REFLECTIONS ON CHANGE

Meta-analysis:
Findings and lessons from evaluations
managed by UN Women in 2017

UN WOMEN

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Global Evaluation Report Assessment and Analysis System

Meta-analysis Report 2017

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EVAW	Ending Violence Against Women
GATE	Global Accountability and Tracking of Evaluation Use
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GERAAS	Global Evaluation Report Assessment and Analysis System
GRB	Gender Responsive Budgeting
HRBAP	Human Rights Based Approach to Programming
IASC	International Agency Standing Committee
IES	Independent Evaluation Service
LEAP	UN Women's Leadership, Empowerment, Access and Protection in Crisis Response Flagship Programme
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
RBM	Results Based Management
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UN SWAP	United Nations System Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UN System	United Nations System
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WCI	Women's Citizenship Initiative
WCS	Women's Cohesion Spaces
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
YIA	Young Innovators Award

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to aggregate and synthesize information generated from 2017 evaluations and transform it into accessible knowledge for future systematic strengthening of programming, organizational effectiveness and the evaluation function. This is intended to help inform the implementation of the United Nations Women Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (UN Women) Strategic Plan 2018-2021.

The meta-analysis is based on 39 evaluation reports independently rated as satisfactory or above, according to the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) quality standards. It uses a process of realist synthesis that builds on similar analyses undertaken in previous years. In addition to qualitative analysis of evaluation findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons, the meta-analysis applies a quantitative assessment of development effectiveness based on widely accepted Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development – Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) specified methods for evaluating multilateral organizations.

Looking through the lens of the UNEG/OECD-DAC evaluation criteria (effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, sustainability), this meta-analysis responds to selected operational effectiveness and efficiency results identified in the UN Women Strategic Plan 2018-2021 and examines contributions made by UN Women to humanitarian response.

Broadly, evaluations conclude that UN Women interventions are relevant, efficient and effective, with most achieving the expected results (across all thematic areas). Nonetheless, securing multi-year funding, scaling up high impact innovative approaches and strengthening results-based management (RBM) systems that go beyond capturing immediate outputs to tracking outcomes needs to be further expanded and improved.

RELEVANCE: The analysis finds that strong levels of evaluation evidence in 2017 affirm continuing improvement in UN Women overall development

effectiveness. Evaluations find UN Women interventions to be highly relevant to normative frameworks, to meet the needs of women at the national level and to demonstrate good adaptive capacity. Although UN Women projects are well designed, most evaluations found the need for more intensive situation analyses.

EFFECTIVENESS: UN Women evaluations found that interventions at all levels have been effective, with most achieving the expected results (across all of the thematic areas) despite limited resources. Strategic partnerships, UN joint programming and openness to innovation have contributed to some of the most effective interventions.

EFFICIENCY: Evaluations found solid positive performance in efficiency of implementation, management arrangements and financial planning. Evaluations conclude that UN Women interventions, overall, are balanced, cost-effective and deliver on most of the intended objectives. However, integration of monitoring, financial and reporting systems could be improved to fully support real-time programme management and effective partnership governance.

CULTURE OF RESULTS: While there was a substantial improvement in RBM systems during the Strategic Plan 2014-2017, most monitoring and reporting systems emphasized activities and outputs relative to outcomes. They, therefore, are not yet fully supporting real-time programme management or effective partnership governance.

SUSTAINABILITY: Despite limited evidence of explicit exit planning in UN Women interventions, many findings on sustainability show that the benefits of interventions are likely to continue due to consistent development of national and local institutional capacity. UN Women comparative strengths are most pronounced in alliance and network building, leveraging the integrated mandate and working with partners; using these approaches, UN Women is overcoming predominantly-hindering external environments, despite reliance on short-term non-core resources that are poorly suited to gender transformative programming.

UN COORDINATION AND JOINT PROGRAMMES: The most significant external driver of performance found in many evaluations was the integration of UN Women interventions with the United Nations System (UN System), especially at the country level. Two evaluations specifically found that country-level UN Joint Programmes can help to address some of gaps faced by UN Women resourcing challenges, with both Ethiopia and Palestine concluding that the joint programme structure created an "enabling environment" for gender equality and women's empowerment. However, while joint programming with UN System was found to be generally good, joint implementation was found to be weak.

