



## **Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women**

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### **Annual Session of 2015**

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Item 3 of the provisional agenda

### **Evaluation**

#### **Review of policies and practices to promote gender-responsive evaluation systems**

##### *Summary*

The international community is calling for the acceleration of progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women. An important component of this involves strengthening the capacity of evaluation systems to inform the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as the gender-related goals in the post-2015 agenda.

This review takes stock of the current gender-responsiveness of evaluation systems in place within the United Nations and among national governments and stakeholders. It focuses particularly on the role of the United Nations in national evaluation capacity development as a means of enhancing its fit-for-purpose in the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda.

The review found that gender-responsive evaluation has been integrated into the normative frameworks, institutional systems and individual capacity-building initiatives within the United Nations, but identified gaps and opportunities for improvement. At the national level, gender-responsive evaluation is at a nascent stage and more advocacy and partnerships are needed to capitalize on the current attention on gender equality.

The review concludes that the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women has a specific role to play in promoting gender-responsive evaluation within the United Nations and in its work with national governments and international evaluation partnerships.

## **A. Background and objective**

1. The year 2015 marks the twentieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the landmark Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Considered the most comprehensive blueprint on advancing women's rights, the 1995 Beijing road map was adopted by 189 governments. But 20 years on, a review of its implementation found that the commitments made in the Beijing Declaration have only been partially fulfilled.

2. In the report *The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action turns 20*,<sup>1</sup> Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director and Under Secretary-General of the United Nations Entity on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) made the following declaration:

Creating a world with greater equality for generations to come is the defining and most urgent challenge of this century. Gender equality and the realization of women's and girls' human rights are fundamental for achieving human rights, peace and security, and sustainable development, and must be central to the post-2015 development agenda. We have set 2030 as the expiry date for gender inequality. Achieving this will require unprecedented political leadership, dedicated and vastly increased resources, and new partnerships across the whole of society. I urge all our partners to give close attention to the recommendations of the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform, as we turn now to develop and then implement the new post-2015 development agenda.

3. One of the findings of the above-mentioned Beijing review was that implementation has been hampered by, among other issues, the absence of strong accountability mechanisms. As a result, the review called for enhancing accountability, one of the main purposes of evaluation, as a means to accelerate progress.

4. The proposal to include gender equality and women's empowerment in the post-2015 development agenda as a stand-alone goal, as well as to integrate them across all other goals, further elevates the strategic importance of establishing gender-responsive evaluation systems.

5. The recent United Nations General Assembly resolution (2014/A/69/473) also underscored the importance of building national capacity for the evaluation of development activities and invited United Nations entities—with the collaboration of national and international stakeholders—to support, upon request, efforts to further strengthen the capacity of Member States for evaluation, in alignment with their national policies and priorities.

6. The call from the international community to strengthen the capacity of evaluation systems to inform the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as the gender-related goals in the post-2015 agenda, raises a number of important questions specific to the role of the United Nations:

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<sup>1</sup> UN-Women, 2015

- To what extent are existing evaluation systems—within the United Nations and national governments—gender-responsive?
- Is the United Nations prepared to further strengthen the gender-responsiveness of its evaluation systems?
- When requested to do so, how can the United Nations best engage with national governments and stakeholders to strengthen capacity for gender-responsive evaluation systems?
- What have we learned from developing and implementing gender-responsive evaluation systems to date?

7. To address these questions, UN-Women, in partnership with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), EvalPartners, EvalGender+ and the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE), has commissioned this review of the policies, systems and practices in place to promote gender-responsive evaluation. By taking stock of existing gender-responsive evaluation systems within the United Nations and Member States, it provides information on the opportunities that can be addressed to strengthen these systems in the future, both individually and collectively.

## **B. Methodology and expected use**

8. The methodology consisted of a desk review and analysis of relevant and available documents, including: (i) information publicly available on the UNEG website; (ii) reporting data for the UN System-wide Action Plan for the Implementation of the Chief Executives Board United Nations System-wide Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women Evaluation Performance Indicator (UN-SWAP EPI); (iii) EvalPartners publications related to national evaluation policies and voluntary organizations for professional evaluations (VOPEs), which in turn draw on the desk review of almost 100 documents;<sup>2</sup> and (iv) additional documents publicly available either through entity or organizational websites.

