeply uncomfortable that so much wealth could be consolidated for one individual, Farhad looked for opportunities to use it to make a difference. Following some tentative first steps, he took a more focused approach that resulted in the Chorus Foundation.

He soon moved away from traditional philanthropy models, which felt too narrowly top down to create the social or systemic change he was envisioning. Reflecting on the power he held in philanthropy, his foundation shifted to increasingly democratic principles, redistributing power from the foundation to grantees and proximate leaders.

Working toward an equitable world, Farhad decided to distribute the entire funds he received from his parents "with a reparations logic", in line with his belief that any transformative effort to use wealth for good should eventually challenge the circumstances that allowed the wealth to be accumulated in the first place.

Today, Farhad sees himself as an organizer in philanthropy by supporting other wealthy families, program staff, and individual donors who have an appetite to do something different. Farhad's vision is to build a base in the philanthropic sector to help people who struggle with their wealth and its effects on society, regardless of their initial political views, starting points, or ambitions.

Chen: Build bridges for change

Cofounder of a platform connecting students with liberal arts colleges

Primary impact approach: The peer influence approach

Primary polycapital: Social capital

Chen is an avid networker who enjoys building bridges. She works toward intercultural exchange and international relations, bringing people together to work toward systemic change.

> "I believe in the importance of authenticity. If I come in with a hidden agenda, people notice. Putting aside my ego, I don't come in as a savior, but to serve and learn. From this, I build real relationships and trust, my strongest currency."

Born into privilege in China, Chen says she often felt humbled by all the amenities in her life, including an opportunity to attend a private liberal arts college abroad. Through her interactions with an American foundation, she grappled with the negative image of privilege. Now, she appreciates her privilege as power to make a difference, as long as it is wielded with care and responsibility.

After moving back to China upon graduation, Chen took her first steps toward making a difference. She aimed to promote intercultural relationships by positioning liberal arts as a serious alternative to business degrees for students. By bringing along both colleges and high schools, she was able to create equal opportunities for interested students to speak with college administration officers.

In managing her family's global investment allocation, Chen focuses on companies and funds with an emphasis on cross-border or global strategies. She acts as a liaison and operating adviser for various leading companies, family businesses, ventures, and institutions planning to enter the Chinese market.

Chen works closely with highly resourced families in China to initiate dialogue related to social change and the deeper meaning of life and society. She wants to encourage peers to become more sustainable, creative, self-aware, and confident in this space.

James Rhee: What if we valued goodwill?

Impact founder, investor, CEO, and educator, United States

Primary impact approach: The public approach

Primary polycapital: Career capital, social capital

James is a strong advocate for the transformative power of kindness in business life, both on a human and an economic level. To spread that message, he uses multiple channels, ranging from teaching positions and public speeches to investing in ESG initiatives and advising industry leaders on transformation.

> "We need to stop thinking about things in a dichotomous way. We are learning the hard way right now that there is little difference between your personal life and your business life, your philanthropic life and your professional life."

After graduating from Harvard College, James was a teacher before earning his JD from Harvard Law School. Following that, he worked for leading investment banks and private equity firms for more than a decade. James founded his own investment platform and assumed the CEO position at Ashley Stewart, which was facing imminent liquidation. Over the course of seven years, James transformed Ashley Stewart culturally, digitally, and financially.

With Ashley Stewart in safe waters, James expanded on his learnings by founding red helicopter, which he calls "an initiative right at the intersection of impact investing, ESG, and financial literacy." One core concept he explores is the element on balance sheets that accounts for the premium buyers are willing to pay over the fair market value of a company: goodwill. James's experience as a private equity professional and CEO confirmed his intuition that one-dimensional traditional accounting and finance measurements such as goodwill create behavioral priming mechanisms that undermine the broader social compact within which capitalism resides. Red Helicopter's mission is to accompany business leaders as they explore how to balance "money, life, and joy to create real and sustainable value."

In addition to his private equity and entrepreneurial career, James is the entrepreneurship chair at a leading historically Black university and a leadership and organizational systems expert and senior lecturer at a top global business school.

Nihar Kothari: Change mindsets

Executive Editor and Director of Rajasthan Patrika, India

Primary impact approach: The public approach

Primary polycapital: Social capital, career capital, political capital

Over the years, Nihar has come to appreciate the power of changing mindsets for systemic change. As the leader of one of India's largest media companies, he engages and empowers audiences by sharing facts and contextualizing them through opinion pieces from global thought leaders.

> "A lot of my work is to think about how we operate as a media company. It's a thin line between an NGO and a company. We make decisions that hurt our bottom line badly, but we understand that it isn't just about business."