Where joint implementation is achieved, such as in Arab States programming on Syria, programmes were found to be more efficient because they leveraged UN structures. To enhance this further, evaluations of humanitarian action found that UN Women should focus on a niche of economic empowerment and link this to wider UN programming under the cluster system.

Joint UN work was found to have made powerful contributions to cross-border and interdisciplinary programming, upstream sensitization and the obtainment of legal rights for women within larger policy frameworks. Three main challenges were identified that fully leverage UN coordination as a positive driver of change:

1. Shifting from 'planning-as-one' to implemen tation-level 'delivery-as-one'.

2. Establishing shared UN-macro frameworks/ narratives to support interventions.

3. Addressing the disconnect across the humanitarian-development continuum.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND GENDER MAINSTREAMING: Most evaluations found that partnerships have been a significant enabler of results for gender equality at all levels – global, regional and country. In particular, partnerships have supported multisector work, and the network of civil society organizations that UN Women has access to is considered to be a firm comparative strength. Evaluations at the country level also highlighted the importance of convening power as a comparative strength.

Despite its strengths, there is a need for UN Women to better develop strategic entry points due to the highly constrained availability of resources. The Strategic Plan 2014-2017 was a period of exploration and consolidation of different partnership approaches, while the Strategic Plan 2018-2021 is an opportunity to bring these evolving approaches together.

Partnerships were found by several evaluations to be the key determinant of levels of engagement with youth, especially when working with young men as partners for change. The structural engagement of youth for supporting behaviour change was found to be reliant on a combination of innovation in UN Women programming with reach, operational capacity and sustainability of partners. The overall effectiveness of these partnerships improved when there was sufficient time allocated to inception phases – an important opportunity for partners to get to know one another and learn how to work jointly in practice.

Partnerships at the national and local levels were found to be a key strategy for most UN Women projects and programmes. Most evaluations concluded that drawing on local capacities for implementation contributed to sustainability. A key attribute of sustainability was supporting the development of informal networks. This was especially the case in relation to women's economic empowerment (WEE) in which community-income generation led to the financial independence of women and development of sizeable joint venture companies.

DRIVERS OF UN WOMEN PERFORMANCE: When combined with UN Women convening power, the integrated mandate was found by many evaluations to be a key factor in supporting the participation of a broad group of stakeholders in national institutional processes, which contributed to positive impacts. Partnerships were essential to achieving this. However, UN Women reliance on non-core funds (with low levels of predictability) affects the degree to which such partnerships can be effective in supporting participation and impact.

UN Women support to technical exchanges between people from different countries or communities was found to be highly valued within programmes. This was particularly true where professionals could learn from neighbouring countries or places that shared similar attributes and experiences. While documented knowledge sharing was extensively reported as an activity, the over-reliance on exclusively English-language knowledge products is a hindering factor to effectiveness.

The commitment of UN Women staff is a key positive determinant of effectiveness. This had the biggest net-positive effect in cases where there were transparent and accountable management practices, supporting trusted relationships with partners. At the same time, several evaluations indicated that UN Women country offices lack sufficient numbers of specific positions for fully delivering on the strategic plan and country strategy notes:

1. Insufficient senior staff positions at the country level.

2. Insufficient numbers of monitoring staff to ensure data protection and use.

3. Insufficient numbers of staff with technical gender-mainstreaming expertise in humanitarian settings.

PERFORMANCE AND ADAPTATION IN HUMANITARIAN AND SECURITY SITUATIONS: Findings on humanitarian action are framed by the context that UN Women is not yet a member of the International Agency Standing Committee (IASC), which governs the humanitarian cluster system (while the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) governs refugee response). UN Women's efforts to become a member of IASC have so far been unsuccessful, which limits opportunities to leverage its mandate through IASC clusters. Addressing the varying degrees of in-country technical expertise is also important for UN Women to enhance its position as an influencer in humanitarian infrastructure.

