



INTERNATIONAL
SOLIDARITY
FOUNDATION

DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2026-2029

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	4
1 Programme justification.....	5
1.1 Problem analysis.....	5
1.2 ISF achievements and lessons learnt.....	9
<i>Engaging men in transforming gender norms.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Promising end-FGM approaches.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Integrating women into the formal economy.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Gender-responsive climate actions in rural areas.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Promoting women's livelihoods in the circular economy.....</i>	<i>13</i>
2 Theory of change.....	14
2.1 IMPACT: Women and girls have agency and power over their bodies and lives.....	15
2.2 OUTCOME 1: Communities abandon harmful practices and violence against women and girls.....	17
2.3 OUTCOME 2: Women have means and power to generate and control income and assets.....	19
2.4 OUTCOME 3: Civil society promotes women's rights	21
3 Country programmes and participants.....	24
3.1 Ethiopia.....	24
3.2 Kenya.....	26
3.3 Somaliland.....	28
3.4 Participants and beneficiaries.....	30
4 Operating model.....	31
4.1 Human-rights-based approach.....	31
<i>Equality and non-discrimination.....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Participation and inclusion.....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Accountability and transparency.....</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Environmental sustainability.....</i>	<i>34</i>
4.2 Results-based management.....	34
<i>Learning and innovation.....</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Planning.....</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Monitoring and reporting.....</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Evaluation.....</i>	<i>37</i>
4.3 Risk management.....	37



Acronyms

- ARP** | Alternative rite of passage
- CSO** | Civil society organization
- DRM** | Disaster Risk Management
- FGM** | Female genital mutilation
- FSTP** | Financial support to third parties (subgranting)
- GBV*** | Gender-based violence
- GIZ** | German Corporation for International Cooperation
- HRBA** | Human-rights-based approach
- IDP** | Internally displaced people
- ISF** | International Solidarity Foundation (Solidarisuus)
- MFA** | Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland
- NGO** | Non-governmental organization
- PWD** | People with disabilities
- SACCO** | Savings and credit cooperative society
- SHG** | Self-help group
- VAWG*** | Violence against women and girls

Annexes

- ANNEX 1: List of projects**
- ANNEX 2: Logical framework**
- ANNEX 3: Risk register, risk mitigation plan and risk map**
- ANNEX 4: Organigramme**
- ANNEX 5: Programme budget**

* The terms GBV and VAWG are used interchangeably in this document. GBV refers to violence based on gender identity or perception, including physical, psychological, economic, and social forms, and is used to refer to broader statistics beyond ISF's scope. VAWG, a subcategory of GBV, highlights the disproportionate violence faced by women and girls. Since ISF focuses on eradicating violence against them, VAWG is used for programme-specific activities and approaches.

INTRODUCTION

The International Solidarity Foundation (ISF) is a Finnish development organization, founded in 1970. ISF's **mission** is to support development that strengthens democracy, equality, and human rights globally and challenge people to build a more equitable world. It implements the mission by building a world where women and girls are empowered to build their own future, their self-determination is fully realised, and their right to bodily integrity respected.

ISF's vision is to be an organization with a leading role in the empowerment of women and girls in East Africa by 2030. It focuses particularly on preventing female genital mutilation (FGM), which is a severe violation against women's and girls' bodily integrity and self-determination. To achieve the vision, ISF has **three strategic objectives**: 1) ISF is a leading enabler in the eradication of FGM in East Africa, 2) ISF has growing funding and brand awareness, and 3) ISF is innovative and adaptive to changes in the operational environment.

Since 2022, ISF has focused its work on **East Africa**, seeking synergies between programme countries, fostering a deeper understanding of the region, closer collaboration with local and regional actors, and maximizing cost-efficiency through shared development approaches and capacity-building efforts. This focus includes prioritizing **least developed countries** (LDCs) and **fragile contexts**. Ethiopia and Somalia are both on the UN list of LDCs¹, but Somalia is ranked as the most fragile state².

This document describes ISF's 2026-2029 development cooperation programme for promoting women and girls' agency and power over their bodies and lives in **Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somaliland**. The programme aims to improve the lives of nearly **120,000 women and girls**.

It builds on ISF's past achievements and lessons learned and has been prepared in a participatory process with ISF staff and local partners. It responds to pressing challenges at a time when equality and women's status are at risk of deteriorating in many parts of the world.

Chapter 1 justifies the programme's focus, illuminating the root causes upholding violence against women and girls (VAWG), women's limited access to economic opportunities, and the narrow space for women's rights activism. The chapter also entails highlights of ISF's achievements and lessons learnt during the past programmes.

The theory of change in **Chapter 2** defines how ISF aims to build women and girls' agency, shift power relations, and transform structures when preventing harmful practices and violence against women and girls (outcome 1), improving women's livelihoods (outcome 2), and strengthening the local civil societies in promoting women's rights (outcome 3).

The country programmes described in **Chapter 3** illuminate how the theory of change will be applied in programme countries including key approaches and stakeholders in the specific country contexts, as well as who will participate and benefit from the programme. Based on the country programmes, best-fit local partner organizations will be identified to implement the programme.

ISF's operating model is described in **Chapter 4**, including the human rights-based approach, the results-based management system, and the risk management system.

1 PROGRAMME JUSTIFICATION



ISF's 2026-29 development programme prevents harmful practices and violence against women and girls (VAWG), promotes women's sustainable livelihoods and civil society's advocacy for women's rights. This chapter outlines the programme's rationale by illuminating the **root causes** upholding VAWG, women's limited access to economic opportunities, and the narrow space for women's rights activism, drawing on **context-specific insights** from Ethiopia, Kenya and Somaliland. The chapter also entails a summary of ISF's main **achievements and lessons learnt** during the past programmes, on which the 2026-29 development programme builds.

1.1 Problem analysis

In ISF programme areas, women face various forms of gender-based discrimination and constraints that limit their civil, cultural, economic, political, social and bodily rights. In Kenya, Somaliland, and Ethiopia patriarchal systems reinforce deeply rooted inequalities, subjecting women to **negative stereotypes** that emphasize their 'purity' and subordination to male guardians, portraying them as weak, emotional, and sexually reckless, as well as incapable farmers, entrepreneurs, and political leaders. Men, in turn, are seen as natural leaders, strong and rational, and socialized to suppress their emotions and disconnect from meaningful relationships. Women are subjected to **conventional societal expectations** to be

caregivers and homemakers, binding them to the private sphere, while men are expected to be breadwinners, granting them authority in the public sphere. This reality is starkly reflected in gender inequality statistics. According to the latest Gender Inequality Index (2024), Ethiopia ranks 176th, Kenya 146th, and Somaliland, as part of Somalia, occupies the lowest position globally at 193rd.

Rigid gender roles not only hinder women's opportunities in productive work but also reinforce power imbalances that contribute to the normalization of VAWG. The most common form of VAWG worldwide is **intimate partner violence** (IPV), which often stems from intergenerational exposure to violence during childhood and is further exacerbated by factors such as men's substance abuse or women's disabilities. While not all men are violent—and some actively oppose it—dominance over women and the use of violence as a means of control are embedded in socially idealized masculine traits within ISF target communities. Harmful practices such as **FGM and child marriage** persist due to entrenched empirical expectations (what people believe others do) and normative expectations (what people believe others think they ought to do). For example, parents often follow these practices, believing they are widely accepted, culturally required, or vital for a girl's marriageability and moral standing. Confined to the private domestic sphere, women's and girls' experiences of violence are often seen as intimate and taboo, reinforcing silence around these issues.

While violence, abuse, and harassment impede women's bodily integrity, they also undermine women's educational and employment opportunities, income-earning capability, and advancement in the workplace. Shame and silence, coupled with the social norms and expectations affect family dynamics, restricting women's use of time and freedom to move outside the home. As a result, women are often **excluded from decision making** on resources, their access to **finance and technology** is poor and they rarely participate in joint planning and development schemes. Women are also less educated, and existing training and advice services are inadequately designed to meet their needs. What is more, women who face violence tend to have lower earnings as violent relationships often include **economic abuse**—controlling assets, income, and limiting movement.

In the Horn of Africa, women are increasingly becoming the sole providers for the family and thus significant economic actors. Yet due to their **socio-economic isolation**, women remain largely in the **informal sector** and lack the same economic rights as men. Informal entrepreneurs generally have low and uncertain income and unsafe working conditions, are not covered by social security and lack collective bargaining and representation rights. They also have poor access to finance, business development services, and markets. Due to women's limited control over resources, high risk of harassment, time constraints, poor access to information and lack of powerful peer groups women-owned businesses tend to remain informal.

In Ethiopia, about a quarter of households are headed by women and women account for 74% of micro and small enterprises.³ In Kenya, more than a third of households live on women's income and majority of the new jobs are created in the informal sector, with women owning 48% of the enterprises.⁴ The Somali National Development Plan 2020-2024 estimates that up to 70% of households identify as economically female-headed. In Somalia, a notable trend over the past 20 years is the increasing share of women in the informal sector, reaching up to 70%. Women are also active in medium to large enterprises, but these women often belong to the diaspora or educated elite.

The economy consists of institutions, transactions, and relations that reflect gendered norms and power relations from local to global levels. **Economic policies** are designed without the involvement of women although they affect them directly. Taxation is one important factor that can reduce or increase the gender gap. Currently, most national tax systems do not account for the gender wage gap or incentivize both genders to participate in unpaid care duties. Instead, they favor capital income and discourage the second earner (typically a woman) from working.⁵ Gender inequalities in employment and job quality lead to differences in access to **social protection benefits** tied to work, such as pensions, unemployment benefits, and maternity protection.

Key factors sustaining gender inequality are shaped by **inadequate laws** that undermine women's economic roles, protection from violence, and women's rights activism. While Kenya and Ethiopia have ratified key international and regional gender equality frameworks,

such as Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Maputo Protocol, outdated laws and entrenched beliefs about women's inferiority continue to limit their access to opportunities, often under the guise of 'protection'. For example, the Women, Business and the Law Index measures how laws and regulations affect women's socio-economic opportunities—including mobility, workplace, pay, marriage, parenthood, entrepreneurship, assets, and pensions—compared to men, who have 100% of the legal rights. On this scale, Kenya scores 83.8, Ethiopia 80, and Somalia 46.9.⁶ Moreover, women's ability to access and exercise their rights remains highly limited in practice.

Somaliland, due to its lack of international recognition as a state, has not signed any key women's rights treaties, but its Constitution mandates adherence to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with Article 36 specifically guaranteeing gender equality. However, in practice the **clan-based governance system** *Xeer* and the **Islamic law** *Sharia* play central roles in decision-making.⁷ *Xeer* emphasizes collective interests of the clan, and undermines individual rights, particularly those of women, whose roles are defined by their social dependence on men. Under *Xeer* women's rights to assets are limited and they are traditionally excluded from community decisions, such as planning for pasture use and Disaster Risk Management (DRM). Women's work is undervalued compared to men's and often restricted to the lower ends of the value chains. The formal wage sector remains male dominated and women and youth face discrimination in accessing formal employment, particularly in the public sector.

Under *Xeer*, VAWG is addressed only in extreme cases, leaving survivors without adequate protection. Women's rights organizations have been advocating for laws to address sexual offenses and IPV, highlighting the lack of formal protections and functioning referral systems, but the deeply **fragmented society** and clan politics complicate affairs within the civic sector. The election of Somaliland's president in November 2024 reflects the public's growing demand for democratic governance, as voters rejected traditional clan-based politics, a major barrier to women's representation.⁸

Also, the approval of a zero-tolerance FGM policy in 2024 marked a significant milestone in the decades long fight against the practice in Somaliland. However, its effectiveness remains limited without comprehensive

legal protections. According to statistics from Somalia, the prevalence of FGM among women aged 15–49 is 99%—the highest in the world. Approximately 64% of women undergo the most severe form of FGM (Type IV), which involves sewing the outer lips closed.⁹ While this extreme form is declining in urban areas, the **medicalization of FGM** is a growing concern, with health practitioners performing the procedure in clinical settings. Moreover, child marriages are widespread, with estimated 24% of women married under 18 years and following incidents of sexual violence, young girls are often being forced into marriage to their abusers to preserve the family's 'honor'.¹⁰

Despite Ethiopia and Kenya being legally more progressive, **poor policy implementation** regarding women's and girls' rights remains a significant barrier, especially in the administrative regions where ISF operates. In Kenya, FGM was criminalized in 2011, and a National Policy on Gender-Based Violence (2019) guides efforts to regulate FGM. Although national prevalence has decreased from 38% in 1998 to 15% in 2022, rates remain high in Kisii and Nyamira, at 77% and 75%, respectively. Similarly, IPV is normalized in the region, affecting up to 50% of women, compared to the national average of 15%. Also, girls in Kisii and Nyamira are traditionally burdened with household chores, which limits their school attendance compared to boys, contributing to higher rates of early marriage and adolescent pregnancy.¹¹

In Ethiopia, the National Costed Roadmap to End Child Marriage and FGM aims to eliminate these practices by 2025. However, in the Somali region, where customary laws and patriarchal norms overshadow national legislation, child marriage remains among the highest in the world (49.4%), partly due to the national child marriage prohibition remaining unratified. FGM affects 98.5% of women aged 15–49, with **misinterpretations of Islam** fueling the practice.¹² Additionally, medicalized FGM is rising, supported by the 2024 *fatwa* (Islamic ruling) from the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council permitting healthcare providers to perform type I FGM.