Rajasthan Patrika is India's third-largest media company and a family organization in its third generation. Founded by Nihar's grandfather in 1956, Rajasthan Patrika started out with the mindset that it should not assume a dominant position and actively supported other, especially local, news outlets. With currently over 150 editions of its newspaper division, each still operates as a group of community newspapers with around half of the content focusing on local communities and affairs. Over its six decades of operation, Rajasthan Patrika has run hundreds of change campaigns and redefined the role of an independent media company in social change.

Nihar has gradually assumed more responsibility at Rajasthan Patrika, eventually becoming executive editor and director. During his time with the company, he has overseen a variety of socially motivated initiatives.

He began his learning journey by supporting several mitigation-focused initiatives. After connecting with Bill Drayton, the founder of Ashoka, Nihar started to value the idea of systemic change and the power of partnerships. Nihar is actively engaged in empowering democracy and democratic processes through Rajasthan Patrika, which he assesses as a conducting medium between the state, private sector, and general public.

Rajasthan Patrika often leans on investigative journalism, through which it can shape public opinion. Bringing together experts with both lived experience and technical or academic expertise, Rajasthan Patrika promotes free exchange of information and knowledge. In this way, Nihar hopes to inform the public and shape mindsets based on facts presented and contextualized in opinion pieces by global thought leaders featured in his newspapers.

Vuslat Doğan Sabancı:
Listen generously

Founder of the Vuslat Foundation, Turkey

Primary impact approach: The all-in approach

Primary polycapital: Career capital, social capital, economic capital

Vuslat is a former publisher of newspapers, a businesswoman, and a social activist. Initially focused on gender equity, she has a growing appreciation for the power of deep listening to bridge power disparities. Based on that, her engagement today mainly revolves around developing new forms of leadership and human engagement.

"A barrier to generous listening is our tendency to express ourselves rather than understand one another, or an urge to "fix" issues rather than listen to them."

Vuslat studied International Relations, Media and Economics respectively and is the former chair of the board of directors at Hürriyet Publishing, the leading news publishing group in Turkey.

Early in her social engagement career, Vuslat focused on human rights, particularly gender equity. In 2004, she initiated the campaign "No! To Domestic Violence," breaking a taboo in Turkey related to denouncing domestic violence. Broad social backing led to changes in how Turkish media cover domestic violence and how police record incidents. In addition, Hürryiet supported the establishment of Turkey's first-ever 24/7 domestic violence hotline. In 2012, Turkey became the first country to ratify the Istanbul convention, a human rights treaty of the Council of Europe against violence against women and domestic violence.

Since then, Vuslat has been an active voice for human rights, gender equity, and freedom of expression. For example, she sought to increase female education by encouraging children to talk to their fathers about sending girls to school.

In her work, Vuslat emphasizes the importance of a mobilized society, perceiving herself as one voice among many. But she also acknowledges that her voice carries special weight in a national and international context. Vuslat says the most powerful skill she can acquire and refine is to listen generously—not only to words but also to the person behind those words. With this in mind, she founded the Vuslat Foundation to promote listening as a key leadership and interpersonal skill. She has partnered with academia, including MIT and Tufts University, and established the Generous Listening and Dialogue Center at Tisch College of Civic Life to further interdisciplinary and applied research on listening, dialogue, and good conversation. Furthermore, she regularly convenes an alliance of like-minded influencers, media leaders, changemakers, and thought leaders to advocate and spread their common messages, stories, and research. Her keen interest in listening as a tool has made her a champion of connectedness and self-reflection.

Antonis Schwarz: Tax me, now!

Impact investor, philanthropist, and activist, Germany

Primary impact approach: The all-in approach

Primary polycapital: Political capital, career capital, social capital, economic capital

Antonis is a vocal critic of inequality in societies. In his view, the fairest solution is to have strong and democratically governed public institutions, making him an advocate of the welfare state and tax justice.

> "Philanthropy should not become the fig leaf of a hugely unjust system. We need to have progressive taxation to counteract the tendency for large fortunes to grow disproportionately more than the economy and the average wage."

Antonis realized he was an HRI when he was a teenager. His family's decision to sell its business ensured a sizable inheritance for Antonis when he became an adult. However, he quickly found that there was no playbook for how he should use this inheritance. To make a difference he set out to choose his own path.

At first, Antonis supported projects and charitable causes that followed his passions. A lifelong skater, he sought to build an indoor skate park for his hometown, feeling Munich's skaters were left without adequate winter facilities. These projects were not always successful. Plans for the skate park were shelved after the earmarked space was purchased for apartment buildings.

Antonis decided to double down on social engagement. Becoming interested in addressing corruption and poor governance in his mother's home country of Greece, Antonis established a parliamentary monitoring organization called Vouliwatch promoting transparency and accountability in the Greek Parliament. This interest in political engagement threads through his other activities, from supporting the counter-cultural magazine Adbusters to political performance artists in Germany.