Within the current context, partnerships have been a key driver of UN Women contributions to humanitarian outcomes and peacebuilding. UN Women has been able to effectively contribute to gender mainstreaming in the humanitarian response in countries such as Malawi and Cameroon. Several evaluations recommended that UN Women focus on supporting the uptake of IASC gender markers across all humanitarian projects.

UN Women's Leadership, Empowerment, Access and Protection in Crisis Response Flagship Programme (LEAP) has been a useful framework for supporting UN Women effectiveness. There is a need, however, for a more holistic overall global framework for gender equality and women's empowerment in humanitarian action to which UN Women could contribute in the future.

WEE was found to be the strongest humanitarian programming area, regarding quality, reach, contextual adaptations and results. UN Women's strength in economic empowerment and legal assistance for survivors of violence, as part of a holistic set of response services (with clinical and psychosocial response led by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and protection by UNHCR), is a potential area for scaling up. This entire integrated response needs to be linked to advocacy – an area where UN Women has established strengths and can most effectively draw on its broader integrated mandate.

UN Women has been successful in operating in rural and insecure conditions, despite high costs and low-level donor presence (to validate and finance projects) associated with these operations. The short timeframe of humanitarian projects (up to one year) was universally found to be a barrier to humanitarian performance, and a few evaluations recommended UN Women engage more vigorously with donors and partners to secure multi-year resource commitments, especially in protracted crises.

The four priority issues to improve the management of humanitarian action identified in evaluations are:

1. Ensuring that focus on humanitarian delivery and effectiveness does not adversely affect the performance of other longer-term development programming, especially in countries such as Sudan, where the emergency is restricted to a specific area of the country.

2. Acquiring addition staff with competencies in humanitarian response and coordination to complement technical expertise in gender.

3. Addressing the gap in multi-stakeholder learning exchanges at the regional level to support better responses to unique regional patterns in emergencies.

4. Shifting humanitarian project monitoring away from a strong focus on project activities to capture changes at output and outcome levels across multiple project cycles.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS

Conclusion 1: Despite constrained human and financial resources, evaluations found that UN Women's interventions at all levels have been effective, with most achieving the expected results. Nonetheless, UN Women should continue to improve its efforts in achieving resource targets, and refine methods and systems to track and capture outcomes and impacts.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Strengthen RBM systems to support adaptive programme management with information on the progress of interventions along the pathways to outcomes that have been articulated in theories of change. Use evidence of progress towards outcomes to advocate for longer-term and more stable core resources to scale and accelerate successful interventions.

Continue to improve RBM systems, but with a stronger focus on monitoring and reporting contribution to outcomes (instead of compliance with activity plans); and, where feasible, link this results data with financial data to help managers and partners to track which interventions and partnerships are translating resources into outcomes most effectively.

Conclusion 2: Knowledge management is reliant on the role of regional offices to connect country-level practitioners and ensure knowledge is translated into results.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Reduce duplication of country-level programme management functions within regional programmes, directing this capacity to support the enabling environment for participating countries. In particular, strengthen the knowledge

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

Conclusion 3: Effective UN coordination and joint programmes have been strong drivers of effective programming at the global and country levels.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Realizing the potential of UN reform to support gender equality and women's empowerment requires building from 'planning-as-one' to implementation-level 'delivery-as-one'.

In some cases, such as economic empowerment and gender-responsive budgeting (GRB), supporting implementation-as-one requires shared UN-macro frameworks/narratives to support interventions and counteract regressive discourse. In many cases, the shared frameworks already exist, and UN Women can leverage the integrated mandate to work hand-in-hand with other entities.

Conclusion 4: Strategic partnerships have delivered substantive, normative and operational results for UN Women and are the heart of programme sustainability.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Institutionalize a range of responsive ('fit-for-purpose') governance practices for working with different sizes and types of partner.

Build on UN Women strengths in partnership, network-building, and UN coordination as three powerful drivers of change to counter challenging external contexts and reliance on short-term non-core funding. Promulgate throughout UN Women the lessons learned about effectively working in