Fragile structures further amplify risks during times of crisis, which are common in ISF operational areas. In Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, over one hundred million people were directly affected by weather, climate and water-related hazards in 2022.¹³ ND-

GAIN country index on climate resilience measures the climate vulnerability of countries and their readiness to meet the challenge. Out of 187 countries in the index, Somalia ranks 164th, Ethiopia 155th and Kenya 145th. Agriculture is the backbone of economic development in ISF programme areas although its productivity is sharply declining, and the years of failure has become more frequent. In Somaliland and in the Somali region in Ethiopia, the **weak or inexistent government services** and lack of basic materials exacerbate vulnerability.

Women are disproportionately affected by these emergencies. Women and girls travel long distances in search of water and firewood, which exposes them to increased risk of GBV. While food insecurity affects everyone, women are often de-prioritized in food consumption. Women's limited education and fewer opportunities to participate in the workforce risk excluding them from the benefits of the green transition. Instead, they remain in rural areas, producing food under worsening conditions and lacking access to essential services. Women's participation in climate adaptation and mitigation planning is low although gender-responsive climate actions and resilience strategies are more successful than gender-neutral actions¹⁴. While many climate funds have made gender policies and action plans possible, there are persistent challenges to fund gender transformative climate actions that directly address women's needs.¹⁵

Successive extreme weather events have kept ISF programme areas in Somaliland and Ethiopia in a constant state of emergency. Limited livelihood options and rising living costs fuel urban migration, displacement, and conflict. Over 40 million Africans are forcibly displaced, including 8.5 million in Ethiopia and Somalia.¹⁶ **Displacement** results in the loss of property, livelihoods, and social safety networks, disproportionately affecting women due to social dependence on men for protection. In Ethiopia, the number of people requiring GBV survivor services rose from 5.8 million in 2022 to 7.2 million in 2024.

In Somali culture, the loss of pastoral land often compels men to migrate with livestock in search of fertile grazing land, while women and children move to **Internally Displaced People's (IDP) camps**. In these settings GBV is evident: the lack of basic infrastructure and on-site services make it difficult to earn an income and exposes female entrepreneurs to harassment and violence.

The absence of proper lighting and reliance on makeshift tents leave women and girls highly vulnerable to sexual violence. Livelihood losses also increase child marriage rates, as families seek to alleviate financial pressures by reducing dependents and benefiting from bridal payments, increasing FGM risk as the practices are often linked. Vulnerabilities are worsened by men's risk-taking behaviour, substance abuse (for example chewing khat), and mental health issues, which contribute to heightened intimate partner violence. Finally, the lack of VAWG prevention and mitigation services exacerbates insecurity and weakens the rule of law, enabling authorities to misuse power and, at times, become perpetrators of VAWG themselves.

Against these deep-seated social challenges and volatile crises, an equally worrying trend is the **narrowing space for civil society**, driven by authoritarian governments. Local CSOs and movements are particularly important when addressing sensitive issues such as gender roles and VAWG as such interventions require context-driven, community-owned approaches that amplify the voices of marginalized groups. In Ethiopia, the reformist government that came to power in 2018 initially created an environment that allowed civil society and the media to thrive, leading to increased activism and the emergence of numerous new organizations. However, persistent political instability and governance challenges have hindered further progress, significantly affecting the women's rights movement and making it difficult to address critical issues such as VAWG and judicial reforms.

The political instability and mass anti-government protests in Kenya in 2024 highlighted the changing dynamics of the younger generation, who are increasingly focused on socio-economic rights activism rather than clan- or ethnicity-based politics. However, these clashes have intensified political volatility and led to a violent **suppression of activism**, further shrinking the space for CSOs. There were also repeated threats and attacks against human rights defenders and journalists. On the other hand, the new Public Benefits Organisations Act provides a framework for the registration and regulation of civil society free from political interference and arbitrariness.

Within authoritarian restrictions in East Africa, civil society is ever more dependent on external support and accountable to its donors rather than local communities.

The international development sphere is dominated by an **imbalanced power relationship between donors and recipient organisations**, where strategic choices, budget allocations, and policy priorities are decided in the Global North. Donor-driven activities constrain institutional development and lead to approaches that often overlook those with the least power and the greatest needs.

Although funding for gender equality has stayed at approximately the same level, support for women's rights organizations and feminist movements accounts for less than 1% of official development aid for gender equality.¹⁷ At the local level in the Global South, this is reflected in the **specific challenges faced by women's rights organizations in accessing funds** and depending on volunteerism. Simultaneously, the focus within development funding has shifted from supporting long-term systemic change to addressing conflict and environmental emergencies, and from grants to trade-based funding instruments. The latter risks increasing country debt burdens and diverting resources from essential services, such as women's health and GBV response programs. Also, the **Global Gag Rule** reinstated by the U.S. 2025 administration significantly jeopardizes women's sexual and reproductive health and GBV response services, while the massive USAID funding cuts will have drastic consequences on the availability of critical services and humanitarian aid to millions of people in sub-Saharan Africa, including ISF's programme areas.

The evolving trends in human rights are interconnected. In the Global North, shrinking civil space and declining women's rights are reflected in a growing **anti-gender movement** opposing the rights of women and gender and sexual minorities. Supported by far-right, populist, and conservative religious groups, this movement advocates for a return to traditional gender norms, while downplaying the significance of VAWG and its roots in rigid societal gender roles. This contributes to a global epidemic of violence against women, increasingly used as a weapon of war and justified by harmful attitudes, such as blaming rape on women's behaviour or dress. While VAWG takes different forms in various contexts, it is part of a broader global trend. The push for traditional gender norms also excludes women's perspectives in identifying problems and development initiatives, weakening the effectiveness of such efforts across sectors, including the economy.

Across all countries, ISF's experience highlights a common, **cross-relational challenge** in VAWG prevention, spanning from structural and relational to individual levels. Police and judicial officials often lack the necessary skills to effectively investigate and prosecute these cases, while violence has become normalized in many communities. As a result, many women and girls fail to recognize the abuse they face and even when they do, they often lack the information, resources, and self-confidence to assert their rights and seek justice. Impunity thereby upholds violence and harmful practices even when such practices are criminalized. Same applies to women's livelihoods: women's lower social status and traditional role in domestic life hinders their economic participation, while unequal legislation and policies reduce their access to resources and support mechanisms. Women are poorly represented and have less power than men in decision-making both locally and internationally.

Together, biased stereotypes and rigid norms ascribe **lower social status to women and girls**, shape women's self-confidence regarding their abilities and aspirations, and are used to justify control of women's sexuality and restrict their self-determination. These challenges, which perpetuate GBV, economic subordination, and the marginalization of women from political life, are further exacerbated by the volatile conditions and shrinking civil society space in the Horn of Africa. Over decades, ISF has addressed these issues through its long-standing work in gender equality. The following section demonstrates key achievements and lessons learnt, and the theory of change in Chapter 2 describes how ISF aims to transform structures, shift power relations, and build women and girls' agency to tackle the three key problem areas of VAWG, women's economic subordination, and the narrow space for women's rights activism.

1.2 ISF achievements and lessons learnt

ISF's 2026-29 programme builds on the past development programmes, achievements and lessons learned, that have been identified, documented, shared and utilized within ISF and its partners, and also more widely among local and national authorities, networks, other Finnish development organizations and donors. This chapter includes a summary of those achievements and lessons that the 2026-29 programme most significantly builds on.

Engaging men in transforming gender norms

In line with the growing trend in gender equality work, ISF has increasingly involved men and boys in its VAWG prevention work. Just as many women have normalized violence, men too experience it across generations, reinforcing harmful norms. Drawing from best practices, ISF has identified three key approaches to scale up male engagement:

First, advocating **healthy, positive masculinity** begins with understanding where and how violent behaviors take root. Safe spaces, such as men-only discussion groups, provide platforms to examine the factors that trigger violence, including childhood exposure to violence, mental health struggles, financial stress, and substance abuse (such as alcohol in Kenya and khat in the Somali context). In Kenya, ISF has worked with husbands of women in savings groups, offering them sessions that strengthen communication, conflict resolution, and empathy, leading to a reduction in IPV and encouraging shared economic responsibilities. Yet, challenges such as men's mental health and alcohol abuse emerged as critical areas needing further attention. In Somaliland, ISF has worked through men's anti-VAWG committees composed of religious leaders, village elders, and fathers, who have conducted house-to-house visits to engage young men at high risk of perpetrating violence. Similarly, addressing VAWG as a moral and religious violation during Friday prayers—one of the most influential male-only spaces—has been a key strategy in shifting harmful behavior and attitudes.

Second, in ISF's integration of livelihood and VAWG prevention projects, couples' programs have been critical in addressing gender power dynamics that extend beyond violence to women's overburdened domestic and care work and lack of free time. Shifting these dynamics requires challenging gender expectations and **broadening men's social roles**. When women can engage in economic life, financial stress on men decreases. Similarly, easing women's domestic workload depends on greater male involvement in household tasks and childcare. In Kenya, couples' sessions encouraging both women and men to expand their roles led to healthier family relationships, women's increased income generation, and greater participation in household financial decision-making. Men's increased involvement with children also has the potential to reduce violence against them, as an evaluation

(2024) of ISF's Alternative Rite of Passage (ARP) project in Kenya highlighted. By incorporating fathers into anti-FGM sessions—traditionally a women-led decision—fathers took ownership of the issue, strengthening their relationships with their daughters.

Third, to create accountability and lasting change, boys and men must be held responsible for challenging harmful gender norms—best done through peer engagement, such as **male champions**. Recognizing this, ISF has long promoted the role of religious leaders in Somaliland, including public FGM declarations. Additionally, school clubs sensitizing boys have been so successful that there is now a demand to scale them up. In the 2026-29 program, specialized training will be developed for groups composed of progressive leaders and ordinary men and boys ensuring a broad communal impact. This will be further reinforced through digital engagement, including online spaces led by male champions to promote intergenerational shifts toward care, empathy, and positive masculinity.

While ISF has already taken steps to deepen this work in Kenya—including developing a Male Engagement Manual—similar training materials will be contextualized for Ethiopia and Somaliland, incorporating lessons learned and scaling up efforts. These will be supported by male engagement training for ISF staff and its partners.

Promising end-FGM approaches

The social dynamics sustaining FGM are deeply rooted in notions of cultural continuity, social acceptance, religion, and misconceptions about hygiene. It is often seen as a means of preserving a girls' virginity, a rite of passage into womanhood, a prerequisite for marriage, and even a way to enhance male sexual pleasure. To counter these myths and beliefs, ISF has found it essential to employ diverse strategies to build local movements against FGM. This includes engaging a wide range of actors to raise awareness about its harmful consequences, providing legal, religious, and human rights perspectives to challenge entrenched moral beliefs, and amplifying the growing rejection of FGM through collective public declarations.

Alternative Rite of Passage (Kenya)

Moral and social norms often outweigh legal prohibitions. For example, in Kenya's Abagusii community, parents continue subjecting their daughters to FGM despite

its criminalization in 2011. FGM remains an initiation rite perceived as essential for social acceptance and marriageability. Local politicians and officials frequently overlook its continuation due to its cultural significance. Moreover, heightened awareness of health risks has led to the medicalization of FGM, where health professionals secretly perform the procedure for additional income.

Because FGM is traditionally part of a ritual that initiates girls into puberty and prepares them for marriage and childbearing, the alternative rite of passage (ARP) provides an alternative **initiation rite without the harmful practice**. Girls attend safe camps where they learn life skills, culminating in a graduation ceremony that marks their new role and status in the community. The participation of parents and community leaders in the ceremony fosters acceptance, reinforces shared responsibility, and ensures the new rite is locally owned and sustained.

In 2024, ISF conducted a joint external evaluation with World Vision Finland and Kenya to assess the effectiveness of the ARP activities supported by ISF in Kisii and Nyamira, and those implemented by World Vision in West Pokot. The findings highlight the importance of timing and location. Camps are held during school holidays—a period when girls are most vulnerable to FGM—successfully protecting many from the practice. Safe physical spaces where girls learn new skills have bolstered their self-esteem and confidence in asserting their rights. ARP camps also improved intra-family relationships, particularly by increasing fathers' involvement in their daughters' lives. As a result, **parents' public declarations** to abandon FGM and replace it with a coming-of-age graduation ceremony have reinforced this positive shift.

To enhance ARP's impact, ISF plans to scale up its reach to protect more girls while further engaging communities to take ownership of the alternative rite. By increasing the number of girls participating in ARP, the practice ensures sustainability and gradually establishes a new normal among the Abagusii community.

Anti-VAWG Committees (Somaliland)

In Somaliland, misleading religious interpretations perpetuate the practice of Type I FGM (commonly referred to as *Sunnah*), particularly in rural areas. Many

people rely on conservative interpretations by local religious leaders, who claim this less extensive form of FGM is 'honourable' or even mandatory. For decades, ISF has mobilized prominent religious scholars and leaders to publicly denounce FGM and reject its religious justifications.

