



## Innovation for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

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*The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is anything but business as usual. We need not incremental change, but bold change. We need an earthquake that will tilt the system altogether, because little and incremental steps will not give us the world that we want.” Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director, UN-Women*

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### Current Trajectories:

**50** years = parity in **politics** (World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report, 2015);

**81** years = parity in women's participation in the **economy** (World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report, 2015);

**95** years = parity in **girls' lower secondary education** for poorest 20% (Education For All Report, 2014)

### Executive summary

Current trajectories towards gender equality will not create the world we want. Innovation to find new, creative and impactful ways of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment is required. For UN-Women, innovation is outcome focused and driven by the imperative to accelerate progress towards achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. UN-Women has prioritized innovation as one of its strategic initiatives in order to achieve the results outlined in its strategic plan 2014-2017.

UN-Women has identified three key challenges for innovating to accelerate progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment: the under-representation of women as social innovators and entrepreneurs; the higher level of risks associated with innovation, which creates incentives to stick to the status quo; and the under-investment in innovation for gender equality.

In order to respond to these challenges and leverage innovation to accelerate progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment, UN-Women adopts a three pronged approach: co-identifying potential high impact innovations, notably by promoting women as innovators; testing, prototyping and piloting, supported by rigorous monitoring and measuring; and scaling up successful innovations to increase positive impacts in the lives of women and girls.

While UN-Women has made significant progress in terms of this innovation trajectory, additional resources, capacities and partnerships are required for UN-Women to continue to identify potential solutions and scale up successes. UN-Women will continue to focus on strengthening internal innovation capacities, embedding innovation throughout the organization, expanding and broadening partnerships, and improving monitoring, measuring and evaluating results from its innovation investments. UN-Women will also ensure that its experience, lessons learned and best practices from innovation will be embedded in its new strategic plan to accelerate progress for every woman and every girl worldwide and achieve gender equality.

## I. Why Innovate?

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals call for transformative shifts, integrated approaches, and solutions to structural barriers to sustainable development. Achieving these ambitious goals, and notably gender equality and women's empowerment, requires a transformation of social structures, value systems, institutions, behaviors and practices. Based on current trajectories existing interventions will not suffice to achieve a Planet 50:50 by 2030.

Similarly, the transformational shifts required to implement Agenda 2030 in a fast evolving and increasingly complex 21<sup>st</sup> century, challenges the United Nations to constantly search for dynamic solutions to ensure it remains relevant and responsive. Innovative approaches that disrupt “business as usual” are no longer optional, but central to successfully delivering the SDGs for all.

UN-Women was created to accelerate progress towards the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment. As a small entity with limited resources and a large and comprehensive mandate, UN-Women depends on multi-stakeholder partnerships and on innovative approaches to bring transformative change in the lives of women and girls worldwide. The creation of UN-Women itself, as a product of UN reform, was an innovation by Member States, establishing a composite entity with a triple mandate of normative support, UN coordination and operational activities. UN-Women's unique nature positions it strategically to find new, cost-effective, and high impact approaches to achieve its goals. As highlighted in UN-Women's mid-term review of its strategic plan 2014-2017<sup>1</sup>, innovation is one of UN-Women strategic initiatives to accelerate implementation and achieve results in all six impact areas of its strategic plan.

## II. What does UN-Women mean by Innovation?

In order to strike a balance between defining innovation neither too broadly, nor too narrowly, UN-Women is guided by the 4Ps of innovation<sup>2</sup>, which refer to products, services, or processes that go beyond traditional approaches, challenge the status quo, add greater value and often – and ideally – are informed by human centered design. It also refers to changing the positioning of products or processes, and dominant paradigms.

The 4Ps help UN-Women balance building innovation into processes and programming over the medium to long term, with the need to find innovative solutions to urgent problems and achieve specific outcomes in the short term.

### The 4 Ps of Innovation

- **Product innovation:** introduces or improves a product or service to end users.
- **Process innovation:** improves the processes through which products and services are created or delivered.
- **Position innovation:** refers to changes in how a specific product or process is perceived or used.
- **Paradigm innovation:** defines or redefines the dominant paradigm of an organization or sector.

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women on progress made on the strategic plan, 2014-2017, including the midterm review of the strategic plan. Annual session of 2016. (UNW/2016/6)

<sup>2</sup> Developed by John Bessant and Joe Tidd and featured in Nester (2016)

UN-Women has endorsed the ‘Innovation Principles’<sup>3</sup> along with other partners during the ‘Innovation in the UN’ session of the Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP in February 2015. In line with these principles, positive outcomes and impacts in the lives of women and girls are front and center of UN-Women’s innovation efforts.

### III. Key challenges for innovating to accelerate progress towards gender equality and women’s empowerment

UN-Women has identified three major challenges with regard to innovating to accelerate progress towards gender equality and women’s empowerment.

The first challenge is **women’s under-representation as social innovators and entrepreneurs**<sup>4</sup>, especially in STEM<sup>5</sup> sectors, which have a high level of influence on innovation, as well as in design thinking and co-creation processes. There is also a disconnect between the social innovation and gender equality communities – while gender perspectives are not adequately reflected in innovation, innovation is not mainstreamed into the gender equality community and its work. Hence there is a limited understanding within both communities of where and how innovation for gender equality will be most effective and lead to systemic change. This can result in a lack of inclusiveness or applicability of innovation for women and girls (e.g. technologies that do not correspond with an average women’s physical size or services that do not align with women’s routines, etc.).

Innovating for gender equality requires a rethink the way problems are defined, the way priorities are identified, who is engaged, how they are engaged, the way in which solutions are delivered, and the ways we learn. Since women best understand the challenges they face in their daily lives and the barriers they experience with regard to gender equality, they are in the best position to define innovative solutions.

