

Theory of Change for FOKUS 2023-2027



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Introduction

FOKUS' Theory of Change (ToC) is based on the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan, which was developed through a consultative process involving the entire FOKUS membership, FOKUS' implementing partners and key stakeholders. The ToC consists of a model and accompanying narrative and forms the basis upon which the 2023-2027 Programmes and Results Framework have been developed. Additionally, we include a situational analysis relevant to the thematic areas in question and the programme country contexts.

The FOKUS Mission

The overall objective of FOKUS as an umbrella organisation is to coordinate and facilitate partnerships to **promote women's and girls' human rights and gender equality globally**. This necessitates strengthening **women's access to rights, resources, and power**, which FOKUS seeks to achieve through advocacy and international development cooperation.

Situational Analysis

To achieve gender equality is one of the most fundamental challenges that our society faces. Globally, laws, social norms and traditions give men more power, religious and political authority, and decision-making roles – within the household, extended family, community, society, and nations. Challenging these powerful and mutually reinforcing roles and levels of influence starts from a basis of very asymmetric relations in terms of resources, legitimacy, and credibility (in the eyes of the powers that be). The struggle for gender equality must also overcome the fact that most women do not have the same organisational capacities, structures, and experience as men who defend the status quo.

This situation is of course neither static nor the same across the world. With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, world leaders recognised that gender equality is central to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), both as a goal in itself (Goal 5) and as a catalyst for progress across the agenda.

The challenge is not simply overcoming old norms and habits. Indeed, strong global forces are actively mobilising against the gender equality agenda, often termed the ‘anti-gender movement’. The anti-gender movement can be defined as a ‘... transnational coalition of conservative activists and organizations working to counter and undermine political and social gains made by local and international feminist and SOGIE (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Expression) rights advocacy.’¹ A study done nearly ten years ago for Norad, ‘Lobbying for Family and Faith’,² documents how conservative religious leaders – Christian, Muslim, Hindu – were already then joining forces across the world to systematically roll back international agreements and norms, in the name of defending family and the sanctity of religion. In many countries, these more conservative forces, whether religion- or nationalism-based (often both), are experiencing considerable success, not least due to increased uncertainty and hardship for many groups. A sense of instability and perceived threats to own future often leads to a search for belonging and safety, and traditional answers carry a lot of appeal. The increased volatility across the globe has been accentuated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has created multidimensional discriminatory impacts that disproportionately affect women and girls.³ This highlights the urgent need to address the prevailing gender inequality in the world.⁴ In addition, the war in Ukraine has had global consequences in terms of reduced food and energy security pushing more people into deep poverty and increasing women’s and girls’ vulnerability.⁵

At the same time, important progress for women and girls has been made over the last decades. Girls’ enrolment in education has improved dramatically around the world, in primary, secondary and tertiary education.⁶ The global outrage at the Taliban banning secondary school education for girls in Afghanistan, also from Muslim societies, shows the strength of this achievement. In the health sector, women’s mortality rates during pregnancy and childbirth and other gender disaggregated data also show a *global* improvement, though the picture varies considerably across countries and perhaps even more *within* countries. The inequality debate sparked by Piketty and his team’s work⁷ has pointed to several drivers that increase within-country disparities, where once again girls and women often come out worse over time – unless countervailing factors come into play.

¹ McEwen and Narayanaswamy (2023): [The International Anti-Gender Movement. Understanding the Rise of Anti-Gender Discourses in the Context of Development, Human Rights and Social Protection.](#)

² Norad and Scanteam (2013): [Lobbying for Faith and Family: A Study of Religious NGOs at the United Nations](#)

³ UN Women (2021): [COVID-19 and women’s rights organizations](#)

⁴ ECOSOC (2021): [Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals](#)

⁵ UN Women (2022): [Global Gendered Impact of the Ukraine Crisis on Energy Access and Food Security and Nutrition](#)

⁶ In conservative Saudi Arabia, in 2019 women made up nearly 56% of all university students – see Statista (2021): [Share of female graduates Saudi Arabia 2010-2019](#)

⁷ See Thomas Piketty (2014), *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*.

In general, the realisation of women's and girls' human rights remain highly uneven both within and between countries – leaving the most marginalised and vulnerable women and girls behind. Research documents that progress is slower where underlying drivers of gender inequality are not being addressed by development policies and programmes,⁸ and civil society organisations play a key role in efforts to change gender discriminatory social norms, laws and practices that restrict women's and girls' access to rights, resources, and power.

Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) continues to be a human rights violation of enormous proportions. VAWG undermines the health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victims and survivors. Globally, 27% of ever-partnered women aged 15–49 years are estimated to have experienced physical or sexual, or both, intimate partner violence in their lifetime, with 13% (10–16%) experiencing it in the past year before they were surveyed.⁹ Practices such as **Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM)** is a fundamental violation of girls' human rights. It seriously compromises a girl's development as it often results in early pregnancy, likelihood of domestic violence, and social isolation, interrupting schooling and limiting career opportunities.¹⁰ The prevalence of CEFM has decreased globally, however it is feared that the economic impact on families in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic is threatening this progress and putting millions of girls at risk of CEFM. While the practice of **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)** has successfully been reduced and even abandoned in some communities around the world due to urbanisation, education and prevention programmes, populations that still practice FGM are growing, which put an additional 68 million girls at risk of undergoing this harmful practice.¹¹ UNFPA estimates that the pandemic has disrupted the progress towards eliminating FGM and that two million FGM cases could occur over the next decade that would otherwise have been averted.¹²

The COVID-19 pandemic has also caused a global setback for **Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)**. UNFPA reported that in 2020, nearly 12 million women and girls lost access to contraceptives, which led to 1.4 million unintended pregnancies.¹³ Concurrently, the anti-gender movement and other conservative forces remain on the rise, with defence of traditional gender roles at the heart of their agenda, and whose influence is especially notable within the field of SRHR. Where progress is made, such as in Colombia where the Constitutional Court voted to decriminalise abortion up to 24 weeks of gestation, a groundbreaking decision and an acknowledgment of women's

⁸ Cerise and Francaville (2012): [Tackling the root causes of gender inequality](#)

⁹ The Lancet (2022): [Global, regional, and national prevalence estimates of physical or sexual, or both, intimate partner violence against women in 2018.](#)

¹⁰ UNICEF (2022): [Child Marriage](#)

¹¹ UNFPA (2020): [Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Family Planning and Ending Gender-Based Violence, Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage](#)

¹² UNFPA (2020): [Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Family Planning and Ending Gender-Based Violence, Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage](#)

¹³ UNFPA (2022) [Impact of COVID-19 on Family Planning: What we know one year into the pandemic.](#)

reproductive autonomy in line with international standards, the anti-gender movement is fighting to reverse the decisions. The Guttmacher Lancet Commission states that progress in SRHR requires confrontation of the barriers embedded in laws, policies, the economy, and in social norms and values that prevent people from achieving SRHR.¹⁴ The Commission further states that a holistic view of SRHR must be adopted to accelerate the progress and provide better access and quality. The holistic view must include the more neglected issues such as adolescent sexuality, gender-based violence, access to safe and legal abortion and diversity in gender identities.

Women's Economic Rights are still subject to restrictive legislation and women face enduring obstacles in achieving economic empowerment such as inability to own land and other assets in their own name, inherit property, taking out loans and running their own enterprises.¹⁵ Women workers are over-represented in informal sectors in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America¹⁶ and are particularly exposed to sexual violence and harassment in the workplace.¹⁷ The gender pay gap remains glaringly unequal worldwide.¹⁸ Conflict and crisis exacerbate these inequalities, as the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic amply demonstrated.¹⁹ Furthermore, women and girls in low-income countries face the risk of gender-specific human rights abuses as a result of foreign business investments, both as workers, producers, land-holders and as members of affected communities.

Moreover, progress to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls is disproportionately threatened by humanitarian crises and armed conflict. With the adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on **Women, Peace and Security**, it was internationally recognised that peace is only sustainable if women are fully included in peacebuilding, and that peace is inextricably linked with equality between women and men. Nevertheless, in many contexts, women's official participation may be temporary, their delegated roles may be more symbolic than substantive, and their capacity to influence may be directly resisted by other actors involved in the peace and transition processes.²⁰

An additional risk to women's and girls' security is the consequences of **environmental degradation and climate change**. Women constitute the majority of the world's poor and are often dependent on natural resources for their and their families' sustenance, resources that are increasingly endangered by accelerating climate change. The many political, social and economic barriers that limit women's

¹⁴ The Guttmacher – Lancet Commission (2018): [Accelerate Progress: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for All](#)

¹⁵ World Bank (2023): [Women, Business and the Law](#)

¹⁶ ILO (2018): [Women and men in the informal economy: a statistical picture, 3rd edition](#)