Beyond religious misinterpretations and moral norms, FGM prevention faces significant challenges because traditional leaders and communities often regard it as a women's issue or a private family matter. To foster collective ownership of FGM prevention, ISF has increasingly supported and trained community based anti-VAWG Committees. These democratically elected committees consist of representatives from various community groups, such as parents, youth, and mothers, as well as religious and traditional leaders. The committees primarily influence their peers, conducting house-to-house visits to raise awareness about the consequences of FGM, dispelling misconceptions about it being an Islamic mandate and serving as peer-support networks and trusted points of contact for reporting cases. They regularly convene to discuss issues within the community and bring them to public attention during village gatherings.

In 2024, ISF conducted an internal assessment of its 2022–25 programme in Somaliland to identify the most promising approaches to ending FGM. The findings revealed that in areas where governmental structures are weak or absent, these committees play a critical role in filling the gaps. They act as **bridges between local communities and authorities**, such as police or health workers, and maintain direct access to ISF supported CSOs. Moreover, the trust these committees have built over the years has encouraged community members to report other forms of VAWG, such as IPV and sexual violence.

Encouraged by these positive results, ISF plans to expand its support for Anti-VAWG Committees and strengthen their influence with local governments and authorities to enhance accountability. Particularly in IDP camps, where government services are often non-existent, ISF views these committees as a promising solution for addressing fragile structures and supporting vulnerable communities.



Intergenerational Dialogues (Ethiopia)

FGM is deeply rooted in tradition, social values, and beliefs about women's roles and sexuality, and is often perpetuated by respected elderly women. Addressing it requires dismantling harmful norms while respecting cultural frameworks. Intergenerational Dialogues (IGD) is a community-led method designed to challenge harmful practices while upholding positive cultural values. Developed in 2001 by the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ) to reduce FGM, IGDs have since been celebrated as a success story across Africa and Asia.¹⁸

The process begins with **consultations in gender- and age-specific groups** led by locally trained facilitators, who explore community dynamics, beliefs, and intergenerational relationships. Weekly sessions, featuring activities such as the 'life-path' exercise, equip participants with skills like active listening and constructive feedback. Gradually, the groups merge, and each subgroup presents its findings. The final public meeting, attended by the entire community, aims to reach a collective consensus that inspires joint action.

In collaboration with GIZ, ISF has introduced IGDs in Ethiopia. The training and dialogue cycle takes from six to nine months, allowing ample time for the slow, transformative process required to achieve meaningful change. While IGDs are a well-established and systemic method, they are also adaptable to local contexts and can be expanded beyond FGM to address other forms of VAWG, as well as gender norms and roles more broadly. IGDs are particularly effective when **integrated into existing community structures**, such as peer-support groups in Ethiopia, anti-VAWG committees in Somaliland, or community gatherings like the ARP

events in Kenya. ISF plans to adapt IGD as a cross-country method across its operational areas, creating a cohesive approach to its VAWG prevention. This strategy not only streamlines efforts but also creates a comprehensive framework for comparing outcomes and identifying the most effective approaches across diverse country contexts.

Integrating women into the formal economy

ISF has successfully integrated women in formal economy by organizing them and building cooperation between women, private sector and support services. Key to success has been appropriate business models to maintain peer support and partnerships and **expert-led development** to ensure competence. By joining forces, small producers can make joint investments and move into larger, more demanding markets.

The most recent successful example is the partnership with Nyamira North Women SACCO (NNWS) in Kenya. ISF developed NNWS's vegetable collection, processing and product quality management system and acquired national product safety standards for it. This required cooperation with various actors, such as the County extension service, Kenya Industrial and Research Development Institute (KIRDI), The Kisii Agriculture Training Centre, The Kenya Bureau of Standards, Mace Foods Ltd. and FAO.

The important part of the approach was to develop NNWS staff's **capacity in business** profitability calculations and marketing and to create a business model to run all SACCO's functions. The Equity Bank trained women and NNWS staff in startup business growth mechanisms. The project succeeded in developing women's small-scale indigenous vegetable farming into marketable products and NNWS has currently several contract farming agreements. In the future, partnerships and strengthened know-how enable NNWS to meet challenges and continue its development.

In Somaliland, the approach has been different because the region is characterized by a lack of infrastructure and weak private sector, which restricts access to production inputs and expert support. ISF has developed missing key services (e.g. seed testing and banking system) and brought new expertise into the country (e.g. Sisal Board of Kenya). In the future, ISF will emphasize this systemic thinking and project planning with partners, invest more

time in public-private networking and link the activities to national reforms, such as the emerging product standard system.

Gender-responsive climate actions in rural areas

ISF promotes gender-responsive climate actions in patriarchal societies in Somaliland and the Somali region in Ethiopia where traditional agro-pastoral livelihoods are in crisis and natural disasters cause destruction and insecurity. Women and men are vulnerable to this worsening situation in different ways. Therefore, it is important that women participate as equals with men in identifying solutions and in decision-making.

ISF's gender-responsive climate action involves three key elements: mapping and addressing men's and women's different needs and opportunities related to climate action; promoting equitable **participation and influence** in climate-related decision-making; and ensuring equitable **access to resources** and other benefits from investments in climate action. In this programme, gender-responsive thinking will be incorporated more systematically into project planning and implementation.

In Ethiopia, ISF has strengthened women's role in community **Disaster Risk Management (DRM) and Early Warning (EW) committees** and promoted the voice of women in the district level. ISF will also facilitate discussions on GBV in emergency situations to broaden the understanding of disaster risks and their mitigation. To support innovative project planning, ISF has trained its own and partners' staff on gender transformative thinking.

In Somaliland, ISF has strengthened women's agency in community DRM planning and cooperatives. For example, women have contracted cooperative land for business purposes and a few women have gained management positions in cooperatives. Dozens of new women-owned businesses have diversified family income sources and further promoted women's influence within families and communities.

Promoting women's livelihoods in the circular economy

In the coming decades, green jobs will be created in areas such as energy, agriculture, forestry and waste management. The green economy advocates for sustainable production and consumption through low-carbon, resource-efficient, diverse, and circular economic models. Circularity is one tool to tackle the transition towards a sustainable future where products and materials are kept in circulation through maintenance, reuse, refurbishment, remanufacture, recycling, and composting. The transition to the green economy offers unique opportunities to reduce gender inequalities in ISF programme areas, and to move women into future-oriented livelihood opportunities.

ISF has promoted circular economy solutions in its interventions, for example in Kenya where banana crop waste has been utilized to make handicrafts, bioenergy and fertilizers. The development of new industries requires cooperation with a wide range of experts to safeguard effectiveness and sustainability. Therefore, ISF develops women's artisan business in cooperation with the Finnish design company Mifuko, Texfed Ltd in Uganda and Kenya Industrial Research and Development Institute (KIRDI). ISF also seeks to promote new agroecological symbiosis (AES) thinking where waste and residues are circulated to boost primary food production, food processing and bioenergy within one local system. In Kenya, ISF promotes the use of banana crop waste in fertilizer and energy production in cooperation with the county government, KIRDI, and the Kenya Climate Innovation Centre.

In the 2026-29 programme, ISF will emphasize circular economy solutions that offer various benefits, such as cost-effective local and ecological raw materials, reduced reliance on imports, improved profitability of agriculture and other livelihoods, locally produced energy as well as less waste, emissions and pressure to overuse natural resources.

2

THEORY OF CHANGE



This chapter outlines the linkages between the different levels of ISF's results chain and describes the key assumptions that ISF considers necessary for the change that it seeks to achieve. The chapter starts with a description of the impact that the programme aims to achieve, and the interlinkages between the expected outcomes. Chapters 2.2-2.4 discuss the expected outcomes, outputs, and the underlying causality assumptions about how the change is expected to happen, as well as the implementation assumptions—obstacles that must be addressed to realize the outcomes.

In addition to the causality and implementation assumptions there are external assumptions—events and conditions unrelated to ISF interventions that could facilitate or hinder the expected change, such as predictable Finnish public development funding and private donations, and absence of major pandemics or armed conflict in ISF's working areas. External assumptions are not addressed here, but within the risk management system (Chapter 4.3 and Annex 3)

2.1 IMPACT: Women and girls have agency and power over their bodies and lives

The impact that ISF's 2026-29 development programme contributes to is women and girls' agency and power over their bodies and lives in ISF's programme areas. To achieve this, the programme has three expected outcomes:

- » **Outcome 1:** Communities abandon harmful practices and violence against women and girls (VAWG)
- » **Outcome 2:** Women have the ability and power to generate and control income and assets
- » **Outcome 3:** Civil society promotes women's rights

VAWG prevention and women's economic empowerment (outcomes 1-2) are deeply **interconnected**, as control over resources and control over one's body cannot be separated. Addressing only one aspect ignores how these forms of power shape women's lives. The same applies to development cooperation—whether women and their organizations are empowered to pursue their own interests and claim for their rights (outcome 3) or merely treated as recipients of support.

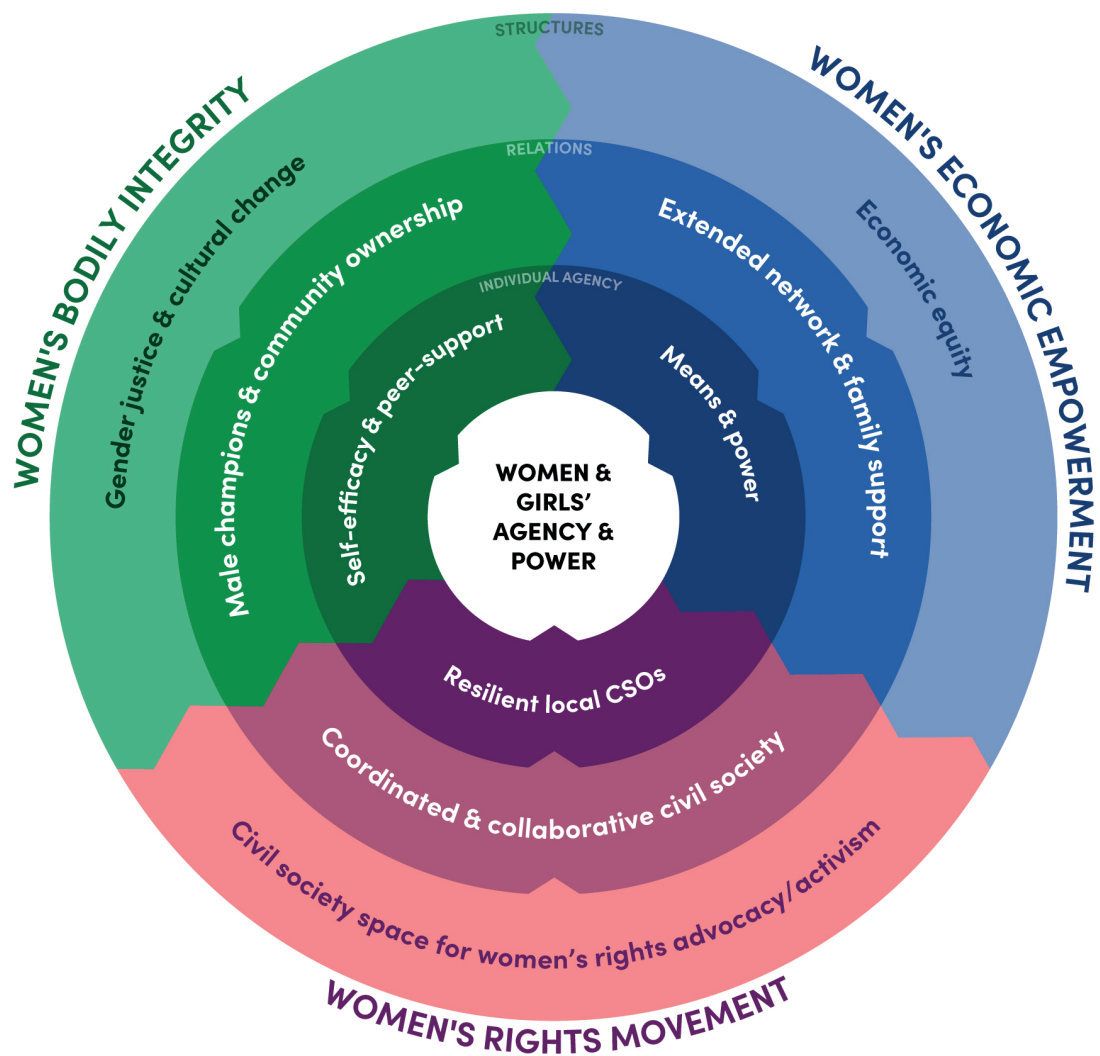
For women to make informed choices about their lives, gain skills and resources, and control their bodies and futures, they must be able to expand their traditional roles without fear of stigma or violence. To achieve this, ISF interventions involve multi-level strategies: ISF builds women's and girls' individual **agency** (confidence, self-esteem, knowledge, and skills), changes power **relations** (within intimate relationships, social networks, civic engagement, and markets), and transforms **structures**

(norms, laws, policies, and services). These levels are interwoven and addressing them together ensures a more impactful change. The visualization on the next page summarizes the interconnected changes that are necessary to achieve the desired impact—women and girls' agency and power over their bodies and lives. ISF's key approaches for promoting these changes are outlined in the bullets below the visualization and described in chapters 2.2-2.4.

