Challenges that shape our future

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The world we live in, almost one hundred years after Simavi was founded, is changing rapidly – unfortunately not always for the better. The future is being shaped faster than ever by world population growth, climate change and large movements of people.

Growing international conflicts, increased regional instability, massive migration and sustained poverty are leading to a rise in conservatism and protectionist attitudes and, as a result, to a shrinking of civic space. Fuelled by economic stagnation, inequality and demographic diversification, nationalism and right-wing politics are gaining ground. Nations seek to reassert their sovereignty by withdrawing from international treaties and organisations. As a consequence, both donor and recipient countries have become more critical of international aid.

Developments of this nature put human rights at risk. Women, in particular, face greater threats from the rise of right-wing movements. A striking example is the US Global Gag Rule, which places restrictions on women’s reproductive health and rights on a global scale. These developments endanger the well-being of many. But if you look closely, they also present us with opportunities. In 2018 at Simavi we embarked on a journey to unlock our full potential, to define our added value and create a business model that will maximise our impact in this changing and challenging world. I am very excited to present the outcomes of this renewed strategy.

For me personally, 2018 has been the year in which I once again experienced and learned how health is at the basis of everything. When basic health is threatened – witnessing children fight for their lives after drinking contaminated water or a young mother dying in childbirth – this is when the realisation hits me. The sense of gratitude I feel for being in a position to make a modest contribution to a healthy life for all is overwhelming and powerful.

On that note, I want to express my gratitude to all our partners, our donors, our ambassadors and of course to our wonderful and dedicated team. Together we will make a difference in the lives of millions of people and I very much look forward to continuing this work in the coming years.

Ariette Brouwer
Managing Director
Theory of Change

For an organisation that has been active for almost a hundred years it is essential that we continue to ask ourselves how we can stay relevant in a rapidly changing world. With that in mind, last year we went through a reorientation process and made strategic choices about the role Simavi should play in the future to remain effective and sustainable. We mapped out how the world is changing and how these trends affect the development sector, and specifically Simavi’s work. We gathered input from our local partners in Asia and Africa and from other national and international stakeholders. Reflecting on all this information, we formulated a new strategy and Theory of Change to ensure we continue to maximise our impact towards our mission: A Healthy Life For All.

Mission

Good health goes hand in hand with personal, social and economic empowerment. It enables people to take control over their lives and pursue their rights. Health is a broad concept, so to be clear about the type of change that Simavi wants to make in people’s lives, it is important to define precisely what we mean by health. As Simavi contributes to more than physical health, we subscribe to the WHO definition: ‘Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.’ To be able to measure our contribution to the health of the people we work for, we have defined six dimensions of health and wellbeing. Each of our programmes contributes to one or more of these dimensions:

1. Experiencing physical and mental health
2. Feeling confident and capable: feeling self-confident enough to have capacity for autonomous action, bottom-up advocacy
3. Being self-aware and self-accepting: understanding your body, not being affected by community stigma
4. Having control over one’s life and environment: decision-making in the family and on household expenditure, having access to services, not experiencing violence
5. Having opportunities: success as education and economic empowerment, not being limited by child marriage or unwanted and early pregnancy
6. Having the capacity for positive relationships with others – on a one-to-one, small group, family, community or societal level: having an inclusive social network and participating in community decision-making

Simavi’s mission is A Healthy Life For All.
Vision
In general, women and girls face greater challenges in achieving a healthy life than men and boys. That is why Simavi decided to invest primarily in improving the health of women and girls. In the communities we work in, women’s chances of living a healthy life are often limited by social and cultural norms, discrimination, coercion and violence. Empowering women, both socially and economically, improves their ability to pursue their rights to a healthy life. Conversely, good health enables women to become more socially and economically empowered. We believe that empowering women to pursue their rights to a healthy life will also improve the health of their families – including men and boys, and by extension their communities as a whole – enabling a healthy life for all.

Outcomes and strategies
To achieve our mission, we have defined five outcomes and strategies that we apply in our programmes. Together these strategies contribute to our vision, our impact statement.

