

Supporting inclusive democratic local governance by strengthening gender sensitivity in fragile contexts



VNG International's mission for gender sensitive local governance

VNG International aims to achieve its core mission "Building better futures" by strengthening democratic and inclusive local governance. We take this mission seriously and intend to take everyone on board.

A better future is one in which inequalities are reduced. More responsive local governments are key in achieving this result. VNG International believes a responsive local government is both effective and democratically accountable:

- **Effective** - service delivery has to be inclusive and accessible to all;
- **Accountable** - they must account to all their citizens for their actions, without discrimination on the basis of gender or any other category.

VNG International employs its expertise to enhance inclusive decision making between local governments and all their citizens.



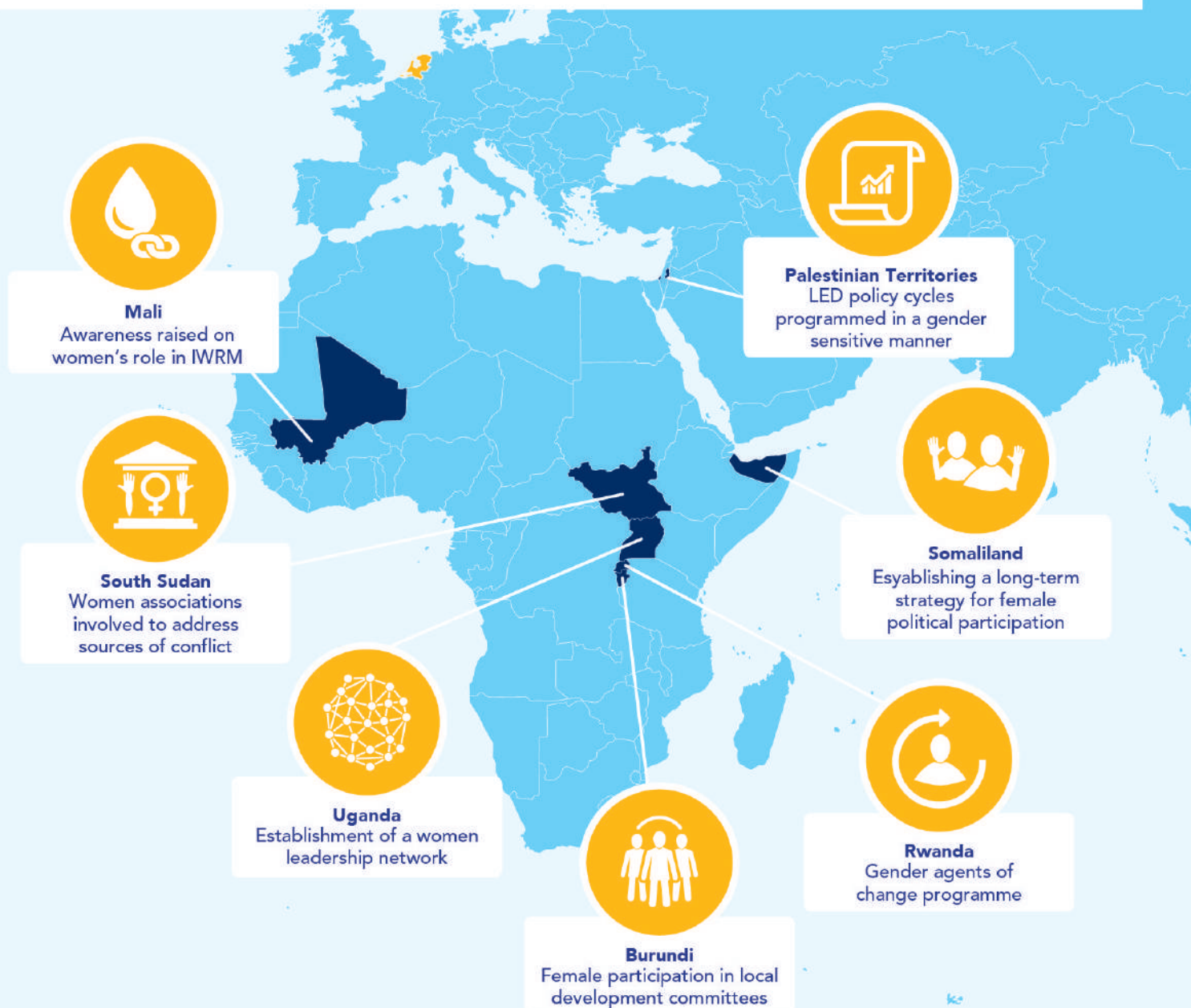
Decision-making is inclusive when all citizens can participate equally, feel heard and represented, experience ownership over resources, and increase their trust in local decision-making. Local governments and its representatives can thus only be truly inclusive and participatory if all men and women can participate and able to shape their own futures.

