



**IN BRIEF**

# CORPORATE FORMATIVE EVALUATION OF UN WOMEN'S SUPPORT FOR CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT OF PARTNERS TO RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS AT NATIONAL LEVEL

**Capacity development support to partners is a central intervention strategy for UN Women** and is widely used across the organization. UN Women supports capacity development among duty bearers and rights holders, at multiple levels, and in relation to both technical and functional capacities, through capacity development interventions that take a wide variety of forms.

The centrality of capacity development within UN Women's work can be seen in UN Women's 2018–2021 Strategic Plan, which envisioned capacity development to partnership stakeholders as a key type of support in its operational activities. In the 2022–2025 Strategic Plan, capacity development is identified as one of the intervention strategies to achieve results, with 11 indicators aimed at measuring capacity development of various stakeholders. In terms of financial commitments, for the period 2018–2021, UN Women budgeted US\$ 152.76 million for capacity development to partners, with a total expenditure of US\$ 152.82 million.

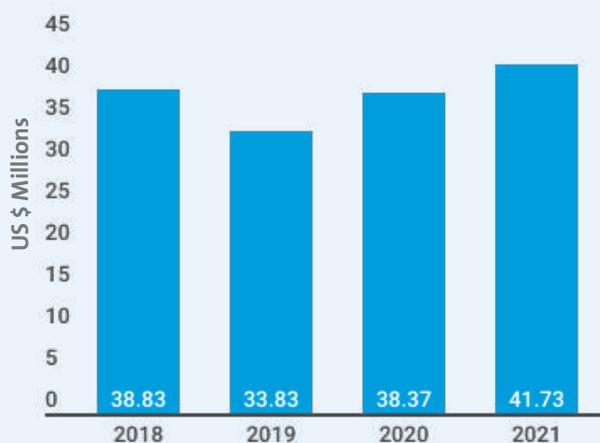
## EVALUATION PURPOSE AND FOCUS

This was a formative evaluation intended to support strategic decision-making and organizational learning. Given the huge breadth of UN Women's capacity development work, the evaluation focused specifically on interventions that aimed to develop the capacity of partners at national level during the period 2018 to early 2022.

### The main evaluation questions are:

- To what extent is UN Women's support for capacity development effective in delivering impact for women and girls?
- To what extent is UN Women's support for capacity development coherent in its approach and coordinated across the organization and with external stakeholders?
- How are human rights, gender equality and inclusion incorporated into UN Women's support for capacity development?
- To what extent are UN Women's organizational processes and structures, and its human, financial and technical resources, adequate to provide capacity development support to partners?
- How sustainable are the results from UN Women's support for capacity development?

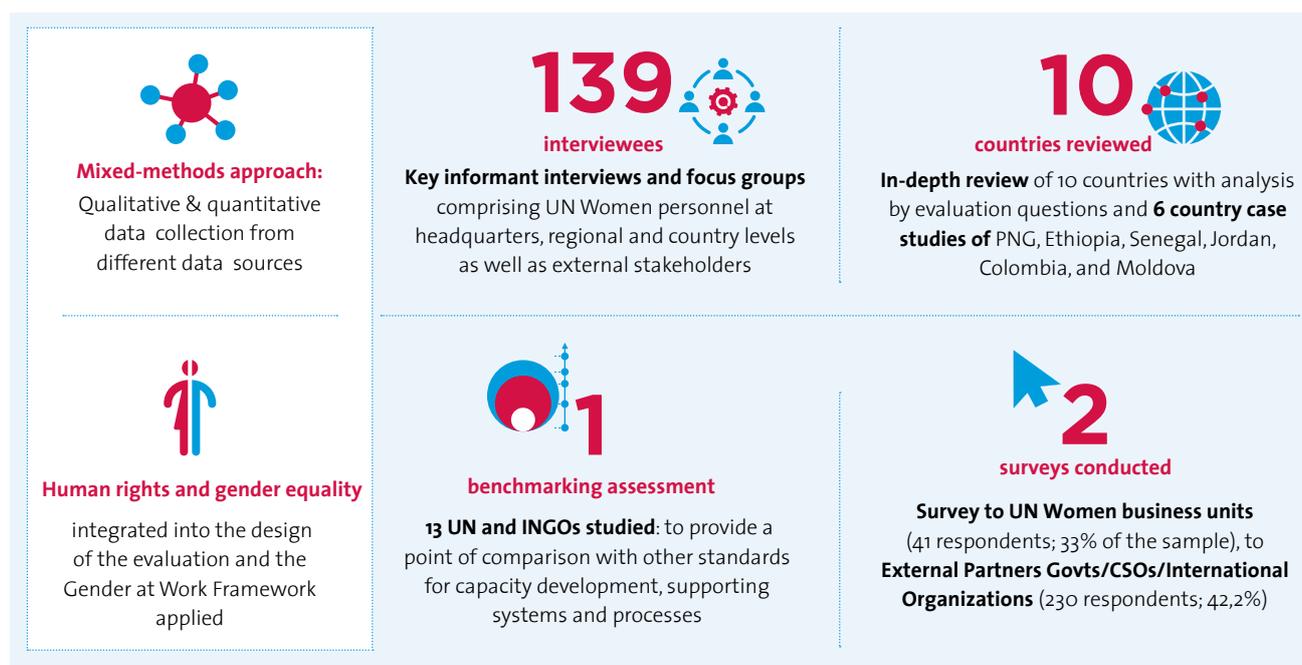
Capacity development budget per year (US \$ Millions)



## METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was utilization-focused and employed a capacity development framework, a theory-based evaluation approach, and contribution analysis through an examination of country case studies. It also applied a gender-responsive and human rights-based approach. A theory of change was developed for the purpose of the evaluation. The evaluation employed a mixed-methods data collection and analysis, driven by evaluation questions, which were selected to provide the best evidence.

Core components of the evaluation were: document review and analysis of over 160 documents; 10 desk-based country reviews; 141 key informant interviews; a survey of UN Women personnel and a survey of external partners; and 5 country case studies: Senegal (in-country); Papua New Guinea, Colombia, Jordan, Ethiopia (all virtual); and Moldova (secondary data from a recent evaluation). In addition, a benchmarking study was conducted with a sample of 13 UN agencies and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs).



## MAIN FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

**Capacity development support is a central element of UN Women's work at national level and is recognized by multiple stakeholders as both valuable and needed. However, the development of a clear organization-wide definition, framework and approach for UN Women's support to capacity development could significantly increase its potential to contribute to results.**

The evaluation noted there was no consistent definition of capacity development across the organization, with UN Women personnel articulating a variety of different definitions. There is also no organization-wide capacity development strategy or guidance. This situation results in a weak shared understanding of what capacity development is and the role it plays within UN Women's work. It also means there is no common approach to designing, delivering, monitoring, reporting on, or communicating UN Women's capacity development work. It would be useful for UN Women to develop a clearly articulated definition of capacity development and related strategy, purpose and principles. Some other agencies have corporate strategies or comprehensive guidance for capacity development that can be learned from.

**UN Women uses a range of capacity development practices that, if meaningfully integrated within a broader 'systems' approach, could contribute more effectively to impact. The current focus is on developing capacity at individual and organizational levels, with limited focus on developing capacity at the level of the enabling environment or working across multiple levels. UN Women is highly valued for its collaborative partnerships at all levels, so is particularly well placed to support capacity development across multiple levels of stakeholders.**

The evaluation found few examples of capacity development work across individual, organizational and enabling environment levels, and a far stronger emphasis on equipping individuals with knowledge and skills than developing capacity across wider systems. It also found that capacity development interventions are often small scale, ad hoc and not well connected to broader systems and change processes. This weakness is due both to funding limitations and limited knowledge on holistic approaches to capacity development.

A more systemic and holistic approach is required in which capacity development is well connected to the wider system it seeks to influence; works at multiple levels; and builds different types of capacities. The evaluation found some positive examples of such approaches, for example where Country Offices have worked over time, at multiple levels and with multiple actors to achieve results, or have institutionalized capacity development within partner organizations.

The evaluation also found that Country Offices have strong networks at multiple levels (regional, national, subnational, local) and among different actors, which can be drawn on to develop more holistic approaches to capacity development. As UN Women's capacity development work is limited in funding and scale, it is critical that this work is strategic, catalytic and connected to wider systems to make maximum contribution to impact.

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**There is an insufficiently systematic approach to ensuring quality standards across the various stages of capacity development interventions. UN Women needs to develop a consistent approach to analysing context; undertaking needs assessments; identifying the most appropriate capacity development modalities; and undertaking follow-up, which together could strengthen the quality of interventions.**

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While the evaluation found some examples of strong and systematic approaches to planning, delivering and monitoring capacity development programming, in most cases it was ad hoc, with significant variety in terms of how it was undertaken. This frequent lack of a consistent and robust approach to the various stages of capacity development means that interventions vary substantially in quality, results and impact.

