

if the SDGs are to be achieved in a gender responsive manner then...

What do we mean by a theory of change?

A theory of change is a hypothesis of how we believe we will contribute to change. Put simply, it is a tool that allows us to: articulate the changes we seek; clarify how we believe we will contribute to those changes; unpack and address the assumptions that underlie our thinking and; clarify how we intend to mitigate the risks that will inevitably arise.

Why do we need a theory of change?

The global community has a shared vision: to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by 2030. The UN system has an important contributing role to play in supporting Member States to attain this shared vision and its accompanying Sustainable Development Goals. In order to play this role most effectively, and as per the UN reform agenda, it is important for the UN system to be able to clearly articulate, track and report on its collective contribution to SDG related results in terms of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

This theory of change outlines the UN system's hypothesis of how it will support Member States to deliver on their shared vision. It is the first time, to our knowledge, that a systematic attempt has been made to develop system-wide reporting building on a theory of change approach i.e. It is the first time, to our knowledge, that a systematic attempt has been made to develop system-wide reporting building on a theory of change approach for a thematic area.

How can we use a theory of change?

A theory of change is a live tool for learning, planning, communication and reporting. It can help the UN system to: improve collective planning and monitoring; identify ways to improve work within existing country mechanisms; enhance coherence and communication amongst agencies in the country context; and identify areas of commonality and comparative advantage towards the achievement of results. It can also be used as a tool for

partnership working with different partners identifying their contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals from the perspective of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. It can also help us to test our hypotheses for establishing programme frameworks.

Who developed this theory of change?

This theory of change was developed by a working group of 14 agencies representing Funds and Programmes, Secretariat entities, Training and Research and Specialised Entities. These were: ECA, ESCWA, IOM, OHCHR, UN Habitat, UNAIDS, UNDSS, UNESCO, UNICRI, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNODC, UNU and WHO. All entities were informed of this initiative and invited to participate and comment. The process was facilitated by UN Women.¹

How does the theory of change tie in to the UN SWAP 2.0?

UN-SWAP 2.0 is the updated accountability framework for the UN System Wide Action Plan for implementation of the UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (CEB/2006/2). Alongside institutional processes, it includes some accountability for SDG results. It has a five-year implementation period. In contrast, this theory of change has a broader learning, monitoring, planning and communication purpose and a deeper focus on results with a longer-term vision up to 2030. Reporting on SWAP 2.0 will support the UN-System to assess performance against the theory of change.

*This theory of change is accompanied by a [Frequently Asked Questions](#) document for those requiring more information.





Theory of Change: Summary Narrative

The theory of change is rooted in two well-established intervention strategies: a) mainstreaming a gender perspective across all interventions and b) development of targeted interventions to address specific gaps in gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The theory of change covers internal organisational change (e.g. gender parity in staffing) as well as external programmatic change (e.g. enhanced financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in the context of implementing the 2030 Agenda). It covers all SDGs and is not limited to SDG 5.

It is a meta-theory of change. It brings together *what entities are already doing and what they are expected to do* to enable us to understand, capture, monitor and report on the UN system-wide contribution to achieving the SDGs from a gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls perspective. It brings in an objective system-wide lens that focuses, not on what individual entities are currently doing, but what changes the cumulative actions of UN support will help to achieve.

It also pulls out the *underlying critical assumptions or enabling factors* that must be in place for our joint efforts to be successful as well as some of the risks that will impact on our success with possible mitigation strategies. It separates out the results that the UN is planning to achieve from those to be achieved by Member States. It recognizes that not everything is within UN system control or direct influence.

Our change hypothesis is that *if* the SDGs are to be achieved in a gender responsive manner and if we are to reach gender equality and the empowerment of women by 2030 we need to see [gender-balanced power relations](#) and [an enabling environment for gender equality](#).