Gender should naturally become integrated in all the fields of expertise and intervention of local governments. We believe that VNG International can make a difference by helping local public and private actors who know their context the best to foster gender equal and sustainable futures for all individuals alike.

The IDEAL Programme

The Inclusive Decisions at a Local Level Programme (IDEAL, 2017-2020) is one of VNG International's flagship programmes. It seeks to involve citizens in local governance in seven countries facing fragility or conflict. The participation of citizens contributes to inclusive decision-making. It improves local governance and the delivery of basic services. It makes local governance more sustainable and increases welfare and stability.

Given the objectives of IDEAL, it speaks for itself that gender takes centre stage in the programme's implementation. This folder and its included loose factsheets offer an overview of how IDEAL deals with the topic of gender across its intervention zone.



Gender sensitivity in IDEAL's fragile contexts

The integration of gender sensitive approaches in the fragile and conflict affected intervention zone of IDEAL lies on two main reasons:

- It is the **right thing to do**, women's rights are human rights.
- Gender inequalities often undermine **conflict prevention**, peace building and ultimately achieving development outcomes.

These views are echoed by the literature, where it is argued that collective and individual violence are gendered processes and that conflicts perpetuate inequalities between men and women.

The IDEAL programme strengthens local governments to reach its development objectives in the face of fragility risks or conflict. In doing so, understanding gendered dimensions in situations of conflicts and fragility is vital to avoid unintended consequences. **A gender-blind programming might inadvertently worsen women's situation.** For example, by aligning aid with locally legitimate institutions, the institution's discriminatory practices might get strengthened. Mainstreaming a gender and conflict sensitive approach provides us with a better understanding on how certain policy areas can contribute to social improvements.

Understanding the context and the complexity of the gender and power relations in our target areas is crucial to "do no harm" but also critical for the efficiency of our interventions. This commitment to gender mainstreaming is translated to IDEAL's theory of change. Specific results contributing to gender equality have been defined for each of the 7 country projects. These are complemented by the project's daily management and monitoring, trainings of field and HQ staff, and the development of gender-specific action plans linked to the IDEAL annual plan.

The factsheets included in this flyer highlight concrete examples from each IDEAL country project on how a gender and conflict sensitive programme implementation is pursued.

Who are we?

VNG International is a leading organisation in strengthening democratic local government in developing and transitional countries. Local governments play a key role in the provision of basic services such as water, waste management, health care and housing. They have profound impact on areas like safety, food security, rule of law, and women's rights. Our projects contribute sustainably to better futures for people, communities and countries.

VNG International runs over sixty projects worldwide, funded by various donors including the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the European Union and the World Bank. We are embedded in the Dutch local government sector and we have an extensive international network of experts in the fields of decentralisation and local administration at our disposal.

In 1993 VNG International was founded by *Vereniging Nederlandse Gemeenten* (VNG), the Association of Netherlands Municipalities. Globally we are represented through a daughter company in Tunis, and local project offices in over 15 countries.



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Burundi

Conflict

The IDEAL programme in Burundi is to a high degree influenced by the national political divide, which in turn causes tensions on the local level. Affiliation with the dominant political party as opposed to the opposition parties cause tensions and rivalry in local governance, and people do not dare to speak out on political or security issues. An example is that members of justice, tribunals and police chiefs, appointed directly by the dominant political party, are all members of a committee in the local government. This creates distrust in local governing bodies. The IDEAL Burundi project accompanies the process of local decision-making, planning and budgeting in the area of human security while ensuring inclusivity, participation and conflict sensitivity for all groups in Burundian society, including the most excluded (Batwa ethnic group, women, youth).