¹⁷ ILO (2022): [Experiences of violence and harassment at work: A global first survey](#)

¹⁸ ILO (2022): [Global Wage Report 2022–23](#)

¹⁹ Center for Global Development (2021): [The Impacts of COVID-19 on Women's Social and Economic Outcomes: An Updated Review of the Evidence](#)

²⁰ UN Women (2015): [A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325](#)

decision-making capacity in general also affect women's opportunities to mitigate the effect of climate change, hence exacerbating their vulnerability.²¹ For instance, women in rural areas are often responsible for securing water and fuel for the household, and in addition to posing a threat to their families' well-being, resource scarcity makes these tasks more perilous and increases the risk of GBV.²² During emergency and disasters, women and girls who are forcibly displaced are particularly vulnerable and more likely than men to face sexual violence, human trafficking and other forms of abuse and enslavement, and at increased risk of unwanted pregnancies and maternal deaths.²³

Climate change is a significant global health threat underpinned by the persisting problem of gender inequality. A recent scoping review was conducted to better understand the relationship between climate change and women's health.²⁴ Four key themes were identified: (i) women's exposure to climate change risks, (ii) the impacts on women's health, (iii) factors contributing to the vulnerability of women's health, and (iv) responding strategies in addressing climate change. The review concludes that women's health faces increasing risk due to women's higher vulnerability to climate change, especially in the poorer countries.

Women's rights organisations, women human rights defenders and civil society organisations (CSOs) in general are experiencing a global trend of **shrinking space for civic action**, which represents a major obstacle to achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls. For this reason, there is a growing need to strengthen civil society organisations that mobilise public support for women and women's human rights, which is particularly crucial to reach the most marginalised and disadvantaged women and girls.

Principles: Human Rights, Participation and Context Sensitivity

FOKUS applies a **human rights-based approach (HRBA)** to programming and international development cooperation by acknowledging that poverty and marginalisation are human rights violations, and that women and girls are disproportionately affected. This means that the goal of all programming and advocacy activities is the realisation of one or more women's human rights. Partnerships and programmes are based on international human rights norms and standards, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing

²¹ UNFCCC (2022): [Dimensions and examples of the gender-differentiated impacts of climate change, the role of women as agents of change and opportunities for women](#)

²² IUCN (2020): [Gender-based violence and the environment](#)

²³ Starrs, Ann M., Alex C. Ezeh, Gary Barker, Alaka Basu, Jane T. Bertrand, Robert Blum, Awa M. Coll-Seck et al. "Accelerate progress—sexual and reproductive health and rights for all: report of the Guttmacher–Lancet Commission. *The Lancet* 391, no. 10140 (2018): 2642-2692.

²⁴ Desai, Z., & Zhang, Y. (2021). Climate change and women's health: A scoping review. *GeoHealth*, 5(9), e2021GH000386

Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the outcome documents of its reviews, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (1994), the UN Security Council resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, the Sustainable Development Goals, and other applicable UN instruments and resolutions.

Employing a HRBA encompasses an understanding of development cooperation as contributing to capacity development of ‘duty-bearers’ to meet their obligations and/or of ‘rights-holders’ to claim their rights.²⁵ The target groups are thus defined as rights holders and perceived as key actors in their own development and ultimately as agents of change. The HRBA entails a prioritisation of marginalised groups in line with the SDG principle of **Leaving No One Behind**. To ensure this, the **intersecting** vulnerabilities of certain groups of women and girls must be addressed, such as indigenous women and girls, rural women and girls, women and girls with disabilities, young women and LBT+ women.

The HRBA emphasises both the processes and the outcomes of programming, meaning that how organisations work and how capacity development is done is just as important as the end results. Local ownership and **participation** based on democratic principles are the identified means of social transformation, including the participation of the most marginalised groups. Participation of the target groups and local communities throughout the programming process also helps ensure **context sensitivity** and facilitates the process of conducting solid contextual analyses. Context sensitivity is further ensured through partnerships with local women’s groups and CSOs that operate in the intervention areas and know the local context and culture. In Colombia, the regional office has staff recruited locally. When employing a HRBA in combination with context sensitivity it is important to underline that culture cannot be interpreted in such a way as to justify the denial or violation of human rights. Another crucial aspect to take account of is conflict analysis since FOKUS works in both development and conflict-affected contexts.

