



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**



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report, and the overall evaluation process, was informed and enriched by the participation of more than 140 stakeholders, personnel and partners, many of whom actively contributed to the development of evaluation findings by serving as reference group members, attending focus group discussions and completing comprehensive surveys. Without the support and active participation of all these women and men involved in the consultation process, this report would not have been possible

The evaluation was conducted by the UN Women Independent Evaluation Service (IES). The IES team included an evaluation specialist, Florencia Tateossian as Evaluation Team Leader; Tania Gatto as Research Assistant; Clare Castillejo, Independent Evaluation Consultant and gender equality expert; and Susanne Turrall Independent Consultant and gender equality and capacity development expert. We would like to also thank all colleagues involved in Innovation work at HQ, especially Alicia Ziffer, knowledge management specialist and Training Center Chief a.i., Shoko Ishikawa, Deputy Director, Policy, Programme and Intergovernmental Division, for their invaluable inputs and strong engagement throughout the evaluation.

We are grateful for the Internal Reference Group members for their thoughtful comments and insights and for investing significant time and effort during the inception phase to ensure that the evaluation would be of maximum value and use to the organization. The evaluation also benefited from active virtual involvement from the UN Women offices. We thank the country representatives and personnel of these offices for all the dedicated time they invested in supporting the evaluation process and in facilitating the engagement and inclusion of a wide range of partners, stakeholders and beneficiaries.

Finally, we would like to thank all those who engaged or participated in this evaluation, be it through responding to a survey, making themselves available for interviews, or participating in the consultation process. We are grateful for your contributions, which have without doubt enriched this report.

## EVALUATION TEAM:

**Florencia Tateossian**, Evaluation Specialist and team leader

**Clare Castillejo**, Evaluation Consultant, gender equality

**Susanne Turrall**, Evaluation Consultant, gender equality and capacity development

**Tania Gatto**, Research Assistant

## EVALUATION MANAGEMENT:

UN Women Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS)

**Inga Sniukaite**, Chief, UN Women Independent Evaluation Service (IES)

**Lisa Sutton**, Director, UN Women Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS)

Design and layout: **Yamrote A. Haileselassie**

Copy-editing: **Catherine Simes**

---

© 2023 UN Women. All rights reserved.

Disclaimer: The analysis and recommendations of the evaluation are those of the Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS) and do not necessarily reflect the views of UN Women. This is an independent publication by the UN Women Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS).

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**



**INDEPENDENT EVALUATION AND AUDIT SERVICES (IEAS)**

Independent Evaluation Service (IES)

UN WOMEN

*New York, February 2023*

# FOREWORD

Capacity Development has been a long-term intervention strategy within the UN system. It is also a key intervention strategy in UN Women providing support to duty bearers and rights holders in both technical and functional capacities. Its centrality within UN Women's work has been evidenced in the Entity's last and current Strategic Plan, and remains a core area to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The Independent Evaluation Service (IES) of the UN Women Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS) undertook this evaluation as part of its corporate evaluation plan with the aim of assessing capacity development support and providing forward-looking recommendations. 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 evaluation found that capacity development is a central element of UN Women's work at national level and is recognized as valuable and very much needed. However, the development of a clear definition of capacity development and an accompanying framework could increase its potential to contribute to results. Furthermore, there is a wide range of capacity development practices used across the organization that would contribute better to impact if integrated within a broader "systems" approach, and monitored with adequate baselines.

The current focus of capacity development interventions is mostly at individual level, to some degree at the organizational level but less so at the enabling environment level. This has led to limited evidence on the impact of capacity development due to overreliance on lower-level results.

In terms of internal organization, the evaluation noted the absence of designated roles and responsibilities between different organizational levels at UN Women, which can sometimes lead to an inconsistent approach and support, together with limited human and financial resources to exclusively support capacity development. However, it is important to note that individual capacity development interventions as stand-alone initiatives have been perceived as efficient in developing both technical and operational capacities. The evaluation confirmed that UN Women is highly valued for its collaborative partnerships in supporting capacity development.

The evaluation recommends that UN Women develop a systematic approach to capacity development support within the organization, and design interventions based on a systems approach to supporting change; work with a variety of partners; and use a range of modalities, capitalizing on its collaborative added value. 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. Finally, the evaluation recommends UN Women identify innovative ways to use its current human and financial resources to support capacity development initiatives.



**Lisa Sutton**

*Director, Independent Evaluation and Audit Services*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>LIST OF ACRONYMS</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2. BACKGROUND</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2.1</b> Overall and UN context	13
<b>2.2</b> UN Women's work related to capacity development	15
<b>2.3</b> Financial description of portfolio	15
<b>3. EVALUATION PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>3.1</b> Purpose/objectives/scope and focus	19
<b>3.2</b> Stakeholder mapping	19
<b>4. EVALUATION APPROACH, METHODS AND TOOLS</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>5. EVALUATION FINDINGS</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>5.1</b> To what extent is UN Women's support for capacity development effective in delivering impact for women and girls?	24
<b>5.2</b> To what extent is UN Women's support for capacity development coherent in approach and coordinated across the organization and with external stakeholders?	38
<b>5.3</b> How are human rights, gender equality and inclusion incorporated into UN Women's support for capacity development?	42
<b>5.2</b> To what extent are UN Women's organizational processes and its human, financial and technical resources adequate to provide capacity development support to partners?	44
<b>5.5</b> How sustainable are the results from UN Women's support for capacity development?	48
<b>6. LESSONS LEARNED</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>56</b>

# LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>EVAW</b>	Eliminating Violence against Women
<b>ICD</b>	Institutional Capacity Development
<b>IEAS</b>	Independent Evaluation and Audit Services
<b>IES</b>	Independent Evaluation Service
<b>OEEF</b>	Organizational Effectiveness and Efficiency Framework
<b>RMS</b>	Results Management System
<b>UNCT</b>	United Nations Country Team
<b>UNDAF</b>	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
<b>UNDG</b>	United Nations Development Group
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNEG</b>	United Nations Evaluation Group
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>WPS</b>	Women, Peace and Security

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# 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.

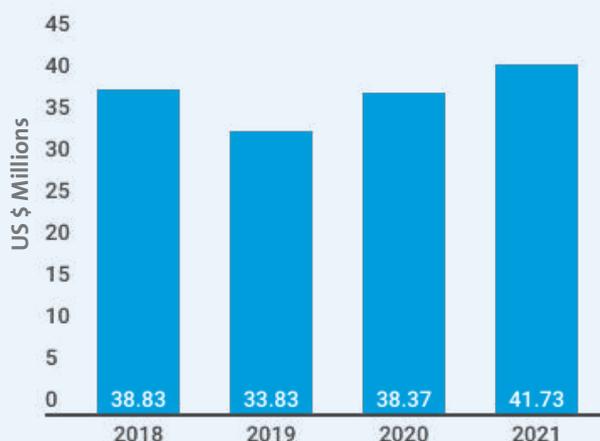
## EVALUATION PURPOSE AND FOCUS

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?

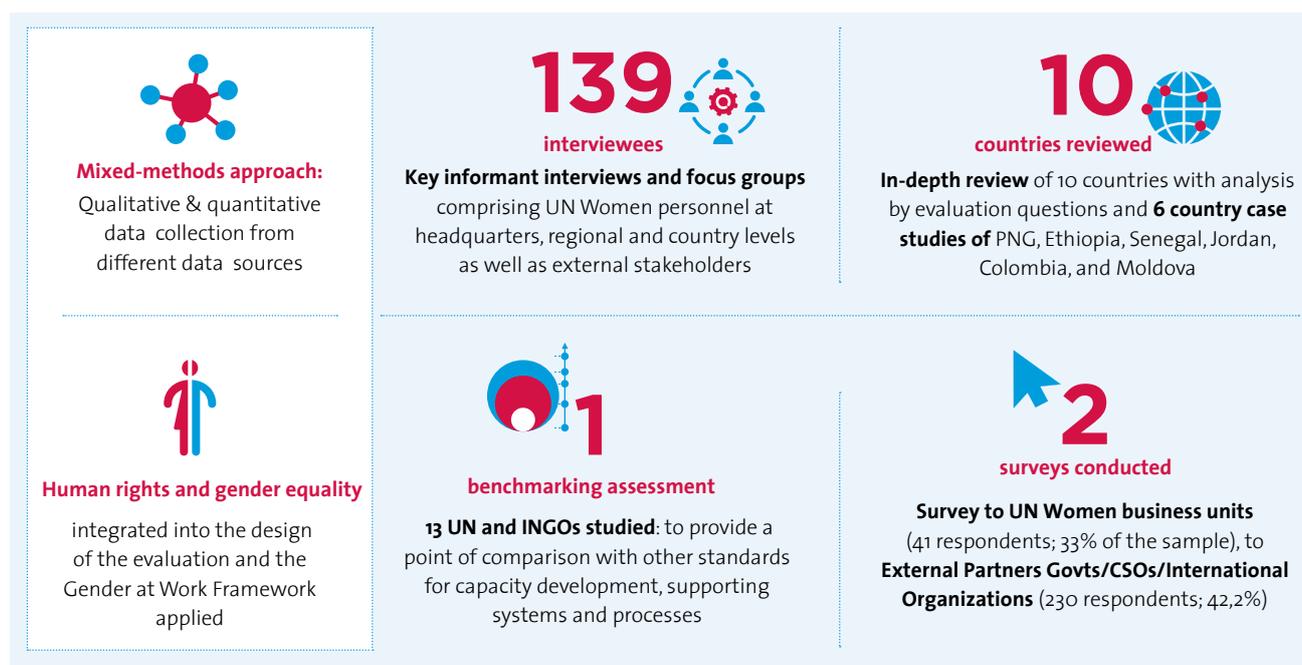
Capacity development budget per year (US \$ Millions)



## 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.

---

**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.**

---

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.