In terms of delivery, the most effective approach was a combination of modalities, particularly those that are focused on imparting knowledge and skills, with ongoing support to apply new skills. Follow-up emerged as a particularly weak part of the capacity development cycle, which was absent in many smaller initiatives, although was more likely to be undertaken within larger-scale capacity development programmes.

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**The absence of designated roles and responsibilities between headquarters, Regional and Country Offices in relation to capacity development can lead to inconsistent support to Country Offices, as well as untapped knowledge-sharing opportunities across the organization.**

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Similarly, UN Women's thematic areas develop their capacity development initiatives independently (in the absence of an overarching strategy), with limited synergies between thematic areas. The overall efficiency of capacity development support across the organization could be improved by strengthening coordination, coherence and knowledge sharing in this area.

There is little structured coordination among headquarters, Regional and Country Offices on capacity development, with the extent and quality of such coordination depending largely on individual personnel. Headquarters support to Country Offices is considered valuable in some cases for its technical inputs, while some capacity development resources produced by headquarters are also highly valued.

UN Women systems for sharing knowledge and guidance on capacity development could be strengthened as there is currently no repository of capacity development materials. Where Country Office personnel are not supported to access relevant knowledge materials, this can result in Country Office's '*reinventing the wheel*' or having to identify external resources for guidance.

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**There is limited evidence on the impact of capacity development support at the national level. This is due to overreliance on lower-level results; limited monitoring of longer-term outcomes and impact; and limited use of baselines against which to assess change. There is a need to strengthen conceptualization of how capacity development interventions will contribute to impact.**

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Reported results from capacity development work are frequently outputs or lower-level outcomes, which provide insufficient insight into how interventions have contributed to gender equality goals. The main reasons why evidence on impact is so weak are inconsistent monitoring of results; absence of clear and realistic theories of change; limited investment across the organization in learning about impact; and the short-term nature of funding and staffing for capacity development interventions.

While this is a very common issue, observed across other organizations, the evaluation did find some positive exceptions where programming was based on clear theories of change and systems were in place to monitor longer-term outcomes.

The evaluation identified a need to increase investment in tracking how outputs or lower-level outcomes contribute to higher-level outcomes and impact over time, information which could both help assess the impact of existing interventions and inform the development of more impactful future interventions.

**The extent to which capacity development support contributes to gender-transformative change is constrained by a limited focus on addressing norms, attitudes and behaviours that drive gender inequality, as well as limited purposeful inclusion of the most marginalized populations. It is important to strengthen personnel's understanding and application of leave no one behind principles within capacity development work.**

Most capacity development initiatives seek to advance gender equality by empowering individual women, or by strengthening formal rules and policies to foster a more enabling policy and institutional environment. There has been less focus on addressing informal systemic drivers of gender inequality, such as discriminatory norms and exclusionary practices.

There is no systematic approach to integrating intersectionality and leave no one behind principles within capacity development support: the evaluation found personnel had differing views on what leave no one behind involves. While certain thematic areas (e.g. ending violence against women [EVAW] and second chance education) and certain regions (notably ACRO) had a stronger emphasis on leave no one behind within their capacity development programming, in many programmes the evaluation found little evidence of a deliberate focus on these principles, while in some programmes delivery modalities had excluded the most marginalized groups.

**There are limited human and financial resources for capacity development support. However, individual capacity development interventions, as stand-alone initiatives, have mostly been perceived as efficient in developing both technical and operational capacity, although the latter is frequently not documented.**

Human resources dedicated to capacity development are limited and there is a heavy reliance on consultants and short-term personnel. Meanwhile, a lack of sufficient, long-term funding for capacity development results in small-scale interventions and is an obstacle to maintaining or scaling up work once projects finish. The evaluation identified a need to strengthen both human and financial resources dedicated to capacity development in order to achieve the intended results.