Underlying Assumptions

A progressive, transformative gender agenda lies at the core of FOKUS’ model for development cooperation and represents the foundation of the organisation’s partnerships and networks at all levels. This model is based on three core assumptions. **Firstly**, we assume that **political organisation of women** is crucial for achieving gender equality. The Norwegian experience of the importance of building a strong women’s movement and civil society to achieve progress on gender equality issues

²⁵ UNSDG (2003): [The Human Rights Based Approach to Development Cooperation](#)

underlies all of FOKUS' work and is a key 'lesson learned' that is shared with the implementing partners and international networks, representing an important added value of the FOKUS model.

As an umbrella organisation consisting of 43 women's organisations and associations in Norway, it lies at the heart of the FOKUS model to seek and form alliances among and with women's organisations both within and across countries. Based on almost 30 years of experience working directly with women's groups and local organisations at the grassroots level in developing countries, it is observed that partnerships with and among these organisations represents an important strength of the FOKUS model. The **second** assumption is therefore that the **partnerships and networks that organisations will be part of through the support offered by FOKUS will be beneficial for their capacity** to provide quality interventions, manage successful programmes and hence, bring about societal change.

Compared to external organisations and institutions, local grassroots organisations often have better knowledge about the socio-cultural context where they operate and may benefit from having more trust and credibility in the communities. This allows them to have a better understanding of how effective approaches can be adapted to this context. This is particularly relevant when addressing sensitive issues. FOKUS' **third** assumption is that **endorsement and participation from local communities and individuals** are crucial for successful development programmes. This requires FOKUS to be attentive to the concerns and suggestions coming from the local implementing partners and have the sensitivity and capacity to understand these concerns when developing programmes and supporting activities.

The direct links and outreach of FOKUS allows for flexibility and innovation, representing a much more agile model than the larger multilateral bodies that must adhere to time-consuming procedures and complex reporting demands. Having a regional office in Colombia and a hub in East Africa with locally recruited staff will add to FOKUS' influence, trust and credibility. These assumptions are constantly tested and challenged through the participatory programming and monitoring activities of FOKUS.

Vision and Impacts

A multifaceted and holistic approach engaging stakeholders at all levels of society must be employed to realise the defined vision of achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls (SDG 5). Indeed, such systemwide change can by no means be achieved by any one organisation alone and requires interventions within many substantive areas in parallel and in partnership with multiple stakeholders. FOKUS will in the following programming period concentrate on four broad impacts, which are all deemed essential to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls, as emphasised in the situational analysis. The four impacts are:

1. **Strengthened prevention, protection and response to violence against women and girls (VAWG), including Female Genital Mutilation.** This also includes work to prevent child, early and forced marriage (CEFM). VAWG and harmful practices represent major threats to women's and girls' health, wellbeing, productivity and community involvement.
2. **Improved sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for women and girls,** to ensure that women and girls gain control of their bodies, sexuality, reproduction and fertility, including access to safe abortion.
3. **Improved realisation of women's economic rights** as workers, producers, land-holders and community members.
4. **Strengthened women's influence and leadership in building sustainable peace with gender justice,** i.e. in crisis and conflict prevention and response, in peacebuilding, reconciliation and transformative reparation.

All four impacts have been the basis of the broad societal change towards greater gender equality that has taken place in Norway over the last decades, which was largely driven by the Norwegian women's movement, including many of FOKUS' member organisations.

Impacts 1, 2, 3 and 4 are all interconnected. For instance, prevention of VAWG/HP will lead to improved sexual and reproductive health, and strengthened access to SRH-services can be an important element in prevention and care for women and girls subject to VAWG/HP. Women's and girls' health is intrinsically linked to income and education levels and a strengthening of women's economic rights and participation will make them able to access health services for themselves and their children. At the same time, participation in working life presume good health that access to health services help maintain. Women's influence and leadership in crisis and conflict prevention and response can both depend on and help ensure access to health services, prevention of VAWG/HP and economic participation. Prevention of VAWG/HP, ensuring women's and girls' access to sexual and

reproductive health services, and women's economic rights are key elements in building sustainable peace and conflict prevention.

Strategic Interventions and Outcomes

Gender inequality and gender discrimination are deeply rooted in social and cultural norms, justifying the power and privileges of men over women and boys over girls. The structural dimensions and complexity of gender inequality combined with economic inequalities between and in countries call for a comprehensive approach that engages multiple stakeholders. Progress at one level can be reversed by lack of progress or even setbacks at another one, so the drive for change must take place on multiple arenas concurrently. In this process, FOKUS supports partnerships to organise and mobilise women and women's interests aiming to generate results at the individual and societal levels to ultimately achieve gender equality and empower women and girls.

