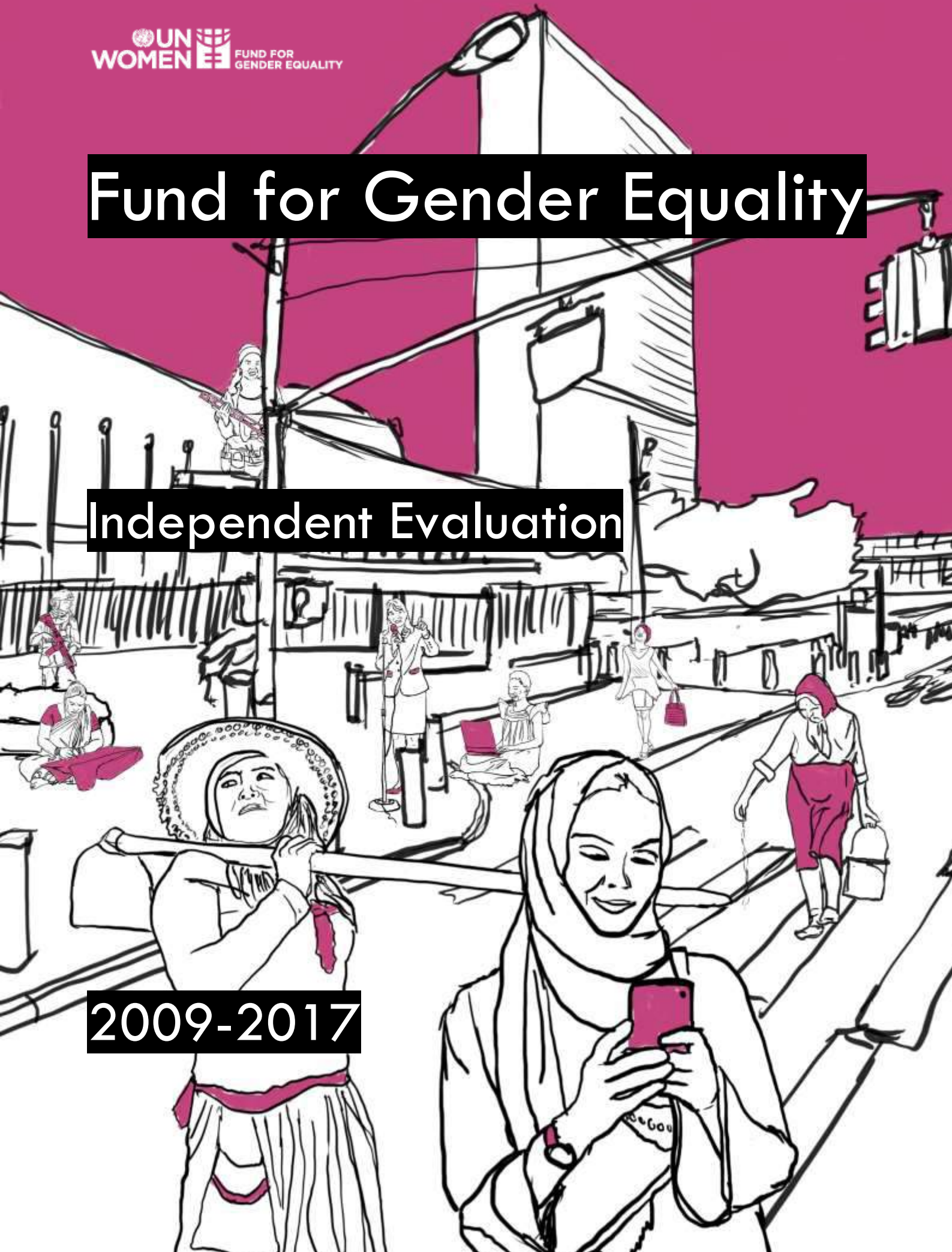


# Fund for Gender Equality

## Independent Evaluation

2009-2017



# UN WOMEN

## Independent Global Programme Evaluation of the Fund for Gender Equality, 2009-2017

### Volume 1

# FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

2018

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## List of acronyms

BPA	Beijing Platform for Action
BMC	Business Mapping Canvas
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CO	Country Office
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DRF	UN Women Development Results Framework
FGE	Fund for Gender Equality
GEEW	Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women
HQ	Head Quarters
HRBAP	Human Rights Based Approach to Programming
ICT	Information Communication Technology
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisations
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
M&R	Monitoring & Reporting Specialist
MCO	Multi-Country Office
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
OEEF	UN Women Organisational Effectiveness and Efficiency Framework
P#	Professional Level Staff in the UN system
ProDoc	Programme Document
QCA	Qualitative Comparative Analysis
RBM	Results Based Management
RMS	UN Women Results Management System
RO	Regional Office
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SDG-F	SDG Fund
SP	UN Women Strategic Plan
UNDG	UN Development Group
UNEG	UN Evaluation Group
UNIFEM	UN Development Fund for Women (Predecessor entity to UN Women)
UNTF (EVAW)	UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
WPE	Women's Political Empowerment