ISF's work against FGM, and child marriage illustrates how the three ISF programme outcomes interconnect: ISF operates in areas with high FGM prevalence where it seeks sustainable livelihoods for vulnerable women and strengthens local women's rights movement. This is because first, economic empowerment provides an access point for raising awareness about harmful practices, such as FGM and child marriage, which are usually not recognized as a form of violence within practicing communities. Second, by enhancing the livelihoods of vulnerable women, ISF can help prevent FGM, as daughters of rural, uneducated, and impoverished women are most at risk. Also, in climate-induced impoverished areas, daughters are often married off at an early age as a means of alleviating financial burdens during periods of economic decline or crisis. By improving economic stability, families are less likely to resort to child marriages or FGM as coping mechanisms. A decrease in FGM and child marriage in turn reduce girls' school dropouts and long-term health problems, thereby contributing to their livelihood opportunities later in life.

Third, in the long run, improving women's economic situation reduces gender-based violence by decreasing reliance on abusive partners and unequal relationships. Economically empowered women serve as role models, showing that their financial independence and social status are not solely reliant on marriage. However, as women take on more public and productive roles, they often encounter resistance and backlash, which can initially raise the risk of violence, particularly from male partners reacting to the shifting power dynamics and gender roles. Therefore, it is crucial for ISF to tackle economic empowerment and VAWG prevention concurrently. Lastly, addressing sensitive issues stemming from deeply rooted social norms requires community-owned solutions, and thereby supporting local civil society is critical. Empowering local women's rights organizations ensures that VAWG prevention and women's economic improvement have lasting impact in the targeted communities.





Intergenerational dialogues & community committees



Service providers & authorities training



Opinion leader mobilisation



Collective business models



Expert-led development processes



Women & the green economy



Family & couples counselling



Men & boys engagement



Female peer support groups



Funding for local women's rights activism



Capacity building partners & CSOs



Women-friendly platforms & spaces

Figure 1 The visualization of ISF's theory of change summarizes the necessary changes on women's rights at the individual, relational, and structural levels to achieve the desired impact. ISF's key approaches for promoting these changes are outlined in the bullets below the visualization.

2.2 OUTCOME 1: Communities abandon harmful practices and violence against women and girls

ISF focuses on **the primary prevention** of harmful practices and violence against women and girls (VAWG), with a particular emphasis on FGM, child marriage, and intimate partner violence. It addresses physical, emotional, economic, and social forms of violence, recognizing that its roots are interconnected across societal levels. To effectively eliminate violence, VAWG prevention activities are tailored to engage women and girls at the individual level; men, boys and community members at the relational level; and decision-makers and opinion leaders at the structural level.

To address individual factors, **women and girls** need knowledge about their legal and human rights as well as access to referral services if they face or fear violence (output 1.1). Increased awareness fosters gradual shifts in attitudes and behaviors, laying the foundation for long-term transformation. Given the taboo nature and normalization of harmful practices and VAWG in the programme areas, ISF prioritizes spaces where women can share their experiences and access peer support, as solidarity groups and networks empower women to assert their rights.

FGM is a form of violence in which women are both the primary victims and the main perpetrators, with mothers, grandmothers, or elderly female community members often carrying out the practice. However, men also play a key role in its perpetuation, as fathers, husbands, and religious leaders who enforce the belief that men prefer wives who have undergone FGM. Therefore, ISF engages ‘ordinary’ **men and boys**—not just leaders—at the relational level to address the factors sustaining FGM (output 1.2). Similarly, partner violence, normalized through the dominant masculinity men are often socialized into, requires alternative, positive notions of masculinity. ISF emphasizes the importance of avoiding the reinforcement of male privilege, as men in gender equality movements often receive disproportionate recognition, and instead views male engagement as an opportunity for men and boys to actively transform social norms. Mobilizing peer role models—both women and men, such as uncut women, their spouses, and parents who have rejected violence and harmful practices—helps promote nonviolent parenting and conflict resolution practices.

Harmful beliefs, practices and norms may be highly valued by the communities who practice them (such as FGM which is seen to preserve premarital virginity and ensure marriageability) and/or regarded as private matters outside authorities to intervene in (such as intimate partner violence and child marriage). To address the structural factors—shift attitudes, address impunity and ensure services for survivors—change agents must possess authority within the target communities. ISF thus sensitizes and mobilizes various **judicial and moral duty bearers** to harness their power to safeguard women and girls’ bodily integrity (output 3.1). Aligned with the socio-ecological framework, ISF facilitates collaboration across different levels of actors, empowering local women’s peer groups to advocate effectively and build links with duty bearers and civil society actors.

OUTPUT 1.1: Women and girls claim bodily integrity and extended roles

Because VAWG is so deeply embedded in social norms across ISF programme communities, women and girls often don’t recognize the violence and harassment they experience. Therefore, the first challenge is to dismantle these harmful norms and the rigid gender roles imposed on them. At the individual level, ISF prioritizes increasing women’s and girls’ **knowledge** of their rights, building their **self-efficacy**, and strengthening their ability to claim their rights, including **access to justice** when experiencing violence.

Recognizing that risks of violence are shaped by socio-economic and environmental factors as well as a woman’s age, ISF takes **an intersectional approach** to target, for example, girls at the highest risk age of FGM and child marriage, adolescent girls needing knowledge of their sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), and mothers facing heightened IPV risk in economically vulnerable households. Similarly, both planning and implementation consider the added vulnerabilities and risks of violence rooted in structural discrimination and elevated external conflict, particularly for women and girls living in IDP camps.

Women’s and girls’ **peer support groups** provide spaces to share experiences, raise concerns, challenge restrictive norms, and identify local solutions. **Safe spaces**—such as designated women’s centers or allocated times in

community spaces—allow women and girls to meet, socialize, and develop skills. Group-based interventions such as women's self-help groups and school clubs across the region further support women by fostering relationship-building, communication, and problem-solving skills, which in turn help reduce emotional, physical, and sexual violence. In Ethiopia safe spaces address the lack of public spaces for women, while ARP safe camps in Kenya offer a nonviolent alternative initiation for girls before puberty.

To ensure participation in VAWG awareness activities does not increase risks, ISF collaborates with local service providers and strengthens **anti-violence networks**. For example, in Somaliland, ISF supports community-elected anti-VAWG committees composed of parents, youth, and local leaders, who serve as bridges between communities and local authorities to improve weak referral systems. These connections help formalize the claims by women and girls' groups and transform their roles within the community.

OUTPUT 1.2: Men and boys support women's bodily integrity and extended roles

To challenge the idealized masculine traits of dominance, control, and sexual violence, ISF provides **safe spaces** and context-specific training for men. In these sessions narrow masculine ideals, the mental health issues arising from such norms, and the normalization of abusive behaviour are examined, and participants equipped with tools for **non-violent conflict resolution** within families. Adolescent boys are invited to sessions addressing gender norms and sexual violence while promoting positive masculinity through participatory activities such as **sports clubs, drama, public debates, and Friday prayers** in the Somali context. Similarly, fathers are involved in male engagement initiatives in activities like ARP sessions in Kenya and anti-VAWG committees in the Somali context.

In post-conflict settings in Ethiopia and Somaliland, ISF addresses the normalization of everyday violence at the societal level and its spillover into domestic spaces. In addition to women and girls, the **intergenerational dialogues** involve both men and boys, enabling them to recognize and challenge cross-generational cycles that contribute to VAWG within family and community levels. While men and boys who engage in women's rights initiatives often face ridicule for not conforming to hegemonic masculinity, ISF creates **male ally and**

champion groups that work closely with other VAWG prevention groups and structures.

In patriarchal societies, as women's public and economic roles expand, traditional gender norms and power structures often face resistance, frequently manifesting as violence. To address this in women's livelihood projects, ISF **sensitizes male spouses on women's economic rights** and the benefits of dual incomes for family and community well-being. Encouraging men to support their wives' income generation and to share domestic tasks and childcare promotes a more balanced approach to family life. Men also gain from the expansion of rigid gender roles and shared decision-making, leading to better management of family finances and reduced stress and substance abuse that can trigger violence.

OUTPUT 1.3: Duty bearers harness their power to protect women's bodily integrity

Societies where ISF operates are hierarchical, where **religious and traditional leaders** have the power to challenge references to culture or religion as justification for VAWG, such as FGM as a prerequisite of Islam, or partner violence as a private, justified behavior to control women. Therefore, ISF sensitizes these moral duty bearers on the harmful consequences of VAWG and trains them in respectful and non-violent community and parenting practices, offering training and methods to address sensitive topics.

To address the worrying increase in the medicalization of FGM across the region, ISF works with **medical professionals and community health workers** to raise awareness among both communities and health professionals about FGM's broader physical, mental, and social impacts. Acknowledging that all duty bearers, from religious leaders to medical professionals, may be reluctant to challenge deeply entrenched practices due to fears of cultural or religious backlash, ISF fosters **group-based influence** by connecting lower-ranking religious leaders with progressive higher-ranking counterparts. Among medical personnel, ISF's group-based efforts link them with moral duty bearers, increasing their influence.

While ISF prioritizes the prevention of VAWG, it recognizes that increased awareness often drives a higher demand for survivor support services, necessitating strong links to local **referral mechanisms and services**,

including health, security, police, and judicial systems. To address the widespread impunity surrounding VAWG, ISF trains political decision-makers, local authorities, and officials on VAWG prevalence and harm, with the goal of promoting survivor-sensitive treatment and the proper investigation of cases. This approach extends to livelihoods activities, ensuring that women's economic rights, dignity, and safety are respected in employment settings. At higher official levels, ISF supports judicial duty bearers in establishing **coordination mechanisms**, drafting, and implementing **policies and action plans**, thus institutionalizing the prevention of VAWG and ensuring long-term sustainability.

In Ethiopia and Somaliland, recurring humanitarian crises often fuel ongoing cycles of violence. To address these heightened risks, ISF follows the Intra-Agency Standing Committee's GBV prevention guidelines¹⁹. ISF emphasizes **violence mitigation** measures such as collaboration with regional NGO and CSO clusters, as well as local community-based systems, to identify the changing nature of VAWG and the most vulnerable groups in need of support. In places like IDP camps, ISF adapts its prevention strategies to tackle the most urgent forms of VAWG, such as sexual assault. At the same time, it advocates for better infrastructure, like improved lighting and safer spaces, to reduce the risk of rape and allow women to move freely.

2.3 OUTCOME 2: Women have means and power to generate and control income and assets

To give women means to elevate their livelihoods, ISF supports their **cooperation with experts** in innovative and sustainable production methods (output 2.1) and enhances their access to **ecological materials, technology, energy**, and finance (output 2.2). Expert-led business development gives women the experience of competence and achievement, which transforms their self-image and enhances their aspirations. Moreover, ISF promotes future-oriented thinking and sustainable **business planning** (output 2.3) to increase women's understanding of the markets and the importance of collective actions and partnerships that help them in meeting future challenges.

ISF supports the development of businesses in promising industries, focusing on women's inclusion in the **green economy**. Even in local markets, products need to be unique and meet certain quality standards to compete with exported products. Accessing larger markets requires production stability, big volumes, and often product standardization and certification. For small-scale producers, this is only achievable through **collective business units** that engage in bulk purchasing and selling and in maintaining quality consistency in production processes.

ISF addresses the structural causes of gender inequality, with the aim of achieving lasting change in the power and choices women have over their own lives. To strengthen women's control over assets, time use and movement, the **engagement of men** is crucial. It fosters positive family dynamics and men are more likely to accept women's productive role when they understand value of their work. Strengthening the role of women in existing community structures and supporting **women's rights organizations** enhances women's opportunity to assert their own rights.



OUTPUT 2.1: Women and men apply ecologically sustainable practices and technologies

ISF maps local production opportunities and studies markets to identify viable livelihood options, particularly in the **circular economy**. ISF promotes women's membership in **self-help groups and cooperatives**, through which women can cooperate with experts, establish peer advice systems, and maintain effective production chains. The priority is to strengthen existing women's groups, because their members are already motivated to develop further, they just lack the support to move forward. Women's **production and manufacturing skills** are improved in collaboration with relevant experts to meet market demands and women's access to existing support services is promoted, ensuring women have a say on the content and availability of service. ISF also links women to **digital services** and solutions. Additionally, ISF provides **vocational training** for youth, helping them build their business skills and connect with support services and regulators.

ISF supports community committees and cooperatives in developing and implementing science-based **climate adaptation and mitigation plans**. Expert-cooperation helps find products and production methods that adapt to changing climate conditions and promote environmental sustainability. The access to early warning systems is promoted. To ensure that the needs of women are incorporated to plans and actions, ISF organises women's discussions and strengthens their representation in community committees, but also in district level. In joint actions and dialogues, it is possible to increase men's understanding of the importance of women's livelihoods and participation in decision-making for families and communities.

OUTPUT 2.2: Women and men have access to key resources

ISF strengthens peer **savings and loan schemes** to enable investments and provide security in hard times. Informal savings and loan associations are particularly important for women microentrepreneurs who often don't meet the criteria of financial institutions. The membership in cooperatives and business growth will increase women's access to formal micro-credit and investment schemes.

ISF links cooperatives and self-help groups with reliable input providers and builds capacities to procure items in bulk, which is particularly important for women with limited commercial contacts and **bargaining power**. The production of local inputs is increased with circular economy solutions, such as fertilizers, energy and fibre products. By using local inputs, women and men are less exposed to price fluctuations, and money remains in the local economy.

ISF invests in storage, processing, energy, and packaging **technology** to increase ecological sustainability, product quality and shelf-life. The construction of water management systems plays a key role in improving the climate resilience of agriculture. All investments are made following careful environmental, technical, and business planning. Importantly, ISF ensures that women play an active role in the decision making on investments and the management of procured technologies.

