

**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

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Gender mainstreaming in public institutions**Summary**

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) is implementing a project entitled “Gender mainstreaming in public institutions” to help national women’s machineries in Arab countries face the numerous challenges that lie ahead in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and the goals set out in the Beijing Platform for Action. The project specifically aims to support the region’s institutions in upholding gender equality, based on the success of ESCWA in implementing the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP).

Putting its technical expertise and the lessons learned through UN-SWAP implementation at the service of Arab States, the ESCWA secretariat will support their endeavours to strengthen administrative efficiency and optimize staff capabilities, while upholding gender equality and women’s empowerment within national bodies. This report provides an overview of the UN-SWAP and its matrix of performance indicators, the experience of ESCWA in implementing it, and the proposed actions to be taken to transfer this experience to member States.

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Introduction

1. The goal of national women's machineries in Arab countries is to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women by integrating a gender perspective into all areas of work. Gender mainstreaming is a key task of these national machineries; it is undertaken by devising gender-sensitive sectoral plans, strategies and policies, building institutional capacities, and reversing the culture of hostility to gender equality and the empowerment of women.
2. The Arab Regional Synthesis Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action Twenty Years Later¹ addressed some of the challenges faced by national women's machineries in mainstreaming gender in institutions, highlighting funding limitations, lack of tools and competences, and weak institutional accountability mechanisms for gender policy implementation. Hostility to gender equality rooted in the institutional culture and environment was identified as the main reason behind the gaps between planning and implementation and, therefore, as a major hindrance to full and effective implementation of gender equality policies.
3. Similarly, a study undertaken by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) on the experience of Arab States in mainstreaming gender in governmental institutions, based on a survey in member States,² found that national women's machineries faced many obstacles in their work. Those included weak political will, lack of gender-related knowledge, constant turnover of cadres in gender units, weak expertise and competencies, and weak accountability and control mechanisms. The study called for enhancing knowledge on gender issues as one of the main institutional measures required to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women.
4. In this context, ESCWA is developing a project on gender mainstreaming in public institutions to help Arab States to achieve the goals set out in the Beijing Platform for Action and Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The aim is to support institutional efforts towards these goals based on the success of ESCWA in implementing the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP).
5. The experience of ESCWA in implementing the UN-SWAP revealed the importance of establishing institutional mechanisms to support efforts towards gender equality and the empowerment of women within decision-making bodies. The ESCWA secretariat will make use of the acquired technical expertise and lessons learned to serve Arab States in their endeavours to strengthen administrative efficiency and optimize staff capabilities, while upholding gender equality and justice and striving to empower women at various levels within national bodies.

¹ The report, issued in 2015, was prepared by ESCWA in cooperation with the League of Arab States and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). It is available from <http://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/all/the-implementation-of-the-beijing-platform>.

² E/ESCWA/ECW/2013/5, available in Arabic from https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/e_escwa_ecw_13_5_a.pdf.

I. UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM-WIDE ACTION PLAN ON GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN (UN-SWAP)

6. The United Nations system has taken interest in the empowerment of women and gender equality since its inception. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights consecrated the equal rights of men and women without any type of distinction.³ United Nations organizations and bodies have implemented gender equality in varying degrees and established specialized mechanisms and entities to support their efforts, those of Member States and of various partners in that regard. In 2006, the United Nations Chief Executives Board (CEB) endorsed a system-wide policy on gender equality and empowerment of women, deemed unprecedented in terms of its inclusiveness, depth and ambitious objectives.

7. The UN-SWAP is the first accountability framework for gender mainstreaming in United Nations organizations. It was designed so as to facilitate identification, monitoring and progress on a set of specific indicators for gender equality and empowerment of women. It applies to all United Nations entities, departments, offices and organizations.

Goal

The UN-SWAP aims to enhance the system's ability to hold itself accountable for its work on gender equality and empowerment of women in a systematic, coordinated and harmonized manner.

The goal is to establish:

- A common understanding of gender equality and the empowerment of women;
- A common method to advance towards this goal;
- A common and progressive sliding scale of performance standards to monitor progress.