# Executive Summary

## Overview of the evaluation

This evaluation assesses \$84 million USD invested in accelerating the implementation of gender equality commitments through the UN Women Fund for Gender Equality (FGE). Of this amount, \$64 million was granted directly to civil society organisations in 80 countries through 121 grants made over three rounds of grant-making; the remaining funds covering capacity building, technical support, knowledge management, and management activities. The Fund encompassed two Programme Documents (ProDocs) starting in 2009 and ending in 2017.

FGE was an ambitious undertaking, not just in its aims but also in its design. The original ProDoc was pioneering in several ways that built on lessons from the past and sought to implement these quickly and at scale.

1. Demonstrating the hypothesis that women's organisations can absorb, manage and leverage large scale funding for gender equality
2. Managing programmes in sensitive political and economic spaces through requiring coalitions of CSOs and government to discover and build on common ground
3. Establishing a technical committee with women from all over the world as members
4. Investing early in an online presence to maximise reach and efficiency of calls for proposals

## Evaluation objectives and intended audience

This evaluation was commissioned because the FGE ProDoc 2014-2017 is coming to an end. Such an ending marks a natural point of transition to assess past performance and identify recommendations for the future. It assesses the Fund's achievements, working methods, management and overall performance to learn lessons for women's political and economic empowerment through working with civil society, and provide input for UN Women's Senior Management to make informed decisions about future civil society grant making approaches.

The primary intended users for the evaluation are:

- 1) **FGE staff and grantees**, to capture the performance story and lessons of FGE, and to support mutual accountability for implementation of the aims and objectives of the Fund.
- 2) **UN Women Senior Management Team**, to inform decision-making on a sustainable, effective, relevant and efficient approaches to direct-financing of civil society for women's empowerment.
- 3) **FGE, UN Women, women-led organizations, development actors, and gender advocates**, to share learning that can improve the design, effectiveness and efficiency of future grant-making; and to support advocacy and awareness raising on the value derived from funding and capacity development of women-led CSOs.

The evaluation seeks to answer 15 questions arranged under standard OECD-DAC evaluation criteria. Each evaluation question was answered through the development of 1-3 hypotheses to test. Hypotheses were assessed using a scale of 3 levels of qualitative progress markers based on: 1) the minimum standard expected of FGE, 2) a benchmark standard of comparable funds and programmes, and 3) the ideal goal of FGE. Hypotheses and progress markers were validated by the broad reference group.

## Evaluation methodology


The feminist design of the evaluation drew on a combination of two approaches:

**Democratic Evaluation** focuses on inclusive practices which foster participation and collaboration. However, it is also used as a means of ensuring public accountability and transparency.

**Outcomes Harvesting** is an evaluation approach in which evaluators, grant makers, and/or programme managers and staff identify, formulate, verify, analyse and interpret 'outcomes' in programming contexts where relations of cause and effect are not fully understood.

Four main levels of analysis were undertaken.

- 1) A portfolio analysis that drew on 23 global-level interviews, quantitative analysis of 160 indicators for each grant, benchmarking against 15 other funds and programmes, and a grantee survey with 96 responses.

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- 2) An organisational review that drew on a desk review of 1,005 documents, and interviews with 9 FGE staff.
  - 3) Participatory grantee reviews and social learning, synthesising 44 complete multimedia self-review submissions from FGE grantees and 33 detailed submissions to an [Empower Women discussion forum](#).
  - 4) Country case study visits to India and Bolivia representing 7 grants, and \$6,549,856 in investment, that drew on focus group discussions with representative from all grants, meetings with UN Women country offices, and site visits to grantees work.

## Most important findings and conclusions

### Did the fund do things right?

**The Fund for Gender Equality implemented everything it set out in Programme Documents covering 2009-2017.**

The evaluation found that FGE has *directly* touched the lives of at least 535,800 women from 80 countries through increased awareness and visibility of women's human rights, stronger CSO networks for gender equality, and establishing local partnerships for women's empowerment. Policy-level impacts are likely to have benefitted millions more. As a result it is viewed by women's civil society as **an important and necessary mechanism for advancing gender equality**.