The importance of women's **control over resources**, including their time use, is discussed with men and women's role in cooperative and community decision making is strengthened. ISF supports the development of culturally appropriate childcare practices and men are encouraged to participate in caregiving. This helps prevent children from being exposed to workplace hazards and reduces the likelihood of school dropouts. Partnerships with women's rights organisations help to advocate women's economic rights, including ownership and inclusive decision-making. It also builds other partners understanding on power relations and their implications.

OUTPUT 2.3: Women and men develop business practices that meet market demands

ISF supports women in obtaining the necessary **documentation** for business registration and promotes their organisation to cooperatives. This enables microentrepreneurs to achieve economies of scale, reduce transaction costs, and business compliance. In addition, women's cooperatives can advocate for better services and public investments. ISF organizes **peer sessions** where women can identify their strengths, weaknesses, and areas for personal growth, share experiences and foster a positive self-image and entrepreneurial aspirations. When women reach their personal targets, they also learn to value themselves more.

Women are trained in financial literacy, business planning and marketing, and contract management. The **trainings** will use real examples from women-owned businesses and benchmark visits support learning in practice. Ensuring product consistency is important for entering new markets. ISF supports SHGs and cooperatives to build quality management systems from production to packaging. Cooperation with authorities is promoted to increase understanding on the product **standardization and certification** requirements and application. ISF also supports cooperatives to improve their environmental and social responsibility practices.

The development of **business models** is supported to increase access to markets, including contract manufacturing and farming. Business model is a framework that includes key production, quality management and commercial actions and supporting services to cooperative or SHG members. Business development is easier when having direct partnership with cooperative, but if this is not possible, expert cooperation will support the NGO project.

2.4 OUTCOME 3: Civil society promotes women's rights

Debates on locally led development, the #ShiftThePower movement, the decolonization of aid, and development effectiveness are increasingly calling for reforms to long-standing cooperation models. To ensure relevance and sustainable impact, there is a need for more **inclusive and equitable partnerships** between international CSO and local actors.

ISF sees the strengthening of civil societies as an intrinsic value and as a tool for achieving other objectives. Civil society actors represent rights-holders and hold the state accountable when it fails to meet its obligations in providing basic services or in complying with international laws. By empowering civil society, ISF increases rights holders' **capacity to monitor and demand accountability** from duty-bearers. It also supports civil society actors to create and promote **innovative initiatives for transformative change**.

In its efforts to strengthen civil societies, ISF draws from OECD's Shifting Power with Partners toolkit ²⁰ around five areas: complementarity of diverse civil society actors; equitable decision-making and inclusive dialogue;

mutual and locally led capacity strengthening; shifting power through funding and compliance; and inclusive communication, language, imagery, and storytelling. ISF implements this by building the resilience of its partners (output 3.1), by expanding local women's rights movements (output 3.2), and by ensuring that the public and political decisionmakers in Finland support women's rights in the Global South (output 3.3).

OUTPUT 3.1: ISF implementing partners are resilient

ISF operating model is structured around long-term development projects that are implemented by **local partners**, including NGOs, community-based organizations, and women's businesses such as cooperatives and other commercial networks. ISF selects partners in competitive processes based on thematic expertise, community knowledge, and organizational capacity. It prioritizes women-led and women's rights organizations.

ISF dedicates six to nine months for **joint project planning** with partners. This allows ISF and its partners to develop community driven initiatives, align strategies, and develop robust implementation plans. Partners have the primary responsibility for planning, implementing, and monitoring the projects, which is crucial for sustainability, as it ensures that the identified challenges and solutions are grounded in community participation and ownership.

ISF supports its partners to become experts in their fields, enhancing their capacity to benefit their members and society at large. Recognizing that the long-term impact and sustainability of ISF's programme depend on partner capacity, ISF allocates funds for **capacity building and co-learning** initiatives, such as training, exposure visits and targeted consultancies. The initiatives are based on comprehensive capacity assessments and capacity building plans developed jointly with the partners.

ISF promotes mutual capacity sharing to find gender transformative and context-specific ways to improve the rights of women and girls and trains partners on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, sexual and gender-based harassment. Throughout the partnership, ISF helps partners in results-based management (RBM), while assisting them in developing internal procedures

and systems that will enhance project effectiveness. Strengthening communication and advocacy skills is also central to ISF's efforts to reinforce the voice of the civil society.

To strengthen partners' resilience, ISF assists them in identifying funding opportunities and creating convincing fundraising initiatives. It aids in proposal development (even when not a main or co-applicant itself) and supports networking and relationship building with potential donors and partners. It also provides capacity building on financial management, including accounting, budgeting, and compliance. It supports improving risk management systems, internal controls, procurement processes, and developing transparent administrative and human resource management practices. ISF provides trustworthy and safe platforms to manage grants: Microsoft Teams for performance reporting and document archiving, and QuickBooks for budgeting and financial reporting.

ISF boosts **cooperation and learning among partners** through quarterly coordination meetings and joint annual performance workshops. These serve as platforms for jointly identifying challenges and best practices. In addition, ISF establishes regular management meetings with partner management teams to increase strategic cooperation. This enables ISF to hear directly from partners, while providing opportunities for partners to influence ISF strategies and vice versa.

Lastly, ISF emphasizes localization of aid. The following criteria have been used to guide planning and budgeting for the 2026-2029 programme: 1) locally recruited field staff should represent at least half of total personnel count; 2) country budgets should be minimum 70% of the total programme budget; 3) LDC countries should be at least two thirds of the country budgets; 4) project budgets (including grants) should be at least 70% of the country budgets; 5) administrative budget in Finland should not exceed 10% of the programme budget; and 6) personnel costs in projects should not exceed 25% of the project budget.

OUTPUT 3.2: Local women's rights movement expands

ISF recognizes that expanding local women's rights movements is crucial for promoting gender equality and addressing deeply rooted sensitive issues, such as FGM.

To achieve this, ISF engages with **various civil society groups**, including girls' clubs, community-based women's support groups, traditional women's groups (Shirkas), women's self-help groups (SHG) and community committees and councils in Ethiopia. In Kenya, it works with women's community-based organizations and village loan and savings associations. In Somaliland, it supports girls' clubs, SHGs, male ally and youth groups, traditional women's groups (Hagbad), and community committees.

Since 2023, ISF has successfully implemented a **financial support to third parties scheme** (FSTP, also referred to as sub-granting) in Kenya to boost a local movement against VAWG. By channelling resources to dedicated formal and informal community groups and activists, ISF has stimulated community-led solutions and innovations that are culturally relevant. The capacity-building and collaboration efforts, which are central to the process, have strengthened the resilience of the grantees, equipping them to mobilize additional resources and sustain long-term change.

ISF will scale up the scheme into a regional initiative that includes Somaliland and the Somali region in Ethiopia. It will also expand the thematic focus to include livelihood initiatives, for example on women's role in circular economy. Through the scheme, small grassroots organizations, informal groups, and activists can apply for grants up to €10,000. Each cohort typically comprises around ten grantees. Grantees can apply for subsequent grants, making the scheme an **incubator** for new long-term partnerships with ISF. ISF will also identify and **accelerate** the most promising initiatives by offering larger partnerships (1-2 years, as of 2028) and by connecting grantees with other funding sources.

Grantees are selected by a local Selection Committee, consisting of ISF staff and partners. Local partners also play a major role, together with external advisers and ISF staff, in providing **mentorship** to the grantees throughout the capacity building phase, helping grantees refine their planned actions and maximize synergies. This approach allows grantees to utilize and add value to other ISF programme activities. For example, in Kenya, grantees have conducted campaign activities during the Muungano Gender Forum community sessions. In Somaliland, mobile caravans will provide similar opportunities.

OUTPUT 3.3: Finnish public and political decisionmakers support women's rights in the Global South

ISF aims to be a leading expert driving change and providing ways for the Finnish public to support women and girls globally. ISF raises awareness of gender equality challenges and fosters understanding of global development cooperation. ISF focuses on advancing women's rights in East Africa by engaging the public to support global solidarity and by driving political advocacy for these goals.

A central and cross-cutting principle of ISF's communication in 2026–29 is transforming how the African continent is portrayed in public discourse. ISF will highlight the continent's diversity and **dismantle colonial rhetoric**. Central to this approach is finding new ways to engage partners, activists, and programme participants, while exploring effective means to amplify their voices. For the Finnish public, ISF aims to raise awareness on global gender equality challenges and provide meaningful ways to support women's rights through four main approaches:

Firstly, ISF aims for more **multi-actor collaborations** in communications and campaigning since it creates parallel audiences, fresh angles, and a sense of unity in and between civil society. Secondly, ISF will **focus** its communication efforts where they yield the best results. While social media has been a major platform in the past, its cost-effectiveness and engagement have declined. ISF will remain active on Instagram and TikTok, leveraging their potential to connect global gender equality issues with public interest while staying updated on digital trends and enhancing audiovisual capabilities. At the same time, ISF will explore new ways to engage audiences. Priority will be given to newsletters, which attract a more stable and action-oriented audience. Additionally, ISF will share its expertise through events, webinars, and opinion pieces.

Thirdly, following the two former points, ISF will put more effort in **engaging the public** in meaningful action, such as petitions, webinars, events, and pledges. ISF wants to play its part in creating a sense of solidarity and act as a platform to support women's rights. The global education materials on climate change adaptation, which has proven popular among schools, will also be updated. Fourthly, media relations are key in gaining visibility for

ISF's work and themes. **Media relations** are handled with a mix of personal pitching and wider press release distribution. In addition, ISF will participate in an NGO-media cooperation development project with the Vikes Foundation.

In addition to reaching out to the public, ISF engages in **political advocacy** to influence Finnish development policies and funding. The objective is to ensure adequate development funding for women and girls; integrate gender perspectives into Finnish development and foreign policies. ISF primarily operates as part of broader networks. It is a founding member of Fair-Trade Finland and the Finnish Somalia Network, and a member of the Red Nose Foundation and Fingo (umbrella organization for Finnish development NGOs). Through Fingo, ISF also advocates at the EU level. Regarding the 2027 parliamentary elections in Finland, ISF will form strategic alliances to promote its advocacy agenda. It also participates in forums related to VAWG and sexual and reproductive rights in Finland, such as the FGM seminars organized by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL).

While ISF supports local women's rights groups in its operational countries, it also seeks to **bridge the voices and concerns** of women's rights groups from the Horn of Africa to Finnish and EU-level forums. To promote a more just world, ISF advocates for global tax justice, corporate sustainability standards, and climate actions and funding that includes the most vulnerable people, especially women. ISF also follows the planning of Finland's Domestic Resource Mobilization (DRM) programme and, when relevant, enhances women's inclusion in national and regional tax system discussions.

COUNTRY PROGRAMMES AND PARTICIPANTS



This chapter outlines how the theory of change will be applied in programme countries, and how many people will participate and benefit from the programme. Each country subchapter has a brief description of the key activities and stakeholders under programme outcomes 1-2, while less context specific key activities for outcome 3—supporting the civil society’s role in promoting women’s rights—were described in Chapter 2. As some new implementing partners will be selected for the 2026-29 programme, and the continuing projects will be assessed and revised in 2025, the activities are indicative, and will become more accurate through the planning phase with each partner.

3.1 Ethiopia

ISF has operated in the Somali region of Ethiopia since 2023. It has offices in Jijiga and Addis Ababa. The Somali region was selected as ISF’s target area due to high FGM prevalence and potential synergies with ISF long-term development programme in neighbouring Somaliland. The 2026-29 programme includes six projects with local partners and ISF-led regional FSTP scheme within the Women’s Rights Movement Amplifier project (Annex 1).

VAWG prevention:

ISF's VAWG Report (2024) in Ethiopia's Somali region showed that rural, crisis-affected communities have relied heavily on emergency responses, leaving a gap in prevention and awareness work. To address this, ISF strengthens partner capacity to shift from response-only approaches to prevention, combining long-term development with crisis preparedness.

Due to the lack of prevention work in ISF's operating areas, the first priority is empowering women and girls to recognize violence, which is a crucial step toward claiming their rights. A key innovation is the development of **Safe Spaces for Women and Girls**, locally named *Ebyan* (meaning complete), beginning in 2025 and planned for scale-up in 2026-29. Currently, public spaces for women to gather are absent, which is why *Ebyans* will provide safe environments for women and girls to organize, advocate, and highlight the importance of gender equality for the entire community. Multifunctional and disability-inclusive in design, *Ebyans* will host peer-to-peer and self-help groups, women's committees, livelihood trainings and other capacity building sessions. Careful planning with ISF and partners will ensure these spaces are community-run for long-term sustainability.

School clubs for girls and youth-oriented drama and art initiatives will enhance girls' self-efficacy when addressing sensitive topics and challenging taboos related to FGM, child marriage, and menstrual hygiene—issues closely tied to notions of feminine purity. Boys, on the other hand, will be engaged in discussions about girls' rights and their critical role in changing attitudes and behavior related to sexual violence in the target areas. When engaging with **youth in urban areas**, ISF will partner with the Finnish Deaconess Foundation, which has successfully led life skills-training for young people in Jijiga. In turn, ISF will provide VAWG prevention training for these groups, drawing on its expertise in the Somali context.