8. The set of 15 indicators is aimed at measuring the performance of United Nations entities in specific actions that fall under six functional areas: accountability; results-based management; oversight; human and financial resources; capacity; and coherence, knowledge and information management.

II. UN-SWAP TECHNICAL NOTES

9. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) issued Technical Notes⁴ aimed at assisting United Nations organizations in reporting on UN-SWAP implementation. These notes provide guidance on fulfilling the UN-SWAP performance indicators, explain implementation methods and present best practices in this area. For each performance indicator, the technical notes set out:

(a) The functional area, namely accountability; results-based management; oversight; human and financial resources; capacity; or coherence, knowledge and information management;

(b) The intergovernmental mandate on which it is based;

(c) How to rate the performance indicator, i.e. guidance on actions needed to report on each performance indicator;

(d) Current practice and examples from across the United Nations system that may help to meet and exceed the performance indicator.

³ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Preamble para. 5 and article 2), available from <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html>.

⁴ <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/how%20we%20work/unsystemcoordination/un-swap-technical-notes.pdf>. The following sections describing the UN-SWAP are based on these notes.

III. RATING SYSTEM

10. The UN-SWAP rating system consists of five levels that allow United Nations entities to assess their performance and report on their achievements with respect to each indicator. Ratings are expected to generate awareness and analysis of both performance and expectations. The rating system is meant as a tool to support leadership and increase coherence. Rating levels are as follows:

- First level: Exceeds requirements;
- Second level: Meets requirements;
- Third level: Approaches requirements;
- Fourth level: Missing;
- Fifth level: Not applicable.

11. In the UN-SWAP reporting system, United Nations entities are expected to provide a clear rationale for each rating. When multiple elements fall under a specific performance indicator (such as the organizational culture indicator with seven requirements to be fulfilled), reporting is requested on each element. As per the technical notes, entities should aim to “meet requirements”; however, this would represent a starting point rather than the conclusion of the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The “exceeds requirements” rating should be sought to ensure that the United Nations play a leading role in that regard.

IV. REMEDIAL PLANS FOR IMPROVING PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

12. Reporting on UN-SWAP implementation also requires the submission of a remedial plan for all indicators, including timelines, resources and responsibility for follow-up actions. Remedial plans highlight areas that entities should focus on and are critical for tackling gaps and challenges. They should be agreed upon at the highest level of entities, whenever possible.

(a) *Timelines*

13. For each indicator, timelines for improving performance should be realistic and reflect implementation plans, review dates that are included in gender policies and plans, and/or gender equality-related outputs included in strategic plans. They should also specify the number of years and months needed to reach the next performance level as of the reporting date.

(b) *Resources*

14. For each indicator, United Nations entities are encouraged to determine the resources required for improving performance and to document their needs in their action plans. This reference to required resources does not commit entities to allocate funds; rather, it is an estimate of resource requirements within entities and across the United Nations system to achieve gender equality and empower women. Estimates of the required resources are also useful for resource mobilization.

(c) *Responsibility for follow-up*

15. To promote decentralization of responsibility and accountability for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women within each United Nations entity, where possible, staff from outside the gender equality unit should be assigned follow-up responsibilities. Moreover, it is recommended that senior management staff be tasked with follow-up responsibilities to strengthen accountability.

V. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

16. The following table sets out performance indicators as per the functional areas, and the activities required for achieving the ratings “approaches requirements”; “meets requirements”; and “exceeds requirements”.