Outcome 1: Norms and practices are gender equitable and inclusive
Cultural and social norms define to a large extent how people behave and interact. For example, gender norms might restrict women’s ability to work or take part in decision-making. To create space for women to become more socially and economically empowered, to learn and practice new skills and to access services, it is important that norms and practices are supportive.
Strategy: Rather than directly challenging norms and practices, in our programmes we provide women, girls, men and boys with factual knowledge and skills. We also create space for dialogue and reflection on existing norms.

Outcome 2: Women have control over and the capacity to manage assets and resources
Having access to assets and resources – being economically empowered – is key to living a healthy life as it provides women with the opportunity to access services and products. In most households, men hold the decision-making power.
Strategy: By giving women and girls new knowledge and skills, we enable them to earn an income and to take part in decisions on the household income.
Outcome 3: Women voice their priorities and participate in decision-making
Men are often the main decision-makers in households and the communities we work in. This means for example that although women are the main users of water, they are often not involved in decisions about access to water. Women have different needs than men and it is important that these are included in decisions on both water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

**Strategy:** Simavi empowers women as well as community stakeholders to ensure that women play an active part in decision-making.

Outcome 4: Women make use of sustainable SRHR and WASH services
Simavi works with public and private services providers to ensure that women and girls have access to services.

**Strategy:** We train service providers and empower communities to demand women-friendly services. In addition, we engage in partnerships to come up with innovative solutions that can increase the uptake of SRHR and WASH services.

Outcome 5: Women-friendly policies in place and implemented
To sustain our work, it is important that women-friendly policies are in place and implemented.

**Strategy:** We advocate with local and national governments to influence existing policies and encourage the development of new policies. When policies are in place, we work closely with local and national government stakeholders to support their implementation.

Local partners
In our programmes we work with local partner organisations that are rooted in and understand their communities and the national context. Together we strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations to represent the health needs and rights of communities at local, national and international levels. We do this by giving tailored support and technical assistance to boost our partners’ organisational capacity, their technical capacity and expertise, and their capacity for lobby and advocacy. This strengthens their ability to position themselves among and work with a wide range of relevant actors, including communities, grass-roots movements, civil society, governments and the public and private sectors. In doing so, we support civil society in its crucial role of making sustainable changes towards a healthy life for all.
Expertise and guiding principles

We have found over the years that there are two crucial factors that determine good health and wellbeing: sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). That is why we have been working on WASH and SRHR for many years. Over the past few decades Simavi has developed extensive knowledge and work experience in both fields. Our niche expertise is implementing a combination of WASH and SRHR in our programmes, with a focus on women and girls. Instead of working through the lens of either SRHR or WASH, Simavi will focus on the WASH/SRHR nexus, drawing on our expertise at all levels.

Expertise areas

Five key expertise areas define our work in the nexus of SRHR and WASH. Our programmes will be centred around one or more of these themes.

Menstrual health

Many women and girls in low-resource settings lack the knowledge and access to products and infrastructure to manage menstruation with dignity. Furthermore, taboos, stigma and cultural and religious norms throw up barriers to women participating in normal daily life, going to school, working or participating in religious ceremonies during menstruation. This has a severe impact on their health and wellbeing and on the realisation of their rights. Good menstrual health leads to improvements in women's and girls' wellbeing, access to education and gender equality. Menstrual health is a key entry point to addressing SRHR, WASH and women's social and economic empowerment.

Bodily integrity

Bodily integrity – the right to govern and control one’s own body – is an innate human right. Any violation of this personal autonomy is unethical, intrusive and, at times, criminal. Women are most affected by violations to their bodily integrity and autonomy. To address this issue, Simavi focuses on a woman’s right to bodily autonomy, self-determination and safety. Our interventions address women's health, specifically their reproductive and sexual rights, and empower women and girls to be able to make informed decisions about their own body and how to spend their time. We also strive to address the safety concerns and psychosocial stress issues related to the lack of SRHR and WASH services that respond to women’s and girls' needs.