---

**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.**

---

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.

---

**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.**

---

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.

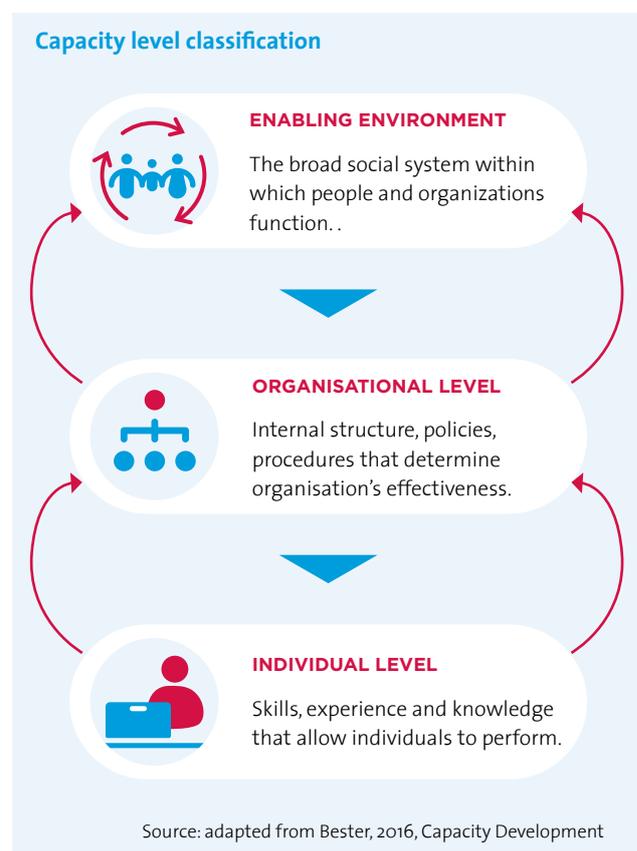
In general, individual capacity development initiatives are mostly perceived by stakeholders as efficient, including in their planning, organization, delivery, expertise, timeliness, logistics and costs. However, in some cases, organizational policy and processes hinder efficiency.

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



Photo: UN Women/Rash Caritativo

# 1. INTRODUCTION

UN Women regularly evaluates its work to enhance accountability, inform decision-making and contribute to learning. Corporate evaluations in UN Women are conducted by the UN Women Independent Evaluation Service (IES), part of the Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS) of UN Women.

IES conducted an independent, formative evaluation of UN Women's support for capacity development of partners to respond to the needs of women and girls at national level. The evaluation covered the period 2018–2022. UN Women's Strategic Plan 2018–2021 identifies capacity development as one of the six types of support within UN Women's operational activities. Capacity development cuts across the organization's thematic areas and strategic areas of change. The evaluation inception phase began in January 2022, with the aim of informing UN Women's Strategic Plan 2022–2025. To ensure its independence and usefulness, the evaluation was led by IES, with the support of external experts.

This report was developed based on the evaluation team's review of documents, analysis of entries in the corporate results-based management system (RMS) based on

the Strategic Plan outputs 2018–2021, review of financial information, and data collection (key informant interviews and focus group discussions with a total of 139 interviewees comprising UN Women personnel at headquarters, regional and country levels as well as external stakeholders). The report is being presented to the Evaluation Reference Group and was also quality assured by the IEAS Director and IES Chief and peer reviewed by an IES peer reviewer prior to finalization.

In addition, this evaluation served as a pilot exercise that linked regional and global evaluation processes for IES-led evaluations commissioned at corporate and regional levels. Therefore, a regional evaluation of UN Women's support to capacity development looking at the Europe and Central Asia region in the last quarter of 2022/first quarter of 2023 will follow this global evaluation.

## 2. BACKGROUND

### 2.1. Overall and UN context

#### THE DEFINITION OF CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Despite widespread agreement of the importance of capacity development within development discourse, the terms ‘capacity’ and ‘capacity development’ are open to interpretation. Over time, capacity development has evolved from the original understanding of being synonymous with education and training to a broader system of interventions - such as coaching, mentoring, peer-peer support - that foster the knowledge base and capacity of individuals and organizations.

The most widely accepted definition of ‘capacity’, and that used by the evaluation, is ‘the ability of people, organizations and society as a whole to manage their affairs successfully.’<sup>1</sup>

Capacity development is defined as ‘the process whereby people, organizations and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt and maintain capacity over time.’<sup>2</sup> In the context of this evaluation, this relates specifically to strengthening UN Women partners’ capacities in support of results in gender equality and women’s empowerment.<sup>3</sup>

#### DIMENSIONS OF CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Traditionally capacity development efforts have focused on individual and organizational levels, but practitioners have increasingly recognized the importance of working at the system level to provide a conducive environment for change. Capacity can therefore be classified into three interlinked levels: individual, organizational and enabling environment, as depicted in Figure 1.

Capacity is often grouped into “technical” and “functional” types. Technical capacities are specific to a particular sector or area, e.g. nursing, primary education, water and sanitation, forestry, farming and animal husbandry etc. Functional capacities are relatively common across sectors or areas such as planning, budgeting, policy-making, financial analysis, strategy formulation and communications.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 1. Capacity level classification**



<sup>1</sup>OECD DAC, 2006, The Challenge of Capacity Development - Working towards Good Practice

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Adapted from UN Women, 2021, Key Lessons Learned on Capacity Development.

<sup>4</sup>UNDG, 2017, Capacity Development: UNDAF Companion Guidance.

## CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE GLOBAL NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK

Capacity development has a long history as a means of achieving sustainable development. This is reflected in the outcome documents and action plans adopted by major international conferences on sustainable development.

For example, Agenda 21, adopted at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, addresses capacity-building in its Chapter 37.<sup>5</sup> Decisions relating to capacity-building were taken by the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development at its fourth (1996), fifth (1997) and sixth (1998) sessions and by the United Nations General Assembly at its Special Session to review implementation of Agenda 21 (1997). The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, adopted at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development also recognized the importance of capacity-building for the achievement of sustainable development. Similarly, the outcome document of the Rio +20 Conference, the Future We Want, emphasized the need for enhanced capacity-building for sustainable development and for the strengthening of technical and scientific cooperation.<sup>6</sup>

Capacity development is now an integral part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): the development of new capacities and strengthening existing capacities is a theme underpinning all the SDGs. Specifically, SDG 17 focused on the global partnership for sustainable development, contains target 17.9 “Enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the sustainable development goals, including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation.” In this way, capacity development is considered a vehicle for meeting the SDGs, and sustaining achievements over the long term.<sup>7</sup>

## CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE UN SYSTEM

For many years, capacity development has been considered a core function of the UN and has appeared in General Assembly resolutions for the past two decades. For example, in 1995, General Assembly resolution (A/RES/50/120) comprehensively addressed the issue of capacity development (then referred to as capacity-building) stating that “... the objective of capacity-building and its sustainability should continue to be an essential part of the operational activities of the United Nations system at the country level.”<sup>8</sup>

In 2005, the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) established an Inter-Agency Task Team on capacity development to help redefine the role of UNDG members in capacity development and provide guidance to UN Country Teams (UNCTs) in supporting national capacity development strategies. The subsequent Position Statement on Capacity Development produced in 2006 set the overarching policy on capacity development for members of UNDG.

As articulated in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) Guidance endorsed in 2017, UNDG recognizes capacity development as one of six key programming approaches for UN integrated programming at the country level alongside results-focused programming; risk-informed programming; development, humanitarian and peacebuilding linkages; coherent policy support and partnerships. As such, the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (2017–2020), adopted by General Assembly resolution 71/243, called on the UN development system to further “support the building, development and strengthening of national capacities to support development results at the country level and to promote national ownership and leadership, in line with national development policies, plans and priorities.”

While there is no coordinated UN framework or approach to capacity development using common methodology and standards; some individual agencies have capacity development strategies (such as FAO, WFP), and most agencies integrate capacity development within their strategic plans and programming documents.<sup>9</sup> Various UN agencies have also developed approaches to measuring capacity development, at various degrees of advancement.

<sup>5</sup> Agenda 21 - Chapter 37 National Mechanisms and International Cooperation for Capacity Building in Developing Countries, United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, 1992, p. 329.