A. Accountability		
1. Policy and plan		
Approaches requirements	Meets requirements	Exceeds requirements
1 (a) Gender equality and empowerment of women, including gender mainstreaming and equal representation of women, policies and plans in the process of being developed	1 (b) Up-to-date gender equality and empowerment of women, including gender mainstreaming and equal representation of women, policies and plans implemented	1 (c.i) Up-to-date gender equality and empowerment of women, including gender mainstreaming and equal representation of women, policies and plans implemented and 1 (c.ii) Specific senior-level mechanism in place for ensuring accountability for promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women
2. Gender responsive performance management		
Approaches requirements	Meets requirements	Exceeds requirements
2 (a) Core values and/or competencies for all posts being revised to include assessment of gender equality and empowerment of women	2 (b) Assessment of gender equality and empowerment of women integrated into core values and/or competencies for all posts, with particular focus on levels P-4 or equivalent and above	2 (c.i) Assessment of gender equality and empowerment of women integrated into core values and/or competencies for all posts, with a particular focus on levels P-4 or equivalent and above, including decision making positions in all committees, missions and advisory bodies
B. Results-based management (RBM)		
3. Strategic planning		
Approaches requirements	Meets requirements	Exceeds requirements
3 (a.i) Gender analysis in central strategic planning and main country programmes or 3 (a.ii) Central strategic planning includes at least one specific outcome/expected accomplishment and one specific indicator on gender equality and empowerment of women	3 (b.i) Gender analysis in central strategic planning and main country programmes and 3 (b.ii) Central strategic planning includes at least one specific outcome/expected accomplishment and one specific indicator on gender equality and empowerment of women	3 (c.i) Gender analysis in central strategic planning and main country programmes and 3 (c.ii) Central strategic planning includes more than one specific outcome/expected accomplishment and more than one specific indicator on gender equality and empowerment of women

B. Results-based management (RBM) (continued)

4. Monitoring and reporting		
Approaches requirements	Meets requirements	Exceeds requirements
4 (a.i) Reporting on gender equality and empowerment of women results in relation to the central strategic planning goal or 4 (a.ii) All key entity data are sex-disaggregated, or there is a specific reason noted for not disaggregating data by sex	4 (b.i) Reporting on gender equality and empowerment of women results in relation to the central strategic planning goal and 4 (b.ii) All key entity data are sex-disaggregated, or there is a specific reason noted for not disaggregating data by sex	4 (c.i) Reporting on gender equality and empowerment of women results in relation to the central strategic planning goal and 4 (c.ii) All key entity data are sex-disaggregated, or there is a specific reason noted for not disaggregating data by sex and 4 (c.iii) Entity RBM guidance mainstreams gender equality and empowerment of women

C. Oversight

5. Evaluation		
Approaches requirements	Meets requirements	Exceeds requirements
5 (a) Meets some of the gender-related norms and standards set by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG)	5 (b) Meets the UNEG gender-related norms and standards	5 (c.i) Meets the UNEG gender-related norms and standards and 5 (c.ii) Demonstrates effective use of UNEG guidance on evaluating from a human rights and gender equality perspective
6. Gender responsive auditing		
Approaches requirements	Meets requirements	Exceeds requirements
6 (a) The risk related to the organization's strategy and plans to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women are considered as part of risk-based audit annual planning	6 (b) Consultation takes place with the gender focal point/department on risks related to gender equality and empowerment of women, as part of risk-based audit annual planning	6 (c.i) Consultation takes place with all levels of the organization on risks related to gender equality and empowerment of women as part of risk-based audit annual planning and 6 (c.ii) International Labour Organization (ILO) Participatory Gender Audit or equivalent carried out at least every five years