Second, innovation is associated with higher levels of risks, which can create incentives to **stick to the status quo**. As societies move from established practices to new ways of doing things, there may be unintended or unexpected side effects. Internally, as an organization, there is also a higher risk of failure, i.e. not achieving targets. UN-Women’s traditional development funding is based on medium to long term planning with detailed logical frameworks and budget breakdowns to help mitigate fiduciary risk - a priority for most contributing partners. However, while managing fiduciary risk in this way helps ensure that funding is spent in the way expected, it may discourage adaptation and innovation. It also creates tensions with outcome risks, particularly where greater flexibility to achieve better outcomes involves operational issues such as procurement or human resource management. Paradoxically, innovations that take measured risk to accelerate progress towards achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment, can reduce the risk of not achieving development targets by promoting adaptive, iterative approaches and learning. Failures, when they do occur, tend to be ‘fast and early’. This facilitates ‘adaptive management’ – an iterative, learning-based process of decision-making in the face of uncertainty. Adaptive management techniques are becoming increasingly valuable, relevant and practiced in today’s fast evolving, uncertain and complex context. It is

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<sup>3</sup> The Principles are: design with the user; understand the existing ecosystem; design for scale; build for sustainability; be data driven; use open standards, open data, open source and open innovation; reuse and improve; do no harm; be collaborative.

<sup>4</sup> For example, only 9% of apps in Europe are created by women (European Commission, WSIS+10 Presentation). Innovation and tech hubs worldwide on average have less than 10% participation of women. In Europe, London leads with 9% representation. (TelefonicaStartup Ecosystem Report 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

critical to also consider the opportunity cost of not innovating, and the potential reward in terms of better, more effective and efficient results.

The two challenges above contribute to the third challenge – **an under-investment in innovation for gender equality** at the different stages of the innovation cycle. The Global Innovation Exchange– a marketplace that connects funders, innovators, users and solution seekers – shows that the total value of funding opportunities for innovations in gender is one third less than the average of other sectors.<sup>6</sup> There is also a substantial investment gap by venture capital in women entrepreneurs - for example in the UK, male entrepreneurs are 86% more likely to be funded by venture capital<sup>7</sup> than their female counterparts.<sup>8</sup> Conversely, in the US found only 6% of global venture capital partners were women.<sup>9</sup>

Innovation for gender equality requires flexible grant funding for the early stage innovation investment, technical assistance, and monitoring. However, such resources are very limited. There is also an acute financing gap between early stage grant funded innovations, and later stage innovations, which are social and commercially viable investments that can be brought to scale by other sources of finance (including capital assistance<sup>10</sup> and social impact investment<sup>11</sup>).<sup>12</sup> This has resulted in a myriad of successful small innovative pilots that have never had the opportunity to create large scale impact. One of reasons for this financing gap is the challenge in bringing development community and private sector together. In order for innovation to be harnessed to accelerate progress towards gender equality and women’s empowerment, it is critical to support successful innovative pilots to access these new and innovation sources of finance. This will require greater capacity within the development sector in understanding and catalyzing social sources of finance.

#### IV. UN-Women’s strategic approach to innovating for gender equality

In line with UN-Women’s objective to leverage innovation to accelerate progress for gender equality and women’s empowerment, and in order to address the challenges outlined above, UN-Women adopts a three-pronged approach to innovation:

- Co-identifying potential high impact innovations to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment, notably by promoting women as innovators;
- Testing, prototyping and piloting, supported by rigorous M&E systems to facilitate adaptive management; and
- Scaling up innovations to increase impact in the lives of women and girls.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.globalinnovationexchange.org/sectors>

<sup>7</sup> Venture capital is financing from investors provided to startup companies and small business that are believed to have long-term growth potential. Venture capital is often provided by high net worth individuals – also known as angel investors.

<sup>8</sup> Telefonica – StartUp DNA Report

<sup>9</sup> Report from Babson College (2014)

<sup>10</sup> I.e debt finance.

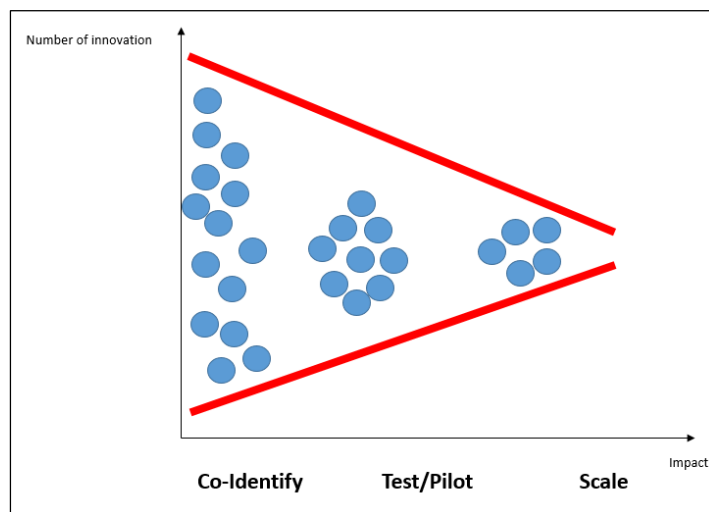
<sup>11</sup> Social impact investment is defined as “the provision of finance to organisations addressing social needs with the explicit expectation of a measurable social, as well as financial, return. Social impact investment has become increasingly relevant in today’s economic setting as social challenges have mounted while public funds in many countries are under pressure. New approaches are needed for addressing social and economic challenges, including new models of public and private partnership which can fund, deliver and scale innovative solutions from the ground up”. (OECD, 2015. Social impact investment – building the evidence base).

