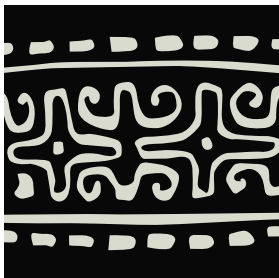


Pamphlet



# **Evaluation of UNIFEM's Partnerships with Regional Organizations to Advance Gender Equality**



## I. BACKGROUND

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The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) provides financial and technical assistance to innovative programmes and strategies that foster women's empowerment and works with a variety of partners at global, regional and national levels in the pursuit of its primary goal – that national commitments to advance gender equality and women's empowerment are implemented in stable and fragile states.

For more than a decade, UNIFEM has partnered with regionally focused intergovernmental organizations referred to as regional organizations (ROs) in its work towards achieving this goal. In 2008, it had 28 such partnerships at different stages of development and partnered with four types of regional organizations: multidimensional regional organizations, multidimensional subregional organizations, regional bodies within the UN system, and regional development banks.

The Evaluation of UNIFEM's Partnerships with ROs to Advance Gender Equality was an in-depth assessment of the relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of these partnerships as a means of strengthening UNIFEM's overall development effectiveness. The need for such an assessment was endorsed by UNIFEM's Consultative Committee, which made a formal request in this regard.



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## UNIFEM - RO Partnerships as of 2009

Africa	Latin America & the Caribbean	Asia, Pacific & Arab States	Central & Eastern Europe / Commonwealth of Independent States
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. African Union (AU)</li> <li>2. New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD),</li> <li>3. Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)</li> <li>4. African Development Bank (AfDB)</li> <li>5. Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)</li> <li>6. East Africa Community (EAC)</li> <li>7. Southern African Development Community (SADC)</li> <li>8. Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)</li> <li>9. Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS)</li> <li>10. Western African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU)</li> <li>11. International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR)</li> <li>12. Indian Ocean Commission (IOC)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)</li> <li>14. Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)</li> <li>15. Organization of American States (CIM/OAS)</li> <li>16. Mercado Común del Sur (Mercosur/REM)</li> <li>17. System of Central American Integration (SICA/COMMCA)</li> <li>18. Caribbean Community (CARICOM)</li> <li>19. Caribbean Development Bank (CDB)</li> <li>20. Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>21. South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)</li> <li>22. Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)</li> <li>23. Pacific Island Forum (PIF)</li> <li>24. Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)</li> <li>25. League of Arab States (LAS)</li> <li>26. Asian Development Bank (ADB)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>27. UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)</li> <li>28. Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC)</li> </ol>

## II. THE EVALUATION

UNIFEM commissioned an independent corporate evaluation of its partnerships with ROs from October 2008 to November 2009 that was conducted by an external evaluation team and managed by UNIFEM's Evaluation Unit. Key inputs and feedback to the process were provided by an internal reference group of relevant UNIFEM staff and an external reference group composed of representatives from UNIFEM's RO partners.<sup>1</sup>

The evaluation was gender and human rights responsive, utilization-focused, consultative and aligned with UNIFEM's evaluation policy and United Nations Evaluation Group's (UNEG) Norms and Standards.<sup>2</sup> It was conducted in two phases: 1) an expanded inception phase that looked at UNIFEM's partnerships with ROs in all regions and 2) an in-depth study phase that focused on six (6) partnerships with ROs in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean (AU, ECOWAS, ICGLR, SADC, CARICOM, and SICA/COMMCA). More than 170 individuals were consulted for the evaluation and data collection methods used were mostly qualitative and included workshops, phone and in-person interviews, document review, site visits and surveys.

<sup>1</sup> The External Reference Group was composed of ten members from ROs with which UNIFEM works: Director of the Women, Gender and Development Directorate, AU; Principle Programme Officer/Head of Division, Gender, Youth and Children's Affairs, ECOWAS; Head of Gender Unit, SADC; Gender Expert, ICGLR; Director/OIC, African Centre for Gender and Social Development, UNECA; Deputy Programme Manager, Culture and Community Development and Gender Affairs, CARICOM; Gender Advisor, Technical Secretariat of COMMCA, SICA; Coordinator, Programme for the Support of Women's Leadership and Representation, IDB; Senior Advisor to the Executive Secretary, UNECE; and Director of Social Affairs, SAARC.

<sup>2</sup> The evaluation also participated in the piloting of a Draft UNEG Guidance Document on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation. More information on the guidance document is available at [www.unevaluation.org](http://www.unevaluation.org).