C. Oversight (continued)		
7. Programme review		
Approaches requirements	Meets requirements	Exceeds requirements
7 (a) Programme quality control systems partly integrate gender analysis	7 (b) Programme quality control systems fully integrate gender analysis	7 (c.i) Programme quality control systems fully integrate gender analysis and 7 (c.ii) Recognition in place for programmes that excel on gender equality and empowerment of women
D. Human and financial resources		
8. Financial resources tracking		
Approaches requirements	Meets requirements	Exceeds requirements
8 (a) Working towards a financial resources tracking mechanism to quantify disbursement of funds that promote gender equality and empowerment of women	8 (b) Financial resources tracking mechanism in use to quantify disbursement of funds that promote gender equality and empowerment of women	8 (c.i) Financial resources tracking mechanism in use to quantify disbursement of funds that promote gender equality and empowerment of women and 8 (c.ii) Results of tracking of the financial resources disbursed to promote gender equality and empowerment of women influences central strategic planning concerning budget allocation
9. Financial resources allocation		
Approaches requirements	Meets requirements	Exceeds requirements
9 (a) Financial benchmark for resources allocation for implementation of the gender equality and empowerment of women mandate is set	9 (b) Financial benchmark for resources allocation for implementation of the gender equality and empowerment of women mandate is met	9 (c) Financial benchmark for resources allocation for implementation of the gender equality and empowerment of women mandate is exceeded
10. Gender architecture		
Approaches requirements	Meets requirements	Exceeds requirements
10 (a.i) Gender focal points or equivalent at headquarters, regional and country levels are staff: a. appointed from level P-4 and above for both mainstreaming and representation of women	10 (b.i.) Gender focal points or equivalent at headquarters, regional and country levels are staff: a. appointed from level P-4 and above for both mainstreaming and representation of women	10 (c.i) Gender focal points or equivalent at headquarters, regional and country levels are staff: a. appointed from level P-4 and above b. who work as per written terms of reference

D. Human and financial resources (continued)

10. Gender architecture (continued)		
Approaches requirements	Approaches requirements	Approaches requirements
<p>b. who work as per written terms of reference</p> <p>c. who allocate at least 20 per cent of their time to gender focal point functions</p> <p style="text-align: center;">or</p> <p>10 (a.ii) Plan in place to achieve equal representation of women and men for general service staff and at the P-4 level and above in the next five years</p>	<p>b. who work as per written terms of reference</p> <p>c. who allocate at least 20 per cent of their time to gender focal point functions</p> <p style="text-align: center;">and</p> <p>10 (b.ii) The entity has reached equal representation of women and men for general service staff and at the P-4 level and above</p> <p style="text-align: center;">and</p> <p>10 (b.iii) Gender department/unit is fully resourced according to the entity mandate</p>	<p>c. who allocate at least 20 per cent of their time to gender focal point functions</p> <p>d. benefit from specific funds allocated to support gender focal point networking</p> <p style="text-align: center;">and</p> <p>10 (c.ii) The entity has reached equal representation of women and men for general service staff and at the P-4 level and above, including most senior levels of representation in field offices, committees and funds linked to the entity (irrespective of budgetary source)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">and</p> <p>10 (c.iii) Gender department/unit is fully resourced according to the entity's mandate</p>
11. Organizational culture		
Approaches requirements	Meets requirements	Exceeds requirements
<p>11 (a) Organizational culture partly supports promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women</p>	<p>11 (b) Organizational culture fully supports promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women</p>	<p>11 (c) Organizational culture fully supports promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women</p> <p style="text-align: center;">and</p> <p>11 (c.i) Senior managers demonstrate leadership and public championing of promotion of equal representation of women and men</p>

E. Capacity		
12. Capacity assessment		
Approaches requirements	Meets requirements	Exceeds requirements
12 (a) Assessment of capacity in gender equality and empowerment of women is carried out for individuals in entity	12 (b.i) Entity-wide assessment of capacity of staff at headquarters, regional and country levels in gender equality and empowerment of women is carried out and 12 (b.ii) A capacity development plan is established or updated at least every five years	12 (c.i) Entity-wide assessment of capacity of staff at headquarters, regional and country levels in gender equality and empowerment of women is carried out and 12 (c.ii) A capacity development plan is established or updated at least every three years
13. Capacity development		
Approaches requirements	Meets requirements	Exceeds requirements
13 (a) Working towards ongoing mandatory training for all levels of staff	13 (b) Ongoing mandatory training for all levels of entity staff	13 (c.i) Ongoing mandatory training for all levels of entity staff and 13 (c.ii) Senior managers receive tailored training during orientation
F. Coherence, knowledge and information management		
14. Knowledge generation and communication		
Approaches requirements	Meets requirements	Exceeds requirements
14 (a) Production and exchange of information on gender equality and empowerment of women	14 (b) Knowledge on gender equality and empowerment of women is systematically documented and publicly shared and 14 (b.i) Communication plan includes gender equality and empowerment of women as an integral component of internal and public information dissemination	14 (c.i) Knowledge on gender equality and empowerment of women is systematically documented and publicly shared and 14 (c.ii) Communication plan includes gender equality and empowerment of women as an integral component of internal and public information dissemination and 14 (c.iii) Entity is actively involved in an inter-agency community of practice on gender equality and empowerment of women