The following outcome categories will guide FOKUS' and its implementing partners' work for the achievement of the defined impacts in the next programming period:

A. Communities actively prevent and respond to VAWG and HP and promote women's and girls' SRHR, women's economic rights and participation, and women's participation in peacebuilding and reconciliation.

This includes creating supportive communities by building knowledge and understanding of women's and girls' human rights and challenging unequal power relations and gender discriminatory social norms and practices. Indeed, knowledge of human rights is essential to be able to claim one's own rights and the rights of others, whether it is land entitlement, access to health and legal services, protection from violence, or political power.

Building skills, knowledge and values among community members and community leaders is at the core of FOKUS' ToC and actual practice. FOKUS and its implementing partners will seek to increase the awareness and develop the capacities of traditional and other leaders and change agents in communities to meet their human rights obligations within the four thematic priority areas.

A key component in several FOKUS-supported programmes is training of and support to community activists often called change agents, facilitators, or champions. These are individuals who are trained to initiate and lead activities at grassroots level including group discussions, home visits, and that provide support to people who need legal assistance or referrals to health or other services. They also

serve as role models and lead by example in terms of supporting and promoting gender equality and women's rights.

FOKUS-supported programmes such as the SASA! Programme in Tanzania; the Women, Peace and Security Programme in Colombia; the Violence against Women and Girls Programme in Guatemala, and Women at Work in Uganda, demonstrate how religious leaders and local government authorities, as well as traditional and indigenous authorities, can be engaged to support a progressive gender-transformative agenda. However, more work can clearly be done to ensure that this approach is inclusive of both men and women in the overall thinking of the various organisations and their programming. This upcoming programme period will thus build on, extend, and critically follow these programmatic experiences, as key to learning how gender equality programmes can be more effective, transformative and sustainable through 'smart' engagement with groups of men and boys and male-dominated organisations and institutions. Engaging men and boys in supporting full equality for women and girls is imperative to achieve gender equality and it is also widely recognised that increased gender equality and challenging harmful social norms related to manhood will ultimately also benefit men and boys.²⁶

Target groups: Community members – including women and girls; women and girls with disabilities; LBT women; men and boys; community activists/champions/change agents; women's groups and cooperatives (rights holders), in addition to community leaders, including traditional and religious leaders (duty bearers).

B. Policymakers and authorities, and businesses where relevant, adopt and enforce gender-responsive laws and policies on VAWG and HP; SRHR; women's economic rights and participation, including women and climate change; and in favour of the WPS Agenda.

Policy analysis for gender equal laws and policies and holding governments to account play a central role in the pathway to achieve lasting social change. Implementing partners will continue their advocacy efforts to influence policies and laws to make sure they are gender-responsive and help guarantee that women's and girls' rights are respected and promoted.

A HRBA to programming and development entails a key focus on capacity development of 'duty-bearers' to meet their obligations, as noted above. FOKUS and its implementing partners will in the coming programming period train or sensitise government authorities at all levels, and to some extent

²⁶ UNFPA and EngenderHealth (2017): [Engaging Men in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Including Family Planning](#)

non-state actors such as companies and enterprises. FOKUS and its implementing partners will conduct training or sensitisation of regional, national and local government authorities on the four thematic areas, and provide inputs to draft laws, national and local strategic plans and other policy documents.

Additionally, FOKUS and its implementing partners will strive to influence businesses and industries to employ women on equal grounds as men and promote women's human rights and avoid doing harm.

Target groups: Governments, parliamentarians (policy and law makers), decision-makers in private sector, multilateral institutions.

C. Improved access to and quality of services and support mechanisms for women and girls

Equitable service delivery is a part of a HRBA, but only as a temporary solution to the state's failure to uphold its human rights obligations or a supplement to insufficient government service provision. This entails that in FOKUS' ToC, FOKUS and its implementing partners will both provide support to the strengthening of public services and engage in direct service delivery when strictly necessary to ensure that fewer marginalised women and girls are left behind, while continuously advocating for governments to meet their obligations and provide women and girls with quality essential services and ensure proper interservice coordination.