## Evaluation Objectives

- Describe and analyse UNIFEM's experience with regional organizations (ROs) to date in terms of the types, purposes and expected results and strategies of these partnerships, and in relation to the main characteristics of its RO partners.
- Identify the key strengths, areas for improvement, and lessons learned by UNIFEM and the ROs it has partnered with on the promotion of gender equality, with particular attention to:
  - The (intended and actual) results and benefits of these partnerships for UNIFEM and for the ROs;
  - The sustainability of these partnerships and their results;
  - Variations across regions; and
  - Develop a framework that can be used by UNIFEM to categorize, make decisions about, and assess UNIFEM's partnerships with ROs in the future.
- Provide UNIFEM with recommendations on policies and/or practices that could guide its engagement with ROs in the future.

While UNIFEM has an established corporate strategic plan that guides all of its activities, it has not yet developed an operational framework for what constitutes a successful UNIFEM-RO partnership, e.g. the types of lower level changes to which these partnerships are expected to contribute, how these changes contribute to corporate outcomes and goals, and how the strategies used are intended to effect desired changes. Based on data gathered during the inception phase, the Evaluation Team constructed two **operational results frameworks** to capture some of the implicit assumptions underlying UNIFEM's work with ROs. This was used as a basis for assessing UNIFEM's partnerships with ROs.

## III. EVALUATION FINDINGS

### *Contextual Issues of UNIFEM-RO Partnerships*

Since the end of the Cold War, ROs have increased in number, and have expanded the scope and density of their activities. There is wide agreement among consulted stakeholders that ROs are important players with the potential to significantly influence policies, agendas, and practices with respect to gender equality and women's human rights – not only at the regional level, but also at the national level. There is a distinct push within the UN, and among donors and many country governments, for development partners to engage with ROs, particularly in the context of UN reform and the Paris Declaration. At the same time, agencies such as UNIFEM are still in the process of finding the most appropriate and effective ways of working with ROs and of enhancing alignment and harmonization among themselves.

UNIFEM currently uses the term '*partnership*' for a variety of different relationships with stakeholders. For the purposes of this evaluation, the terms '*boundary partner*' and '*strategic partner*' were introduced to describe two different types of relationships.<sup>3</sup> The two types of partnerships are not mutually exclusive and some partnerships have elements of both. UNIFEM's relationships with both boundary and strategic partners can also be '*strategic*' in the everyday sense of the term, i.e. in that they are part of a systematic plan of action designed to achieve a larger objective or goal. UNIFEM has related to ROs as a boundary partner in approximately 75% of the reviewed partnerships.

- Boundary partners are those individuals, groups, or organizations with which a programme interacts directly and with whom it can anticipate some opportunities for influence.
- Strategic partners are actors that a programme works with but which it does not want to (or is not able to) directly influence or change.

<sup>3</sup> These terms, derived from IDRC's Outcome Mapping Methodology, are used in this report to describe the relationships that UNIFEM has with ROs – not to make judgments about the nature, relevance or effectiveness of a particular partnership or RO.

The number and characteristics of UNIFEM's current partnerships with ROs differ considerably by region. This is due to a multitude of factors including variations in: i) the existence and roles of ROs in different regions, ii) the maturity and capacity of ROs, as well as iii) the history, number and type of partnerships that UNIFEM already has in the region with other organizations. Partnering with ROs in each region is also defined by the varying degree and context of regional integration.

While partnerships with ROs vary based on contextual factors, most ROs share some key characteristics that define their common potential as well as common limitations. Most ROs share a common focus of influencing change at the national level within their member countries to foster the advancement of common regional goals. Another shared key characteristic is that ROs typically act as catalysts that can positively influence the enabling environment for change, but cannot steer or control change at the national level. **While each partnership between UNIFEM and a RO is unique, the evaluation data indicate that UNIFEM's current and recent partnerships focus on two main areas: 1) institutional development and 2) policy development and advocacy.**

#### **Finding 1: UNIFEM is highly relevant to all consulted RO representatives.**

For some, partner satisfaction is considered a relevant indicator of performance. While UNIFEM's financial contributions are relatively modest, RO partners stressed the helpfulness of UNIFEM's presence, experience-based advice and ongoing encouragement. Key positive characteristics that were mentioned as distinguishing UNIFEM from other partners that ROs work with include its unique mandate, experience and expertise focusing on GE and WHR; close connection/good working relations with regional and national CSOs; status as a neutral UN agency that allows it to establish and facilitate networking among a broad range of diverse players; demand-driven approach; and its staff members' knowledge and experience on regional issues and challenges and networks/connections with regional women's organizations/entities working on GE and WHR.

#### **Finding 2: UNIFEM has not explicitly defined the rationale and expected benefits of its partnerships with ROs or established a way to track and report on the relevance of those partnerships.**

As with other UN agencies, UNIFEM is expected and mandated to work with ROs. While this may make the question of 'why engage with ROs?' irrelevant on a pragmatic level, it does not suffice to answer the question: what is the potential and actual *relevance* of engaging with ROs as a particular type of partner? Therefore, it is still important for UNIFEM to identify how a proposed or existing partnership is expected to be (or is) relevant to UNIFEM and the respective RO in terms of fulfilling their mandates and/or working towards their organizational priorities.