Based on an analysis of entity specific mandates and resources, the UN System has identified eight change areas that will contribute to gender balanced power relations and an enabling environment for gender equality. We believe that focusing system-wide efforts on these areas will allow the UN to best support Member States to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls across their 2030 Goals. These change areas are:

- *Women lead, participate in and are represented equally within gender-responsive governance systems*
- *Women are economically empowered, have income security and decent work*
- *Women and girls live a life free from violence, stigma and stereotypes*
- *Rights holders access gender-responsive services*
- *Availability of appropriate financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls*

- *Comprehensive set of norms, policies and standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is implemented*
- *Knowledge is generated, managed and transferred to enhance integration of gender equality and women and girls' empowerment across the SDGs*
- *Internal UN System Changes enable gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.*

The accompanying FAQ document highlights exactly which SDG goals, targets and indicators each of these change areas contributes to.

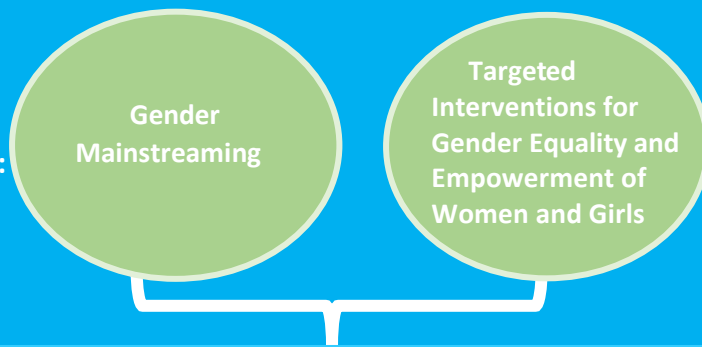
Each UN entity is currently contributing to at least one of these change areas. Some entities may contribute to multiple types of intervention; some may only contribute to one due to the nature of their mandate or due to other factors. Some entities will currently be contributing to change areas that are not outlined here. At a minimum, all entities will be contributing to internal UN organisational change, as per commitments within UN SWAP 2.0, the UN Strategy on Gender Parity and the UNCT-SWAP Scorecard. Some entities will be contributing to change at activity/intervention level and/or at output level and/or at outcome level. NB: This theory of change does not detail specific activities as each of the 68 entities will define these, in line with their mandate and workplan.

A number of assumptions underline these changes. These are specified at each level of the theory of change. Overall, the *key assumption* is that the delivery of the defined goods and services will lead to given knowledge and attitude changes, which will in turn lead to behavioural changes required. Once these behaviours are being practiced as a matter of course by the given stakeholders, it is anticipated that an enabling environment will be in place to support gender equality and the empowerment of women and that power relations will be gender balanced. The other overarching assumption is that the global community will continue to come together to resource and support UN contributions.

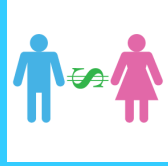
Figure 1 below provides a visual summary of the theory of change. Table 1 below provides a visual and narrative theory of change.

Figure 1.

Gender Equality Results Wheel:
Summary Theory of Change



Women lead, participate in and are represented equally within gender-responsive governance



Women are economically empowered, have income security and decent work



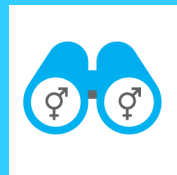
Women and girls live a life free from violence, stigma and stereotypes



Rights holders access gender-responsive services



Appropriate financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls



Comprehensive set of norms, policies and standards on GEEWG is implemented



Knowledge is generated, managed and transferred to enhance integration of GEEWG across the SDGs