Gender

In the context of Burundi, women and youth are often socially excluded: they have a lack of voice, lack of recognition and/or lack of capacity to actively participate in decision-making on the local level. In the 2018 Gender



and Conflict Sensitivity study conducted under the IDEAL programme it was revealed that even though the constitution allows for 30% of local government position to be filled by women, the lower the governance level, the smaller the amount of positions that are actually filled by women. One of the most important barriers is the economic dependence of women on men and the lack of confidence they experience – which prevents action on this matter. Women and girls are considered second in line for nearly all activities and youth encounter high levels of unemployment, which makes political participation and transparency difficult. That is why the IDEAL programme promotes not only the active participation of women in political processes, but also in economic life through the support women's access to finance in Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs).

Linking gender & conflict

The exclusion of women and girls from participating in decision-making structures has an effect on local tensions and conflict. An example that shows the connectivity of conflict and gender can be found in laws and taxations: Local decision-making bodies are set up based on an ordinance that only men should be members of the local development committees. The committees are both inflicted by political institutional tensions as well as cultural perceptions of power. Only by ensuring meaningful participation of women and youth in these committees, can we ensure decision-making is relevant for all citizens. We have done so by providing trainings on gender sensitive budgeting, female leadership and empowerment and by support of RFEL, the Female Network for Locally Elected Leaders in Burundi.



Mali

Conflict

IDEAL in Mali focusses on integrated water resources management (IWRM), as water is a catalyst for both conflicts and peace in communities. Over the last decade, decentralisation in Mali allowed municipalities to manage hydraulics, education and community health. However, local elected and technical staff are not always tooled properly to deliver on their new responsibilities. Along filling the gap between required and available technical skills, practices of inclusive governance are still to be improved, especially when it comes to inclusion of women and young men and women in public life and decision making processes. The exclusion of parties in water management or the lack of communication between communities leads to contentious and sometimes violent situations, such as competition between gold diggers, dredgers and fishermen. IDEAL Mali brings together IWRM stakeholders to dialogue and better understand each other, leading to a more peaceful and sustainable natural resources management.



Gender

In Mali, IDEAL offers trainings to both governing and governed parties, on inclusive governance, with a specific focus on gender aspects of power dynamics in society. Thanks to these trainings, awareness on gender sensitivity increased and understanding on the stakes of inclusion improved. Attendees to trainings and awareness raising sessions share the ideas and practices during restitution moments in the villages; so spread inclusive ideas. Monitoring of the reach out of communities is challenging, but done in partnership with local partners. To stimulate change and spread of innovative ideas, study visits and exchanges between the municipalities of the projects are organised; delegation are as much as possible composed of men and women of all ages.

Linking gender & conflict

When excluding part of the population from decision making processes because of their identities, decision makers increase chances of conflicts to arise. Recognised interest of all parties and mutual understanding of priorities supports social cohesion. Grants for inclusive governance were made available in all municipalities in order to foster stakeholders around a common project. For example, in the municipality of Kouoro, the rehabilitation of the Makono swamp allows longer availability and supply of water of fishing, cultivation, and cattle breeding. By repairing the dam installations, economic conditions improved for women and youth, thus the entire community benefits from this inclusive rehabilitation project. Together, communities and the municipality, supported by IDEAL, with continue to include excluded groups in the local development programmes and aim at a more prosperous environment.



Palestinian Territories

Conflict

The Palestinian Territories know deeply embedded tensions. These translate economically by the fact that more than a quarter of the Palestinians are unemployed. Lack of opportunities for economic growth causes stress on all levels of society. The IDEAL programme supports Palestinian municipalities in developing a joint approach with their communities to create job opportunities and to promote prosperity.

Gender

The public economic sphere is shared by both genders, yet it is men who are by far most dominant in setting economic policy and benefitting from entrepreneurial support. This is often the result of a plethora of expectations on the roles of men and women. The direct consequence is that the LED Forums, that advice municipalities on the types of community proposals the municipality should support, rarely take into account the specific economic needs of women or the opportunities that they can offer the community.



Within the IDEAL programme in the Palestinian Territories, municipalities receive support for incentivizing LED Forums to advise on community driven initiatives that generate employment and benefit men and women on an equal basis. Municipal staff members receive awareness training and are coached in gender-sensitive programming of their local economic development policy cycles.