9. The review process was led by the UN-Women Independent Evaluation Office. A management group was constituted to quality assure the review process and reference groups composed of a wide range of stakeholders from within UN-Women, UNEG, EvalPartners, EvalGender+ and national governments were engaged and consulted throughout the process.

10. This report is expected to be used to inform continuing and emerging efforts to develop and strengthen gender-responsive evaluation systems. It is expected to be of use to UNEG collectively; the UN Interim Coordination Mechanism for System-wide Evaluation; UN entities individually (e.g., evaluation offices) and UN-Women specifically; international, regional and national VOPEs; parliamentary forums for evaluation; national evaluation systems and offices; and international, regional and national knowledge management networks focusing on gender and/or evaluation (e.g., the Gender and Evaluation Network).

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<sup>2</sup> For example: EvalPartners, UN-Women and IOCE in partnership with UNEG, *National evaluation policies for sustainable and equitable development: How to integrate gender equality and social equity in national evaluation policies and systems* (2015); and EvalPartners, United Nations Children Fund and IOCE, in partnership with UNEG and UN-Women, *Voluntary organizations for professional evaluations [VOPEs]: Learning from Africa, Americas, Asia, Australasia, Europe and Middle East*, (2013).

### C. What is gender-responsive evaluation?

11. According to UNEG, gender-responsive evaluations:

... provide a holistic and meaningful assessment of how an intervention is guided by human rights and gender equality approaches... [It] draws upon established and well-known approaches, techniques and methods to design, implement and use evaluations. However, performing human rights and gender-responsive evaluations goes beyond technical issues. It is not about one design or set of methods, but [about the] lens or standpoint that influences choices made in design and methods... they align the work of the evaluators with binding international mandates directed at ... advancing GE [gender equality].<sup>3</sup>

12. In most cases, gender equality and the empowerment of women (GEEW) is not the direct focus of an intervention and it is often overlooked in the planning, design, implementation and monitoring phases. It is therefore not surprising that it is often omitted from the evaluation phase as well.

13. However, evaluation plays an important role as an agent of change. It can bring attention to this common oversight so that corrections can be made or future interventions improved. Evaluation can provide important learning and accountability for mainstreaming GEEW that supports strengthened implementation.

14. Gender-responsive evaluations are geared not only towards assessing GEEW results but also pay attention to processes. They assess the extent to which: (i) the intervention design is guided by GEEW objectives; (ii) the intervention has achieved results related to these objectives; and (iii) GEEW is mainstreamed in the intervention's programming process. Finally, gender-responsive evaluations also aim to integrate GEEW principles within the evaluation process itself.<sup>4</sup>

15. Evaluations that neglect or omit considerations of GEEW risk depriving stakeholders of evidence about who benefits (and who does not) from interventions, may contribute to perpetuating discriminatory structures and practices, and may miss opportunities for demonstrating how to implement effective interventions.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, an evaluation that overlooks GEEW dimensions may lack credibility since it fails to take into account this crucial aspect relevant to all development interventions and ignores potential differential effects related to gender.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> UNEG, *Integrating human rights and gender equality in evaluation* (2014).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

## **D. Policies, systems and practices to promote gender-responsive evaluation in the United Nations**

16. Within the UN system, there has been increased focus on the need for conducting gender-responsive evaluation since 2005. In response, a threefold approach has been implemented at both the system-wide and individual entity level: strengthening normative frameworks, institutional systems and individual capacities.

### **Normative frameworks to promote gender-responsive evaluation**

17. At the system-wide level, the normative framework has been strengthened through the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review Resolution A/67/276; the recently constituted Independent System-wide Evaluation Policy; and the foundational documents of UNEG—an inter-agency professional network that brings together the evaluation units of 46 UN entities.<sup>7</sup>

18. The 2012 **Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review** resulted in General Assembly Resolution 67/226 that included specific provisions explicitly calling for the UN system to strengthen gender-responsive evaluation by:

- i) Instituting greater accountability for gender equality in evaluations conducted by country teams by including gender perspectives in their evaluations<sup>8</sup>
- ii) Continuing to work collaboratively to enhance gender mainstreaming within the UN system, by ensuring that the various existing accountability mechanisms of the UN system provide for more coherent, accurate and effective monitoring, evaluation and reporting on gender equality results<sup>9</sup>
- iii) Encouraging the use of the UNEG norms and standards (including those related to gender-responsive evaluation) in the evaluation functions of UN funds, programmes and specialized agencies, as well as in system-wide evaluations of operational activities for development<sup>10</sup>
- iv) Fully implementing the UN-SWAP, including its EPI<sup>11</sup>

19. General Assembly Resolution 67/226 also called for the development of a **policy for independent system-wide evaluation** of operational activities for development of the UN system. Developed in 2013, the policy not only commits to an evaluation of UN system efforts to mainstream human rights and gender equality, but it also states that all system-wide evaluations will adhere to the UNEG norms and standards and make use of UNEG guidance

<sup>7</sup> For more information on UNEG, please see: <http://www.uneval.org>.

<sup>8</sup> General Assembly Resolution 67/226, para. 84.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, para. 89.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, para. 180.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, para. 86 and more specifically, para 87: “Requests the Joint Inspection Unit to undertake a system-wide evaluation of the effectiveness, value-added and impact of the System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women as a tool for performance monitoring and accountability for submission to the General Assembly following its full implementation.”

and tools, including the specific guidance related to integrating human rights and gender equality in evaluation.

20. The **UNEG norms and standards** for evaluation in the UN system constitute the key normative framework for evaluation within the United Nations.<sup>12</sup> An issues paper on the revision of the UNEG norms and standards developed in 2013, found that the absence of a stand-alone norm on gender equality was the most recurrently referred gap, and concluded that “there is a clear and justified need for a norm on gender equality and UNEG should consider developing such a norm”. While there are fairly substantive provisions for gender-responsive evaluation in the UNEG standards, the UNEG norms contain only one gender-responsive provision related to evaluation ethics. It is not included as a key principle for overall evaluation processes.

21. At the individual level, UN entities have translated the UNEG norms and standards for evaluation into **evaluation policies** that are tailored to each entity’s specific mandate and context. A review of 30 evaluation policies developed from 2005 to 2014<sup>13</sup> revealed that 57 per cent include at least one reference related to gender equality (or related principles).<sup>14</sup> Almost one third of these entities with evaluation policies have included GEEW as a central guiding principle for evaluation. Provisions in ethics (26 per cent) and design and methodology (23 per cent) were also more prevalent in the reviewed sample. Also of note, some policies explicitly reference the UNEG guidance documents related to integrating human rights and gender equality in evaluation and the UN-SWAP EPI technical note and scorecard.

### **Institutional systems to promote gender-responsive evaluation**

22. To be able to operationalize the above-mentioned normative frameworks, the United Nations has developed systems informed by clear operational guidance, the implementation of which is quality-assured and reported back through accountability systems.

23. UNEG has developed a series of issue-specific **guidance documents** that explain how to implement the UNEG norms and standards. The recent guidance, *Integrating human rights and gender equality in evaluation*,<sup>15</sup> is a major contribution towards operationalizing gender-responsive evaluations. In addition, other UNEG guidance documents include sections addressing methods for integrating GEEW in specific types of evaluations (e.g., impact evaluations, evaluations of normative work, etc.). UN entities have also developed entity-specific evaluation guidance that incorporates GEEW. These are normally aligned with, and drawn from, UNEG resources, and tailored to the specific context and needs of individual entities.

<sup>12</sup> The UNEG norms and standards were developed in response to General Assembly TCPR Resolution A/RES/59/250. They have also been recognized by the Economic and Social Council and the Chief Executives Board for Coordination, among others.

<sup>13</sup> The review examined the 30 individual entity evaluation policies available in the online UNEG website document library.

<sup>14</sup> Related principles include, but are not limited to, those pertaining to human rights, equity, and participation and inclusion for marginalized or vulnerable groups.

<sup>15</sup> UNEG, 2014. This builds on previous guidance developed in 2010.

24. To further guide entities in the implementation of the UNEG norms and standards, gender equality was integrated in the UNEG **quality checklist** for evaluation reports. Not only is gender equality a stand-alone parameter (consisting of five criteria), but two additional parameters also include gender equality criteria.

25. A number of UN entities have also incorporated similar parameters or criteria in their own quality assessments. While some UN entities may not have integrated GEEW explicitly in their quality assessment criteria, meta-evaluation reports nevertheless may still include sections related to the assessment of both GEEW performance and its integration in evaluation practice.