However, the FOKUS ToC principle of context sensitivity requires that for each programme and country context, FOKUS must analyse the realistic capacity of a given state to provide services and support. Dire humanitarian conditions, external economic and political pressures, political instability, conflict and corruption are all factors that negatively affect state capacities. Certain services, such as ensuring that women are able to overcome the hurdles in accessing justice through the WPS agenda or supporting women in creating small-scale enterprises might not be viewed as essential responsibilities. Governments hostile to women's rights, such as abortion rights, might also limit service provision on ideological grounds.

Finally, it is important to recognise that providing services and support has wider, beneficial effects. For instance, securing land ownership rights in Colombia or Uganda might give households the opportunity to send their girl children to school, which might lead to increased gender equality in the community, and ultimately, in the society at large.

Target groups: Public and private service providers (duty bearers), women and girls, women's groups and cooperations (rights holders)

D. Implementing partners have the capacity to deliver quality projects, produce knowledge and build strong partnerships

Organisational and technical capacity development of implementing partners and the FOKUS umbrella is another key component of FOKUS' ToC in line with the HRBA to programming and development. Furthermore, FOKUS will work to strengthen its partnerships with both implementing partners and other CSOs and boost local, regional, national and international networks and alliances of women's rights organisations and women's groups and strive to form new ones where these do not exist today. This builds on the underlying assumption of the ToC that a strong women's movement will lead to more gender equality. Partnerships and alliances will be used for advocacy particularly at national level for policy changes, new laws, better implementation of laws and regulations, etc. Advocating for increased government budget allocations to address FOKUS' thematic priority areas and adequate legal and social protection for women and girls, as well as improved public services, is also critical. FOKUS, its member organisations and its implementing partners will in the coming programming period strive to be a voice for marginalised women and girls both in programme countries, in Norway, and in global networks and platforms targeting both local governments and multilateral institutions to strengthen policies at all levels, from local policy development to international normative frameworks.

To achieve the defined vision, impacts and outcomes of the ToC, it is also crucial to strengthen the knowledge base on FOKUS' thematic priority areas that can inform current and future programming and policies. Over the next five years, FOKUS and its implementing partners will continue to build knowledge about effective approaches, and to develop technical reports and briefs to be used in advocacy work, and tools and guidelines for programme management and service delivery. A particular focus will be on increasing the knowledge base on the effect of climate change on the situation for women and girls.

Target groups: FOKUS' implementing partners, member organisations and other collaborative partners and the FOKUS secretariat and regional office.

Coordination and Synergies

Many gender equality efforts are small-scale, fragmented and not able to establish synergies across projects and sectors. Yet it is often the larger societal processes that have led to more gender-responsive laws, regulations and procedures, and – more importantly – less gender discriminatory social norms, behaviour and practices on the ground. Unless and until such larger transformative forces come together, improvements risk being ad hoc, limited, with little learning and spread effects. In

Colombia, the FOKUS office has played a strategic role in collaborating and supporting diverse actors in efforts to achieve gender equality, an example being the landmark Causa Justa movement for the elimination of abortion crime in the country. In this Framework Agreement period, the mandate of the Colombia office will be expanded to include FOKUS' programmes in Guatemala to maximise synergies.

The positive experiences from Latin America have informed FOKUS' decision to establish a regional hub in East Africa during the new Framework Agreement period. In East Africa, despite that there are many women's organisations fighting for gender equality and women's rights, and with considerable achievements that can be pointed to, many actors on the ground remain small, localised and particularistic in terms of agenda.

For this reason, a FOKUS hub is expected to be able to act as a 'force multiplier' and reduce learning-, communications-, and other forms of transaction costs, while contributing to sharing positive experiences and strengthening synergies. Implementing partners can undertake joint campaigns, draw on each other's strengths and networks, and come together around key concerns, strengthening visibility and advocacy at both national and regional levels, having the capacity to engage more long-term and comprehensively as joined-up group.

Finally, FOKUS will continue to facilitate, encourage and function as a conduit in establishing and developing cooperation and best practice exchanges among organisations and projects both within and across programme countries, among other things through participation and events at the Commission on the Status of Women and other international conferences.

Barriers to Implementation

FOKUS' programmes aim to address the root causes of gender inequality, including the unequal power relations between women and men, boys and girls resulting in gender discriminatory social norms, laws and practices, as well as structural impediments such as poverty and unequal opportunities to claim human rights. However, these factors also represent barriers to achieving the defined vision, impacts and outcomes of the programmes. As noted above, humanitarian crises and climate change add new layers to these challenges. Furthermore, lack of political will and capacity to achieve gender equality or even a hostile political environment, and lack of public funding of legal and social protection mechanisms are major challenges. In FOKUS' ToC, the strategic interventions and outcomes identified above seek to overcome these barriers to ultimately empower women and girls and achieve gender equality.

