

UNIFEM Strategic Plan 2008-2011 Evaluability Assessment

Final Report

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This Assessment was conducted by independent evaluation consultants from IOD PARC, and managed by the UN Women Evaluation Office.

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Acronyms

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CO	County Office
CS	Country Strategy
DAW	Department for the Advancement of Women
DRF	Development Results Framework
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
EVAW	Ending Violence Against Women
GEWF	Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment
GRB	Gender Responsive Budgeting
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
HO	Headquarters
INSTRAW	International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women
IRF	Integrated Results Framework
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MRF	Management Results Framework
MYFF	Multi-Year Funding Framework
OSAGI	Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women
PAC	Project Approval Committee
PCM	Programme/Project Cycle Management
RRM	Results Based Management
SP	Strategic Plan
SRO	Sub Regional Office
SRS	Sub Regional Strategy
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNIFEM	The United Nations Development Fund for Women



1. Study background and approach

This study, which was conducted from May 2010 to February 2011, is an analysis of the UNIFEM Strategic Plan (2008-2011), its associated results frameworks and institutional systems. It assesses UNIFEM's experience of implementing the Strategic Plan, with a view to informing the new strategic planning process of UN Women. It is aimed at all members of UN Women and relevant partners, at headquarters, sub-regional and country levels, plus any interested external partners.

The implementation of Resolution A/RES/64/289 in July 2010, which mandated the formation of the UN's new organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women (subsequently UN Women) led to a decision to modify the study and a consequent two-month pause in its implementation. Rather than pursue a classic evaluability assessment (given that evaluation of UNIFEM's Strategic Plan was now unlikely), the revised purpose of the study was:

A qualitative analysis of the Strategic Plan's basic parameters and its monitoring and reporting systems...A formative and forward looking exercise aimed at capturing best practices, challenges and lessons learned from the UNIFEM Strategic Plan experience to date for reflection and learning.

The study comprised a range of methods: technical appraisal of corporate, thematic, regional, sub-regional and country Strategic Plan documents and results frameworks; review of a wide range of internal and external documentation, including workplans and annual reports; interviews with UNIFEM staff and external informants; workshops with and feedback from a Reference Group; programme and country sampling and selection leading to in-depth analysis of selected sub-regional (8) and country (8) offices and field visits to two sub-regional offices (Andean and Central & Eastern Europe) and two country offices (Colombia and

Albania) conducted in November 2010.

Despite experiencing a number of challenges, which are set out in the full report, the study has identified some relevant and interesting lessons on the formulation of the UNIFEM Strategic Plan, its systems and the experience of its implementation. Consequently, it provides a useful body of evidence on how the learning from UNIFEM's Strategic Plan experience could be used to support any future institutional planning processes of UN Women.

2. Key findings and conclusions

The key conclusions of the report are presented below in summary form, followed by lessons learned in section 3 and recommendations in section 4. The full report also contains five findings sections, which set out from which these conclusions have been derived.

Conclusion 1: The Strategic Plan and its technical robustness

The UNIFEM Strategic Plan and the understanding of change on which it is based provided a **relevant, appropriate and conceptually sound articulation** of UNIFEM's core mandate on the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE). However, there are some **technical weaknesses**, which constrained its effective implementation. These include:

- There is **insufficient development of the understanding of change and results logic** within the **Strategic Plan** and **inadequate recognition of potentially different pathways of change**;
- There is very **limited acknowledgment within the Strategic Plan of the assumptions and risks** that underlie the processes of change, such as the political

factors that drive or hinder this;

- The **roles of key strategies** (e.g. knowledge management, capacity development) in linking outcomes and progressing change are **not sufficiently elaborated** within the Strategic Plan;
- Despite the considerable improvement from previous years, **specific results and neutral and measurable indicators/concrete targets** are not consistently applied within the Strategic Plan framework, nor does it have a **baseline** to set a starting point;
- While the Strategic Plan places emphasis on implementation at national level, the **primacy of country strategy planning** has been only a relatively recent departure within the strategic planning process.

performance management and trend analysis;

- There was **limited analysis of trends/progress and downward feedback loops**, which constrained the flow and use of valuable information;
- There was a need **to enable reporting beyond fixed and sometimes narrow global indicators** so that offices and sections could report on significant, wider changes;
- Considerable progress was made on results measurement but **systems had not yet been geared to support comprehensive results management** (throughout the full programme cycle). In particular **monitoring was not well developed**, though significant progress has been made to move towards results-focused evaluation.

Conclusion 2: Accompanying systems and their role in supporting Strategic Plan delivery

The systems developed for Strategic Plan implementation represent a **major transformation** in the way UNIFEM sought to introduce a results based culture and to collect and analyse data for performance monitoring. However, implementation did **not deliver the results oriented culture** envisaged. Specifically:

- Guidance material to support sections and offices to develop linked strategies is **good practice but can be improved on** in terms of timeliness and comprehensiveness;
- The results tracking system enabled **comprehensive results reporting** at global level but its main gearing towards (centralised) annual reporting **constrained its potential utility** for more locally relevant

Conclusion 3: The experience of implementation: UNIFEM's take-up and use of the Strategic Plan and its systems

The Strategic Plan, its results frameworks and associated systems provided a **clear organising frame** to make explicit UNIFEM's work and strategic focus to staff and partners. They supported coherence and consistency across the organisation. However, their potential value was **not being fully realised** (especially at sub-regional and country levels):

- The understanding of how change would be supported through the Strategic Plan was **not been sufficiently tested and validated at local levels**;
- The Strategic Plan was providing a conceptual **umbrella for thematic and strategic coherence, rather than acting as a strategic driver for operations**;

- The results tracking system was **not adequately supporting local reporting and decision-making**;
- UNIFEM's **status in the UN, inadequate staffing and insufficient predictability of resources** constrained effective implementation, and were out of sync with the aims of the Strategic Plan;
- The process of development of the Strategic Plan and related strategies (such as country strategies) took place rapidly, and **without the time period required for full engagement and discussion** with staff and partners.

Conclusion 4: The role of the Strategic Plan in supporting the delivery of UNIFEM's remit around normative / operational activity plus UN co-ordination processes

Under the Strategic Plan a considerable volume of work took place to **address normative and operational linkages** and to support the **mainstreaming of GEWE within UN coordination processes** centrally and at field level. However, this was not being conducted to its full potential:

- While UNIFEM's mandate was generally understood by partners, **the Strategic Plan document was not generally well known or communicated**;

normative and operational work, **further work is needed to strengthen these linkages**, including generation of an evidence base on what is working/not working.

Conclusion 5: The role of the Strategic Plan in delivering an information base to support any later evaluation

The measures taken to provide evidence of Strategic Plan impact has enabled the generation of a **more focused and coherent evidence base for future evaluation** than was the case previously. In particular there are now up-to-date and aligned performance data, which are aggregated from country to corporate levels. However:

- The lack **of clarity on starting position** (baseline); an **absence of clear targets** (in country strategies as well as corporate Strategic Plan) and **inadequate monitoring systems and capacity**, severely limits robust and comprehensive performance measurement;
- The **evaluation evidence base is gradually developing** but lacks (i) a systematic approach to generating evaluation information around areas of strategic institutional interest; (ii) feedback loops between evaluation reports and strategic planning and

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