The financing gap for gender equality CSOs (based on demand) is close to \$60 million USD per year (equivalent to 1/3 of the non-core resources mobilised by UN Women in 2016<sup>1</sup>). Addressing this gap was an original ambition of the Fund. FGE launched with a \$65 million USD contribution in 2009; by the time of the ProDoc 2014-2017 this had reduced to a steady biennial income of \$6 million USD. Nevertheless, the early results of the \$7.5 million Round 3 grants indicate the enormous value this support represents to the structurally-underfunded women's CSO that received it.

Set up under intense time pressure, and with a large initial contribution to manage, the initial programme design paid attention to realising the vision of a strategic fund grounded in feminist principles and the lessons of the past. It was not considered to be the creation of a permanent entity, and did not give significant consideration to resource mobilisation (neither did the subsequent ProDocs). As a result, the Fund itself has struggled to achieve sustained high-levels of financial support.

The Fund has, however, successfully mobilised around 0.7% of the global funding for gender equality that it is targeting. As gender is a marginalised area in terms of development funding, there remains a large untouched potential pool of funds through better gender mainstreaming in other sectors, such as climate or global health.

As the operating landscape and funding environment evolved, the primary focus of FGE has adapted: shifting towards a tight focus on addressing the structural inequality experienced by local NGOs and women-led CSOs. Recognition of this focus on inequality between organisations – between large scale 'general NGOs' and women's CSOs in particular – is critical to understanding the unique value proposition of the Fund.

**FGE grant-making has contributed directly to the development results and organisational effectiveness priorities in UN Women strategic plans covering 2011-2017.**

At the global level, the evaluation found that **FGE grant-making has been clearly aligned with UN Women development goals**, normative frameworks, and the priorities of key stakeholders. Within the areas of political and economic empowerment, FGE has systematically targeted, and strengthened the voice of marginalised groups of women. Since these groups are often not on the national agenda of governments, they mostly feature only on the fringes of UN Women country level strategic notes. This gives an impression of loose alignment at country level. However, the evaluation found multiple examples of issues and organisations first identified by FGE being mainstreamed into core UN Women programming because of increased awareness and demand built among national stakeholders.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://annualreport.unwomen.org/en/2017/financial-statements>

While the actions of FGE has been guided by a consistent theory-of-change that is fully pretexted on establishing civil society leadership, tensions have sometimes emerged in cases where UN Women country offices perceive that FGE is not supporting the implementation of country Strategic Notes that were developed in consultation with women's civil society representatives. Establishing a **shared understanding of what 'demand-led' civil society financing means** – as has been achieved in some countries – is critical to the future performance of the Fund.

**Despite the original design of FGE giving insufficient consideration to sustaining the fund; FGE has managed inputs and outputs economically, attained an appropriate level of efficiency, and delivered overall value-for-money.**

Comparative analysis with 15 gender, civil society, and environmental funds and small grants programmes reveals that **FGE performance benchmarks well in most of the institutional enablers identified in the UN Women Strategic Plan 2018-2021**. This includes: monitoring and reporting of FGE projects has been systematic, reliable, and detailed; a positive reputation among most women's civil society representatives for its efficient and effective stewardship of resources; and extensive evidence of FGE practicing a culture of 'accompaniment' – supporting leadership, continuous learning, and performance improvement by civil society organisations.

Both the management of input/output value, and an overall value-for-money assessment, indicate that FGE has achieved a 'good' performance. While the weakest areas have been found to be the systematic assessment of impacts, and the consistent assurance of sustainability, these two dimensions do not substantively detract from the impressive overall achievement of a comprehensive and **robust level of value-for-money over the lifetime of the Fund**.

The strongest overall performance of FGE relates to the 'potential for impact' evaluation criterion, with the Fund achieving 80% of its ambition and 3/5 hypotheses rating as having fully achieved the intended 'goal standard'. The second strongest area is 'effectiveness', with FGE having achieved 67% of its performance ambition, and all hypotheses achieving or approaching the 'benchmark standard' based on comparable funds and programmes.

By comparison, the only evaluation criterion in which FGE did not achieve the minimum expected standard for all hypotheses was in relation to 'potential for sustainability'. This low score is primarily related to the strategic weakness of the Fund in sustaining its own financing base, and creating limited transformation in the sustainability of grantees; however, a strongly positive finding is that 96% of supported projects have continued in some form beyond the end of FGE funding. The remaining criteria, 'relevance' and 'organisational efficiency' rated in the mid-range of the ambition of FGE and comparing similar to equivalent funds and programmes.

Evaluation criteria	Achievement of performance 'markers'
Effectiveness	67%
Organisational efficiency	45%
Potential for sustainability	22%

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