Although the structural barriers to implementation are similar in all programme countries, there are also important differences across the programme countries. For instance, the barriers are particularly high in Somaliland given that there is a full-blown humanitarian crisis and armed conflicts in the region, so the challenges are different than in stable country contexts such as Kenya and Tanzania. Nevertheless, interventions seeking to address the barriers to women's advancement in a context such as Somaliland can undoubtedly benefit from some of the lessons acquired in the neighbouring countries, and FOKUS can be an important conduit for these conversations and exchange of lessons learned. An important added value is FOKUS' ability to analyse differences and similarities between various country contexts and sharing good practices that may allow local implementing partners to find more efficient and effective ways to achieve their goals. However, FOKUS faces some constraints in its ability to function as a facilitator, learning arena and knowledge producer due to limited internal resources. For the complete set of barriers, see the attached risk matrix.

Rationale for the Selection of Programme Countries

FOKUS has more than two decades of experience working with civil society partners to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls in the majority of its programme countries (Colombia, Guatemala, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda). FOKUS and its implementing partners have achieved considerable results in these countries during this period, thus forming an important part of the rationale for the selection of these programme countries. In 2014, FOKUS made the strategic decision to strengthen the thematic and geographic concentration of its programming portfolio with the aim of consolidating its resources to achieve greater results. Consequently, the number of programme countries was significantly reduced and FOKUS also sought to maximise its efforts within each programme country. FOKUS is actively seeking to create synergies between all its implementing partners, particularly at the country level, but also regionally, and between countries.

FOKUS will continue to implement programmes in partnership with civil society organisations in two countries in Latin America: **Colombia** and **Guatemala**, and four countries in Sub-Saharan Africa: **Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania** and **Uganda**. FOKUS will also implement programmes in two new country contexts: **Malawi** and **Somaliland**. The office in Colombia will serve as a regional office for Colombia and Guatemala and a regional hub will be established in Uganda with the aim of maximising synergies and results on the ground. Programmes in Kenya and Tanzania will continue to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls and harmful practices, and implementing partners in Ethiopia, Uganda, Malawi and Somaliland will strengthen women's and girls' SRHR. With the inclusion of Malawi

and Somaliland in FOKUS' programming portfolio, FOKUS aims to strengthen the regional outreach of its SRHR programme in Eastern and Southern Africa, while at the same time involving member organisation Sex og Politikk (the Norwegian Association for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights) directly in programming activities for the first time, as well as a second diaspora member organisation, namely Somaliland Women Solidarity Association (SWSA).

FOKUS will no longer be funding the women, peace and security project in South Sudan. The South Sudan project was evaluated, which documented poor achievement of results. This, along with a challenging collaboration with the implementing partners involved, led to FOKUS' decision not to continue the project but instead seek to draw synergies from the WPS programme in Colombia with the hub in Uganda.

During the new Framework Agreement period, FOKUS will through its hub in Uganda seek to identify grassroots organisations in South Sudan and elsewhere, with the aim of developing new avenues for collaboration and reestablishing FOKUS' programme on women, peace and security in the region beyond 2027.

FOKUS' Theory of Change Model 2023-2027

Vision: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (SDG 5)

IMPACTS

Changes at the impact level are structural changes improving the lives of women and girls in a given society, to which FOKUS will contribute, resulting in the fulfilment of their rights and potential.

Impact 1: Strengthened Prevention, Protection and Response to Violence against Women and Girls, including Female Genital Mutilation

Impact 2: Improved Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for Women and Girls

Impact 3: Improved Realisation of Women's Economic Rights

Impact 4: Strengthened Women's Leadership and Influence in Building Sustainable Peace with Gender Justice

OUTCOMES

These are the outcomes that FOKUS, its implementing partners, member organisations and multiple collaborative stakeholders are seeking to achieve to reach the defined impacts and vision of the theory of change.