<sup>6</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/topics/capacity-development>

<sup>7</sup> Vallejo, B., and Wehn, U., 2016, Capacity Development Evaluation: The Challenge of the Results Agenda and Measuring Return on Investment in the Global South. World Development Vol.79, pp1-13

<sup>8</sup> General Assembly resolution A/RES/50/120, p.5

<sup>9</sup> Bester, A., Capacity Development: A Report Prepared for the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs for the 2016 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review.

## 2.2. UN Women's work related to capacity development

Capacity development support to partners has been a key intervention strategy in UN Women's work and cuts across the organization's thematic areas of work, and cross-cutting priorities. UN Women delivers on its commitment to support Member States in addressing structural barriers to gender equality and women's empowerment by leveraging its triple mandate of normative support, UN system coordination and operational activities. Within this triple mandate, UN Women uses capacity development to partners (e.g. women and girls, civil society organizations [CSOs], women's rights organizations, service providers, etc.) as a key strategy to achieve its outcomes. UN Women's support to capacity development focuses on working with partners to strengthen their capacities for the achievement of UN Women's outcomes and contribute to UN system results.

In line with its comparative advantage and objective to advance the gender equality and women's empowerment agenda in a comprehensive manner, the UN Women 2018–2021 Strategic Plan envisioned capacity development as a key type of support in its operational activities, to be provided to partnership stakeholders.<sup>10</sup> Under this Strategic Plan, the intention was for UN Women's Training Centre to have a role in these efforts, by developing and offering training to diverse partners, including the UN system, and consolidating UN Women's offerings in support of national capacity development.

To date, the Training Centre is still operating, but a strategic assessment and business plan are under way to provide recommendations on its future configuration and functions.

Strong importance is also given to capacity development in the 2022–2025 Strategic Plan, where capacity development is recognized as one of the intervention strategies to achieve results.<sup>11</sup> The 2022–2025 Strategic Plan contains 11 indicators aimed at measuring the capacity development of various stakeholders. To increase consistency in UN Women's approach to capacity development, as part of the development of the 2022–2025 Strategic Plan, the organization has very recently developed a document that articulates a definition of capacity development and proposes a standardized methodology to measure capacity development outputs.<sup>12</sup>

UN Women's Strategic Plans refer to the need for UN Women to develop the capacity of both duty bearers, to ensure the frameworks in which they are working are gender responsive, and rights holders to foster their empowerment. Such needs are further refined in UN Women's work, particularly through the use of capacity needs assessments. Specific relevance is given to directly supporting the capacity and work of CSOs, including grassroots and women's organizations, and to promoting capacity development for youth, in support of UN Women's strategic priorities.

## 2.3 Financial description of portfolio

An analysis of UN Women's financial reporting systems including the OneApp Project Delivery Dashboard allowed the evaluation team to generate an estimated budget/delivery data on capacity development to partners. It is important to note that the financial figures might not fully present the real picture of budget allocated to capacity development activities. As discussed later in the report, a wide range of activities are undertaken to strengthen the capacities of partners, yet these might not be tagged as capacity development in internal UN Women reporting systems. The extraction of data was conducted selecting 17 outputs from UN Women's 2014–2017 and 2018–2021 Strategic Plans.<sup>13</sup> All outputs refer to: enhanced capacities at national and sub-national levels, legislators and policy makers, gender equality advocates; strengthened capacities of parliaments and sub-national legislatures, government stakeholders, national and local authorities, gender equality advocates, service

providers, regional and national institutions and partners; strengthen capacities of women living with HIV, women's as candidates and voters; enhanced skills and opportunities of women, and ensure more women to play a role and served by disaster risk reduction and recovery processes.

For the period 2018–2021, UN Women budgeted US\$ 152.76 million<sup>14</sup> for capacity development to partners. Total expenditure for capacity development to partners was US\$ 152.82 million. As seen in Figure 2, budget and expenditure varied year-on-year, with expenditure exceeding budget in some years (e.g. 2018) and an excess of budget in other years (e.g. 2021). Of note, between 2018 and 2019, there was a US\$ 5 million reduction in the budget for capacity development and total expenditure generally matched this reduction. Overall, the budget delivery rate was 100 per cent, meaning the allocated budget was fully spent over the four-year period (see Figure 2).

<sup>10</sup> UN Women Strategic Plan 2018–2021, p. 13

<sup>11</sup> UN Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025, p. 9

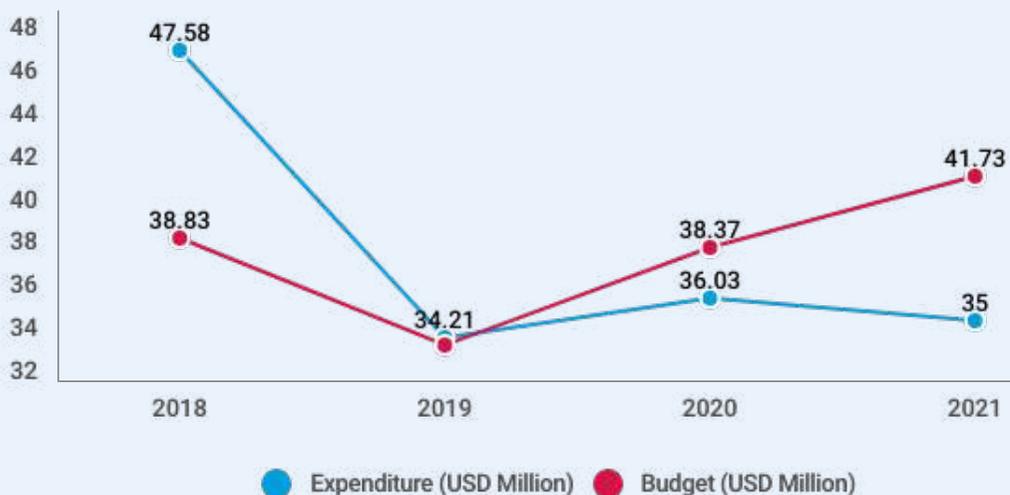
<sup>12</sup> Methodology for Strategic Plan Indicators on capacity development, UN Women (For internal use only).

<sup>13</sup> See Annex 4: UN Women Strategic Plan Outputs related to capacity development to partners.

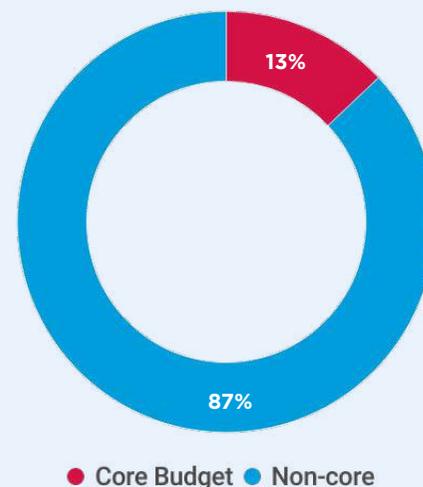
<sup>14</sup> All financial data was extracted from the UN Women <https://apps-oneapp.unwomen.org/Dashboard>. The data reflects the 17 Strategic Plan outputs identified as relating to capacity development to partners from 2018–2021 (data exported in December 2021 and January 2022).

