

Neilson  
foundation

**Stronger communities  
where people, places  
and culture thrive.**

Judith Neilson Foundation  
**STRATEGY  
2030**

# Introduction

**All over the world, people and communities are driving change. They are challenging inequality, reshaping systems and working toward more just and inclusive futures.**

This strategy sets out how the Judith Neilson Foundation will contribute to that momentum between now and 2030. We are a young Foundation, still growing, listening and learning. This strategy reflects what we have learned so far and how we plan to be most useful: by supporting local leadership, investing in long term solutions and adapting as the world changes.

Our work spans Australia, Africa and, through our new Innovation portfolio, a growing global network. In all of it, we back people with deep knowledge of the challenges they face. This strategy is a roadmap and an invitation to partner, to learn and to keep moving forward together.

# Our portfolios

Across our three portfolios, we have identified key strategic focus areas.

| Mission                                                                                                                  | Focus area 1                                                                                                                                          | Focus area 2                                                                                                                                | Focus area 3                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Africa</b><br>Strengthen Africa's self-sufficiency by investing in health, inclusive economies and leadership.        | <br>Strengthening public health systems and delivery                 | <br>Advancing inclusive digital and green economic growth | <br>Investing in African leadership, voice and regional influence |
| <b>Australia</b><br>Address inequalities faced by disadvantaged women and girls to create a just and prosperous society. | <br>Investing in Sydney's support sector and strengthening systems | <br>Backing First Nations women and girls                | <br>Justice for women and girls                                 |
| <b>Innovation</b><br>Enable radical change for people and communities by investing in visionary innovation.              | <br>Urban futures                                                  |                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                      |

# Africa

**Our vision is a self-determining, prosperous, and resilient Africa, shaping its future and influencing the world.**

The Foundation's Africa portfolio focuses on strengthening public health systems, expanding inclusive economic opportunity, and advancing regional leadership and collaboration.

We prioritise work that benefits women, girls and young people, and take a pan-African approach that reflects regional diversity, encourages learning across countries, and adapts to new opportunities as they arise.

We deliver our strategy by supporting a range of partnerships, from direct service delivery to work that strengthens systems and connects efforts across countries and sectors. We prioritise flexible, long-term support and trusted relationships, backing work that responds to local priorities and is shaped by organisations with deep roots in the communities and sectors they serve.





## Focus area 1:

# Strengthening public health systems and delivery

*Strengthening gender responsive public health systems, infrastructure, and local manufacturing to expand healthcare access.*

## The case for action

Across Africa there is growing momentum to build public health systems that can meet current and future demand. Progress is underway, yet gaps in access, workforce, and supply continue to limit reach and impact. More than 600 million people remain without essential services and preventable maternal and child deaths are still too common. Local supply chains are underdeveloped, oversight and accountability systems are limited, health workers are overstretched, and the public health ecosystem is not yet equipped to manage the health impacts of climate change, including the rise of climate-related diseases. Government budgets are under pressure, and recent cuts to international aid have further undermined already fragile public health systems.

We prioritise solutions that are rooted in context, shaped by those closest to the challenges, and focused on building resilient, responsive health systems that deliver lasting impact.

## Our strategic priorities

- Strengthening services and workforce.
- Improving maternal, neonatal and reproductive health, water and sanitation, and climate-related disease response.
- Building local supply chains and supporting regional production of medicines, vaccines, and equipment to reduce import reliance.
- Promoting policy and financing reform.
- Advocating for universal health systems coverage and strengthen civil society-led accountability.
- Investing in resilient health systems and local capacity through training and digital tools to ensure health systems can meet future demand independently.



## Focus area 2:

# Advancing inclusive digital and green economic growth

*Driving inclusive, climate-smart economic growth through sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, digital transformation, and entrepreneurship.*

## The case for action

Africa holds vast potential for climate-smart growth, with abundant resources, a young workforce, and flourishing innovation. Yet food insecurity, energy poverty, and digital exclusion continue to hold many communities back. Over 800 million people face hunger, and 600 million lack electricity, despite rich agricultural land and critical mineral reserves. Smallholder farmers struggle to access markets, inputs, and finance, while women and youth remain underrepresented in economic leadership. Climate shocks, weak infrastructure, and underdeveloped supply chains limit opportunity, and demand for digital tools outpaces access.