UNIFEM's partnerships with ROs are based on a number of largely implicit assumptions (i.e., not formally stated or corporately agreed upon) about their relevance to UNIFEM on which there is wide agreement. However, there has been no systematic analysis of the extent to which these reasons and their implied benefits are valid. Clearly and explicitly defining the rationale and expected benefits of partnerships and establishing a tracking system for related results would allow UNIFEM to report on the continued relevance of these partnerships.

#### **Finding 3: Stakeholders consulted inside and outside UNIFEM agree on the key reasons for and benefits of working in partnership with ROs.**

ROs are seen to be relevant partners for UNIFEM (and vice versa) for reasons beyond the fact that working with ROs is mandated for UN agencies. ROs are considered to have potential for influencing change at regional and national levels as far as GE and WHR are concerned, in particular through the development of policy/normative frameworks that are agreed upon at the regional level and ROs' ability to act as catalysts and facilitators of change. However, information collected was anecdotal and not backed up with concrete examples of how ROs have influenced change at the national level.



- 1) *ROs can have a multiplier effect* and working with them can be a cost-effective way of working towards goals in countries/subregions where UNIFEM does not have a presence.
- 2) *ROs can provide a particular theme or issue with increased legitimacy at the national level* and working with them can enhance the effectiveness of UNIFEM and other partners' national level advocacy on GE.
- 3) *ROs can develop and implement regional level policies/agreements that are (more or less) binding for Member States* and, therefore, can be important allies towards the common goal of implementation of regional/ international commitments at the national level.
- 4) *ROs can serve as effective forums for enhancing the influence of UNIFEM's other partners* and, therefore, are relevant partners for strengthening the capacity and influence of other regional and national partners on GE.
- 5) *ROs have specific knowledge, capacities, and resources related to the regional context that might be complementary to UNIFEM's or that UNIFEM might learn from* and can act as UNIFEM's implementing partners to scale up projects or co-implement projects.

**Finding 4: There is considerable evidence that UNIFEM-RO partnerships have resulted in positive short-term and some midterm changes.**

The short and midterm changes realized are meaningful mostly in terms of their potential future contribution to further changes within the RO at regional and, ultimately, national levels. They are positive contributions to the enabling environment for change at the national level (while not actually constituting changes at the national level themselves, it is plausible that the achieved results positively influence the existing conditions for such change).

Type of Result	Example of Results/Achievements
Changes in RO policies	<div>1. Development of the <b>AU</b> women's rights protocol and Gender Policy; <b>SADC</b> Gender Policy and Gender and Development Protocol; <b>IGAD</b> Gender Policy and <b>ECOWAS</b> Gender Policy.</div> <div>2. <b>CARICOM</b> has adopted several policy statements and plans of actions, such as 'Plan of Action to 2005: Framework for Mainstreaming Gender into Key CARICOM Programmes' (2003).</div>
Changes in RO structures and/or practices	<div>1. Establishment of the <b>SADC</b> Gender Unit; <b>ECOWAS</b> Gender Division and Centre for Gender Development (as two distinct entities) and support for establishment of <b>IGAD's</b> Gender Unit (2005).</div> <div>2. By being a Council member, UNIFEM has actively participated in the definition of <b>IDB PROLEAD</b> Program priority funding areas.</div> <div>3. UNIFEM supported the creation of the 'Women and <b>MERCOSUR</b>' Network which in turn supported the creation of the Specialized Meeting of Women (<b>REM</b>).</div> <div>4. <b>SAARC</b> and UNIFEM collaborated on the development of the SAARC Gender InfoBase (SGIB).</div>



Type of Result	Example of Results/Achievements
New knowledge or tools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Improved gender statistics and indicators for public policy and gender analysis of MDGs in Argentina and Paraguay (in cooperation with <b>UNECLAC</b>).</li><li>2. Research studies on women domestic workers in Central America carried out by UNIFEM's programme AGEM at the request of <b>COMMCA</b> and study of political party manifestos in <b>SADC</b> region in terms of the extent to which they promote and support the participation of women in political parties.</li><li>3. Joint <b>SAARC</b>-UNIFEM publication: <i>Gender initiatives In SAARC: A Primer</i>; the <b>UNECE</b>-UNIFEM joint publication, <i>The Story Behind the Numbers: Women and Employment</i>; and joint UNIFEM/<b>UNECA</b> publication <i>Partnership for Gender Equality: The Role of Multilateral and Bilateral Agencies in Africa</i>.</li></ol>
Enhanced capacities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Women's organizations in the Great Lakes Region mobilized and able to provide input to <b>ICGLR</b> Process.</li><li>2. UNIFEM and <b>IGAD</b> (and others) jointly hosted a Somali Women's Symposium in Uganda bringing together Somali and Ugandan delegates.</li><li>3. Support for sensitizing staff of the <b>CARICOM</b> Secretariat to the concepts of gender and gender mainstreaming.</li></ol>