Despite these efforts, IDEAL's own observations during field visits, as well as an evaluation conducted by ACE, showed that the platform to guarantee an inclusive consultation process on Local Economic Development - the so-called LED forum - is not yet working as intended. The membership of the LED Forum remains too often connected to the "old boys" network and does not reflect the diverse groups in society. Seeking to address this starting 2020, IDEAL will engage mayors of the 5 pilot municipalities to support inclusive LED consultation, relying on both their formal and informal influence to change local power dynamics.

Linking gender & conflict

Apart from monitoring and understanding the context, the representation problem and the gender bias could be solved if more women would participate in LED fora. LED Fora are created as bodies to advise the municipal council on the formulation and implementation of LED policy. Activities such as making sure that a gender sensitive recruitment process is in place, could increase the inclusion of women in these fora. These steps could in time also lead to an increased legitimacy of the LED unit, as leadership can be involved in the process. This enables a better work environment.



Rwanda

Conflict

Even though the IDEAL programme in Rwanda does not specifically tackle conflict sensitivity, the latent conflict that stems from rapid and unplanned development poses a concern at both the national and local levels. These conflicts are not overt but instead simmer and may potentially pose challenges as citizens experience a perceived unequal development. On a political level, national politics are quite stable. However, regular changes in local leadership do affect the implementation and speed at which IDEAL activities are completed as leaders acquaint themselves with the different programmes their institutions implement with organisations. This often also results in changes in focus to meet the leader's leadership agenda. Regionally, Rwanda is experiencing bilateral tension with Uganda and Burundi, however efforts are being made to quell these tensions to abate the effects on bordering populations.



Gender

The Rwanda team has already actively invested in a specific activity for a gender outcome; the approach of transformative agents for change to inspire interventions. This activity aims to address the structural causes and symptoms of gender inequality. Within the programme's framework, a training was conducted to address individual bias related to gender, in which self-reflection and action planning for individual transformation was the focus point. The result was an action plan specifically on gender sensitivity, which the trainees could, in their own spheres of influence, introduce in their units and further institutionalise the guiding points. A coach guides them through every step and ensures monitoring and evaluation.

Linking gender & conflict

Generally, activities within IDEAL Rwanda are regarded to be somewhat technical. With the support of IDEAL, concerted efforts are being made to avoid a pure technical angle that overlooks the gender and conflict sensitivity, but to have sufficient eye for this all steps of the way. An example of this is in the development of pro-poor detailed urban development plans for prioritised residential areas in two pilot districts (2020). The background study for the activity employed questionnaires, interviews, and community meetings to gather primary data about the households within the concerned area. This was done to ensure that the proposed land subdivision plans take into account the specific needs and priorities in the community and truly meet the social inclusion standards with regards to gender, youth and other socio-economic disparities.



Somaliland

Conflict

The traditional Somali society is based on a system of kinship that links individuals and communities. Before Somalia became a European colony clan lineages served as a form of self-governance. Following the colonial era that had already sharpened divisions and social cohesion among the Somalis, the elite began to compete over power and resources (e.g. land, water, livestock). Clan interests were put before national interest with the establishment of clan-based political parties. Weapons replaced the Rule of Law. The nepotism, corruption and misuse of power led to weak state institutions that were never rebuilt. This all resulted in a poor economy and the loss of trust between the citizens and government, being the main cause for instability and conflict in Somaliland. This has also caused several local government and parliament elections to be continuously delayed.

Gender

Because of the patriarchal nature of the Somali society, women are afforded relatively less opportunity to be self-reliant and are generally expected to be reliant on men for resources and protection. Due to little allocation of re-



sources and power, women are only to a limited extent represented or even absent in traditional informal institutions, e.g. political institutions and clan elder councils, whilst they do play an important role in the informal economy (e.g. markets). The local elections are an important element of the gender action plan. A long-term strategy is being developed to promote female political participation. This is not only relevant for gender equality as a goal in itself. As married women cannot represent a clan, supporting women can lead to additional ways of political representation (next to the clan system) which might innovate decision making about (local economic) development. Being an opportunity, this is at the same time the risk we will need to take into account.