Male engagement efforts will further challenge the normalization of violence, which is deeply rooted in societal and historical contexts where masculinity is often linked to 'strong' but violent behavior and a culture of impunity. Men-only sessions will also focus on family wellbeing and the links between substance abuse and triggers of partner violence, reinforcing the role of husbands' and fathers' in promoting healthier behavior.

At the community level, ISF has adopted **intergenerational dialogues** (see Chapter 1.2) as a cross-cutting method to address harmful gender norms and traditions and find locally owned solutions. In collaboration with GIZ, ISF will train Ethiopian staff and partners in 2025 and further scale the approach in the new program. While key topics include FGM and child marriage, discussions will also challenge broader gender norms. ISF will connect dialogue champions with local authorities to amplify community voices and integrate solutions into structural frameworks.

Finally, while key national policies, such as child marriage legislation, remain unratified in the Somali region, ISF is part of a **regional anti-FGM and child marriage alliance**, and aims to push for the regional ratification of anti-VAWG laws. At the same time, ISF continues to strengthen the weak violence reporting framework through collaboration with local authorities and the regional Bureau of Women's and Children's Affairs. A holistic approach is crucial, engaging both the formal, structural systems, alongside **traditional duty bearers**, particularly to address the rising medicalization of FGM. Traditional and religious leaders, as well as **health workers**, are trained as anti-FGM advocates to shift community attitudes. To broaden its reach, ISF will invest in local **media** channels—TV, radio, and social media—to engage a wider audience beyond the target communities, raising awareness and challenging taboos around VAWG and harmful practices.

Women's livelihood:

Ethiopian Government has an ambitious plan to tackle the challenges posed by climate change with a focus on diversification of the economy and enhancing its resilience to climate shocks. ISF will contribute to the implementation of Ethiopia's National **Disaster Risk Management** (DRM) Policy and Strategy by strengthening DRM and Range Land Councils in the communities (*kebeles*) in Harawa district (*woreda*). In cooperation with woreda DRM office, the Community Adaptation Action Plans (CAAP) and Rangeland Management Plans (RMP) will be developed and their implementation supported. The woreda DRM office coordinates the implementation and finance of the plans.

ISF will inform partner organisations, **Early Warning** (EW) committees in kebeles and woreda offices about the

national EW mechanisms developed in the programme between the Finnish Meteorological Institute (FMI) and Ethiopia Meteorological Institute (EMI). Constant exchange of information with FMI and EMI guarantees the utilization of synergies on both sides.

ISF will support the application of climate smart **technologies and agro-pastoral practices** that promote circulation of nutrients, water and energy in farming systems (agroecological symbiosis thinking). Joint studies will be conducted with the Bureau of Agriculture, Jijiga University and Somali Region Pastoral and Agropastoral Research Institute to promote crop health and drought resistance fodder management. Provision of technical support to farmers will be promoted. ISF will also explore opportunities to collaborate with Finnish research institutions in dry areas in Ethiopia and Somaliland.

The national policies and strategies emphasize the inclusion of women in DRM and EW response: half of the DRM council and EW committee members must be women. To enhance women's influence, it is important to organize separate dialogues among women, including PwD and youth. ISF will also facilitate discussions about GBV in emergency situations to broaden the understanding of disaster risks and their mitigation. The accessibility of EW information and the influence of women and PwD in woreda level discussions will be strengthened.

ISF will partner with **vocational and technical colleges** to train female youth and PwD, strengthen their businesses, and connect them with government that is obliged to offer them business space. Opportunities for cooperation with existing hubs, such as Finnish Church Aid Creators Hub in Addis Ababa, will be explored. In urban projects **women's participation in green economy** will be emphasized based on a ISF's study on opportunities for circular economy in the Somali region, including ideas on utilizing the waste generated in agriculture. ISF cooperates with the Swedish innovation and green business incubator 'Reach for Change' and follow closely the development of the National Circular Economy Roadmap of Ethiopia to seek synergies and cooperation possibilities.

ISF will support **business registration**, train women in entrepreneurial skills and ensure that their products meet market requirements. Business skills trainings will

be organised in collaboration with the Bureau of Job Creation and Microfinance that can also link women to microfinance institutions. ISF supports women's participation in **self-help groups and cooperatives** to diversify their livelihood and increase their income. Focus is on traditional systems (*shirkas*) which are socially acceptable and can help break barriers to women's participation in economic activities. Clan leaders must also be involved when advocating for an extended role and access to resources that women typically lack (e.g. land, technology, finance).

3.2 Kenya

ISF has operated in Kisii and Nyamira Counties in southwestern Kenya since 2015 and has offices in Kisii town and Nairobi city. The counties were selected in 2014 due to high FGM prevalence, poor development level and scarcity of international development actors. The 2026-29 programme includes six projects with five local partners, one project implemented directly by ISF, and ISF-led regional FSTP scheme within the Women's Rights Movement Amplifier project (Annex 1).

VAWG prevention:

ISF's long-standing work in Kisii and Nyamira has helped women recognize the various forms of VAWG and contributed to its denormalization. In line with this, ISF continues to promote the means for women to assert their rights, expanding gender norms from merely denouncing violence to actively enabling women to shape and influence their environment.

Peer-sharing and mentoring-based **safe space sessions in schools** educate girls on VAWG, including FGM and sexual abuse and encourage them to challenge harmful gendered stereotypes, and assert their bodily autonomy from a young age. Additionally, these sessions enhance awareness of referral pathways, empowering girls to act against VAWG.

Women-led community forums will provide women with knowledge about their rights through participatory activities like role plays, storytelling, and debates. By engaging diverse stakeholders, the forums will explore how local gender roles, shaped by social norms, sustain and perpetuate violence, with lasting effects on social and economic well-being. The forums will promote

community ownership and sustainable solutions to eradicate VAWG, strengthen reporting mechanisms, and improve access to support services.

ISF will continue implementing **Alternative Rite of Passage** (ARP) camps as a non-violent alternative to FGM, guiding girls into adulthood while teaching them about the harmful effects of FGM, myths surrounding the practice, sexual and reproductive health, and socio-economic life skills. The camps will build confidence and empower girls to resist FGM and advocate for their rights, with parents, duty bearers, and community members publicly declaring their commitment to abandon FGM. Based on findings from the 2024 joint ARP evaluation with World Vision (Chapter 1.2), ISF will revise its methodology and manual to address changing FGM realities in the target areas, including medicalization, the lowered age of cutting, and the targeting of older women (such as mothers-in-law), boys and men.

ISF's Kenya programme will further strengthen **male engagement** efforts, introducing new training materials to equip facilitators with practical tools to involve men and boys as allies, starting in 2025 and scaling up from 2026. 'Men-only forums' will provide supportive spaces for men to learn about the impact of VAWG, address their own mental health challenges, and explore substance abuse as a trigger for violence. Male peer role models will be trained as ambassadors for change, and boys will participate in 'Coaching Boys to Men' sessions, strengthening positive masculinity across different generations.

ISF has adopted **intergenerational dialogues** as a cross-cutting method to address harmful gender norms and traditions and find locally owned solutions. Because in the Kisii community, FGM is closely tied to tradition and preserving social values, the dialogues challenge hierarchical structures and facilitate conversations on evolving norms. While FGM serves as an entry point, the conversations will also address broader gender norms and the normalization of violence. By connecting dialogue champions with local authorities, ISF aims to amplify community voices and integrate these solutions into local frameworks for lasting change.

Through the Muungano Gender Forum, ISF will **strengthen local civil society** actors and **collaborate with county authorities** and stakeholders to enhance reporting and referral systems, including the development of gender policies in Kisii and Nyamira. It will work

with chiefs, paralegals, police, and community health promoters to strengthen the enforcement of these policies. Advocacy efforts will also involve organizations like the Union of Nurses and Midwives and government ministries, focusing on policy co-creation and engaging with the Gender Technical Working Groups. Additionally, ISF will leverage partnerships with anti-VAWG actors such as with the Coalition of Violence against Women (COVAW), the Anti-FGM Board and the CSO-Network on Ending FGM in Kenya to strengthen local implementation of national policies within the timeline of the programme 2026-29.

Women's livelihood:

National Green Economy Strategy and Implementation Plan 2016-2030 promotes sustainable use of natural resources and resource efficiency to increase overall economic profitability. In Kisii, bananas are gaining interest due to high potential in valorization of by-products. Therefore, ISF will strengthen women's cooperative in making high-quality handicrafts from **banana crop waste**. Benchmarking will be done with other banana fibre companies, such as Ecobana, Ziada Solutions and Fibretext. The new products enliven local business and improve the profitability of banana growing in Kisii County that is the leading producer of cooking banana in Kenya. ISF and a Finnish design company Mifuko implement a Finnpartnership project in the same value chain with the technical support of Texfed Ltd in Uganda and Kenya Industrial Research and Development Institute (KIRDI).

In cooperation with the county government, KIRDI, and the Kenya Climate Innovation Centre, ISF will promote the use of banana crop waste in **fertilizer and energy briquette production and biogas systems**. To promote the use of clean transport, ISF cooperates with Kisii Smart Community (KSC) that has developed a local solar-charged electric vehicle transport service. ISF will use the expertise of KSC also in off-grid power generation and digitalization processes. In 2025, ISF will survey key actors and business ideas for using household and/or agricultural waste and residues. The survey will inform development of a new project implemented with a women-led cooperative. The Government supports informal sector in many ways, for example via capacity building and support to register the Savings and Credit Cooperative Organizations (SACCOs). There are also

private sector initiatives to increase MSMEs access to digital services. ISF has positive experiences in collaborating with government and the new projects will engage with the available services.

Nyamira and Kisii Counties are implementing the Locally Led Climate Action (FloCCA) programme to improve state of environment, including the national target to increase tree cover to 30% by 2032. Nyamira and Kisii counties have put emphasis on farm forestry. To promote **climate adaptation and mitigation**, ISF will strengthen a women-led agricultural cooperative by applying the lessons learnt and cooperation contacts from the NNWS project (see lessons learned). The project will promote women's collective resource mobilization and water management, circulation of materials and facilitate strong public-private partnerships in product development and standardization and in improving market access. ISF's previous cooperation with the Food and Forest Development Finland (FFD) will continue focusing on utilizing crop waste biomass in fertilizer and energy production and capacity building in agro-forestry.

ISF will establish a **youth-led skills hub** to promote employment, especially unemployed skilled young women and school dropouts. In the hub the youth can test ideas, incubate nascent business models and get mentorship using ISF pool of stakeholders. ISF will benchmark and seek cooperation with existing youth interventions, such as Finnish Church Aid (FCA) Hub on creative industries in Nairobi and the County Government of Kisii youth development forum and job centre.

ISF will **engage men in dialogue** on the importance of women's access to household resources and allocating time to business activities. This will reduce women's dependency and promote their membership in community-based organizations, SHGs and SACCOs for improved access to resources and supporting services. The ISF-led Muungano Gender Forum will provide a platform for women to promote their economic rights at the county level.

To help women move from the informal to the formal economy, ISF will facilitate business **registration**, train women in **business skills** and develop **quality management** systems in compliance with national standards. This will be done in collaboration with key Bureaus of Standards (KEBS, KEPHIS, NEMA) and

KIRDI. Business model development ensures the long-term sustainability of the cooperatives.

3.3 Somaliland

ISF has operated in Somaliland since 2000 and has offices in Hargeisa and Burao. The 2026-29 programme includes six projects with local partners and ISF-led regional FSTP scheme within the Women's Rights Movement Amplifier project (Annex 1).

VAWG prevention:

ISF's program in Somaliland will continue its focus on preventing FGM, child marriage, and intimate partner violence, while expanding efforts to address sexual violence and transform gender norms. Activities will include group-based efforts such as **peer-to-peer groups, self-help groups, and school clubs**, which are essential in the Somali context, where communal identity supports collective rights claiming. In school clubs and among youth, participatory approaches, such as drama performances addressing taboo topics, have proven successful in VAWG prevention and in building trust among students to report cases of violence among peers.

Building on findings from the Somaliland mid-term assessment (2024), ISF's 2026-29 programme emphasizes **structural strengthening** as a key focus for VAWG prevention. This includes reinforcing weak and informal community frameworks, with a particular focus on anti-VAWG committees—community-elected groups that raise awareness and offer support (Chapter 1.2). These committees have been instrumental in addressing gaps left by institutional weaknesses, and ISF will enhance their integration with structural systems involving local government, referral mechanisms, and other leadership and duty-bearers to promote local ownership and ensure the sustainability of VAWG prevention initiatives.

ISF's cross-cutting approach through **intergenerational dialogues** will create spaces to discuss FGM, child marriage, and gender norms as a transformative tool to challenge deeply rooted generational beliefs and gendered hierarchies in Somali culture. Training for these dialogues will be implemented in collaboration with GIZ, mirroring successful efforts in Ethiopia. These dialogues aim to foster consensus-building and will be piloted alongside anti-VAWG committees, ensuring that

the topics discussed are translated into practical efforts and tangible solutions.

ISF will also focus on **engagement with men and boys**, including the development of a manual by early 2026. This initiative will draw on best practices from post-conflict settings to address harmful gender norms and behaviors, as well as substance abuse, a typical trigger for partner violence. Recognizing the lack of services for people with disabilities in Somaliland, ISF will conduct training in 2025 to ensure the program proactively integrates **disability inclusion** into its prevention focused VAWG strategies.