<sup>12</sup> This gap is often referred to as the ‘valley of death’. See Wong, J. 2016.

Cross-cutting UN-Women’s three-pronged approach is also an emphasis on partnering learning and strengthening internal capacities.

This three-pronged approach creates a funnel that allows management to evaluate and select high potential impact innovation opportunities. The goal of the innovation funnel is to eliminate weak ideas before they consume excessive resources while allowing strong ideas to filter through the process and be scaled up (Figure 1). While many opportunities were explored in the early implementation stage of strategy, UN-Women is now gradually balancing investment across the three innovation stages.

**Figure 1: UN-Women’s three –pronged approach to innovation**



The Entity’s three-pronged approach was developed and consolidated to a large extent with the support of the Government of Denmark,<sup>13</sup> which provided UN-Women with resources to establish an Innovation Facility.

The following section outlines UN-Women’s three-pronged approach, and highlights selected examples within each. A more comprehensive list of UN-Women’s innovation work may be found on the **Global Innovation Exchange** (<https://www.globalinnovationexchange.org/>)<sup>14</sup> and on Empower Women (<https://www.empowerwomen.org/en>).

<sup>13</sup> Since 2014 the Danish government has committed 5% of its annual core contribution towards a UN-Women Innovation Facility.

<sup>14</sup> The Global Innovation Exchange is an open-source platform for innovators, funders and experts to connect and share relevant information that supports the development community. It brings together innovations, funding opportunities, experts and resources over a wide range of development sectors, into one place. It is supported by the US Global Development Lab (USAID).

## V. Co-identifying potential high impact innovations to accelerate progress towards gender equality and women’s empowerment

UN-Women engages a broad community of problem solvers – especially women themselves – to find new inclusive and appropriate solutions to barriers to tackle gender inequalities and challenge the status quo. This approach borrows principles from participatory development and venture capital:<sup>15</sup> anyone, anywhere in the world can respond to a call or challenge, or receive an award for the most innovative, promising solution to a particular problem. Investments are selected based on proposals with the highest potential to achieve UN-Women’s objective: scaling up results to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment. UN-Women’s open calls use performance criteria to determine whether seed innovation investments should receive follow-on funding.

In this process, UN-Women promotes a design thinking and co-creation process. This process involves engaging end-users in new ways - as key participants in identifying problems and challenging assumptions, in developing potential solutions, in programme design and testing, and as sources of ongoing feedback on recalibration. Design thinking also entails active consultation of people and partners working outside of our normal channels.<sup>16</sup>

With funding from its Innovation Facility, UN-Women has created an **internal innovation incubator**, which trains and supports internal innovation champions to identify new approaches and solutions to accelerate progress towards gender equality and women’s empowerment. Through the group of champions at global, regional and country level, 10 innovative projects, guided by a design thinking and prototype approach have been launched. These projects range from engaging home-based women in the sharing economy through social ventures, to trials around behavioral therapy to prevent violence against women, to using service journey mapping and insights around rural women farmers’ uptake of technology. A brief overview of key initiatives supported is provided in figure 2.

**Figure 2: UN-Women’s Internal Innovation Incubator**

Country	Project Focus	Region	Project Focus
<b>Moldova Country Office</b>	In partnership with the local government innovation lab and various stakeholders at the community level, prototyping a project on Ending Violence Against Women using a Co-creation and Positive Deviance approach. These approaches inform the project design and implementation through 1) active engagement of key stake-holders and service-providers and 2) involving survivors of violence as subject experts.	<b>Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office</b>	Control trials on the use of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in the prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls in Panama in partnership with Panamanian cognitive therapists.

<sup>15</sup> Venture capital is financing from investors provided to startup companies and small business that are believed to have long-term growth potential. Like an open call or challenge, the first step in accessing venture capital is to submit a business plan, which details the business model. The most promising models are funded.

<sup>16</sup> For example, design thinking includes using foresight methods, which require engaging outliers working at the margins and cutting edge of areas that intersect with our development challenges.