Internal UN System Changes enable GEEWG

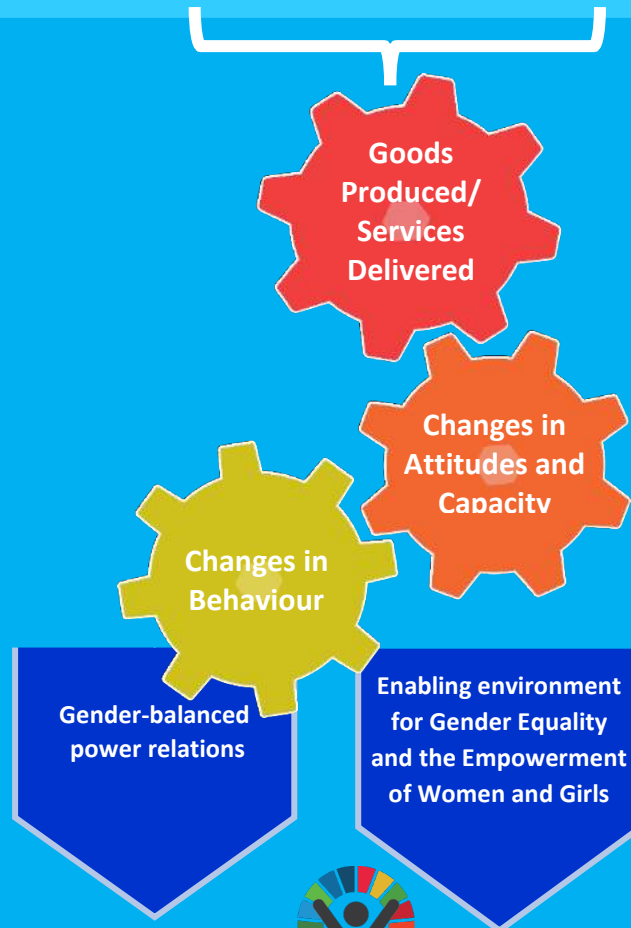


Table 1.

Planet 50-50 by 2030

Impact

All women, girls, men and boys are all able to live lives free from poverty (SDG 1), hunger (SDG 2), with reduced inequalities (SDG 10), and are able to enjoy good health and wellbeing (SDG 3), quality education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9), access to justice and to effective and accountable institutions (SDG 16), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), responsible production and consumption (SDG 12), our land, oceans, seas and marine resources (SDGs 14 and 15) and engage in climate action from a young age (SDG 13).

Gender Balanced Power Relations

Enabling Environment for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

Change assumption: Changes in behaviours lead to the impact anticipated

Changes in Behaviour Outcomes (Outcomes that the UN can influence)

Women lead, participate in and are represented equally within gender-responsive governance systems

Women are economically empowered, have income security and decent work

All women and girls live a life free from violence, stigma and stereotypes

Implementation and evaluation of a comprehensive set of norms, policies and standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

State and non-State actors conduct gender-responsive budgeting and allocate dedicated resources for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

Global, national and local state and non-state actors across sectors are gender-responsive throughout policy and practice cycles, including service delivery and SDG implementation monitoring and reporting

All UN interventions are gender aware and moving towards gender transformative. UN staff work in a gender-responsive office environment, free from gender bias and sexual and gender based harassment.

Behaviour change assumptions: Stakeholders want to make the required behavioural changes and have the capacity, attitudes, knowledge and resources area dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment o; The political environment continues to prioritise Agenda 2030 commitments; Behavioural changes instigated are accepted by others so that the changes can be sustained.

Changes in Attitudes and Capacity Outcomes (Outcomes that the UN can influence)

Interested, diverse and capable women are successfully standing for office and are recognised by all stakeholders as equally legitimate and effective political leaders

State and Non State actors are actively transforming social norms and providing quality gender-responsive services at community and individual levels in relation whilst also targeting the prevention of and response to violence against women and girls and their economic empowerment

State and non-State actors understand why they need to be gender-responsive across service delivery and SDG implementation, monitoring and reporting and have the skills to ensure that they are gender-responsive

State and non-State actors understand the necessity of gender-responsive budgeting and how to develop and use systems for tracking resource allocation and allocating funds to gender equality and empowerment of women and girls

State and non-State actors have improved their capacity to develop legal and regulatory frameworks that align with agreed normative standards on gender equality and human rights.

UN staff have improved their capacity and desire to generate, transfer and use knowledge to mainstream gender equality throughout services delivered- both programmatic and non- programmatic and develop targeted actions for the empowerment of women and girls where required

Capacity Change Assumptions: Goods and services reach intended audience and are considered to be relevant, acceptable and useful. Goods and services are understood, realistic, culturally acceptable, relevant and commensurate. Relevant stakeholders receive active support from peers, family and wider community to enable meaningful engagement and learning. Transforming attitudes and developing capacity is necessary to enabling behaviour changes required to reach impact.