As an avid impact investor, he claims that it "doesn't matter from an inequality perspective if you own 99 percent of a coal plant or 99 percent of a solar farm" if the underlying issue of inequality remains unaddressed. Antonis wants to not only play by the rules but also change them. He therefore urges his peers to speak up for both the welfare state and tax justice as a basic tenet for real impact. This cumulates in his active involvement in #taxmenow, a petition for higher wealth-related taxes in Germany and Austria.

Appendix

Methodology

We mainly used a qualitative approach in the development of this report, involving:

- A review of existing reports and literature on systemic change, philanthropic engagement, and the involvement of HRIs in social initiatives beyond finance.

- A review of the data collected over the last four years that informed our report series on systemic change, especially over 100 interviews with seasoned practitioners, proximate leaders, and ecosystem experts on social entrepreneurship and systemic change.

- Four interviews with leading scholars in the field of ethics and philanthropy.

- More than 50 semistructured interviews with either HRIs from all over the world or advisors to HRIs, particularly those with a focus on philanthropy.

The concepts presented in this report were developed based on the literature review and prior work of publishing partners, including more than 100 interviews conducted for prior reports in this series. The sources of responsibility (see "Why work towards systemic change," page 6) and the self-reflection framework (see the "Look with courage" chapter, page 22) were drafted with leading ethics scholars.

All concepts were then validated and refined, informed by more than 50 interviews with HRIs and advisors acting as ecosystem experts. Our interview partners come from a variety of backgrounds and generations, ranging from under 30 to over 90 years in age. We talked to financial investors, business leaders, inheritors, nobility, serial entrepreneurs, and heads of family empires. Furthermore, the interview partners came from 18 different countries across five continents (Africa: 2, Asia: 8, Europe: 31, Latin America, including Mexico: 4, North America: 14). We interviewed 28 men and 31 women. The average interviewee was comparably young, in their early to mid-40s.

We identified suitable interview partners through snowball sampling, starting with individuals already working toward systemic change in the publishing partners' networks. Although this led to some homogeneity in our interviews, we observed that every HRI developed their own, unique approach to working toward systemic change. We aimed to capture this diversity throughout the report. Due to the selection process, all of our interview partners were socially engaged in some capacity and questioning how to deploy their power in ethically sound ways.

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Thank you

Ashoka and McKinsey & Company would like to acknowledge all the partners who joined our annual study on systemic change. We are humbled by everyone's enthusiasm and dedication and would like to thank our colleagues for their trust and willingness to co-create. We hope this report will lead to further collaborative work on supporting systems change efforts.

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We thank all interview partners who took the time to answer our questions and introduced us to additional people. Moreover, we thank all contributors who reviewed our drafts and helped us refine this report through their feedback.

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Summary of prior reports

The world has no shortage of social challenges. To sustainably solve them, we need to move beyond mitigation and change the underlying social systems that cause them.

To support this effort, Ashoka and McKinsey convene a group of leading networks on an annual basis to showcase the impact of systemic change and how different stakeholders can contribute to a strong ecosystem that works toward a better future.

From small to systemic

In 2019, for example, McKinsey estimated the financial benefit of systemic change in Germany at €18 billion per year. This number is based on Ashoka Fellows' assessment of the potential economic benefit of systemic change in German society at scale.

One of the social enterprises involved in this effort is Discovering Hands, founded by Dr. med. Frank Hoffmann, a physician who developed a method through which blind women can detect early-stage breast cancer. If all German women between the ages of 35 and 50 had access to this practice, German society could save €80 million to €160 million per year in healthcare costs, a figure that includes training and diagnostic costs. Not included are the jobs created for blind women who are usually excluded from employment, the reduced harm for breast cancer patients, and the public image shift of disabled people.

Embracing complexity

In 2020, the series turned to foundations as the first key stakeholder in the systemic change ecosystem. *Embracing complexity* formulates five principles on how to fund systemic change that are directed at, but not limited to, foundations:

1. Embrace a systemic mindset
2. Support evolving paths to systemic change
3. Work in true partnership
4. Prepare for long-term engagements
5. Collaborate with other stakeholders

Embracing complexity is grounded in a broad consensus beyond the publishing partners (Ashoka, Catalyst 2030, Co-Impact, Echoing Green, Schwab Foundation, and Skoll Foundation). Its findings are in line with more than 70 publications by other authors, the opinions of more than 50 additional foundations and intermediaries, and more than 100 social entrepreneurs from around the world.

New allies

In 2021, the report series covered how governments can create conducive ecosystems for social entrepreneurs working toward systemic change. Based on successful governmental initiatives throughout the world, *New allies* presents best practices that politicians, public servants, and other government officials can use to best position their societies for social innovation. Several of the proposed steps don't even rely on fiscal contributions but focus on the organization, communications, data access, and willingness to explore new directions.

Endnotes

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