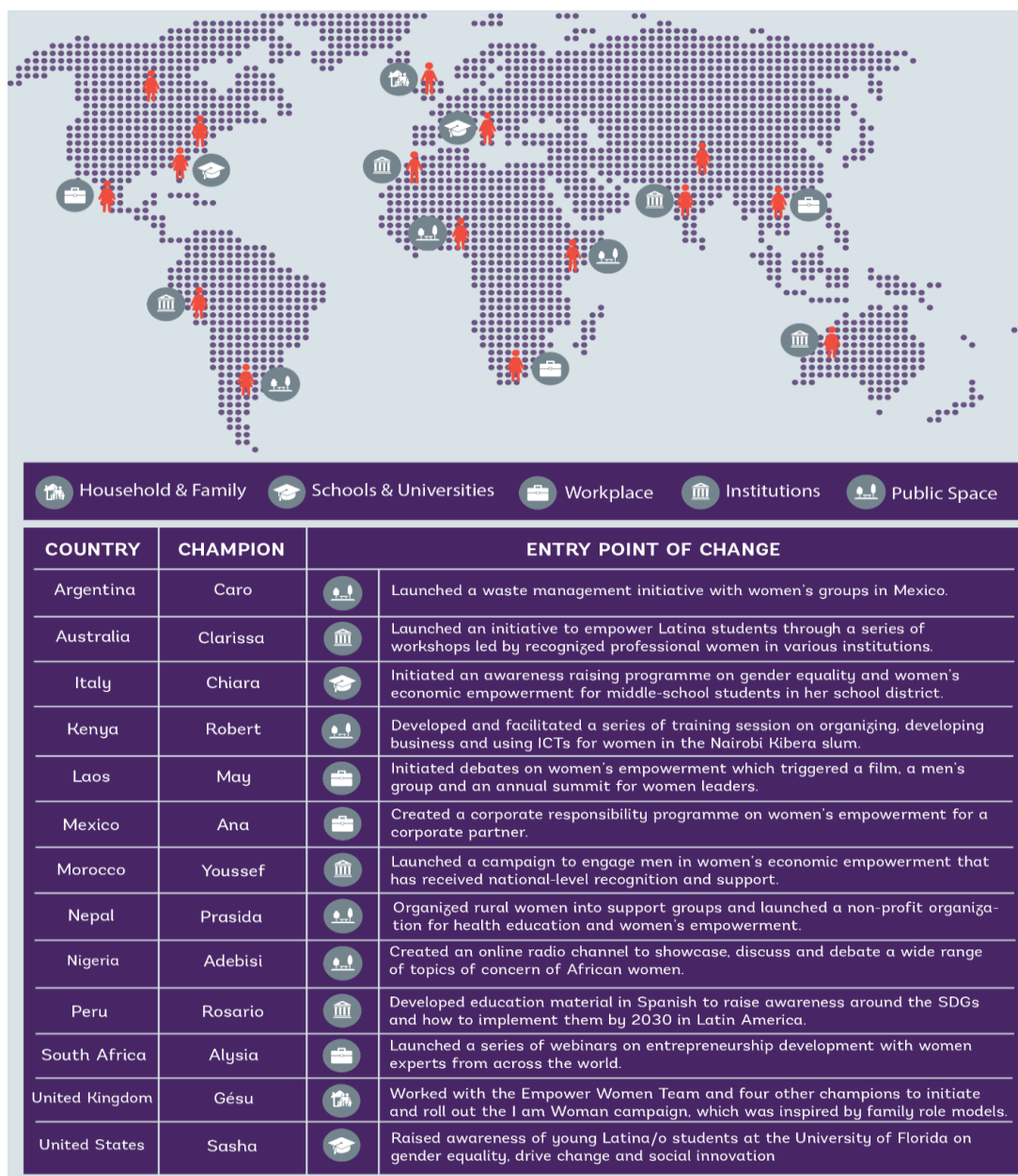
<b>Georgia Country Office</b>	Prototyping a project in partnership with the head of government administration on the use of an empathetic design approach to develop a course on prevention of workplace sexual harassment for public servants in Georgia. This project is being rolled-out both through practical trainings and also in the form of an interactive, electronic course.	<b>East and Southern Africa Regional Office</b>	Conducting customer journeys to establish the economic factors that influence acquisition of post-harvest loss technologies by rural women farmers. The aim is to support women's economic empowerment through uptake of such technologies.
<b>Pakistan Country Office</b>	Project focuses on the use of technology to economically empower women in the informal food industry. Home-based women workers are linked to new markets through a technology-based food ordering platform where they showcase their home-made meals to prospective customers.	<b>UN-Women headquarters (Fund for Gender Equality)</b>	The fund for Gender Equality is in the process of opening an innovation lab within the fund to capture and support grantee innovations.
<b>Mali Country Office</b>	Business development boot camp as well as digital entrepreneurship skills training for young women. The entrepreneurs will afterwards be incubated for a year by the Agency of Information Technologies and Communication (AGETIC), receiving capacity building and individual coaching and skills development to support them build business prototypes that would be introduced into the market through digital platforms. Businesses range from an application to alert and prevent violence against women to digital business models.	<b>UN-Women Headquarters (Private Sector)</b>	Development of a digital platform to encourage and increase individual giving as a supplementary resource mobilization strategy for UN-Women.

Similarly, UN-Women calls on external champions to identify innovative solutions for gender equality. In 2013, Empower Women<sup>17</sup> ([www.empowerwomen.org](http://www.empowerwomen.org)) initiated a six-month open call for its **Global Champions for Women's Economic Empowerment Programme** and has since been joined by 250+ Champions of Change from 60+ countries in four cohorts. The Champions represent Empower Women's "eyes and ears, and extended arms" to ensure that change for women's economic empowerment is reaching communities around the world, above and beyond Empower Women's online space. The Champion of Change programme enables "ordinary-extraordinary" women and men to identify local challenges in their communities, receive capacity-building and coaching and then work with the Empower Women team and peers to conceptualize solutions to these challenges.

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<sup>17</sup> Empower Women is implemented by UN-Women with financial support from the Government of Canada.

**Figure 3: Institutional entry points used by Empower Women Champions**



As a direct result of Empower Women’s learning and capacity-building activities, many of these female and male Champions have been able identify new ways of influencing policy changes in their workplaces and communities, and empower women and girls by raising their confidence, awareness and capacity. Additionally, they have also been empowered themselves from their new knowledge and leadership functions acquired as Champions, and have reported benefiting from new or better jobs and higher salaries, and having started businesses and expanded their markets. Figure 3 provides some examples of the entry-points that Empower Women Champions have used to initiate ripple effects of change in their local communities. These



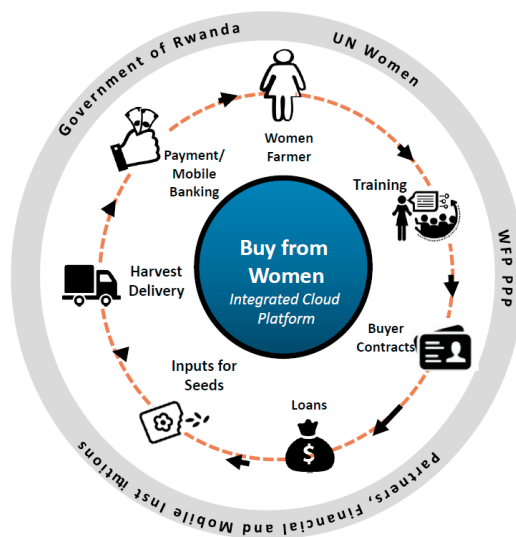
entry-points include: (1) Household and family, (2) Schools and universities, (3) Workplace, (4) Institutions and (5) Public space.