Figure 2: Financial background

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE PER YEAR



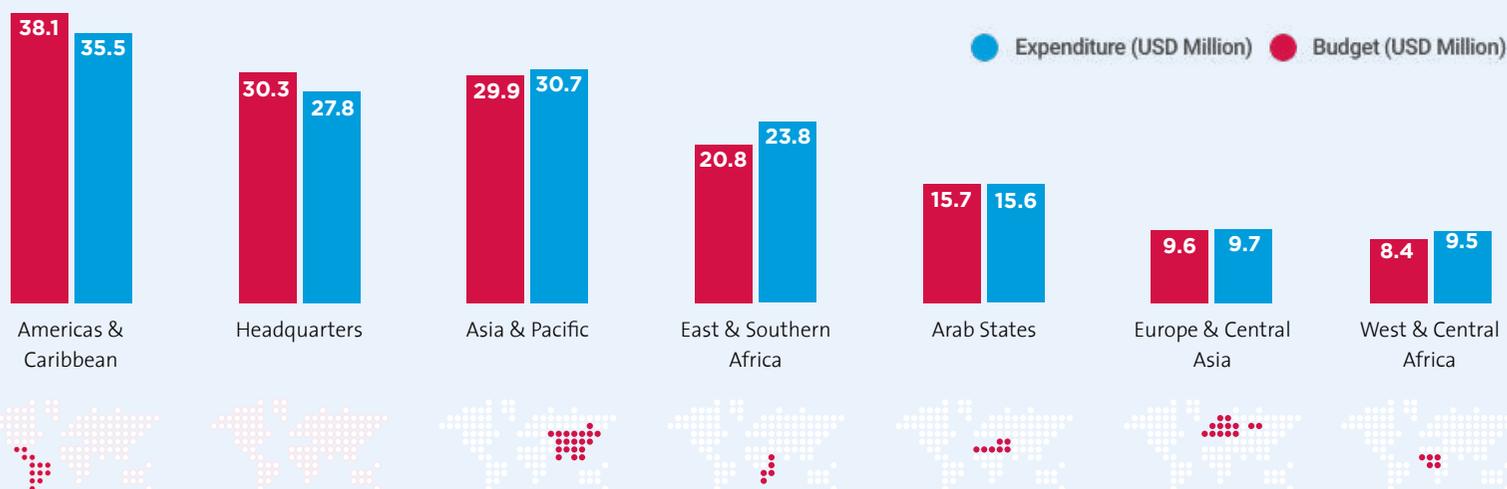
BUDGET SOURCES



TOP 5 OFFICES BY INVESTMENT



BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE BY REGION



2018-2021

**152.76 M** Total Budget (USD)

**12.3%** of budget dedicated to capacity development

**152.82 M** Total expenditure (USD)

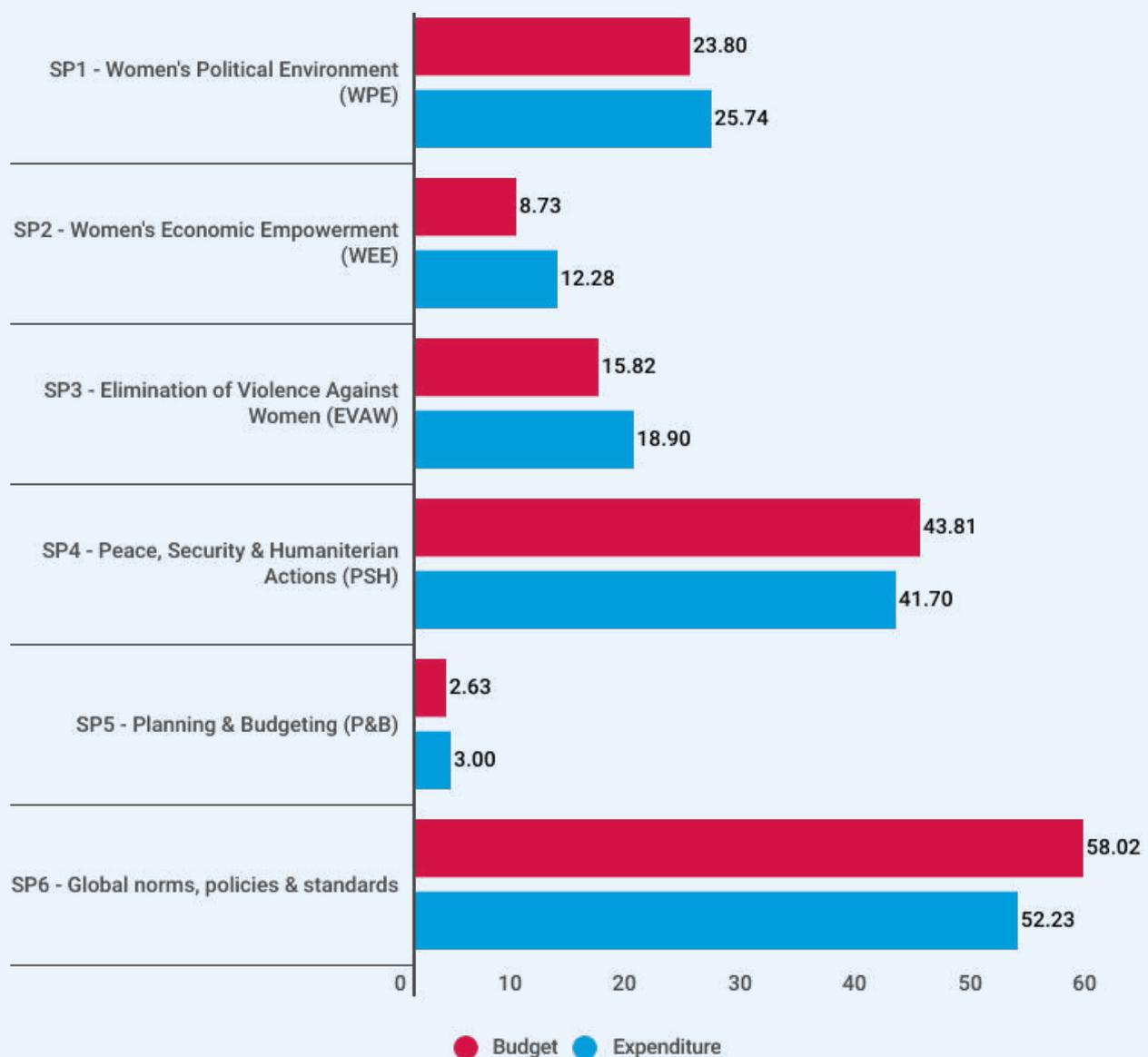
**13.5%** of expenditure for capacity development

The evaluation conducted a ranking of Country and Regional Office budgets (business units' budgets) to understand the geographical mapping of investments (see Annex 5). At the Country Office level, the UN Women Colombia Country Office had the highest budget (and expenditure) allocated to capacity development to partners followed by Iraq,<sup>15</sup> Mozambique, Bangladesh, Barbados Multi-Country Office, Cameroon, Pakistan and Ethiopia. As the ranking was by business unit, it was noted that the Asia and Pacific Regional Office was ranked among the top five in terms of investment

in capacity development followed by Governance and Participation Policy Division at headquarters, and the Intergovernmental Support Division.

During the inception phase, the evaluation team also undertook a review of entries in the UN Women Results Management System (RMS) and progress of outputs related to capacity development to partners. This allowed the evaluators to understand progress towards capacity development outputs by region and thematic area and informed the country case study selection process.

**Figure 3. Budget and expenditure by thematic area in US\$ Millions (2018–2021)<sup>16</sup>**



<sup>15</sup>The information was extracted based on 2018–2021 data where Iraq was still considered a Country Office. Today Iraq-Yemen is a Cluster Office.

<sup>16</sup>All financial data was extracted from the UN Women <https://apps-oneapp.unwomen.org/Dashboard>. The data reflects the 17 Strategic Plan outputs identified as relating to capacity development to partners from 2018–2021 (data exported in December 2021 and January 2022).



Photo: UN Women/Mahmudul Karim

# 3 EVALUATION PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

### 3.1. Purpose/objectives/scope and focus

The purpose of this formative evaluation was to (a) understand UN Women's support for capacity development of partners to respond to the needs of women and girls with the aim to achieve gender equality at national level; (b) evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of UN Women in providing support for capacity development of partners to respond to the needs of women and girls at the national level; (c) identify examples of good practices from key interventions that include support for capacity development of partners, including corporate tools that Country Offices can leverage for capacity development initiatives; and (d) develop lessons learned and recommendations to strengthen UN Women's national capacity development support strategies to partners to respond to the needs of women and girls. The formative evaluation looked at support for capacity development provided by UN Women to partners from 2018 to 2022) at the national level.

Drawing on insights from the inception report process, the evaluation focused on five key questions:

- 1 To what extent is UN Women's support for capacity development **effective in delivering impact for women and girls**?
- 2 To what extent is UN Women's support for capacity development **coherent in approach and coordinated across the organization** and with external stakeholders?
- 3 How are **human rights, gender equality and inclusion incorporated** into UN Women's support for capacity development?
- 4 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?
- 5 How **sustainable are the results** from UN Women's support for capacity development?

---

The findings from this evaluation aim to support strategic decision-making and organizational learning to inform UN Women's approach to capacity development at national level as the organization strengthens its intervention strategy across all thematic areas.

---

### 3.2. Stakeholder mapping

Throughout the inception phase, the evaluation team conducted a stakeholder mapping exercise. The mapping exercise identified groups and individuals who were engaged in and/or affected by capacity development activities conducted by UN Women at the global, regional and country level, as well as those who could potentially be affected by the outcomes of this evaluation process. Duty bearers included internal stakeholders, namely the Programme, Policy and Intergovernmental Division (PPID) for its work in supporting the capacity development of partners and other UN agencies; UN Women Training Centre, given its nature as an implementer of capacity development; UN Women capacity development specialists in specific thematic programme sections as well as thematic policy and programme sections; and regional directors and national programme officers.