15. Coherence		
Approaches requirements	Meets requirements	Exceeds requirements
15 (a) Participates in an ad hoc fashion in inter-agency coordination mechanisms on gender equality and empowerment of women	15 (b) Participates systematically in inter-agency coordination mechanisms on gender equality and empowerment of women	15 (c.i) Participates systematically in inter-agency coordination mechanisms on gender equality and empowerment of women and 15 (c.ii) Participates in the UN-SWAP peer review process

VI. EXPERIENCE OF ESCWA IN IMPLEMENTING THE UN-SWAP

17. At the end of 2011, ESCWA and another seven United Nations entity piloted the implementation of the UN-SWAP. An analysis of the performance of ESCWA revealed that 14 per cent of the 15 UN-SWAP indicators were then “not available”; it approached requirements for 65 per cent of the indicators and met requirements for only 21 per cent. It did not exceed requirements for any performance indicator. There were gaps in mainstreaming a gender perspective within ESCWA and no systems were in place to achieve that goal. There was no strategy for gender equality and the gender focal points network was not effective. The assessment also showed that women were underrepresented in senior positions and that there were no capacity-building programmes on gender equality targeting staff.

18. Since then, ESCWA has developed a remedial plan to improve its performance gradually. In 2012, it reactivated the gender focal points network and redefined its role. It also developed an annual action plan to integrate a gender perspective into the work of its various divisions. This yielded an improvement in 5 out of 15 performance indicators in 2013. ESCWA also undertook an assessment of staff knowledge in gender equality issues in 2013, which served to identify the gaps to be remedied. It finally reviewed its project assessment policy so as to include gender mainstreaming and respect for human rights.

19. In 2014, ESCWA made further progress in its implementation of the UN-SWAP (table 1). Improvement was registered in 9 out of 15 indicators compared with 2013. It devised gender mainstreaming plans and policies, and set procedures to improve the work environment and respond to the issues that emerged in the course of its implementation of the UN-SWAP. ESCWA also adopted the Policy on Gender Equality for 2014-2018; it formulated an administrative plan to increase female representation among staff and a knowledge and communication strategy on gender issues. It also conducted the first participatory audit of gender issues. Progress in 2014 also included the development of a system of flexible working hours that enabled greater female representation among staff. Finally, ESCWA launched an award that was granted to three staff members for their outstanding efforts in advancing gender equality and empowerment of women.

20. ESCWA designed several training programmes on mainstreaming gender in research and statistics in 2014, which facilitated the integration of a gender perspective and of gender equality issues into the work of all divisions. It also financed the participation of gender focal points in the specialized training programme organized by ILO in Turin, Italy.

21. In 2015, ESCWA became one of the first United Nations agencies to have implemented the UN-SWAP fully. The year’s achievements included specialized training programmes for staff; a financial audit system to assess expenditure on the promotion of gender equality within the Commission; and a budget allocation for the implementation of its gender equality mandate.

TABLE 1. PERFORMANCE IN UN-SWAP INDICATORS, 2012-2015

	Average performance rates for all indicators (Percentage)			2015
	2012	2013	2014	
Exceeds requirements	0	0	33	73
Meets requirements	13	40	40	20
Approaches requirements	67	47	27	7
Missing	13	13	0	0
Not applicable	7	0	0	0

22. ESCWA outperformed the United Nations Secretariat and other United Nations entities in meeting UN-SWAP requirements. Table 2 shows that it exceeded requirements in 73 per cent of indicators in 2015, compared with 33 per cent for regional commissions, 15 per cent for the United Nations Secretariat and 17 per cent for the system as a whole. In that year, none of the indicators for ESCWA were “missing” or “not applicable”, whereas 16 per cent of indicators fell under these categories for the United Nations system and Secretariat.

