

ISF Theory of Change

1. Introduction

This Theory of Change describes the change that ISF seeks to achieve in relation to the gendered constraints to women's livelihoods and bodily integrity in its programme areas, as well as how it will be achieved. It describes how ISF will address gendered constraints to support its vision of a *world where no woman suffers from violence and nobody lives in poverty*.

Women's individual and collective empowerment is at the heart of the Theory of Change. Empowerment is a parallel process, which at the same time enables other changes to happen and is a result of them. It occurs continuously alongside the other changes. ISF supports economic, social and individual empowerment of women to encourage critical thinking on rigid gender roles and the maintenance of gender power hierarchies. For ISF, empowerment is a process by which women expand their ability to make strategic life choices, enact their personal goals, and claim for their rights in the family and society at large. According to ISF experience, women are empowered through personal skills development, solidarity with other women, participation in joint development processes and discussions on women's rights. Additionally, structural changes in legislation, policies, services, public discourses and gender representations are needed.

Scope of Theory of Change

ISF promotes subsistence, empowerment and security rights for women and girls to improve their social status and wellbeing. More specifically, it prevents female genital mutilation (FGM) and promotes women's livelihoods.

FGM is a severe violation against the bodily integrity and self-determination of girls. It is often carried out before the age of ten and entails many short and long-term physical and psychological problems. ISF focuses on primary prevention of FGM, addressing root causes such as community and societal attitudes that uphold gendered violence. FGM goes hand in hand with early marriage and school dropout, which undermine the opportunities of girls to actively engage in productive roles.

Female entrepreneurs are often more vulnerable to economic, political and climate shocks than men due to prevailing cultural beliefs and practices, as well as institutional norms that formalize these. Beliefs and past experiences also affect women's self-confidence to handle shocks and their willingness to reform livelihoods proactively. ISF strengthens women entrepreneurs' livelihood resilience by supporting their access to assets and social safety nets, by providing knowledge and skills development, and by strengthening confidence in their own abilities. Improved resilience enhances women's ability to learn, innovate and reform their businesses in a sustainable way. While ISF primarily promotes women's own participation in economic life, it also promotes spouses' joint livelihood planning and cooperation with men in value chains.

Women who engage in productive roles in ISF programme areas and obtain power over their own lives challenge prevailing gender norms and power relations. This may cause resistance and backlash, which manifest in heightened risk of violence and harassment. ISF livelihood interventions thereby entail strategies to prevent the immediate possibility of violence.

Lastly, ISF engages both rights holders and duty bearers at the local level in its programme areas. In terms of legislation, for example, ISF supports local police and judicial officials to implement laws that support the fulfilment of women's rights. ISF also supports civil society actors to claim for necessary legislation and its implementation, as well as support services for survivors of violence.

2. ISF's role in enabling the change

Local partners are at the heart of ISF's operating model. Partners are local civil society actors such as NGOs, community-based organizations and women's own businesses (e.g. cooperatives and other commercial networks). In livelihood interventions, ISF seeks to cooperate directly with private sector actors. Partners own the development processes supported by ISF, which contribute to their own strategic priorities.

ISF works closely with partners in planning, implementing and monitoring projects. It promotes knowledge-based decision making through **data collection and analysis**. Partners are capacitated to collect and analyze data, for example mapping value chains, analyzing markets and testing agriculture production methods. As such, ISF not only funds projects, but works closely with partners and other actors to find solutions to local problems. Strengthening partners' capacity to **learn and innovate** is at the center of ISF's work. Furthermore, ISF supports partners to **mainstream gender equality and women's empowerment** in their work

Together with partners, ISF promotes **multi-stakeholder dialogue** on gendered constraints to women's livelihoods, health and security. This increases the understanding of local duty bearers and other stakeholders in dismantling gendered constraints and allows them to enact laws and policies that promote women's rights and allocate enough resources to services for women. Supporting women's own participation in multi-stakeholder dialogue supports their empowerment and opportunities to decide on their own lives.

ISF raises **awareness on women's status** in programme countries among the general public in Finland. Through communications and global education, ISF offers information and new perspectives to increase understanding on gendered constraints to women's livelihoods and bodily integrity. ISF also calls for action and **inspires people to become part of the change**. This supports institutional and private sector fundraising but also promotes women's and girls' rights more broadly. ISF advocates for women's rights on Finland's development agenda and influences EU policy through its operational partners.

3. Preventing harmful practices and violence against women and girls

Abandoning deeply embedded social and cultural practices requires addressing the reasons that perpetuate such practices. Female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriage are harmful practices that violate women and girls' bodily integrity and self-determination and aim to control their sexuality. Also, men's intimate partner violence against women often aims at retaining control, controlling women's sexuality, and performing masculinity: to be a man is to be in charge, to beat is to be in charge and masculine in itself.