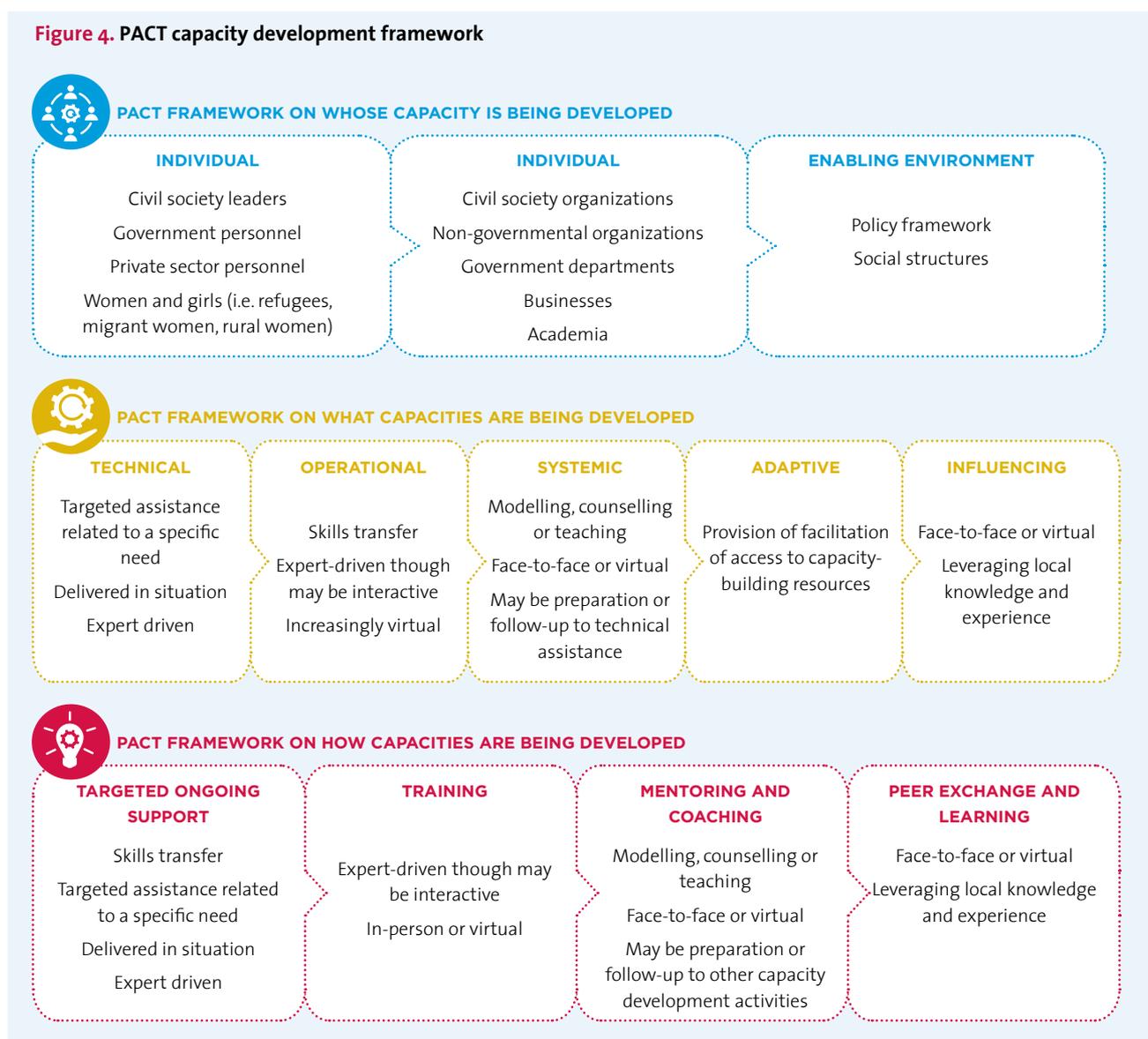
Donors, UN system partners, CSOs, women's rights organizations, private sector stakeholders, government and national gender machineries were also among this group. Rights holders included beneficiaries of capacity development interventions such as women and girls with a particular focus on marginalized or left behind groups (e.g. women with disabilities, women living with HIV/AIDS, women belonging to LGBTIQ groups). The analysis was based on an initial desk review of key documentation (UN Women's global programmes and regional initiatives) and scoping/inception interviews with key internal stakeholders (see Annex 3). The analysis has also indicated the proposed means of engagement of key stakeholders throughout the evaluation process.

## 4. EVALUATION APPROACH, METHODS AND TOOLS

The evaluation was utilization-focused and employed a capacity development framework developed by PACT,<sup>17</sup> a theory-based evaluation approach and contribution analysis through country case studies that target capacity development initiatives (See Figure 6 for Reconstructed Theory of Change). It also applied a gender-responsive and human rights-based approach and incorporated a “no one left behind” perspective, including disability inclusion.

The evaluation adhered to the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Handbook for Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality<sup>18</sup> Perspectives in Evaluations in the UN System. Human rights and gender equality have been integrated into the design of this evaluation and in the development of methods. The Gender at Work Framework was also applied to analysis of the findings. The evaluation carried out a benchmarking exercise to learn what is considered as ‘good practice’ by other agencies; and to provide a point of comparison with other standards for capacity development, supporting systems and processes.

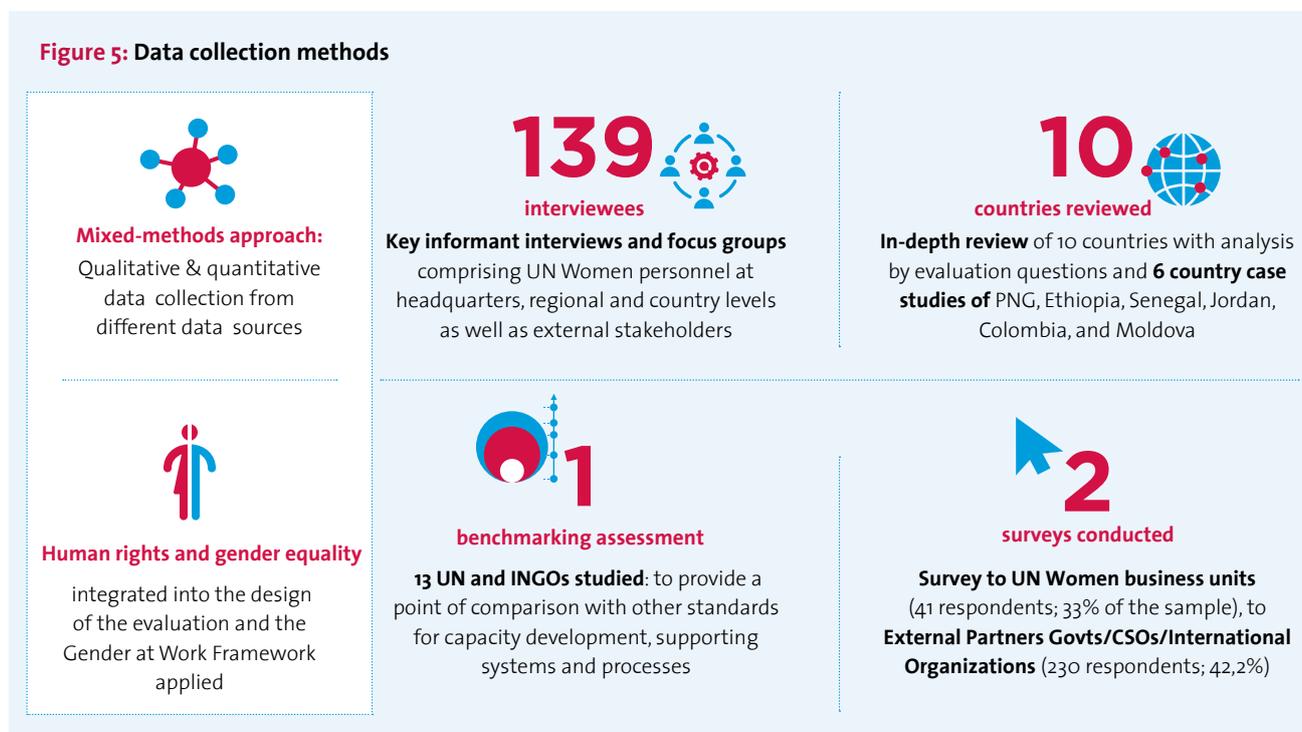
**Figure 4. PACT capacity development framework**



<sup>17</sup> This is a comprehensive framework, developed by PACT (<https://www.pactworld.org/>), as a model to show the multi-faceted nature of capacity development for an organization. The framework disaggregates capacity development into three continua, which together describe the range of capacity development opportunities. These respond to three key questions: Whose capacity is being developed? What capacity is being developed? How is capacity being developed?

<sup>18</sup> UNEG Guidance, Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluations, August 2014 <http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/1616>

The evaluation employed a mixed methods approach driven by the evaluation questions, and selected case studies to provide the best evidence to UN Women. Figure 5 below describes the data collection in detail. Additional details of the methods and tools used can be found in Annex 7.



The evaluation team developed a theory of change for the purposes of this evaluation. It draws on thinking about how capacity development contributes to development results from a number of sources.<sup>19</sup> The theory of change is based on the conceptualization of capacities as grouped in three levels, individual, group/organizational and enabling environment, which are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. It is also based on the conceptualization that capacity development firstly results in enhanced knowledge, skills and capabilities among stakeholders. Where the necessary conditions and opportunities are in place, these enhanced knowledge, skills and capabilities can then result in actions and changes to advance gender equality and women's empowerment.

Beginning on the left, the theory of change identifies a range of inputs that relate to the three stages of capacity development: planning and design, delivery and follow-up. It then identifies a range of capacity development outputs that result from these inputs. The theory of change articulates how these outputs lead to a set of lower-level outcomes related to increased knowledge, skills and capabilities within individuals, groups/organizations and the environment. It then articulates how these lower-level outcomes contribute to higher-level outcomes in the form of actions and changes that actively advance gender equality and women's empowerment. Finally, it illustrates how these higher-level outcomes contribute to UN Women's thematic and systemic outcomes.