Linking gender & conflict

Gender and conflict are interlinked. Under the IDEAL Somali programme, Local Economic Development is used as a means to establish a stronger social contract between citizens and their government by involving citizens in local decision-making. A stronger social contract will, in the long-term, reduce conflict and promote stability. For this to happen, one should mitigate the risks regarding 'elite capture' and involve all groups in society including women and youth for them to benefit equally to the extent possible ('do no harm'). IDEAL Somaliland will therefore develop a long-term gender strategy with identified short-term actions and ensure more frequent and structural conflict analyses.



South Sudan

Conflict

One of the sources of tension in the IDEAL area in South Sudan is related to moving tribes and their cattle. Owning cattle in South Sudan establishes dominance, like political leadership, resulting in cattle raiding. These inter-communal fights layer up on the existing instability. IDEAL in South Sudan supports local governments and civil society organisations, including women-led associations, in conflict mitigation and resolution strategies, and improved inter-government relations to promote local dialogue.

Gender

Beyond principles of inclusive governance, women's associations involvement in the project activities is key because of the connection between cattle raiding and men abilities to buy a wife from her family. Young men in age to marry often lack the means to buy cattle, but have access to guns. This is where the spiral of violence starts: the raided communities also do cattle raiding and are heavily armed, so clashes are often deadly for both sides. Communities wanting to avenge the death of their community members lead to perpetual cycles of "revenge raids".



Another aspect connecting gender to conflict is the management of cattle by women: as soon as there are water shortages, cattle (and the keepers) will have priority over the scarce water sources before families. This conflict becomes stronger due to climate change and lack of proper boreholes maintenance resulting in fewer usable sources.

Linking gender & conflict

The overall context in South Sudan shows that gender and conflict are deeply related. The challenges of cattle raiding are directly linked to the position of women in society. Women are trapped at the forefront of conflicts, being victims, but also investigators of violence: village women wild up the men by saying that they're not "real men" until they have raided. Through planning and facilitating gender sensitive activities and the use of the gender analysis, women are more included in conflict resolution and prevention processes. That way they can play as big a role as men.

In order to facilitate learning on these issues, IDEAL has organized an exchange visit from Kapoeta to Wau state in 2019. The overall objective was to get experience from the peace building and cattle migration management programme, implemented by VNG international in Wau from 2013-2018. This programme resulted in a reduction of conflict between farmers in Wau and cattle keepers in both Tonj and Gogrial. Participants from the IDEAL programme were taught practical skills on how conflict can be resolved and managed at the local level, taking gender into account.



Uganda

Conflict

The overarching conflict which the IDEAL programme in Uganda aims to resolve is the difficult position of the municipalities respective to the national governance structure. The municipal councils fall in between the national government and the lower governments of the constituents and town councils, which prevents the municipalities from enforcing their mandate to meet citizens' demands for needs-based services and complicates the understanding of responsibility and the authority between the different governing bodies. These challenges affect the legitimacy of local governments and their ability to act upon the social conflict in their communities. Ultimately, local governments need to be sensitized on conflict dynamics, coupled with the capacity to effectively plan and implement actions in a more inclusive way which include being gender and youth sensitive, will contribute to a more effective local government that can address drivers of fragility.

Gender

Local governments in Uganda have a significant role to play in the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies, as local governments are in the best



position to understand the local situation. IDEAL's gender analysis shows that even though Uganda has various legal thresholds and quotas that should promote equal male-female participation in governance, women are still poorly represented and unheard on the local level. While the programme has put a lot of focus on inclusion and gender mainstreaming on a local level, an issue that should be brought forward once more is a women-focussed intervention. The development of a Women Leadership Network in Uganda in 2020 by IDEAL will empower women on a local level and create a space where both male and female representatives have equal access to responsibilities, resources and opportunities.

Linking gender & conflict

Often, gender and conflict are closely related. With IDEAL Uganda, we therefore work to achieve the goal of equal access to resources and decision-making for all, this includes men and women, but also various ethnic and religious groups. Inclusion trainings within the programme using change agents have been part of the programme throughout, and we will now build upon these developments: The women's councillors network for transformative agents could act as champions to create awareness on inclusion both within as well as outside of our intervention zone. These champions do not necessarily have to be women, including men as gender champions could overcome the challenge of women empowerment within the organisations and create a broader gender sensitive common framework.