## VI. Testing, prototyping and piloting

In order to better manage innovation and development risks for both UN-Women and other investors, UN-Women prioritizes, tests, prototypes and pilots potentially disruptive technologies or innovative models identified that can address specific problems or underlying barriers faced by women. In such cases, UN-Women works with partners to take these through the innovation life cycle in order to assess whether it can be brought to scale. This approach allows UN-Women to commit to achieving specific outputs and outcomes, while at the same time, provides UN-Women with the space to adapt, learn, and iterate.

In order to better predict failures and successes, and to identify innovations with potential to scale-up, testing, prototyping and piloting is accompanied with rigorous monitoring and measuring of results. The data and evidence generated from such monitoring, can unlock additional finance to bring successes to scale.

For example, in Rwanda, UN-Women in close partnership with the government and the World Food Programme (WFP) is piloting the **Buy from Women Enterprise Platform** - a data-driven, enterprise platform that combines an open source end-to-end cloud-based, and mobile enabled supply chain system to connect women farmers to information, finance and markets. This product innovation enables women farmers to have a 360-degree view of the entire business lifecycle. It is mobile enabled, and provides real time reports in dashboard form of key performance indicators including forecasted yields and sales revenue. The registration process includes a mapping of farmers' land plots, which is then used to generate a yield forecast. It also captures farmers' and cooperatives' experience with finance.



By the end of July 2016, about 1,000 farmers in Rwanda have been registered on the Buy from Women Platform. By the end of October 2016, an estimated 4,000 additional



farmers will join the Platform. The information about farmers' expected yield and financial track record captured through the Platform has the potential to unlock social impact investment in processing and post-harvesting labour and time-saving equipment for target cooperatives. Such equipment will enable farmers to avoid distress selling, receive higher prices, and reduce post-harvest losses. Once planting begins, in order to supplement extension services and address the gap in women farmers' access to such services, the Buy From Women Platform will send text messages to farmers with important climate resilient agricultural extension information. Since the

Platform uses open-source software, it can be extended to additional farmers within and outside Rwanda at low-cost. Data collection, monitoring and measuring results are built into the system.<sup>18</sup> This will enable an assessment of the financial and socio-economic impact of the Platform, which in the post-pilot stage could mobilize social impact investment, capital assistance and diaspora and crowd funding.<sup>19</sup>

A second example of an ongoing pilot programme is **IMPACT 10X10X10** within the UN-Women created HeForShe campaign. The IMPACT 10X10X10 is a three to five-year effort to advance gender equality and women's empowerment through top-down change, engaging global leaders across three sectors: government, the private sector and academia. These 30 leaders are at the forefront of gender equality, serving as public champions for change and committing to concrete progress within their own institutions. By demonstrating progress in a select group of companies, countries and universities committed to equality, the pilot programme aims to scale up successful approaches to institutions across the world.

UN-Women will also be piloting **digital fundraising**. Building on UN-Women's engagement at the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in August 2016, UN-Women will start developing its digital fundraising infrastructure, in partnerships with a leading digital strategy agency. A dedicated 'landing page' will be developed to feature "One Win Leads to Another", a joint project of UN-Women and the International Olympic Committee focusing on the empowerment of adolescent girls. The Landing Page will carry relevant information and data including dollar handles and human interest stories focusing on the girls who are beneficiaries of the project. Most importantly, this will provide the critical infrastructure required to handle mass donations, including a customer engagement tool with required ability to collect and store data that allows to send personalized messages (emails, e-updates etc.) to donors and help optimize existing online payment mechanisms.

## **VII. Scaling up innovation to increase positive impacts in the lives of women and girls**

UN-Women scales up successful innovations<sup>20</sup> by either promoting their replication and/or facilitating their access to finance to extend their activities.

UN-Women promotes the replication of successful initiatives through expanding awareness of potential entrepreneurs and beneficiaries, reaching new target groups and influencing the broader innovation community and the larger public.

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<sup>18</sup> The system registration process collects baseline information on sales revenue. The system then tracks key metrics related to yields, sales volume and prices.

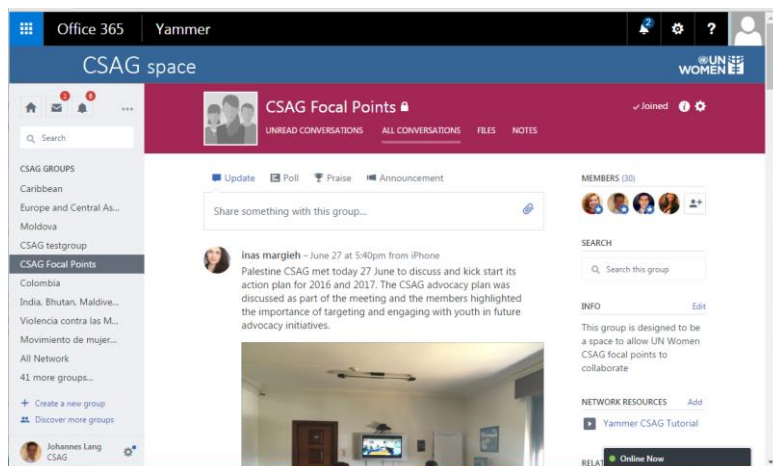
<sup>19</sup> Crowd funding is raising money from a large number of people (including from the diaspora), often through web-based platforms.