In IDP camps, ISF will tackle the significant challenges posed by weak infrastructure, lack of governance, and heightened risks of sexual violence. Preventative measures will include **formalizing camp networks and strengthening linkages to local governance**. In urban areas, such as Hargeisa, ISF will partner with the Finnish Deaconess Foundation, combining their expertise in youth engagement with ISF's specialization in VAWG prevention. Target groups will benefit from life skills education, which will be integrated with training on understanding and preventing sexual and gender-based violence.

In various emergency contexts across Somaliland, ISF recognizes the challenge of fostering long-term attitude change among highly mobile and isolated populations. To address this, the **mobile caravan** initiative will continue to deliver awareness-raising sessions through drama, music, and art—accessible and engaging methods tailored to mobile pastoral communities with limited literacy and educational opportunities.

Finally at the structural level, the programme will expand its partnerships with progressive **religious leaders** to raise awareness of the non-religious basis of FGM, complemented by the **medical ambassador** initiative, which trains nurses and university students to highlight the negative health impacts of FGM. To further strengthen structural frameworks, ISF will enhance collaboration with a **women's rights organization**, advocating for protective legislation including the anti-FGM bill, and building regional alliances to amplify women's advocacy efforts.

Women's livelihood:

Recently the government has formulated a range of frameworks related to climate change, such as Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction policies and Environmental Management Act. However, only 1.6% of the state budget for 2023 was allocated to the environmental sector. In rural areas, ISF will enhance communities' capacity to plan and implement **community-based climate adaptation plans (CAAP)** that are inclusive of women's perspectives. This will scale up ISF's previous work with partners that is documented in Somali language manuals. Special attention is paid to the **circulation of agro-pastoral biomass waste, sustainable energy production, water management and seed availability**. To improve national capacities, it is of the utmost importance to cooperate with local research and extension and sector Ministries and see when ISF can bring in external expertise from Ethiopia and Finland, e.g. Finnish drone technology to support natural resources management. To benefit from ongoing research, ISF will follow closely FAO-SWALIM platform.

ISF will strengthen **women's SHGs and cooperatives** by identifying promising agri-business opportunities and providing business support services, such as business registration, training and fostering self-awareness. Women's time poverty will be addressed and a partnership with a women's rights organisation enables women's economic rights to be promoted at the clan and administrative levels. (see VAWG prevention above)

There are only few large-scale enterprises in Somaliland. The private sector consists mainly of micro-scale and low-productivity businesses (70% women-owned in informal sector) and most production inputs are brought from abroad. In this situation the development and professionalization of the private sector as well as increasing access to local materials is important. Somalia has recently joined the East African Community (EAC), which might lift strict restrictions on Somali products in the markets of neighbouring countries.

In urban areas, ISF will strengthen women's **entrepreneurship in artisan industry**. ISF will facilitate cooperation between women's tailoring groups and young urban female designers and textile entrepreneurs to develop marketable products. Possibility to utilize local by-products for artisan production will be studied. The ecological menstrual pads production initiated in

2023 will continue and ISF will explore the possibility of collaborating with the AFRIPads social enterprise. The project will cooperate with Deaconess Foundation and their youth groups. ISF will also promote the utilization of **waste in income generation** and protecting environment. To support the planning of a new project, ISF has conducted a study on actors and opportunities within waste management, special focus on plastic recycling (2024). The new project will build value network between education and research institutions, private sector and state administration.

To ensure competitive market entry, **quality management systems, business models and marketing strategies** will be developed. ISF will cooperate with Somaliland Quality Control Commission, Somali Bureau of Standards and local government departments to ensure compliance with new standard policies, such as The National Food Safety Policy. Recently, Somalia has developed its previously almost non-existent product safety system and ISF seeks to learn more about its functions, gaps and opportunities.

3.4 Participants and beneficiaries

In ISF programme, **direct participants** include both rights holders and duty bearers who participate in programme activities. Participants are selected jointly with partners. In VAWG prevention, participants are

typically women and girls at risk of violence, their family members, and moral and judicial duty bearers (such as religious leaders, police, authorities). In livelihood work, direct participants include members of cooperatives or other organized groups and value chain actors. ISF reports the number of participants it has reached, disaggregated by gender, age, and disability.

In addition to direct participants, the programme improves the lives of many other people. These are called **final beneficiaries**. Final beneficiaries are for example children of direct participants. The number of final child beneficiaries is based on official fertility rates (average number of children per woman) in programme areas.

ISF estimates to reach 41,600 direct participants and 166,600 final beneficiaries during the 4-year programme (Annex 1). 53% of the direct participants and 70% of the final beneficiaries are estimated to be women and girls. The numbers are based on 2022-25 programme for continuing projects and rough estimates for new projects and will be revised during the project planning phase in 2026.

In addition, the programme benefits other individuals, whose number is not possible or meaningful to estimate, such as people who benefit from improved legislation or intensified economic activity.

	female minors	female adults	male minors	male adults	TOTAL	% female	PwD
ETHIOPIA							
direct participant	1 000	4 400	800	4 000	10200	53%	260
final beneficiary	20 300	14 600	14 700	8 600	58200	60%	n.a.
KENYA							
direct participant	1 700	3 700	1 100	3 200	9700	56%	360
final beneficiary	17 000	9 500	6 000	3000	35500	75%	n.a.
SOMALILAND							
direct participant	900	4 550	900	3350	9700	56%	194
final beneficiary	18200	13 800	10 200	6700	48900	65%	n.a.
REGIONAL FSTP SCHEME							
direct participant	0	6 000	0	6000	12000	50%	600
final beneficiary	12 000	12 000	0	0	24000	100%	n.a.

4

OPERATING MODEL



In this chapter, the following elements of ISF's operating model are described: the human rights-based approach (HRBA), results-based management (RBM), and ISF's risk management system. At the heart of ISF's operating model is the commitment to long-term partnerships with local civil society actors, including NGOs, community-based organizations, and women-led businesses. By working collaboratively with them, ISF aims to enhance their resilience, which is a key outcome of the programme (see Output 3.1). Another fundamental aspect of ISF's operating model is multi-actor cooperation, which is detailed in the country programmes (Chapter 3).

4.1 Human-rights-based approach

ISF's operating model is based on the human-rights based approach (HRBA), which is guided by the central human rights principles of universality, equality and non-discrimination, participation and inclusion, accountability, and transparency. The **do-no-harm principle** sets the minimum standard for implementing HRBA in ISF's programme. Harm refers to negative consequences in the lives of individuals, as well as negative impacts on the environment. The do-no-harm principle implies that ISF is aware of the harms and risks created by its interventions and that risk mitigation plans are developed.

ISF's programme is **human rights transformative**: rights holders are seen as active agents to change their own lives and communities. ISF supports their capacity to identify and claim for their rights, and encourages duty bearers to respect, protect and enforce human rights. ISF particularly addresses women and girls' right to life, liberty and security (Universal Declaration of Human Rights §3), right to be free from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (§5), and right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of her/himself and of her/his family (§25), and sexual and reproductive rights.

The programme includes mainstreamed and targeted actions to advance gender equality, non-discrimination (emphasis on disability inclusion), climate adaptive capacity, and protection of the environment, as described below.

Equality and non-discrimination

Gender equality is a key aspect of ISF's programme. Altogether, 3,600 girls and 18,650 women will directly participate in programme activities, while the lives of 67,500 girls and 49,900 women will improve following the programme (Annex 1). In all actions, ISF assesses gendered impacts, placing particular emphasis on the rights and needs of women and girls. ISF identifies and addresses risks that may hinder the realization of women and girls' human rights and their equal participation, taking proactive steps to mitigate these. Project and programme monitoring data is disaggregated by sex and age. ISF also monitors its internal processes by setting targets and tracking progress related to key principles of gender equality (Annex 2).

ISF applies its own **Ethics and Safety Guidelines** for planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating projects that target women and girls in vulnerable positions. These guidelines describe how ISF seeks to protect women and girls from violence, exploitation, abuse and harassment, or threat of it, because of ISF's work. They include guidance on how to prevent survivor distress and re-traumatization, backlash and retaliation in interventions targeting women at risk of violence.

The programme is **gender transformative**: Violations against the rights of women and girls are eradicated by addressing negative gender stereotypes and patriarchal

belief systems that uphold rigid gender norms, roles and responsibilities, which in turn subordinate women and expose them to violence and other forms of discrimination. Changes are pursued in the very structures that cause and maintain inequality, to expand women's ability to make strategic life choices.

In addition to gender, ISF programme pays special attention to discrimination against persons with disabilities. The impact on the rights of persons with disabilities, as well as risks for the realization of those rights, are assessed and mitigated during project planning. ISF promotes **disability inclusion** by connecting partners with disability organizations and providing training to remove barriers for equal participation, accessible environment, information, communication, transportation and services. ISF monitors the number of people with disabilities engaged in the programme and sets targets for key components of disability inclusion (Annex 2).

ISF is a member of a Plan International Finland initiated Community of Practice (CoP) on Gender Transformative and inclusive sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) Programming, a platform for Finnish NGOs to collectively learn, share experiences, and strengthen their SRHR programming through a gender and inclusion lens.

Participation and inclusion

Participation and local ownership are fundamental to ISF's operating model. Lasting change can only occur if it starts from within the community and oneself. ISF interventions are jointly planned, implemented, and monitored with project participants, partners, local authorities, and other stakeholders. Participants in programme activities are encouraged to further disseminate their knowledge and support local civil society actors to become active and claim for their rights.

All people in ISF programme areas have equal opportunities to be selected as programme participants and no one is discriminated based on religion or conviction, political and/or ideological views, gender, age, ethnicity or language, disability, health, sexual or gender identity, or any other personal characteristics. As described in more detail in Chapter 3.4, In ISF programme, direct participants include both rights holders and duty bearers who participate in programme activities.

To promote local ownership, ISF also fosters delegation of decision making and creates platforms for collaborative planning. All key organizational documents—ranging from ISF’s strategy to development programmes, annual plans, and reports—are drafted and co-created in participatory processes within the organization. The Extended Management Committee, which includes Country Directors, meets 4-6 times per year to discuss strategic issues. Country offices with locally recruited staff have great autonomy in programme management.

Accountability and transparency

Accountability at ISF entails sharing responsibility in programme planning and implementation, empowering participants, donors, and other stakeholders to hold ISF accountable for its actions. To support this, ISF has established a **complaints mechanism** for reporting misconduct (<https://solidaarisuus.fi/en/about-us/complaints/>). Setting up similar mechanisms will become compulsory for ISF partners from 2026 onwards. The mechanism allows programme participants and other stakeholders to confidentially report misconduct or harm caused by the programme.

Accountability also involves good governance, supported by robust results-based management and risk management systems (described below). ISF’s financial management principles are outlined in several key documents: the **Administrative and Financial Regulations** detail how financial management and administration are organized; the **Delegation of Authorities Policy** specifies the delegation of responsibilities in financial and administrative management; the **Procurement Policy** governs how purchases are managed, including for implementing partners; and the **Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Policy** establishes high standards of transparency and accountability, with a zero-tolerance approach to fraud and corruption. Together, these policies ensure ISF’s financial integrity and efficient management practices.

ISF cooperates closely with its partners to monitor project progress and improve their financial management skills. This includes monitoring site visits, verifying project reports, performing internal reviews, external evaluations and annual audits. Financial instalments to partners are made quarterly once financial reports have been approved and supporting documents uploaded on a cloud service.

In the new programme period, ISF will elevate partners’ financial management capacity by harmonizing the chart of accounts and by training on the UN/EU sanctions screening. ISF will also promote the effective use of the QuickBooks accounting software, used by country offices and most partners, and explore potential integration with Netvisor, the software used at HQ.

In addition to the financial and administrative policies listed above, ISF has policies to prevent and respond to violations against bodily integrity and supports partners in implementing similar policies: The **Policy Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse** describes how ISF prevents such incidents, and how it responds if such incidents occur. It ensures that all ISF employees understand their responsibilities and aims to always protect programme participants. ISF’s **Policy Against Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment** describes how ISF prevents and responds to such conduct at the workplace. It ensures that everyone working with or for ISF is aware of their responsibilities and rights regarding sexual and gender-based harassment.

ISF is committed to the well-being of children and does not tolerate any form of child abuse. To ensure all operations are child safe, ISF applies a **Child Protection Policy** that complies with United Nations Convention on Rights of Children (UNCRC) and is binding to all staff and associates of ISF. The **Zero Tolerance to all forms of FGM Policy** establishes binding obligations for all actors, partners, and staff working within or alongside ISF projects, ensuring strict adherence to zero tolerance for FGM/C and ECM while maintaining a comprehensive, multisectoral, and community-centred approach to prevention.

Private Sector Cooperation Policy clarifies ISF’s goal of business cooperation and states guiding principles and ethical criteria for ISF partnerships with private sector. It describes the safeguard process, including screening of potential partners and monitoring and quality control process throughout the partnership. This policy will be prepared by the end of 2026 with the peer support of Fingo’s Business Cooperation Network. Before the policy is finalised and approved, ISF will form partnerships with companies that apply HREDD certificates. The policy development process will include updating performance standards to manage environmental and social risks and impacts when partnering with local cooperatives.

Accountability also means timely and transparent **communication** about programme achievements and challenges to stakeholders. Annual reports and other useful documents are shared with local authorities and partners, donors and relevant embassies, and published on ISF website. In Finland, private donors and the public are targeted through social media, media outreach, and donor reports.