Harmful practices often comprise social norms, maintained by what people expect others to do and what they believe others think they ought to do (i.e. empirical and normative expectations). For example, in communities where FGM is widely practiced, parents may believe that all parents in the community support the continuation of FGM, or that only cut girls will become marriageable and morally upright women. The threat of social sanctions (such as ostracism) and absence of legal sanctions, as well as shame and guilt are effective enforcers of social norms.

To change harmful beliefs and attitudes, it is important for the receiver of a message to accept and respect the bearer of the message. The credibility of the messenger is estimated by whether the sender of information has similar interests or is similar in descriptive characteristics as the receiver and whether the sender has proven professional authority, quality arguments, and effective response to contrary views.

To change normative expectations on culturally and/or religiously expected or mandated behavior, ISF supports its partners to sensitize, train and mobilize **local opinion leaders** (e.g. religious, traditional and cultural leaders). These are often men in highly patriarchal ISF target communities. Local opinion leaders have credibility among community members on social and moral norms and can thereby alter people's beliefs about beneficial and/or acceptable practices by publicly condemning FGM, early marriage and domestic violence, and by promoting respectful and nonviolent relationships and parenting practices.

Ending FGM, early marriage and domestic violence requires raising awareness on the negative physical, mental and social consequences of these practices. **Health professionals and survivors** of harmful practices and violence have credibility as messengers of these consequences. When engaging survivors, however, special attention is paid to their security, as speaking out often entails increased risk of violence and harassment.

To change people's expectations on 'normal' behavior and perceived risks of resisting traditions and norms, **peer role models** are encouraged to share their experiences, such as uncut women and their spouses, parents who reject FGM and male advocates against VAWG. Information and training on alternative, nonviolent and positive parenting and domestic conflict resolution practices must be available. Nonviolent parenting practices have a long-term prevention effect on domestic violence, as exposure to violence and childhood neglect are risk factors for victimization and perpetration of violence against women later in life. As an example of alternative practices to reject FGM, ISF supports noncutting initiation rituals, whereby lessons on traditional wisdoms are taught together with sexual and reproductive health issues, legal and human rights, and where to seek help if they experience violence.

Efforts to increase understanding of women's legal and human rights, as well as of negative consequences of violence, increase demand for support services for victims. Simultaneously, efforts to enhance women's economic role challenge prevailing gender power relations and may lead to resistance, which manifests in increased violence. Hence, ISF supports shared parenting, decision making and income generation between **spouses**. Harmful gender stereotypes, rigid gender norms and roles, and unequal gender power relations are discussed using drama and other participatory methods. ISF disseminates information on community-level referral mechanisms (health, security, police and legal services) for VAWG survivors in target communities. To ensure victim-sensitive treatment for female survivors of violence and harmful practices, as well as proper investigation on alleged cases, **police and judicial officials** are sensitized. This aims to mitigate impunity and impose criminal sanctions on perpetrators.

To improve local mechanisms to prevent VAWG, protect survivors and prosecute perpetrators, ISF sensitizes **local duty bearers** (e.g. political decisionmakers and authorities) on the prevalence, harmfulness, unacceptability and preventability of harmful practices and violence against women and girls. Coordination is promoted through local multi-stakeholder platforms. Women are encouraged to participate in these platforms, raise their voice and claim for their rights.

Above described changes in knowledge and attitudes gradually lead to a new understanding among parents of what is the best interest of their daughters: safeguard their bodily integrity and education instead of FGM and early marriage. They lead to nonviolent parenting and domestic conflict resolution practices, as well as shared domestic duties and joint decisions over the use of time, land and money among spouses. Furthermore, they lead to effective policies and budgets to promote women’s livelihood, health and security by local duty bearers. These changes in gender norms, roles, and power relations finally lead to a decrease in FGM, early marriage and domestic violence.

The figure below summarizes how the various activities and paths of change support each other and enable that FGM, early marriage and domestic violence decreases:



Figure 1: Interrelatedness of behavioral changes to prevent FGM, early marriage and domestic violence

4. Promoting women’s participation in economic life

According to ISF, women can reform livelihoods and lead strong businesses when they are empowered and have access to relevant resources, such as knowledge, skills, access to advisory services, inputs and technology, commercial contacts and access to markets. This in turn, improves their adaptation capacity to overcome hardships such as climate change.

The desire and ability to learn and change is crucial to successful entrepreneurship. Research on adaptation resilience indicates that psycho-social factors, such as cultural norms, self-

efficacy and past experiences, influence significantly one's attitudes towards change and desire to learn and innovate. ISF supports **women entrepreneurs** to believe in themselves, otherwise they do not have the courage to challenge and change prevailing situations. According to ISF experience, women's self-esteem improves when they participate in solving their own livelihood challenges and improve their skills.