<sup>20</sup> These could be internal innovations that UN-Women has successfully tested, or external innovations, including from open-sources.

For example, UN-Women leverages online social media to increase its engagement with the public at large and connect its key constituents. UN-Women uses **Snapchat** – one of the world’s fastest growing social apps, with an estimated 150 million daily users and 10 billion daily video views, also known for being the app of choice for youth with 60 percent of its users between 13 and 24 years old – **to increase its engagement with youth on UN-Women’s mandate**. In an innovative partnership, UN-Women and Snapchat created a joint first-ever pre-produced Live Story for International Women’s Day 2016 including snaps from UN-Women partners and other remarkable women from around the world, which were viewed by 12.5 million people, with 125,000 screenshots were taken. The pre-produced Live Story combined video contributions from UN-Women partners with live contributions from people around the world. Users who watched on their app had a chance to contribute their own Snaps by using a special International Women’s Day overlay filter, telling their stories and honouring the remarkable women in their lives. UN-Women has been building on this innovative use of social media since International Women’s Day and has launched its Snapchat presence in the lead up to the Rio Olympic Games.



Similarly, UN-Women is building an online collaboration network based on **Yammer** – an existing, popular enterprise social media platform - to connect **UN-Women’s civil society advisory group (CSAG)** members across countries and regions, and enable consultations beyond individual groups. The CSAGs are a key institutional mechanism for UN-Women to engage

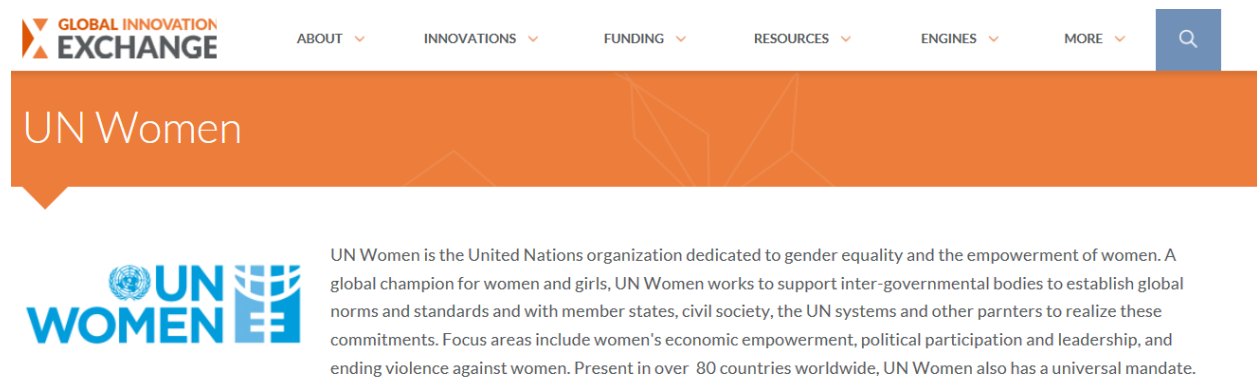


with civil society at global, regional and national level. CSAG members consist of eminent leaders of grass-roots, rural and community-based groups, and indigenous peoples’ organizations; youth activists; feminist faith actors; scholars, and male advocates for gender equality and women’s rights. The CSAG’s representation aims to facilitate a broader dialogue with the social justice constituencies and serve not only to inform and sharpen UN-Women’s initiatives drawing from the diverse expertise, experience, outreach and knowledge, but also to voice civil society’s priorities and facilitate their reflection in global spaces.

The CSAG Yammer social network has already been tested and piloted with key groups. UN-Women is now focusing on scaling this platform to include all CSAG members in all groups (more than 400 CSO representatives in 39 CSAGs). By providing a safe space for solidarity building and strengthening constituencies of gender equality, leveraging Yammer has enabled an open dialogue across the local, subnational, national, regional and global levels to develop common strategies, for example on the universality and localization of the SDGs or on civil society’s role in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda.

In the traditional media space, UN-Women scales up innovation by replicating new, creative pro-bono editorial partnerships with a number of different media outlets. In March 2016, UN-Women launched the **Step it Up for Gender Equality Media Compact**, which calls on media outlets to play an active part in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, by focusing on gender equality and women’s rights issues via two fronts: by disrupting stereotypes and biases in their reporting; and by increasing the number of women in the media, particularly in leadership and decision-making roles. Close to 40 leading outlets, from Thomson Reuters Foundation, to France 24, Jakarta Post, Marie Claire and others signed on as founding members of the Step it Up for Gender Equality Media Compact, and others continue to join every week. The Media Compact functions as an alliance of media organizations who are committed to playing an active role in advancing gender equality issues within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals. The outlets will implement the compact by increasing the focus on women’s rights and gender equality issues through high-quality coverage, including the use of UN-Women’s editorial packages, complemented by gender-sensitive corporate practices. The Step it Up for Gender Equality Media Compact comes closely on the heels, and is an expansion, of the success of UN-Women’s Beijing+20 Media Compact, launched during the Beijing+20 campaign, where media and news outlets were similarly encouraged to increase coverage of women in the news and in their newsrooms. During the 1.5-year campaign, from 2014 to 2015, thirty-four media outlets joined the Compact, spanning a variety of print, broadcast and online outlets, from Asia-Pacific, the Arab States, Africa and the Americas. Thousands of reports, editorials and feature stories were produced as a result, profiling courageous women and giving voice to those marginalized.