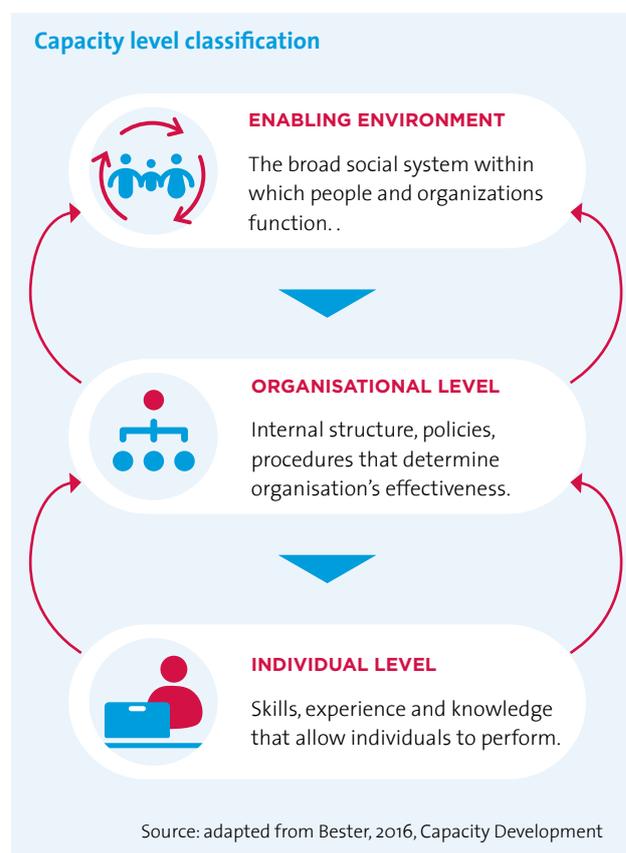
In general, individual capacity development initiatives are mostly perceived by stakeholders as efficient, including in their planning, organization, delivery, expertise, timeliness, logistics and costs. However, in some cases, organizational policy and processes hinder efficiency.

UN Women frequently supports implementing partners to develop operational and administrative capacity. While this support is highly valued, it is mostly not documented as it is ad hoc and responsive in nature and not an explicit project outcome. A more systematic approach to such support would be useful, as would stronger monitoring and knowledge sharing in this area.

**Building ownership of capacity development work is key to ensuring the sustainability of results. To date, this has been hampered by the short-term nature of initiatives and limited funding.**

Sustainability is a challenge for UN Women's capacity development work, with barriers including inadequate and short-term funding and staffing; limited follow-up activities; and the absence of sustainability strategies. While the evaluation found some capacity development initiatives that had a sustainability strategy, in most cases there was no clear vision for how results would be sustained.

Ongoing accompaniment emerged as particularly important for sustainability, to support participants to apply and embed the knowledge, skills and practices they developed through capacity development initiatives. Similarly, fostering ownership within institutions, beyond individual champions, emerged as important for sustaining action and results over the longer term.



## LESSONS

The evaluation identified the following lessons regarding UN Women's support to capacity development:

**LESSON 1.** An organizational capacity development strategy that sets out a definition for capacity development, and includes a conceptual framework and operational approach would provide personnel with a shared understanding of what is meant by capacity development as well as the principles to guide capacity development interventions. This emerged clearly in the benchmarking exercise.

**LESSON 2.** Context-specificity and national ownership are fundamental for a successful capacity development strategy.

**LESSON 3.** A systemic and holistic approach to capacity development is the most effective, seeking to develop capacity at individual, organizational and environment levels in ways that are connected to and support wider change processes.

**LESSON 4.** Effective knowledge sharing can facilitate the spread of good practice and avoid 're-inventing the wheel'.

**LESSON 5.** It is critical to provide ongoing follow-up with participants after a capacity development intervention to support them in applying new learning and skills.

**LESSON 6.** Monitoring and evaluation of capacity development initiatives is a challenging area. For both UN Women and the organizations that were part of the benchmarking exercise, the systematic reporting of solid data is almost non-existent and there is a growing recognition of the need to focus on results at the level of outcomes.

**LESSON 7.** Capacity development takes time (particularly when it involves changing norms, attitudes and behaviours) and requires a long-term approach and commitment by UN Women and partners.

**LESSON 8.** The development and roll-out of a capacity development strategy/guidance requires dedicated resourcing.

**LESSON 9.** Operational capacity development support is important but remains largely undocumented. While this is a highly valued form of support by UN Women to partners, it is not well captured in planning or reporting.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation recommended the following key steps to strengthen UN Women's capacity development support.



### RECOMMENDATION 1

UN Women should develop a systematic approach to capacity development support within the organization.



### RECOMMENDATION 2

UN Women's capacity development interventions should be strategic, holistic and based on a systems approach to supporting change; work with a variety of partners; and use a range of modalities.



### RECOMMENDATION 3

UN Women should be more systematic in integrating the most left behind groups within capacity development interventions and ensure that interventions support gender-transformative change.



### RECOMMENDATION 4

UN Women should identify innovative ways to use current human and financial resources to support capacity development initiatives. Development of partners' operational capacity should be included as an explicit outcome of programmes.