<p>Goods Produced/ Services Delivered (Outputs that the UN does and has direct control over)</p>	<p>Support to women to engage in governance and leadership² and facilitation of community and civic understanding of gender equality and women's right to political participation³ and economic empowerment, access to income security, and decent work⁴</p>	<p>Facilitation of contextually appropriate and effective partnerships at national, regional and global levels (bringing together a range of state-national and local- and non-state actors) to transform gendered power relations through tackling violence against women and girls, and gender based stigma and stereotypes⁵ and facilitating women's economic empowerment, access to income security and decent work</p>	<p>UN-system facilitates the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes for the prioritisation and mainstreaming of gender equality as well as targeted actions for the empowerment of women and girls across the SDGs amongst staff and Member States⁶ (political parties, line ministries, service delivery agencies, etc.)⁷</p>	<p>Support to State and non-State actors to provide and require gender-responsive services⁸ UN entities delivering direct support & delivery to rights holders, including crisis affected populations, at country and regional levels have: a) fully integrated a gender lens across all interventions b) delivered direct services relating to SDG goals in a gender-responsive manner.</p>	<p>UN system has facilitated State and non-State actors to develop systems for tracking allocation of resources and facilitated innovative workshops and information to support the increased allocation and tracking of sustainable resources for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at country, regional and global levels</p>	<p>Support contextually appropriate adoption, development and strengthening of policies and enforceable legislation and legal adherence, to enable gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, in alignment with agreed gender equality and human rights norms and standards.⁹</p>	<p>UN staff, including leadership, have been engaged in meaningful knowledge, skills and attitude development to enable them to play their role in UN system contributions to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls</p>
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Strategies	<p>Mainstreaming: Gender analysis and a gender transformative approach is integrated across the intervention cycle... accompanied by ... Targeted Interventions: Focusing on women and girls' empowerment and gender equality</p>
Cross-cutting Assumptions	<p><i>Environmental:</i> Political environment continues to support GEEW; Adequate or increased financing for GEEW in the context of the 2030 agenda; Stakeholders want to engage with the UN-System and solicit the comparative advantage that the system offers; We find committed, competent agents of change to work with (this includes UN staff as well as external stakeholders). Reforms and changes happen in a timely manner and by 2030; freedom of information is respected and governments are increasingly open to sharing data with all stakeholders; SDGs provide an impetus for transformative change.</p> <p><i>Institutional:</i> The UN system does add value and has a comparative, system-wide advantage on GEEW; The areas of change selected are those that collectively are most likely to yield GEEW results in the context of the SDGs; We tailor our interventions to ensure that they are country-led, context specific and designed to have maximum impact for GEEW; Our internal results reporting systems will evolve to enable us to report against this theory of change; This theory of change will be used as a tool to learn, evolve and improve; Executive teams in all entities will align with this theory of change and system-wide approach.</p>
Risks, Barriers and mitigation	<p><i>Environmental risks:</i> We are operating in a challenging financial environment and in a crowded market place, with Increasing competition for resources. <u>Mitigation:</u> The UN-system must be clear about and elicit agreement among MSs about its comparative advantage in terms of delivering gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in the context of the SDGs. Climate change and socio-political unrest may draw attention away from gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. <u>Mitigation:</u> Strong advocacy showing the GEEW implications of climate change and of socio-political unrest. Restricted political freedoms, absence of a culture of political dialogue and public engagement do not enable civil society organizations and other actors to participate fully in the enabling of GEEW. Community attitudinal and behaviour change are difficult to change and monitor; community pressure and social norms generate a backlash and/or backslide and/or culture of silence on gender-related crime reporting and inhibit women from exercising their rights; gender-discriminatory social norms are even more difficult to address during periods of political transition. <u>Mitigation:</u> Strong advocacy, mobilization of protection efforts, heightened monitoring, reprisal response, political intervention and use of UN convening space.</p> <p><i>Institutional risks:</i> We don't yet have full buy-in across all staff and partners for GEEW. <u>Mitigation:</u> Provide leadership coaching, training, awareness raising on GEEW requirements under the 2030 Agenda. Organisational reform at UN system level could detract from GEEW. <u>Mitigation:</u> Piggy back on the transformation agenda. Promotion of gender equality and eradication of harmful gender stereotypes and social norms is argued to be a "Western" imposition. Failing to address the issue through cross-regional and cross-cultural/religious approach may risk UN's reputation as being perceived as biased. <u>Mitigation:</u> Directly address concerns and provide evidence of non-Western examples of GEEW. Lack of disaggregated data and gender analysis to be able to report on results. <u>Mitigation:</u> Engage internal leaders to ensure GEEW is prioritised in monitoring and reporting systems as well as in implementation.</p>