Developing new products or addressing constraints to business development, such as climate change, is difficult alone, especially for poorly educated women. According to ISF experience, women often manage businesses in isolation from other people who face similar challenges or experts who may know how to overcome them. To strengthen cooperation and peer support among women, ISF strengthens women's **collective businesses** to provide training and peer advice services to their members (women entrepreneurs) in production, business management and basic life skills, such as literacy and numeracy training. ISF also supports multi-stakeholder platforms and direct cooperation between businesses and **experts**.

Multi-stakeholder platforms generate system-level cooperation that can transform local livelihood strategies. Entrepreneurs who are not members of collective enterprises are supported through business hubs or clusters. These activities (training, peer advice and expert cooperation) improve women's and men's knowledge and skills to reform their livelihoods. It also allows women to actively participate in identifying solutions and developing their own livelihoods, instead of receiving solutions suggested by others. New contacts and improved skills are important social capital, which contribute to sustainable results.

Women's livelihoods are part of local and sometimes global value chains. ISF facilitates cooperation with other value chain actors within the household, community and region. The inclusion of **male entrepreneurs** is important to improve material conditions for women and their families. It also increases men's appreciation of women's productive roles. If women are seen as valuable economic actors in their own households and societies, they are more likely to receive financing, equal treatment from regulation officials and better advice and training. Men are also more likely to share domestic duties (such as childcare, cleaning and cooking) if they value women's productive roles.

ISF promotes commercial cooperation with **private sector actors** to improve women's access to inputs and technology. Commercial cooperation with retailers and customers allows women to increase sales and obtain market feedback. Business-to-business cooperation builds women's and their businesses' capacity and access to inputs, technology and markets. ISF promotes investments in infrastructure and equipment primarily through business collectives' own savings and loan mechanisms, but sometimes also with programme funds. The investments are used to improve production security and efficiency, improve product quality and marketing, and to initiate new more resilient livelihoods.

To improve women's livelihood resilience, **local duty bearers** must plan and implement services and programmes that support women entrepreneurs. ISF sensitizes duty bearers on gendered constraints to women's livelihood and engages them in multi-stakeholder dialogue. ISF supports women's participation in decision making through dialogue and cooperation with governance functions with the aim to achieve better infrastructure and services for women, which in turn will reduce structural constraints to women's livelihood.

The figure below summarizes how the various activities and paths of change support each other and enable women's livelihood resilience:

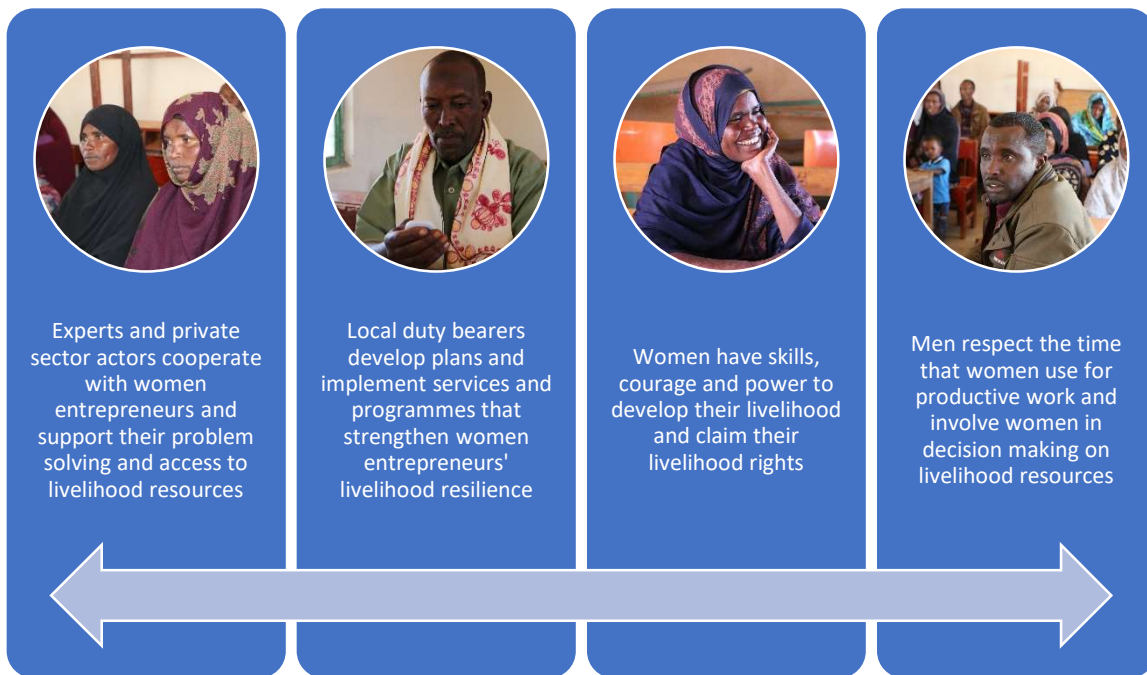


Figure 2: Interrelatedness of expected changes to promote women's livelihood resilience.