<sup>19</sup> Sources include FAO's OED Capacity Development Evaluation Framework; the World Bank's Guide to Evaluating Capacity Development Results; UNDG'S UNDAF Companion Guidance: Capacity Development; and PACT's Approach to Capacity Development as well as UN Women documents.

Figure 6. Reconstructed theory of change developed by the evaluation team based on interviews and document analysis





Photo: UN Women/Mwangi Kirubi

# 5 FINDINGS

### 5.1. To what extent is UN Women's support for capacity development effective in delivering impact for women and girls?

#### FINDING 1:

**Although capacity development is a fundamental intervention strategy for UN Women, there is currently no single understanding of what capacity development means, both for UN Women and its partners. Unlike some other UN agencies, UN Women does not yet have a strategic framework to guide its capacity development work.**

Capacity development is a key intervention strategy in UN Women's work, across its triple mandate of normative support, UN system coordination and operational activities. The 2018–21 Strategic Plan articulated capacity development as one of the six types of support provided by its operational activities,<sup>20</sup> and it is recognized as one of the main intervention strategies to achieve results in the most recent 2022–2025 Strategic Plan.<sup>21</sup> The budget dedicated to capacity development 2018–2021, was US\$ 152.76 million, significantly 12.3 per cent of the total budget.<sup>22</sup> Despite the importance of capacity development for UN Women both historically and currently, the organization did not have a singular, standardized definition of capacity development within its Strategic Plan, although a document related to Methodology for Strategic Plan Indicators on capacity development was developed in 2021.<sup>23</sup>

#### Box 1: OECD DAC definition of capacity development

→ **Capacity is** the ability of people, organisations and society as a whole to manage their affairs successfully.

→ **Capacity Development** is the process whereby people, organisations and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt and maintain capacity over time.

Source: OECD, 2006, *The Challenge of Capacity Development: Working towards good practice*

The evaluation explored stakeholders' understanding of capacity development. Perceptions of capacity development among UN Women personnel varied in scope and nature, and were also dependent upon interviewees' depth of knowledge of the pedagogy of capacity development. In summary, the majority referred to strengthening the skills, knowledge and abilities of individuals and organizations to better respond to the needs of women and girls.

Changing attitudes and behavioural change to challenge underlying gender inequalities was an important element for some; and the need to provide capacity development support to gender-responsive government systems and policies was raised by others. In this context, the need to support both duty bearers and rights holders was raised as important including support for capacity development to enhance political participation and successful advocacy for gender equality. For the most part, interviewees discussed capacity development in relation to their own thematic areas rather than more broadly within UN Women. The need for a consistent understanding and approach to capacity development across the organization was repeatedly articulated to the evaluation team by UN Women personnel and external partners.

The desk review showed that the terms 'capacity development' and 'capacity-building' are widely used within the organization by all levels, and across all thematic areas (a search on UN Women's website of 'capacity development' elicited over 750 documents, and 'capacity-building' over 550 results<sup>24</sup>). The evaluation did not find any efforts to articulate what capacity development means for UN Women, with the exception of a very recent guide for the measurement of indicators in the 2022–2025 Strategic Plan regarding measuring capacity development results which adopts a definition put forward by OECD DAC (see Box 1) which is discussed below.<sup>25</sup>

A definition of capacity development was developed by OECD DAC in 2006 and is still the most widely used definition. The benchmarking exercise (see Annex 11) revealed that for those agencies that have definitions, it is the definition that has been adopted (FAO, UN-DESA and UNDP) or it has been adapted to the purpose and mandate of the organization (WFP). Notably it is also the definition adopted by UNDG in 2017.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>20</sup> UN Women, Strategic Plan 2018–21

<sup>21</sup> UN Women, Strategic Plan, 2022–25

<sup>22</sup> As mentioned in Section 2.3 financial figures might not fully represent the exact budget allocated to capacity development activities as most activities related to capacity development might not be tagged as such in UN Women's internal systems.

<sup>23</sup> UN Women, Methodology for SP Indicators on capacity development (internal document), 2021

<sup>24</sup> Search carried out on 06/07/2022.

<sup>25</sup> UN Women, Methodology for SP Indicators on capacity development (internal document)

<sup>26</sup> UNDG, 2017, UNDAF Companion Guidance: Capacity Development

Drawing on the wider literature of good practice for capacity development, the definition includes the following key characteristics: the term *capacity development* is used which suggests enhancing and strengthening capacities, rather than building them anew as the term *capacity building* implies;<sup>27</sup> capacity development is considered an endogenous transformation process, supported, but not steered by external interventions;<sup>28</sup> and, the intention of capacity development is not for increased knowledge *per se* but for acquiring knowledge to do things differently; modify habits and practices; and apply the learning to different contexts and cultures.

The evaluation included a question within the evaluation survey for personnel, asking whether personnel agreed with the following definition, which linked the OECD DAC definition with UN Women's mandate "*the process whereby people, organizations and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt, and maintain skills, knowledge and abilities to enable them to more effectively respond to the needs of women and girls*". Ninety-two per cent of UN Women personnel "agreed" (22) or "strongly agreed" (11); only 8.3 per cent disagreed (3).

In addition to the limited awareness of the recent definition included in the guide for measurement of indicators in the 2022–2025 Strategic Plan,<sup>29</sup> there is also no organization-wide articulation of the purpose of capacity development; or how support for capacity development contributes to change or provision of a framework to guide decision-making. This was also confirmed by interviews where a recurrent theme raised was the absence of an overarching strategy, contributing to a lack of organizational direction and shared understanding of the role of capacity development within UN Women's work. It also applies a lack of a common approach to designing, delivering, monitoring, reporting on, or communicating UN Women's capacity development work.

Personnel indicated it would be useful to have a clearly articulated purpose for capacity development to foster a common understanding and consistent thinking of how capacity development contributes to UN Women's goals and thematic outcomes; and for an elaboration of principles on which capacity development support should be based. It was asserted that while this should steer and guide capacity development throughout the organization, Country Offices should have the flexibility to apply and implement activities, tailored to national contexts.

The evaluation explored the utilization of capacity development strategies/frameworks/guidance by other organizations, to provide insights for UN Women. The benchmarking exercise found that of the eight organizations within the review, three have corporate strategies (UN-DESA, FAO and WFP) and one has comprehensive guidance about capacity development that includes a framework (UNDP). Box 2 provides further information of the approaches taken by the four agencies. Underpinning all the strategies/ guidance is support to national systems and services with the recognition that the achievement of national development targets hinges on the capacity of societies to transform in order to reach their development objectives.<sup>30</sup>

Common to all of the strategies/guidance is the need to work at three levels: the enabling environment (improving policy frameworks to address economic, political, environmental and social factors); organizations (improving organizational performance through strategies, plans, systems, processes); and individuals (improving individual skills, knowledge and performance). These three levels are considered to influence each other in a fluid way – the strength of each depends on, and determines, the strength of the others.<sup>31</sup> The figure developed by FAO illustrates this (see Figure 7). Such a systemic approach/framework which draws attention to the enabling environment as well as organization and individual levels, and the interlinkages between them, is currently lacking within UN Women.

**Figure 7. Corporate Strategy on Capacity Development**



Source: FAO, 2010

<sup>27</sup> Ohlbaum, D., 2015, *The Illusion of Control. Foreign Aid Effectiveness: A Radical Rethink*

<sup>28</sup> Vallejo, B., and Wehn, U., 2016, *Capacity Development Evaluation: The Challenge of the Results Agenda and Measuring Return on Investment in the Global South. World Development Vol.79*, pp1-13

<sup>29</sup> Please refer to earlier paragraph 32 on this.

<sup>30</sup> UNDP, 2009, *Capacity Development: A UNDP Primer*

<sup>31</sup> UNDP, 2009, *Capacity Development: A UNDP Primer*

**Box 2: Benchmarking insights – capacity development strategies/guidance of other agencies**

**UN-DESA's** Strategy for Capacity Development (2017) links capacity development to its mission to support Member States in translating the 2030 Agenda and other relevant global policy frameworks into viable and effective national strategies, policies and programmes. The strategy comprises a vision, mandates, commitments and principles. There is no framework or methodological approach to accompany the strategy.



**FAO** developed its Corporate Strategy on Capacity Development in 2010, which placed emphasis on national ownership and nationally led change processes. It situated capacity development within its wider organizational strategy; set out key improvements in FAO's approach to capacity development; and outlines a series of actions to enhance capacity development within the organization (governance, coordination, institutional systems). Critical success factors in capacity development are also described. A framework (setting out levels of capacity development) is also integral to the methodology.



**WFP** created its first policy on capacity development 'Building National and Regional Capacities' in 2004. Supporting national systems and services and the achievement of national development targets is central to its approach. In 2009, the policy was updated and included a more comprehensive policy framework, with a vision, overarching objective, outcomes and outputs, followed by an action plan and other corporate guidance documents. The Country Capacity Strengthening Framework was developed in 2017 which outlines the levels and critical pathways for capacity development.



**UNDP** developed 'Capacity Development: A UNDP Primer' in 2009. This provides comprehensive guidance for both UNDP and development practitioners more broadly. It sets out key elements, principles, provides a framework and some methods/tools.