**Finding 5: Consulted stakeholders widely agree that the UNIFEM-RO partnerships have the potential to contribute to longer-term impact including at the national level. However, there are no reliable data available to provide objective evidence of this.**

Linkages may exist between changes achieved through UNIFEM-RO partnerships and subsequent changes at national level and it is also plausible that ROs can have an influence at the national level. While the evaluation collected some anecdotal evidence of such linkage, there was little if any objective evidence available to support it.

ROs and their partners are aware of and struggling with the difficulty of tracking contributions to complex, long-term development impacts (such as GE and WE), and attributing such impacts to specific interventions. Neither ROs, nor their development partners have developed reliable and systematic mechanisms to monitor or assess the impact of RO policies, agreements and decisions. Information is also lacking on the factors needed to enable regional initiatives to have 'trickle down' effects at the national level.

In this light, the absence of objective evidence of UNIFEM-RO partnerships contributing to longer-term changes is neither surprising, nor does it mark a weakness or gap in partnership performance. However, it highlights the need to make logical relations between expected immediate or midterm results and intended longer-term impacts explicit in order to illustrate and track the relevance of interim results in the broader context of long-term social change.

**Finding 6: There is limited evidence that UNIFEM-RO partnerships have contributed to sustainable changes within or outside the respective RO.**

In reviewing the sustainability or dynamic adaption of short and midterm results of UNIFEM-RO partnerships, it was found that some factors that affect sustainability are beyond UNIFEM's control (e.g. changes in the political or economic contexts of ROs, change in leadership, etc.), but others are within UNIFEM's sphere of influence and could be improved, such as short-term and activity-focused intervention strategies with ROs and limited systematic mid to long-term follow-up and support.





The issue of tracking by UNIFEM and ROs of partnership results, or lack thereof, affects the overall ability to plan and report on sustainability of partnerships. Many of the gender policies, frameworks, and agreements developed with UNIFEM's help are important steps in the complex change processes to achieve GE and WHR, but given that most of these policies are relatively new and coupled with the absence of mechanisms to collect data on these change processes, it was not possible for the evaluation team to comment on their sustainability. Similarly, in regards to the development of studies and publications, there is no information on whether and to what extent UNIFEM and/or its partner organizations have systematically tracked their actual use and effects.

Although the establishment and work of UNIFEM supported Gender Units within ROs are considered successes, most of the reviewed Gender Units continue to face severe challenges such as limited influence within the respective ROs and scarce senior level gender sensitivity and buy-in. This raises the question of whether and to what extent support to these units has been based on concepts of individual and/or institutional capacity and capacity development and what types of indicators should be used to monitor institutional change and commitment to GE and WHR within ROs.

While RO stakeholders provided examples of their enhanced capacities as a result of UNIFEM-RO partnerships, it was not possible to determine if these were one-time initiatives or part of an ongoing process of applying and developing stakeholder awareness, knowledge, skills, and commitment that can be sustained.

**Finding 7: UNIFEM's partnerships with ROs are established and managed individually on a case-by-case basis. Consulted UNIFEM staff in several locations expressed the need for a more corporate approach to managing RO partnerships.**

A variety of different approaches are used to manage partnerships between UNIFEM and ROs, which are for the most part managed individually by the relevant UNIFEM Subregional Office (SRO) and are governed by partnership arrangements that vary significantly in terms of formality, duration, objectives and resources allocated. The individualized nature of managing these partnerships provides some key benefits (context specific, responsive, accessible, and personalized), as well as some limitations:

- Reliance on personalized contacts that could affect sustainability.
- Diversity of management approaches make it difficult to compare partnerships with different ROs and systematically collect and analyse data to draw lessons based on experience and to share information that could lead to development of replicable models.
- Lack of explicit criteria for assessment of RO partners and partnerships (when to exit a partnership and/or change strategy) could lead to wastage of human and financial resources.

The benefits and limitations of the current approach need to be weighed when taking any decision on the level of corporate criteria/guidance to be provided for UNIFEM-RO partnerships (based on the type of RO), as well as the roles and responsibilities of UNIFEM staff in managing RO partnerships. In addition, fragmentation of the management approach when an RO partner falls under the jurisdiction of two different SROs needs to be addressed.

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