

Theory of Change

Urgency

01

The gender gap is large; at this pace, it will take another 131 years to close. Yet gender equality is our best hope to get ALL the SDGs on track, according to UN Women. In sports, this gap is still far too wide. Because of stereotyping and the lack of role models for both women and men, there is a “dream gap”:

- they cannot become what they cannot dream of. Girls and women are allowed to participate, but they are still not in decision-making positions (only 24%) in sports and business.
- Only 10–15% of sports media coverage in the Netherlands goes to women.
- Women’s sports receive only 10% of sports sponsorship budgets.
- The number of girls and women who quit sports is high.

Impact

02

Redesign towards a gender-equal playing field in the (sports) world

Perspective

03

Gender equality for men and women in sports is self-evident, not only visible in the sport itself, but also at boardroom tables, in the media, and in society.

- A playing field with professional female footballers and male ballet dancers.
- A (sports) world where women and men are visible in every sport and take part in decision-making.
- Moving towards a future generation of coaches and leaders.

The Netherlands has a sports culture in which equal opportunities are the norm for both women and men.

Themes – short- and long-term

	Belief in opportunities	Support for equal opportunities	Policies on gender equality
Long-term effects	Women, men, boys, and girls believe in their own opportunities in the (sports) world and act accordingly.	Families, coaches, teachers, and peers create a supportive context in which stereotypes are actively broken down.	Sports federations and partners in sport implement active policies on gender equality and related leadership development.
Short-term effort	Build self-direction and self-confidence. Engage relatable role models. Create meaningful relationships and lasting positive memories.	The social environment (parents, coaches, teachers) understands the impact of stereotypes and, as supporters, provides equal opportunities.	Sports federations, clubs, and partners implement active policies on gender equality and leadership development.
Elaboration	We want to focus on the current generation of athletes so that they gain access to opportunities. Boys can become ballet dancers, and girls professional footballers. Barriers at the individual level that we must address include gender stereotyping (and its impact on self-image), low self-esteem or lack of confidence in one's own abilities, the absence of role models and networks, career preferences, and the queen bee phenomenon (where women more often hold stronger stereotypes about women than men do, and express them more readily, making them more likely to be believed). It is important that the girls and boys who want to play sports are given the right tools to become whatever they want to be, both on and off the playing field. Think of having role models to learn from. Think of programs that strengthen self-image, but also create awareness that they themselves often think in stereotypes and how this influences their self-image and opportunities.	When we talk about the social environment, we mean the immediate surroundings of athletes. Think of the family, coaches, friends, and the social network. Within that environment, too, there are significant barriers that need to be addressed. Barriers in the social environment include gender stereotyping in sports—"girls don't play football, boys don't do ballet"—but also broader ideas such as the "standard" view on work-life balance, and the lack of mentors and professional support. Barriers never stand alone. It is important to raise more awareness within the social environment . We need to move from an environment that hinders to one that supports, with a focus on social support from those surroundings. Think of parents being engaged in this topic, but also coaches and leaders who are aware of it and who take on a role as examples and supporters.	When we talk about societal structures, we mean the sports federations, sports clubs, but also their partners. "As long as nothing changes in leadership, the rules of the game will not change either." This is especially true within existing societal structures. Here too, gender stereotyping is an important barrier, influencing, among other things, the undervaluation of women, biases in recruitment and promotion ("boys don't dance"), as well as barriers such as a male-dominated organizational culture (think of the "old boys' network"), an unsafe organizational culture, and the "leaky pipeline" (the closer to the top, the fewer women remain). Ultimately, you need organizations that are aware of their role when it comes to gender equality and that implement active policies on it. This is not about having one male horse rider, one female coach, or one woman on the board, but about cultural change and creating a critical mass .

Route to success – Theory of Change