26. In the future, quality criteria may be developed for other aspects of the evaluation process beyond the report phase. For example, a UNEG-endorsed quality checklist for evaluation terms of reference and inception reports includes a specific parameter on gender equality and human rights. Although this review found only a few examples of formal quality assessment criteria for evaluation terms of reference and inception reports at the entity level, if momentum to develop such systems grows in the future, inclusion of gender equality as a specific parameter and/or as cross-cutting criteria would further support and ensure integration of GEEW in evaluations at both the design and the reporting stages.

27. While quality checklists are necessary, they alone are not sufficient to ensure full integration of GEEW in evaluation systems. The endorsement of the UN-SWAP **reporting mechanism** and **EPI** in 2012 provided further impetus to institutionalize GEEW in UN evaluation systems. The benchmarks used for the UN-SWAP EPI are the gender-related UNEG norms and standards, and UNEG guidance on integrating human rights and gender equality in evaluation. UN entities are required to assess progress against the indicator and report on an annual basis; to support this UNEG has developed a technical note and scorecard to harmonize reporting criteria among its members.

28. In 2014, UN entities reported against the UN-SWAP EPI for the second time. Out of 69 entities that were required to report, a total of 62 reported on their performance. Of the 62 entities, 28 (45 per cent) had utilized the UNEG-endorsed UN-SWAP EPI technical note and scorecard (compared to 21 entities—or 34 per cent—in 2013), demonstrating a progressive shift from self-perception reporting to more systematic and harmonized reporting. Though encouraging, the use of the UNEG-endorsed UN-SWAP EPI scorecard should be further promoted to improve comparability across UN entities.

29. Out of the 62 UN entities that submitted a report, 16 reported that the indicator was not applicable to them, either because no evaluations were conducted or they did not have an evaluation function. Of the 46 entities that reported against this indicator, 22 entities (48 per cent) reported ‘meeting requirements’, 18 entities (41 per cent) reported ‘approaching requirements’ and four entities (9 per cent) reported ‘missing requirements’. Only one entity (2 per cent) reported ‘exceeding requirements’. Overall, the UN-SWAP EPI was perceived as a powerful tool for raising the importance of integrating GEEW in the evaluations conducted by the different UN entities.

30. In addition, entities have also reported on internal steps and remedial actions taken to further incorporate the gender-related UNEG norms, standards and guidance within their

evaluation practice, with the aim of improving performance within the next and future years. While the reporting from 2014 is still being analysed, some major trends and good practices have been identified:

i) At the policy level, several UN entities are improving their evaluation frameworks to strengthen their capacity to conduct gender-responsive evaluations. Some have adopted gender-responsive evaluation provisions into their evaluation policies, strategies and guidance in the past year, with several other entities indicating their plan to do so for upcoming policy revisions.

ii) When it comes to quality assurance mechanisms, some entities have identified promising practices such as: developing peer review mechanisms for evaluations that engage their gender units/teams in the review of evaluation terms of reference and reports; committing to assess the extent to which integrating a gender perspective in all evaluation activities and products supports GEEW overall in a specific region; and conducting regular spot-checks of evaluations to ensure GEEW is integrated.

iii) At the capacity-building level, some entities delivered training on gender-responsive evaluation, not only for evaluation officers but also for project managers involved in evaluation. In one instance, several entities conducted a joint training for their evaluation staff.

31. Finally, there is some limited evidence of the UN-SWAP EPI reporting process—and the initiatives it prompts for strengthening gender-responsive evaluation—being leveraged to engage internal stakeholders (such as gender units, strategic planning units, executive offices, etc.) in ways that can build support for gender mainstreaming in other areas of work. Examples include: development of gender-responsive monitoring systems, investments in strengthening the gender-related evidence base, and development of an organizational gender equality strategy.

32. As a result, the UN-SWAP EPI reporting process is strengthening compliance and accountability by creating an environment that challenges UN entities to further strengthen their gender-responsive evaluation practice, and in some cases gender mainstreaming in general, at the organizational level.

33. Finally, UNEG has also developed and implemented a **professional peer review** framework for evaluation functions within the UN system that acts as both an external quality

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