TABLE 2. COMPARATIVE PERFORMANCE IN UN-SWAP IMPLEMENTATION, 2015

	Average rates for all performance indicators (Percentage)			
	ESCWA	Regional commissions	United Nations Secretariat	United Nations system
Exceeds requirements	73	33	15	17
Meets requirements	20	40	43	40
Approaches requirements	7	20	26	28
Missing	0	7	7	9
Not applicable	0	0	9	6

VII. TRANSFER OF EXPERTISE TO MEMBER STATES

23. The experience of ESCWA in implementing the UN-SWAP showed the importance of establishing institutional mechanisms to support decision-making bodies’ efforts towards gender equality and the empowerment of women. Its acquired technical expertise and the lessons learned could help Arab States in their endeavours to strengthen administrative efficiency and optimize staff capabilities, while upholding gender equality and justice and empowering women at various levels within national bodies. The success of ESCWA has improved knowledge on the issues faced by female and male staff in its administrative and technical sections within the six functional areas of the UN-SWAP, which has, in turn, upgraded the Commission’s capacity to implement its programme of work effectively and efficiently and ameliorated the work environment. ESCWA thus sought to adapt the UN-SWAP to national women’s machineries in member States through considering their specific needs and realities.

24. Accordingly, ESCWA designed a project entitled “Gender mainstreaming in public institutions”, which was presented at the seventh session of the Committee on Women held in Oman, on 20 and 21 January 2016. The project was adopted by member States, which recommended that the secretariat be assisted in its efforts towards: (a) integrating a gender perspective into all its activities and administrative structures; (b) promoting its leading role in this endeavour within the United Nations system; (c) cooperating with national women’s machineries to implement this ambitious project in public institutions; and (d) establishing an Arab framework to measure progress towards achieving gender equality in public institutions.

25. The project is aimed at designing the first Arab accountability framework to measure progress in achieving gender equality in public institutions. It will enable national women's machineries to support governmental institutions, the private sector and civil society organizations in mainstreaming gender in their work by adapting the framework to the national context and applying it in compliance with national laws.

26. The project adopts a participatory approach. ESCWA translated the UN-SWAP Technical Notes into Arabic in partnership with the Supreme Council for Women in Bahrain, producing a preliminary draft that will be reviewed according to comments from member States. The draft will also be submitted to experts to reach a set of performance indicators applicable in Arab countries.

27. The project will be undertaken as follows:

Activity	Notes
(a) Translation of the UN-SWAP technical notes into Arabic	The technical notes were translated in cooperation with the Supreme Council for Women in Bahrain, which funded the activity
(b) Revision of the technical notes and particularly the UN-SWAP components and indicators for adaptation to Arab countries' needs, at an expert meeting attended by representatives of national women's machineries and Arab experts	The expert group meeting was held in partnership with UN-Women (the New York office and the Regional Office for Arab States) from 14 to 16 November: the technical notes were reviewed to be adapted to member States' needs
(c) Amendment of the technical notes as per member States' comments to produce the first Arab accountability framework for measuring progress in gender equality in public institutions	The regional consultant will amend the technical notes, and include good practices of member States in that regard
(d) Building the capacity of member States by holding three workshops on implementing some of the performance indicators as per member States' requests	This activity will be implemented in the context of a project on promoting social justice in Arab countries, funded through the United Nations Development Account
(e) Launch a pilot implementation of the framework on a selected national women's machinery, as per the request of member States	A pilot implementation will be undertaken in cooperation with the regional office of UN-Women, which will provide a grant and technical assistance for the national women's machinery through field visits
(f) Mainstream the project in governmental institutions and provide technical support to member States in that regard	The project will be mainstreamed in governmental institutions upon their request, through the national women's machinery

28. Member States are invited to support national women's machineries in testing and mainstreaming this project, and in tailoring it to their special needs and contexts.