Source: Created by the evaluation team

**FINDING 2:**

## Capacity development work is aligned with national strategies and policies. Flexibility to respond to national change processes was mostly evident.

The case studies revealed that all capacity development initiatives that the evaluation team studied were considered to be highly relevant to the national context and aligned with government policies on gender equality. This was confirmed more broadly within the in-depth reviews. As an example, in Jordan, all capacity development work is aligned with the National Strategy for Women and the Gender Mainstreaming Policy as well as sectoral policies, such as the national education strategy and women, peace and security national action plan. In Papua New Guinea, capacity development support provided through the Spotlight Initiative Programme and its pillars is closely aligned with the national strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence (2016–2025).

Case studies also revealed that capacity development initiatives are based on a strong understanding of national gender equality challenges and priorities. This is informed by UN Women's analysis of the national context in country Strategic Notes and Annual Work Plans.

Survey results showed that UN Women personnel rated 'solid understanding of context' as the most important enabler of the effectiveness of capacity development (89.29 per cent - N:25).

Appropriate flexibility to adapt capacity development support to shifting contexts and priorities was also evident across data sources for the case studies reviewed. For example, in Ethiopia, government legislation that limited foreign funding of NGOs/CSOs was liberalized in 2019, and UN Women undertook a needs analysis of and placed emphasis on strengthening NGO/CSO systems and functional capacities. In Colombia, capacity development to support the peace process was found to be particularly relevant and responsive to the *Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz* (the Special Jurisdiction for Peace) to embed a gender focus within the restorative justice mechanism that was mandated by the peace agreement.

Across all countries reviewed as part of the evaluation, flexibility was shown to respond to Covid-19, although this was timelier and more relevant in some countries than others. In Ethiopia, the EVAW programme faced the challenge of how to continue providing services to survivors within the social distancing restrictions, and UN Women supported the establishment of a transitional shelter which included a COVID facility for testing as well as interim counselling, medical support and a managed referral services to the different shelters. In Papua New Guinea, COVID-19 created some challenges in the implementation of face-to-face training. The Country Office adapted to the circumstances and moved to online training; however, this was reported to have been ineffective. According to stakeholders, due to limited internet

connection and other difficulties linked to the online learning, participants abandoned the training much more easily than they would have if the training had been in-person.

The evaluation found less evidence within other evaluation reports and case studies of responding to subnational processes. The presence of subnational offices may facilitate deeper contextual knowledge and relevance of initiatives. The Colombia case study revealed that UN Women's subnational presence had significant value for capacity development work and was able to support the local context (characterized by weak state institutions; high levels of armed violence and drug cultivation; and geographical inaccessibility) and tailor initiatives to be responsive to context, including an intersectional approach to gender.

### FINDING 3:

**Successful design and delivery of capacity development initiatives is evident across UN Women's work, but there is scope for greater systematization and guidance to ensure consistent quality and appropriateness for the context. Follow-up support to participants is often insufficient.**

#### LACK OF A SYSTEMATIC AND PROGRAMME CYCLE APPROACH TO PLANNING CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

Along with the lack of a strategic framework or guidance, no organization-wide systematic process has been developed or adopted within UN Women for planning, delivering and monitoring capacity development initiatives, whether stand-alone activities or within wider programmes. The approach to planning capacity development initiatives occurs independently across the organization, employing different processes and approaches.

The wider literature highlights the importance of a robust process to plan capacity development initiatives. UNDG, as part of guidance for UN agencies and partners has conceptualized capacity development considerations for each step of the programming cycle. This applies to both distinct capacity development programmes and projects, or capacity development initiatives which are part of broader results planned in joint or individual programmes and projects (see Figure 8).

There are a few examples across UN Women where capacity development initiatives have followed highly systematic processes, which the organization can learn from. The Guidance Note on Capacity Development for Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting<sup>32</sup> (although developed prior to the evaluation review period) is noteworthy for how it sets out a clear process and guidance

for the organization in identifying capacity needs at different stage of planning, defining capacity development needs and measurements of success, implementing and monitoring.

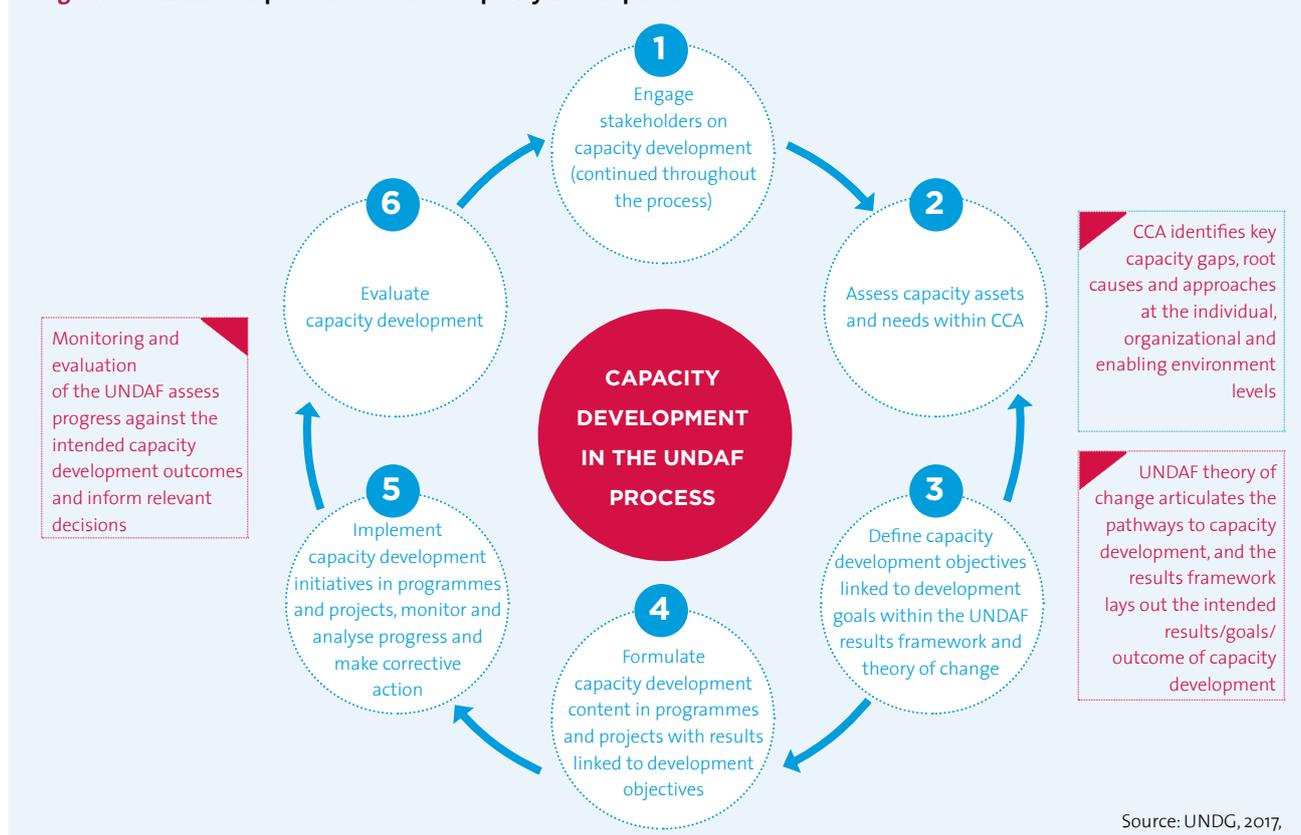
There are also other examples, often for larger-scale programmes and areas that are corporate priorities, showcasing a systematic process. The Handbook on Gender Responsive Police Services is a positive example, developed by EVAW (headquarters) as part of the UN Joint Programme on Essential Service for Women and Girls Subject to Violence.

#### **Box 3: Benchmarking insights: WFP's systematized approach to country capacity strengthening with government partners.**

- WFP uses a systematic approach and engagement strategy to develop capacity development plans. WFP and government partners jointly set objectives, assess national capacities and agree on concrete, multi-year workplans.
- A framework is used to help systematically identify capacity assets, gaps and priorities along (five) dimensions that are critical to effective national response systems.
- Standardized tools have been developed that include: a process of steps to facilitate multi-stakeholder engagement around country capacity strengthening; guidance for developing a road map; guidance for articulating 'capacity outcomes'; and capacity needs mapping.

Source: Created by the evaluation team

<sup>32</sup> UN Women, Guidance Note on Capacity Development for Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting

**Figure 8. UNDAF Companion Guidance: Capacity Development**

### DIAGNOSING NEEDS WITHIN INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES AND DESIGN

While the wider literature highlights the importance of a robust understanding of needs before embarking on the design of a capacity development initiative,<sup>33</sup> this is ad hoc and at times informal within UN Women. Insufficient needs assessments were a key finding of a synthesis of evaluation conducted of selected UN Women evaluations in 2019.<sup>34</sup> It found that only a few capacity development initiatives had conducted a full needs assessment to identify areas in which capacity development support was required before the full planning and implementation phase.