Environmental sustainability

All human beings depend on the environment in which they live. A safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment is integral to the full enjoyment of human rights. ISF strengthens climate adaptation, promotes low emission practices and safeguards biodiversity to mitigate the impacts of environmental degradation on human rights.

ISF has incorporated environmental safeguards to its project cycle management. In the project planning phase, all livelihood interventions assess environmental risks and impacts, including people's safety. Furthermore, the livelihood options and practices that significantly increase emissions or affect environment (e.g. rainwater collection, energy source, overgrazing) are further studied and, if possible, replaced with low emission options. ISF does not support livelihoods that significantly affect carbon sinks and biodiversity, such as charcoal production or wood industry with poor forest management. During project implementation, climate sustainability is improved by cooperation between experts, local government and communities that jointly discuss climate challenges and develop innovative solutions. results are monitored through project, programme and HRBA indicators.

In 2025, ISF will update the environmental guidelines to address emissions and carbon sinks, biodiversity and natural resources, pollution and waste management, and pest management. The updated guidelines will describe how ISF screens, assesses, and minimizes environment and climate related risks and impacts of climate change, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss on its interventions from planning to evaluation.

4.2 Results-based management

ISF's Results-Based Management (RBM) system is designed to help the organization achieve its desired impact, enhance effectiveness, and foster continuous learning. This approach not only improves accountability to programme participants and stakeholders but also supports adaptive management—an essential requirement in ISF's complex and fragile operating environments, where plans often need to be adjusted throughout the programme's life cycle. The key components of ISF's RBM system include learning and innovation, planning, monitoring and reporting, and evaluation.

Learning and innovation

Learning and innovation are organizational priorities for ISF. Within the development programme, opportunities for systematic collective reflection are created to support knowledge-based decision making and programme development. Best practices and lessons learned are documented, shared and utilized within ISF, among its partners (see Outcome 3 for different learning forums) and more widely to other actors such as local or national authorities; local, national or international networks; other Finnish development organizations; and donors. ISF also benchmarks and collects inputs from relevant networks and peer organizations.

To foster an organizational culture that promotes innovation, ISF embraces a high tolerance for risk and an acceptance of failure, encouraging collaboration with diverse actors from the outset of project planning. This allows partners to identify and test new ideas while facilitating multi-stakeholder collaboration among programme participants, civil society, private sector actors, authorities, and researchers.

Promoting innovations also involves capacitating staff on how to collect, analyze and utilize lessons learned, while ensuring that enough time is devoted to learning processes. Partners are encouraged to openly share unsuccessful experiments and challenges in project implementation. The project and programme lifecycles constitute an ongoing four-year learning loop, where quarterly and annual reporting, midterm assessments and evaluations offer key opportunities for critical reflection and revision of project plans.

Technology plays a significant role in fostering innovation. However, the digital gender gap—particularly regarding access to devices (such as mobile phones and computers), internet connectivity, and digital skills—often limits women's ability to leverage technology. As described in Chapter 2, ISF supports women to connect with experts and improve their access to relevant technologies. It also utilizes innovative methods, including technologies, to raise awareness about VAWG. Since 2020, ISF has increasingly utilized Ombea digital audio response system for project monitoring, and supported partners in putting it to use for their quantitative data collection.

Planning

Programme planning builds on the results and lessons learned from previous programmes. It is an inclusive process with involvement of ISF country offices, partners and other stakeholders. Each country team prepares four-year country programmes (Chapter 3) based on ISF's theory of change and finds local partners to implement the programme. To find the right partners, open calls will be published in late 2025.

Project planning is a comprehensive process that takes 6 to 12 months. It is led by partners, with close support from ISF, and involves active participation from project participants and key stakeholders. The planning phase follows the ISF Project Manual and is divided into two phases: The analysis phase starts with a Standardized Partner Capacity Assessment (SPAT), which informs the tailored capacity building plans for each partner (see output 3.1). This is followed by a situation and problem analysis using tools like actor mapping and ecosystem analysis, and development of project objectives. The design phase includes development of the logical framework, activity scheduling, resource planning (budgeting, staffing) and monitoring system.

ISF assists partners in designing projects that address local needs, support long-term development, and are aligned with partners' own strategies and ISF's programme objectives. To ensure sustainability of the interventions and to cause no harm, all project plans address relevant institutional, socio-cultural, climate and environmental, and technological sustainability issues. Exit plans are prepared to set jointly agreed criteria for phasing out of projects and partnerships. In addition to long-term planning, annual plans and budgets are prepared both at programme and project levels. Projects are also required to prepare quarterly activity plans and budgets.

ISF works in emergency-prone areas, and it primarily improves communities' preparedness to disasters and contributes to disaster mitigation, both in VAWG and livelihood interventions. In extreme disaster situation, such as severe drought, ISF participates in joint efforts to minimize the damages and to invest in returning the community to normal. ISF will improve its practices in emergency situations, and together with partners develop an approach to prevent GBV during emergencies and to build learning cycles for better understanding livelihood vulnerabilities during drought and flood situations.

Monitoring and reporting

Monitoring is the systematic and continuous assessment of progress over time by collecting and analysing information and using that information to redesign interventions. It includes monitoring changes in the operating environment, risks identified in the risk register, and tracking progress towards predetermined objectives by using indicators and sources of verifications determined in the logical framework.

At the **programme level**, ISF's monitoring system consists of the Logical framework (Annex 2) that outlines what the programme aims to achieve, and what information will be needed to track it; an Indicator Tracking Table for managing this information; and the Annual Performance Report for analysing and complementing the results presented in the Indicator Tracking Table.

ISF indicators are designed to be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART). The logical framework includes those aggregate indicators for Finnish development policy that are relevant for ISF programme. Standardized national datasets, such as National Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), are utilized in designing indicators and means of verification. For some indicators (especially attitude change indicators for outcome 1), data is accrued from composite measures, i.e. indexes with standardized questions.

Baselines and target levels for programme indicators will be set in 2026, following the finalization of detailed project plans that include project level result chains and indicators, which may entail minor adjustments in the programme logical framework.

ISF reports regularly to key stakeholders, including donors and local authorities. Reporting focuses primarily on programme indicators, but also other significant

The tables below summarize key programme and project level monitoring, reporting and evaluation activities.

PROJECT	FOCAL PERSON	FREQUENCY	TARGET GROUP
Monitoring visit reports	Various ISF staff	After each visit	Partner, ISF
Project activity report	Partner	Quarterly	ISF
Project financial report	Partner	Quarterly	ISF
Financial verification, internal controls, audit recommendation followup	ISF Finance Admin Coordinator	Quarterly (+ annually by ISF Programme Controller)	ISF
Country coordination meeting	ISF Country Director	Quarterly	Partners, ISF, local authorities
Project performance report	Partner	Annual	Participants, ISF, key stakeholders
Project performance workshop	ISF Country Director	Annual	Partner, ISF
Project audit	ISF Controller	Annual	Partner, ISF, ISF auditor
ISF-Partner executive level dialogue	ISF Country Director	Every 2nd year	Partner, ISF
Project mid-term assessment	Programme Manager	Mid-project (optional)	Participants, partner, ISF, key stakeholders
Project final evaluation	Programme Manager	End/after project implementation	Participants, partner, ISF, key stakeholders

PROGRAMME	FOCAL PERSON	TIMING/FREQUENCY	TARGET GROUP
Half-year financial review	Management committee	After Q1-2	Board
Country programme report	Country Director	Annual	Programme management
Performance report	Programme Manager	Annual	Board, donors, stakeholders, general public
Donor specific reports	Grants Manager	Annual (semiannual if requested)	Donors
Programme audit	Finance and Admin Director	Annual	Board, donors
Final (country) programme evaluation	Programme Manager	End/after programme implementation	Board, partners, donors, stakeholders, general public
Final report	Programme Manager	End/after programme implementation	Board, partners, donors, stakeholders, general public

changes are highlighted. Most indicators are monitored and reported on an annual basis, though biennial monitoring is done if changes are expected to be slower or if data collection is particularly time-consuming and complex. Results are disaggregated by country and gender whenever meaningful. Annual and final programme reports are published on ISF's website.

In addition to the programme logical framework, ISF has a separate logical framework and tracking table for

crosscutting HRBA elements that guide its programme design—equality and non-discrimination, and environmental sustainability (see Chapter 4.1 and Annex 2).

At the **project level**, ISF's monitoring systems encompass the same components (logical framework, indicator tracking table, and annual performance reports), complemented with detailed monitoring plans outlining how and when information will be collected and by

whom. Additionally, partners prepare quarterly activity and financial reports. To support partners in addressing emerging challenges and to verify quarterly reports, ISF conducts regular monitoring visits to project locations. Annual workshops are also organized to discuss monitoring findings and make any necessary adjustments in the project and activity plans. Furthermore, projects are audited annually, and audit recommendations regularly followed up during the verification of quarterly financial reports.

Evaluation

Evaluation is the process of assessing a project or a programme at a specific point in time to determine its impact and the extent to which its objectives have been met. ISF conducts external project and country level impact evaluations and internal meta-evaluations towards the end of its 4-year programmes.

When there are specific information and learning needs, ISF conducts internal midterm assessments, supported by external consultants where needed. These participatory exercises help to identify lessons learned and best practices, as well as to illuminate whether certain approaches and methodologies have been or could be successful.

Evaluation and assessment reports are published on ISF's website and shared with key stakeholders, including donors, local authorities, and other development actors who can benefit from the findings. The findings and recommendations are also discussed with project participants.

Findings and recommendations from several project evaluations and assessments conducted during the 2022-2025 programme have significantly contributed to the preparation of this programme. Insights from some of these evaluations are highlighted in Chapter 1.2. In addition, an MFA commissioned, KPMG implemented programme review (reported in 2024) has informed developing of ISF's internal financial and monitoring processes.

4.3 Risk management

The main purpose of risk management at ISF is to identify potential risks and develop treatment plans to help achieve strategic and programme objectives. This is particularly important in the high-risk environments where ISF operates.

The organization-wide risk management system includes a risk register, a risk management plan and a risk map (see Annex 3). ISF's policies on fraud and corruption, sexual exploitation and abuse, sexual and gender-based harassment, and staff security, as well as the complaints mechanism for reporting misconduct and the Ethics and Safety Guidelines for projects that target women and girls in vulnerable positions, are also central to the risk management system (Chapter 4.1).

The risk register outlines key risks and an assessment of their impact and likelihood in relation to ISF's strategic objectives and programme goals. It includes five types of risk categories: strategic, operational, funding, financial, and security risks. The risk mitigation plan complements the risk register by providing information on risk treatment and monitoring responsibilities for the most significant risks with high or extreme impact. The risk map is a visual presentation of the risk register. The three components of the risk management system are updated annually by the Management Committee, approved by the Board, and published on ISF's website.

Risks are identified and analyzed, and mitigation measures prepared, as part of ISF's planning processes. At the project level, this is done jointly by ISF and its partners. As of 2026, all projects will have project-level risk registers and risk mitigation plans as part of the project agreements. These will be updated annually and reported on in the regular project reports. Partners will also be required to set up their own mechanisms for reporting misconduct. Partners will be trained in risk management. At the country level, ISF develops mitigation measures for the most significant risks. These are discussed at the management level and incorporated into the organization-wide risk management tool when relevant.

- ¹ UN Committee for Development Policy (2024), [List of Least Developed Countries](#).
- ² World Population Review. [Fragile State Index 2024](#).
- ³ World Bank Group (2010), [Gender Data Portal](#), Ethiopia: Heads of households; Ethiopian Central Statistics Agency.
- ⁴ [Kenya Democratic and Health Survey](#) (2022).
- ⁵ OECD (2022), [Tax Policy and Gender Equality – A Stocktake of Country Approaches](#).
- ⁶ World Bank, [Women Business and Law Index](#) (2023).
- ⁷ SIHA (2024), [Gender, conflict, and Power Analysis: Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan](#).
- ⁸ SIHA (2024), [Somaliland's 2024 Presidential Elections: Is Gender Equality Possible?](#)
- ⁹ Directorate of National Statistics, Federal Government of Somalia (2020), [The Somali Health and Demographic Survey](#).
- ¹⁰ UNFPA Somalia [Annual Report 2022](#).
- ¹¹ [Kenya Democratic and Health Survey](#) (2022).
- ¹² Mulatu, W., & Sahilu, A. (2024), [United Against Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage: Voices of Communities to Bring Lasting Change in the Somali Region of Ethiopia](#).
- ¹³ World Meteorological Organization (2023), [The state of climate in Africa 2022](#)
- ¹⁴ UN Climate Change News (8th March, 2023), [Five Reasons Why Climate Action Needs Women](#)
- ¹⁵ Schalatek, L. (2022), [Gender and Climate Finance](#).
- ¹⁶ World Meteorological Organization (2023), [The state of climate in Africa 2022](#)
- ¹⁷ OECD (2024), [Development Finance for Gender Equality 2024](#).
- ¹⁸ BMZ (2019), [The Generation Dialogue Approach: Respecting traditions and envisioning change. What is the Generation Dialogue?](#)
- ¹⁹ Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2015), [Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing risk, promoting resilience and aiding recovery](#).
- ²⁰ OECD (2024) [Shifting Power with Partners: Toolkit for implementing the DAC Recommendation on Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance](#).