We prioritise African-led efforts to build inclusive, climate smart economies that connect people to sustainable livelihoods, resilient food systems, and the green and digital sectors.

## Our strategic priorities

- Supporting climate-resilient crops, regenerative farming, and land use.
- Improving access to finance, processing, markets, and storage.
- Investing in decentralised renewable energy and technician training.
- Supporting initiatives in communities that organise and strengthen critical minerals small scale mining and connecting them to safer, fairer minerals and clean energy supply chains.
- Supporting women and youth with the skills and resources to enter and expand small to medium sized entrepreneurship.
- Promoting responsible critical minerals governance and initiatives on value addition.
- Building digital skills, mechanisation, and secondary and vocational education access.
- Scaling policy, innovation, and inclusive economic reform.



## Focus area 3:

## Investing in African leadership, voice and regional influence

*Amplifying African thought, voices and leadership, and fostering global connectivity.*

### The case for action

Africa is home to a growing share of the world's population, talent, and ideas, yet remains underrepresented in global governance and decision-making. African countries are among the largest recipients of World Bank IDA financing but hold only 11% of voting power at the Bank and just 6.5 percent at the IMF, reflecting persistent disparities in financial access and global influence. Meanwhile, the continent continues to lose skilled professionals to the global North, limiting local leadership in key sectors. Regional coordination is often fragmented, and opportunities for cross-country learning are underused.

Our priority is to back African leadership and institutions driving regional collaboration, global engagement, and locally led influence in decision-making and governance.

### Our strategic priorities

- Backing African led advocacy in shaping the global economic and governance architecture.
- Investing in African leadership to engage in regional and international forums and solve global challenges.
- Strengthening cross-regional collaboration and peer learning.
- Supporting local institutions to shift power and funding to African-led actors.

# Australia

## Our vision is equity for women and girls in Australia

The Foundation's Australia portfolio supports women and girls facing systemic disadvantage, with a focus on economic equity, freedom from violence, and access to justice.

We prioritise investment in First Nations women and girls, refugee and migrant women and girls, women and girls in rural and remote communities, and older women. We also recognise the children of these cohorts, acknowledging the intergenerational effects of poverty, violence and exclusion.

We fund organisations working across Sydney, Northern Australia, and nationally to strengthen services, shift systems, and amplify the leadership of those most affected by inequality. Our approach centres lived experience and is grounded in long-term, collaborative change.





## Focus area 1:

# Investing in Sydney's support sector and strengthening systems

*Strengthening the network of services that support disadvantaged women and girls in Sydney, and supporting systems at scale.*

## The case for action

Sydney is home to a diverse network of grassroots organisations working to advance justice, safety, and opportunity for women and girls. Many are navigating increasing demand and limited funding, while working in fragmented systems that make cross-referral and collaboration difficult. Service models often leave little room to invest in infrastructure, partnerships, or strategic planning. Meanwhile, funding structures can unintentionally create silos, limiting collective impact.

We support frontline organisations and systems level collaboration that enable more resilient, coordinated services for women and girls in Sydney.

Beyond Sydney, we also seize opportunities to address systemic barriers to women and girls' economic participation and access to justice, as well as inadequate responses to violence and the overrepresentation of women in the criminal legal system.

## Our strategic priorities

- Backing high-impact services supporting women and girls in Sydney.
- Investing in organisational resilience and collaboration across the sector.
- Strengthening internal systems and adaptive capacity of service providers.
- Supporting cross-referral pathways and strategic partnerships.
- Improving relationships with government, funders, and other actors.
- Investing in systemic efforts to advance freedom from violence, justice, and economic equity.