- A. Communities actively prevent and respond to VAWG and HP and promote women's and girls' SRHR, women's economic rights and participation, and women's participation in peacebuilding and reconciliation
- B. Policymakers and authorities, and businesses where relevant, adopt and enforce gender-responsive laws and policies on VAWG and HP; SRHR; women's economic rights and participation, including women and climate change; and in favour of the WPS Agenda
- C. Improved access to and quality of services and support mechanisms for women and girls
- D. Implementing partners have the capacity to deliver quality projects, produce knowledge and build strong partnerships

The outcomes can be considered as change strategies that are 'red threads' that run through FOKUS' programmes regardless of thematic area or operational context. They are catalysts for change across the entire programmatic portfolio and capture 'how' FOKUS supports gender transformative change. The outcomes will be reached through results at the **output** level that are directly attributable to FOKUS and its implementing partners and achieved with FOKUS' support.

The set outcomes are based on a Theory of Change that is common for the four thematic areas.

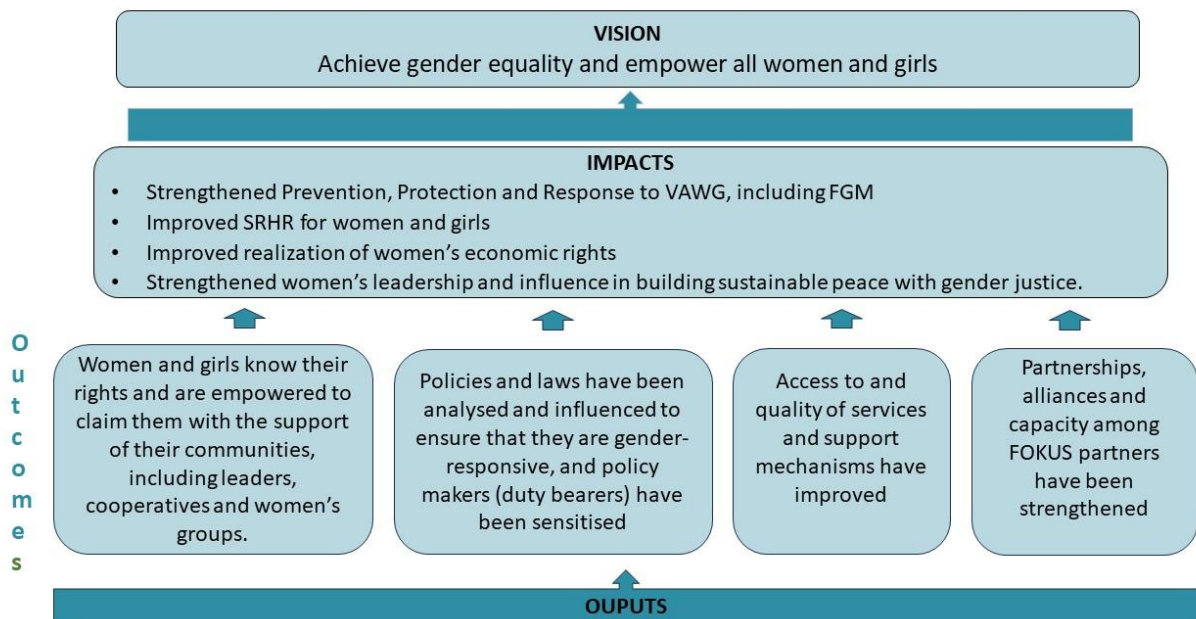
IF

- women, girls, men and boys have better knowledge and awareness about SRHR / VAWG / economic rights / WPS, and communities (including women's groups and cooperatives) are mobilised to claim their rights (outcome 1),
- local leaders, authorities and activists actively promote SRHR / work to end VAWG / promote women's economic rights / strengthen women's role in peace and security processes (outcome 1),
- we get more gender-responsive laws and policies (outcome 2)
- women and girls have better access to quality services and claim their rights (outcome 3)
- and implementing partners have established new or strengthened existing alliances and improved their capacity and knowledge... (outcome 4)

THEN

... we will have reduced VAWG and HP / improved SRHR / improved realisation of economic rights / strengthened women's role in peace and security processes.

Conceptual Framework and Foundation for FOKUS' Programmes 2023-2027



Principles: Human rights-based approach – Participation – Context Sensitivity

Assumptions: Political organisation of women is crucial for achieving gender equality – partnerships and networks that organisations will be part of through the support offered by FOKUS will be beneficial for their capacity – endorsement and participation from local communities and individuals are crucial for successful development programmes

Barriers: Unequal access to human rights and resources – lack of political will and public funding – weak institutions – protracted conflicts and insecurity – climate change and humanitarian crisis situations

Root Causes: Unequal gender power relations – Gender discriminatory social norms, laws and practices – Violence against women and girls