Maternal health

Although maternal mortality has nearly halved since 1990, the number of maternal deaths around the world remains unacceptably high. The underlying causes of maternal morbidity and mortality can be traced back to poverty, inequality and, in many cases, a number of interrelated delays that ultimately prevent women and girls from accessing the health services (both WASH and SRHR) that they need. Simavi promotes reproductive rights and improves maternal and neonatal (the first 28 days of life) health by improving knowledge of and creating access to safe and hygienic antenatal, delivery and post-natal health services, including safe and legal abortion and post-abortion services.
Water and sanitation
The United Nations has recognised that access to water and access to sanitation are human rights, reflecting the fundamental nature of these basics in every person’s life. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by the lack of access to water and sanitation. Not only do women and girls bear the responsibility for fetching water, they also pay the heaviest price for poor sanitation. For example, when latrines are not available in households, women and girls may seek privacy by walking to isolated areas, or by restricting themselves to only going after dark. In both these cases, they are exposed to greater risk of harassment, violence and sexual assault. Simavi empowers women and girls to claim their right to water and sanitation and take part in decision-making processes that affect access to sustainable and inclusive WASH services. We ensure WASH services are in place and address the prevailing gender norms and values in order to remove the barriers that women face. Our rights-based approach targets duty-bearers to fulfil their obligations and rights-holders (in particular women and girls) to claim their rights regarding access to and the use of safe and sufficient water and sanitation – at an affordable cost and without discrimination, coercion or violence.

Hygiene
Hygiene is the theme that unites all the work we do. We define hygiene as the conditions and practices that help maintain health and prevent the spread of disease. Good hygiene consists of personal hygiene and adopting practices to keep all homes and workplaces, including sanitation, clean and germ free. Our expertise in hygiene has been developed and integrated in all our WASH and SRHR programmes.

Guiding principles
Having an ambitious mission and a broad understanding of health, we approach our work in a holistic way. Simavi has defined three principles that will guide us towards adding value within our mission – while at the same time giving focus and clarity to the way we design our programmes.

Women-centred approach
In our programme design we build on the realities we see in the communities where we work, where social norms and values often restrict opportunities for women and girls. By creating space for women’s voices to be heard, we can challenge deep-rooted discrimination and norms to create greater equality for all. For that reason, we will take a women-centred approach in our programmes and place women’s and girls’ needs, rights and priorities at the centre of our programmes.

Rights-based approach
Health is a human right. Human rights are inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion or any other status. Yet for many millions of people around the world this right is not fulfilled. That is why we use a rights-based approach in all our work to empower women and girls, and their communities. We help them to understand their rights and support them in claiming these rights from duty-bearers. Duty-bearers (often governments or service providers) have a responsibility to ensure these rights are respected, protected and fulfilled. Furthermore, rights give us a clear and less subjective understanding of where to focus our efforts, without imposing our Western standards of needs on the communities we work in.

Sustainable change
Simavi believes that to ensure lasting change we need to think in a sustainable way: all our programmes and activities need to be efficient and effective. This means thinking about both behaviour and systems change. We strive to empower women and girls to make decisions about their own health and the health of their families. They need not only to be properly informed about their health and rights, but also to be socially and economically empowered. We also seek to create lasting change in the systems around them, to create a supportive environment in which their needs and rights are respected and upheld. The norms and attitudes held by men and women, community stakeholders, service providers and duty-bearers have to change so that women and girls have the freedom and opportunity to make such decisions. To this end we work with service providers to improve service provision and lobby duty-bearers to ensure women-friendly policies are in place and fully implemented.
Approach
Every programme Simavi designs and implements is built on four working principles. These have proven to be effective approaches in adding value and creating sustainable change. Our four working principles are inclusion, evidence-informed and impact-oriented programming, social and economic empowerment and lobby and advocacy. These working principles are further explained below.

Inclusion: leave no one behind
In all our programmes we strive to reach out to hard-to-reach and excluded people. We aim to improve their access to services and engage them in wider processes of decision-making to ensure that their rights and needs are recognised and fulfilled. Our inclusion lens ensures that everybody is able to participate fully, regardless of differences in ethnic-racial background, financial status, educational level, physical or mental ability, religious or faith-based beliefs, gender, marital status, geographical location (rural/urban), sexual orientation, age or any other socioeconomic circumstances.