## Focus area 2:

# Backing First Nations women and girls

*Investing in First Nations women's leadership and economic participation, with a focus on Northern Australia.*

## The case for action

First Nations women are leading efforts to create safer, stronger, and more self-determined communities. Across Northern Australia in particular, they have called for greater investment into their leadership and capacity as a pathway to long-term wellbeing. Despite strong engagement in education, structural inequities continue to limit access to employment, enterprise, and financial independence, particularly in remote regions. Supporting women-led enterprise and leadership is a proven route to intergenerational change.

We invest in First Nations women's leadership and enterprise as a proven pathway to economic participation, safety, and intergenerational change.

## Our strategic priorities

- Backing First Nations women-led enterprises and leadership programs.
- Focusing investment in Northern Australia where need is greatest.
- Recognising women and girls as experts in their own lives.
- Fostering financial freedom, employment, and intergenerational wellbeing.
- Responding to community priorities to drive systemic change.
- Collaborating with funders and partners for long term impact.



## Focus area 3:

# Justice for women and girls

*Addressing the criminalisation of women and girls and enhancing access to legal support.*

## The case for action

Across Australia, women and girls are working to navigate legal and institutional systems that are often ill-equipped to respond to their needs. Many, particularly First Nations, and those seeking asylum, encounter barriers rooted in racism, gender bias, and structural inequality. In the absence of timely legal support, issues like violence, poverty, housing insecurity, or visa uncertainty can escalate into increased precarity, mental and physical health issues or criminalisation. Most women in prison are mothers and victim-survivors of violence, reflecting missed opportunities for prevention and care.

We fund organisations that promote equitable access to justice and reduce the criminalisation of women and girls, particularly those facing systemic disadvantage.

## Our strategic priorities

- Preventing criminalisation through diversion and reintegration.
- Addressing social drivers of incarceration, including violence and homelessness.
- Expanding access to specialised, trauma-informed legal services.
- Supporting migrant and refugee women to navigate complex systems.
- Reducing intergenerational harm through community-based support.
- Partnering with stakeholders seeking to disrupt entrenched cycles.

# Innovation

**Our vision is that people everywhere can define and drive radical, positive change through innovation.**

The Innovation Portfolio is the newest part of the Foundation's work. Unlike our regional portfolios, it has a global scope, defined by approach rather than geography or theme.

We invest in early ideas and transition-to-scale efforts, especially those led by people with lived experience and grounded in community. We prioritise innovations that are joyful, creative, impact first, inclusive and intersectional.

This portfolio backs the process of innovation, supporting experimentation, adaptation, and systems change. We aim to stay flexible, support bold thinking, and evolve as we learn, connect, and test new ways of working.



# Innovation



## Focus area 1:

### Urban futures

*Improving the liveability, inclusivity, safety and resilience of urban environments, creating places that are more vibrant, joyful and ready for growth and change.*

#### The case for action

Rapid urban population growth is a defining trend of this century. Cities are expanding at unprecedented rates, unlocking opportunity but also intensifying pressures on communities, infrastructure, institutions and economies. In rapidly growing regions across the world, millions of people lack access to secure housing, clean water, sanitation, and affordable energy. Risk from hazards associated with climate change are increasing in all cities and urban areas. Women, people with disabilities, and low-income communities face systemic barriers to mobility, safety, economic and social participation.

This work centres on innovations that help urban areas to grow in ways that are fair, sustainable, inclusive and community-centric. Innovation can also create more vibrant, playful places that bring greater joy to people's lives.

## Our strategic priorities

### Design for inclusion

Support innovations that create safer, more inclusive products, services and systems, with a focus on those overlooked in traditional urban development such as women, children, people with disabilities and low-income communities.

### Construction for resilience

Back development and adoption of materials, techniques and infrastructure that strengthen the built environment towards climate resilience, population change and systemic stress, incorporating traditional knowledge and nature-based solutions.

### Systems for transformation

Enable equitable access to foundational systems, like finance, technology, urban planning and communication, through new platforms, tools and processes rooted in local knowledge and lived experience.



## About the Judith Neilson Foundation

The Judith Neilson Foundation's mission is to invest in people and ideas that strengthen communities and tackle inequality across Africa, Australia and the world. We approach our work by forging partnerships with organisations addressing complex challenges and building more inclusive, resilient societies.

### Judith Neilson Foundation

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