Endnotes

¹ Leslie Groves Williams was the consultant responsible for facilitating the working group and drafting the document. Regine Guevara provided visual support.

² Examples: Increasing technical capacity of women to engage in leadership contests (capacity development of women aspirants; public speaking; constituency engagement; transformative leadership training, including of young and marginalized women); enhancing capacity of women to mobilize resources to run competitive, well-resourced and innovative campaigns (capacity development of women candidates on campaign messaging, outreach, using ICT and social media campaigns; access to women's fundraising networks); supporting networks of support for women leaders (e.g. working with professional networks, CSO networks, social media networks, political parties, youth groups) and building their capacity (e.g. through mentoring; forums for women leaders, women's caucuses; legislative drafting expertise; leadership training; peer-to-peer learning).

³ Examples: Advocacy and social mobilization (provision of outreach; community dialogues; women & gender advocates articulate demands); working with media to report positive portrayals of women leaders and gender equality as a social goal (media awareness raising, targeted campaigns, media code of conduct, social media).

⁴ Examples include: building capacity and raising awareness about the gender implications of economic growth and macroeconomic policies; promoting decent employment for women through the adoption and implementation of legal and labour market reforms, and expansion of social protection coverage through supporting legal and regulatory frameworks that recognize the rights of women working in all forms of informal employment to safe working conditions, minimum wages, and other protective measures in the workplace that improve the terms and conditions of their employment, and extending social protection, especially social insurance, maternal and health insurance and; supporting efforts to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work through investments in social care and physical infrastructure and the adoption of gender-equitable policies that support the reconciliation of unpaid care work with paid work. See UN Women [Theory of Change for thematic priority 5 More policies promote decent work and social protection for women](#).

⁵ Examples: Convening active and inclusive regional/global platforms that facilitate policy dialogue for consensus-building and adoption of common regional/global positions on eliminating violence against women and girls by bringing together a cross-section of its member States and the Regional Communities, civil society organizations, academia and private sector.

⁶ Examples: UN expert advice provided for mainstreaming gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls across different sectors of the SDGs and for delivering the empowerment of women and girls; analysis (evidence) and policy advice developed, showcased and transferred both internally and externally by UN-Internal research and think tank entities; Face to face or online

training delivered on collecting, analysing and disseminating comprehensive and sex disaggregated data on SDG processes and results relating to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; Leadership coaching; Development of a stronger, publicly accessible knowledge base around gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in the context of SDG achievement.

⁷ Examples include strengthening capacities of key stakeholders to design and implement initiatives to mitigate Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP) (capacity building of security forces; data collection; CSO monitoring mechanisms; gender observatories in place); strengthening capacities of electoral stakeholders to promote gender balance (EMBs guarantee women can register and vote; women have access to ID documents; measures put in place to encourage participation in elections; voter outreach; women lead in electoral management).

⁸ Examples access to gender-responsive health (staffing with more female health care assistants to encourage women to attend health care centres), water, housing, education (provision of sanitary materials and school lunches for girls so they can attend school), natural resources, agricultural services (providing seeds grown by women), and access to food as well as services that support women's financial autonomy and decent work.

⁹ Examples: Providing contextually appropriate advice on legal and regulatory frameworks- from design to implementation to monitoring and evaluation- in alignment with agreed normative standards on gender equality and human rights; supporting MSs to develop comprehensive policies addressing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; to ensure that public policies and practices in Y countries now comply with international gender equality standards and provide non-discriminatory access; ensuring that legal and social frameworks in Z countries increasingly promote women's and girls' autonomy and choice and protect them from violence, including in the digital space; supporting development of legislative frameworks that promote gender balance in governance and decision making.