5. Interrelationship of the changes

Preventing harmful practices and violence against women and girls and supporting women's livelihood resilience—the two interlinked long-term changes—are closely interrelated, as shown in the following picture.

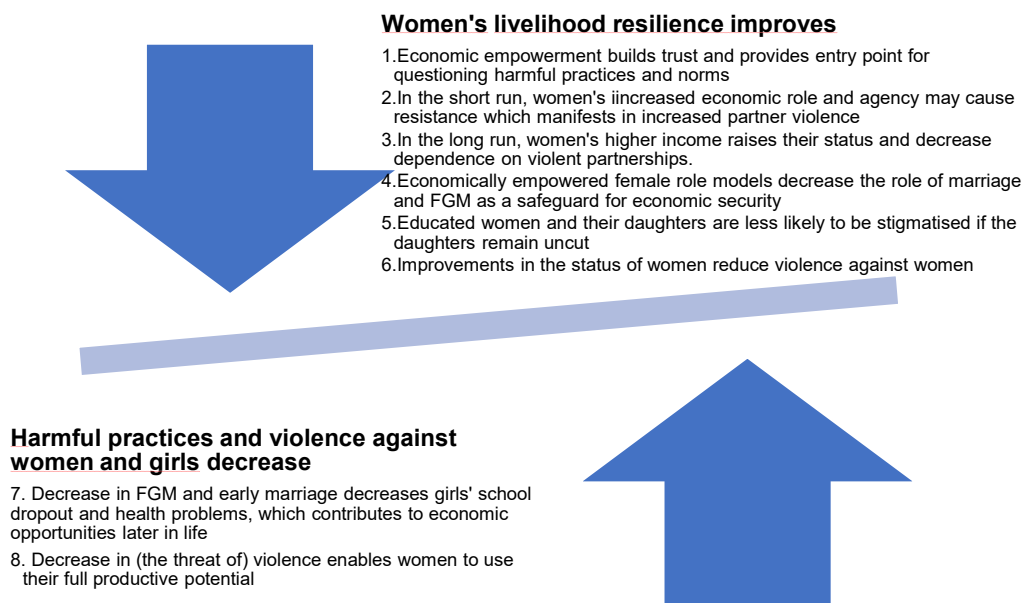


Figure 1 Interrelatedness of women's livelihoods, harmful practices and violence against women and girls

First, raising awareness on violence and harmful practices through the **entry point** of economic empowerment builds trust and respect among community members. According to studies, poor and uneducated rural women are most likely to practice FGM. In general, poor

families have little capacity to resist and reject prevailing social norms and practices. Second, women's growing economic role and power over their own lives challenge prevailing gender roles, norms and power balances, which may cause **resistance and backlash**, manifesting in violence and harassment. Third, women's improved livelihood **decreases dependence** on violent partners and unequal relationships in the long run. Fourth, economically empowered women serve as **role models**, demonstrating that women's economic security is not dependent on marriage, thereby also decreasing the need for FGM as a guarantee of marriageability. Fifth, isolation and stigma towards uncut girls and women is greater for uneducated girls, while educated women in **responsible positions** (e.g. teachers and community leaders) are less likely to be stigmatised and their children are less likely to be targeted if they are not cut. Sixth, as gender-based violence is a manifestation of unequal power between men and women, all policies and programmes that **improve the status of women**, facilitate women's participation and promote gender equality reduce violence against women. Seventh, a decrease in FGM and early marriage reduce **school dropouts** and health problems, thereby contributing to girls' economic opportunities later in life. Lastly, a decrease in (the threat of) violence enables women to use their **full potential**.

6. Main assumptions/risks for programme implementation

ISF's Theory of Change is based on the following assumptions, which are continuously monitored by ISF offices:

- Key donors continue to support development cooperation and funding is predictable.
- Operating possibilities for civil society actors in programme countries are not deteriorated further.
- Partners and other actors supported by ISF stay democratic and stable.
- Development processes are not interrupted by constant humanitarian crises or other security risks in programme countries.
- Significant unwanted consequences do not emerge from questioning prevailing gender norms and power relations.
- Local communities take ownership of development processes to secure sustainable results.
- Women have time for development processes and productive work.
- Women dare to take risks and are willing to change subsistence livelihood to business mentality.
- Programme beneficiaries' attitudes towards sensitive topics (e.g. harmful practices) are favourable and they are motivated to participate in programme activities.
- Progressive opinion leaders dare to publicly condemn VAWG.
- Peer role models serve as examples to others.
- Basic referral mechanisms for VAWG survivors (health, security, police and legal services) are available in target communities.
- /Local private sector actors exist and are willing to cooperate with ISF partners.