UN-Women is also part of the effort to influence the broader innovation community to gender equality and promote a stronger engagement with the gender equality community. UN-Women created a microsite on the **Global Innovation Exchange** to capture and share gender-related innovations through the Exchange worldwide. The gender microsite also enables improved innovation horizon scanning, and will help identify focus areas of work and gaps that can inform organizational planning and investments around gender equality programming.



Successful pilots can also be extended by embedding these within the processes of a larger ecosystem. For example, within the UN system – UN-Women has developed the UN System Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (**UN-SWAP**), the first unified accountability framework for gender equality which over the past four years has led to the coalescing of over 90 per cent of all UN entities and is now used beyond the UN system. It constitutes an innovative method to better embed and mainstream gender equality into all functions of an institution in a new and different way. It has yielded consistent results in terms of an unprecedented level of uptake, systematic monitoring and uniform reporting over several years.

In 2015, almost 75 per cent of UN entities reported having gender policies, up from 40 per cent in 2012. The implementation of the UN-SWAP has been catalyzed by a network of over 300 focal points, double the strength of its 150 members in 2012, spread across the UN System. In a system as complex as that of the UN, harmonized accountability systems and sustainability of networks supporting them is both new and rare. The UN-SWAP has been replicated in the UN System on other themes, such as youth and indigenous peoples. The System-wide Action Plan on Youth was endorsed in 2013 and the System-wide Action Plan on the Rights of Indigenous People was finalized in 2015.

In 2015, the United Kingdom National Health System (NHS) worked collaboratively with UN-Women, to review and develop a plan for action on gender equality in the NHS, learning from the UN system and in particular the UN-SWAP. The report recommended the NHS adopt a focus, champion, goals, task force, accountability framework and processes to change its organizational culture in order to address the under representation of women in leadership, despite 77% of the NHS workforce being women. The report was launched in December 2015 by NHS Employers in collaboration with UN-Women and the Health Services Journal (HSJ), and included 12 co-signatories from national NHS bodies including the Chief Medical Officer. As a result of this collaboration, the Chairman of NHS Improvement, the body responsible for all hospitals in the NHS, has taken up the role of champion. Board level data will be collated, the HSJ have started a campaign to meet the goal of 50:50 by 2020.

While some successful pilots can be replicated by a broader community at present scale, others need access **to new sources of finance** (social impact investment, capital assistance, crowd/diaspora funding) to further develop their strategic capabilities and extend their activities. UN-Women supports the growth of these successful pilots by helping them to establish a track record. Data driven results from successful pilots can unlock women's accesses to new and innovative sources of finance. Notable, business data systematically captured on UN-Women's enterprise platforms has the potential to allow women to build a track record and to provide investors with the information they need to lower risk, and thus increase women's access to much needed finance. In addition, UN-Women is also exploring the potential of establishing facilities financed with capital rather than grant assistance, to provide women entrepreneurs with low-cost credit to expand their businesses

## VIII. Lessons learned and upcoming innovation pipeline

### *Lessons learned*

Through its work and its collaboration with a wide range of partners – other UN agencies, Member State innovation hubs, civil society, the private sector, and innovators and end-users themselves, UN-Women has drawn some lessons to promote gender equality through innovation. The key lessons are summarized in the section below:

- **Applying innovation to internal processes:** Organizational processes and culture plays an important role in the innovation. It is critical to ensure that UN-Women's investment to create innovation solutions and new approaches to accelerate progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment outside the organization, is complemented with efforts within the organization to develop processes and approaches that are iterative, flexible and can adapt to a rapidly evolving development context.

- **Organizational capacity and skills:** organizations also need the right mix of capacity and skills to drive innovation. For example, UN-Women has found the need to combine traditional gender expertise at headquarters and field level, with design thinking, ICT, and business development expertise. This can be challenging to organize and finance. One of key lessons learned from other UN agencies is that innovation requires dedicated time and space within organizations, and often dedicated units to drive innovation are needed.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, it is important not only to focus on this unit as the source of innovation. Instead, innovation must be embedded and extended organizational wide. Such an organizational approach creates a “bias towards action” – moving the debate of what innovation is within the organization, to simply getting down to work and showing it.
- **Adequate blend of financial resources:** Innovation requires a mix of different funding strategies that provide UN-Women with adequate and flexible resources to be able to invest in innovation in a meaningful manner. Resources need to adequately cover grant investments to source innovations (e.g. prizes for open call proposals), technical assistance for early stage innovations to grow, and measure results, as well as capital and social finance to scale up successful pilots. UN-Women’s flexible Innovation Facility has been central to promoting innovation for gender equality both within and outside UN-Women. Particularly in the early stages of an organization’s innovation journey, such flexible grant funding is vital. However, access to adequate technical assistance and capital finance will be key to bring innovations to maturity. Related to the first point on organizational capacity and skills, this will also require UN-Women to invest in the financial literacy of staff engaged in late stage innovation and broaden its traditional range of partnerships to reach out to the social impact and capital finance communities.
- **Measuring results:** Due to the inherent nature of innovative initiatives, there is an essential need to rigorously monitor their implementation and effectiveness to learn from their success or failure. This requires greater investment in monitoring, measuring and evaluating than well established and standard approaches where the indicators and underlying theories of change are more firmly established and broadly accepted. Linking innovative approaches, ideas, and practices to measurable, data driven results is also a pre-condition to assess social impact finance. Gathering such data driven evidence comes with costs that must be factored into testing, prototyping and piloting.
- **Measured risk and learning from failure:** Innovations that take measured risk needs to be accompanied with allowances for the possibility of failure. Both contributing partners to UN-Women’s work as well internally within UN-Women, it is important to create space for and accept failure. This in turn ensures that lessons can be systematically captured and learned from. Measured risk in innovation should also encourage UN-Women and its partners to balance the risks of failing fast from innovating, with the costs of the current trajectory.
- **Strengthening partnerships and collaboration, including between UN agencies on innovation:** A number of UN agencies are prioritizing and finding game-changing solutions to development problems. Greater creative collaboration across agencies holds great promise for more and better innovations. The experience of the UN-SWAP is a concrete example in this regard.