Evidence-informed and impact-oriented programming
Simavi invests in impact-oriented programming to maximise the impact of our programmes on the lives of women and girls. Simavi defines impact as the lasting change in the lives of women and girls resulting from Simavi’s contribution, both in relation to our mission and their own perspectives. Impact also includes changes that may be negative and unintended. We use the lens of impact to steer and inform our programmes and improve our monitoring, evaluation and programme design. To better understand how change comes about and what interventions are most effective, we use evidence to inform our programme design and decision-making. We believe that the knowledge we have acquired over the years, as well as research conducted by ourselves and others, can be used to benefit future programmes. Where possible, we ensure that our programme evaluations fill gaps in existing evidence. To this end we have established close working relationships with a number of research institutions.

Social and economic empowerment
In the communities we work in, women’s chances of living a healthy life are often limited by social and cultural norms, discrimination, coercion and violence. Empowering women, both socially and economically, improves their ability to pursue their rights to a healthy life. Conversely, good health enables women to become more socially and economically empowered. We believe that empowering women to pursue their rights to a healthy life will also improve the health of their families — including men and boys, and by extension their communities as a whole — enabling a healthy life for all.

Lobby and advocacy
Lobby and advocacy is a cornerstone of Simavi’s work and a vital element in our Theory of Change. Influencing policy and implementing international obligations is essential for achieving structural change towards a healthy life for all. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are important in achieving this mission. Our work on SRHR and WASH focuses specifically on the following goals: SDG 3 (good health and well-being), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities).
Our added value to the Sustainable Development Goals

Through our work on WASH and SRHR, our focus on women and girls, and the different strategies that we use in our programmes, Simavi addresses several of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs have been formulated by the United Nations as the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. The targets are to be delivered by 2030, with a firm emphasis on where to add value. The SDGs provide the opportunity for Simavi to position its work on a global scale and on the 2030 agenda. Of the 17 goals, we contribute directly to four of them.

SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being

As stated in the SDG 2018 report, many more people today are living healthier lives than in the past decade. Nevertheless, people are still suffering needlessly from preventable diseases and too many are dying prematurely. Overcoming disease and ill health will require concerted and sustained efforts, focusing on population groups and regions that have been neglected. It is Simavi’s mission to ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all. In taking a holistic approach, and making sure we leave no one behind, we contribute directly to this goal.
SDG 5 – Gender Equality
According to the United Nations gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Simavi strongly believes that societies will benefit from providing women and girls with equal access to education, healthcare, work and representation in political and economic decision-making processes. Simavi strives to ensure that women and men have the same opportunities, rights and responsibilities in all areas of life.

SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation
The United Nations states that access to safe water and sanitation are essential to human health and to environmental sustainability and economic prosperity. Simavi shares this view and works to improve drinking water sources and sanitation facilities – always with an eye to good hygiene, education and awareness raising.

SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals
As Simavi believes that the SDGs can only be achieved by working in strong and meaningful partnerships, all our implemented programmes are collaborations with partner organisations worldwide. Simavi strengthens its partners by building their capacity, improving their communication and advocacy skills and sharing knowledge. Partnerships also provide excellent vehicles for Simavi to develop new and innovative opportunities and techniques, by working together with innovation labs, universities, commercial brands and other research institutions. Simavi stands for working together, for sharing expertise, technology and financial support, and for combining goals in programme implementation.

Contributing more
The 17 SDGs are all interlinked, meaning that failure to reach one goal could significantly impact our ability to reach another, and also that contributing to one creates opportunities for different development areas. There is a strong link between our work and the objectives defined in the SDG 1 (no poverty) and 10 (reduced inequality). Our work towards a healthy life for all, our multi-stakeholder approach and our focus on SRHR and WASH expertise areas all contribute to achieving the targets that have been set for no poverty and reduced inequalities.