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<sup>21</sup> Nesta (2016). Innovation in international development.

### *Upcoming innovation pipeline*

In line with its maturation trajectory for innovation, UN-Women will endeavor to bring to scale a first generation of pilots and will also continue to co-identify a second generation of potential innovations with high impact and test potential solutions for scale. The following section provides an overview of a few examples in this regard.

#### **Taking successes to scaling in 2017/2018**

- In order to accelerate women's economic empowerment, based on the results from the Buy From Women Platform in agriculture, UN-Women may **extend similar enterprise platforms for women entrepreneurs in other sectors**, notably in women entrepreneurship in decentralized sustainable energy. UN-Women will also focus on linking enterprise platforms to global social finance and crowdfunding. Such innovative sources of finance have the potential to address the gender gap in terms of women entrepreneurs' access to finance. In some cases, UN-Women may act as an early stage social impact investor within its traditional programming in order to lay the foundation to scale up proven successes. **Testing, prototyping, piloting in 2017/2018.**
- Some of the main barriers limiting women's economic empowerment, particularly for young women, are their limited access to education and skills development opportunities, and the mismatch between formal education and emerging labour market skills requirements. Listening to feedback provided by users of Empower Women, and leveraging this virtual platform and community, UN-Women is in the process of developing a prototype for a **Virtual Skills School** to help women and girls leapfrog ineffective, low-quality or inaccessible educational and skills development opportunities, including by using technology and innovative learning pedagogies. This will enable young women to acquire critical 21st century life and soft skills, including digital skills. A particular focus will be on providing second chance education to girls who have not entered or have dropped out of secondary school. Training for teachers and educators on women's empowerment issues, gender-based social norms and biases will constitute another important element of the Virtual Skills School. UN-Women's own learning materials will be systematized and adapted. Course packages will be created with partners based on different learning pathways. Issues of women's empowerment will be integrated throughout the platform.
- **Behavioral Science with BIT and UNDP:** One of the main challenges towards effectively addressing gender-based violence whether in terms of prevention or response to the phenomena is the ability to influence behavior change, alter power relations and societal norms and attitudes. One of the reasons why this has remained a persistent problem is due to a lack of data and evidence on what works in developing countries. UN-Women, the Behavioral Insights Team (BIT) and UNDP are working together to conduct trials to on-going GBV projects using a four-step methodology borrowing insights from a behavioral science lens on what approaches work most effectively in programming towards preventing gender-based violence.
- In partnership with Global Pulse, UN-Women is working to frame the potential and limitations of the **Data Revolution** through a gender lens, establish proof of concept and locally based research projects on Big Data and women's empowerment and gender equality, exploring the use of Big Data for real time monitoring of the SDGs and exploring innovative means through which big data can be harnessed to disintermediate development programming processes.

- Based on a number of discussions with humanitarian partners, notably UNHCR, ICRC, and Mercy Corps, UN-Women will pilot the use of the **distributed ledger technology** to link refugee cash transfers to longer term livelihoods and recovery through the creation of an economic identity. The distributed ledger technology is disrupting the way digital financial transactions are made by allowing direct transfers of digital assets without the need of intermediaries and associated costs, and maintaining an immutable historical record of transactions. Such a technology will enable refugees to build, own and maintain their economic transaction history, creating a track record that is not lost when they move from place to place. Such a track record, in turn can more easily facilitate their access to finance and other services, promoting recovery and resilience.

#### **Co-identifying potential high impact innovations for gender equality**

- UN-Women has partnered with the African Enterprise Challenge Fund in order to launch a **gender-sensitive challenge** to provide investment support to the private sector for new and innovative ideas in financial intermediation services, energy service delivery and models for women entrepreneurs and customers to accelerate universal sustainable energy access. The challenge fund will initially target an investment of up to \$10 million in Senegal and Morocco.

### **IX. Moving forward**

Based on its lessons learned and building on its successes, UN-Women will continue to invest in strengthening its internal innovation capacity, including by bringing together a small dedicated innovation team. Such a team can also guide others around innovation, and promote cultural and process change and learning. This will support UN-Women to continue to embed innovation through the entity, including in its programming and business processes. For instance, UN-Women will be introducing the design thinking and co-creation process into the strategic note formulations by its country offices. An additional cohort of innovations champions is also expected to be created, further strengthening UN-Women's innovation capacity at the regional and country levels.

UN-Women will continue to expand and strengthen its partnerships with UN agencies, Member States, civil society, and the private sector on innovation for gender equality will also be required. A number of Member States, civil society organizations and UN agencies have innovation development hubs. UN-Women welcomes the opportunity to collaborate more closely together.

UN-Women will also invest in strengthening monitoring, measuring and evaluating results from its innovation investments. This will ensure that UN-Women directs its limited resources towards areas with the greatest potential for impact.

Finally, UN-Women will ensure that all its experience, lessons learned and best practices from innovation will be embedded in its new strategic plan to accelerate the achievement of gender equality for every woman and every girl worldwide.