Many capacity development initiatives are formulated through a more informal process rather than a specific needs assessment. Examples from the case studies highlighted how capacity needs are ascertained through continuous, ongoing research by UN Women. For example, the Moldova case study showed how needs are usually identified on the basis of continuous research by UN Women (e.g. policy analyses in the area of electoral legislation; and a feasibility study of implementation of special measures to promote gender equality in security and defence sectors), learning from previous implementation, and consultations with stakeholders.

However, needs assessments with specific participants/beneficiaries is critical, and need to engage all relevant actors, including groups with often weak or non-existent representative organizations, particular in the context of leaving no one behind.

In some cases, Country Offices have undertaken needs assessments as part of wider programmes. In Senegal, all three initiatives reviewed had undertaken needs assessments before the design of the programmes, which included aspects related to capacity development. Specific needs assessments were undertaken with partners, for example in Jordan quantitative data was collected on existing capacities and needs of the ministry, to gather evidence about existing work on gender mainstreaming, gaps and priorities. This was then used to create a ‘gender reality report’ (to act as an institutional baseline assessment).

In 2014, UN Women’s Training Centre developed a capacity assessment tool. It aimed to facilitate understanding of an organization’s knowledge and skills in gender equality and women’s empowerment, and an organization’s gender architecture and policy. While this is a well formulated and practical tool with a questionnaire and guidelines, the extent to which it is used is not clear.

<sup>33</sup> UNDP, 2009, Capacity Development: A UNDP Primer; UNDG, 2017, UNDAF Companion Guidance: Capacity Development

<sup>34</sup> UN Women, In Brief: Lessons Learned on Capacity Development

It was not mentioned by UN Women personnel or partners in the evaluation interviews. An Advocacy Capacity Assessment Tool, adapted from GIZ's general organizational capacity assessment tool, also emerged in the context of the work of the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. Similarly, the Women Count programme shared the "Assessing Data and Statistical Capacity Gaps for Better Gender Statistics: Framework and Implementation Guidelines". This framework, aimed at national statistical offices, proposed a holistic approach to capacity development as well as methods, activities and tools for conducting assessments related to gender statistics. However, the extent to which these tools are shared and used within the organization was unclear.

**Box 4: Benchmarking insights: FAO's approach to capacity development**

- FAO developed a tool for participatory multi-stakeholder capacity needs assessments, looking at the level of individual, organizational and enabling environment needs.
- FAO supports partners in the process, and has developed a methodology, tools and training in capacity assessment, including a problem tree, stakeholder mapping and a capacity needs questionnaire.

Source: Created by the evaluation team

The case studies revealed that some programmes develop their own diagnostic tools. The Colombia Country Office developed two diagnostic instruments that can be used to analyse the capacity of partners; identify capacity development needs; inform the design of capacity development interventions; and assess their impact. One instrument is for civil society partners (Índice de Capacidades Organizacionales) and consists of a series of questions related to administrative, programmatic, technical, communication and advocacy capacities. Based on this, the Colombia Country Office develops a quantitative rating on the organization's existing capacity, which is used to inform capacity development support. The other is a similar instrument for state institutions (Índice de capacidad institucional), which is used to understand the existing capacity of these institutions and to measure the extent to which capacities have been strengthened following capacity development support. These instruments are a useful way to systematize the analysis and needs assessment that can inform the design of capacity development support. It is not known whether these tools have been shared, or are planned to be, more widely within UN Women.

## DESIGN

According to the evaluation case studies, the design of capacity development initiatives has generally been positive and is well received by stakeholders. Approximately 82 per cent (N:23) of UN Women personnel and 92 per cent (N:114) of external partners "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that the design of UN Women's support for capacity development of partners at the national level is appropriate for the purpose and context of participants. This was also backed up by case studies where feedback received from capacity development beneficiaries was that projects had appropriate designs for the context.

A key factor that emerged for the appropriate design of programmes was that capacity development initiatives are demand-driven. More nuanced responses revealed that while the original idea for the programme may or may not come from stakeholders, and could derive from UN Women, the co-creation/ design of programmes is critical.

A range of strategies were used, such as in-person and virtual training, coaching and mentoring, study tours, peer to peer support and networking. Although the selection of the capacity development modalities was considered by survey respondents as effective, the evaluation did not find evidence to suggest that the selection of approaches was informed by pedagogical and adult learning theories. The combination of modalities was deemed important in some cases. For example, the Moldova case study highlighted how the office applies a variety of capacity development strategies in synergy, such as training with technical assistance, providing opportunities to apply knowledge and skills and assisting beneficiaries in development of their knowledge and skills through practice.

As discussed further in Finding 6, there are positive examples of capacity development initiatives that have been designed with frameworks focusing on the overall capacity development system, and the connections between the different elements, focusing on the enabling environment (laws, rules, policies) as a key factor for the success of the capacity development initiative design.

For example, in the Women in Leadership Programme in Ethiopia, the approach has moved from a 'one off' approach (i.e. participants attending training in the hope that they would then follow a career path within politics) to a more 'systems' approach, diagnosing the need to facilitate women's enhanced participation within politics, and responding accordingly.

## DELIVERY

The delivery of capacity development initiatives was generally considered to be of a high standard. Survey results showed that 89 per cent (N=25) of UN Women personnel and 91 per cent (N=114) of external partners agreed or strongly agreed that the delivery (methodology/modality, content, trainer, logistical arrangements) of UN Women's support for capacity development of partners at the national level is appropriate for the purpose and context of participants. This was verified across the case study data where numerous positive examples of delivery of initiatives were shared.

The content of capacity development materials was generally considered to be of a good standard, and helpfully aligned to international norms. However, in some cases, feedback was received that resources were too generic and not sufficiently tailored to the local context and not offered in the preferred language. The process of adapting can be challenging, with some concern about the balance of international and national consultants undertaking the adaptation, with a greater role needed for national consultants. A synthesis of evaluations noted the need for all materials and training to be available in local languages, particularly for reaching beneficiaries in remote areas.<sup>35</sup>

Evaluative evidence, including interviews, highlighted that while there are many positive examples of strong delivery of training, there are some inconsistencies in the quality of trainers. Issues included: expertise in a technical area but a lack of expertise in pedagogical training; the ability to impart knowledge but inability to change 'hearts and minds' and attitudes; and a lack of contextual knowledge.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, much capacity development support was forced to move into the online space, which could not have been foreseen and incorporated into the design phase, and many programmes proved adaptable in changing their design. Challenges were reported related to online events, particularly with implementing partners and end beneficiaries, due to participants' lack of technical capacities in using the provided technologies as well as in some cases the sessions' limited interactivity or limited interaction as participants didn't have or didn't use cameras during the sessions.

## FOLLOW UP TO CAPACITY-BUILDING PROVIDED

The extent to which there is follow-up support to capacity development participants is highly variable, and case studies showed that the extent, scope and emphasis placed upon providing follow-up support varied across programmes within country portfolios, and across Country Offices. The evaluation desk review and interviews did not reveal any specific guidance regarding the need to provide follow-up, or any tools for doing so.

Evaluative evidence reveals numerous examples of one-off training programmes with limited follow-up or of a short term-nature.<sup>36</sup> Of all the delivery components, follow-up was considered the weakest by UN Women personnel and external partners with 64 per cent of personnel (N=18) considering it 'somewhat effective' and 36 per cent (N=10) 'not effective' and 52 per cent (N=66) of external partners considering it 'somewhat effective' or 'not effective'. The main hindrance to offering follow-up support appeared to be a lack of results-orientated planning to capacity development with consideration of what is needed to ensure uptake of capacity for the longer term.

Those programmes that are larger-scale and part of a 'package' tended to have more follow-up. Examples include the Women in Leadership and Governance Programme implemented by the UN Women Ethiopia Country Office that follows a training programme for women leaders, with a two-year mentoring programme across participants. In a programme implemented by the UN Women Jordan Country Office, there was consistent follow-up to support ministry personnel through coaching to partners, including fortnightly meetings with a gender mainstreaming committee to discuss progress and challenges. In Moldova, the UN Women Country Office ensured that IT skills training, and business development activities for CSOs were followed by small grants, career orientation sessions or networking with employers to support sustainability.

Some follow-up support was found to be more informal but valued. For example, UN Women partners in Colombia reported the ongoing support and coaching provided to them by UN Women personnel, helped them to overcome challenges, identify opportunities and build new relationships. These were particularly valued by small civil society partners working at the subnational level.

<sup>35</sup> UN Women, 2021, Meta-Synthesis of Evaluations

<sup>36</sup> UN Women, 2021, Meta-Synthesis of Evaluations

## MONITORING

Measurement of knowledge, post training evaluation and reporting of implementing partners are not standardized and reviews and quality assurance rely mostly on implementing partner reports and less on monitoring by UN Women personnel. While 75 per cent (N=93) of external partners agreed or strongly agreed that UN Women's support for capacity development of partners at the national level includes appropriate follow-up to monitor results and impact, only 49 per cent (N=14) of UN Women personnel agreed or strongly agreed and 42 per cent (N=12) disagreed or strongly disagreed. The meta-synthesis of evaluations cited the lack of results as a major impediment to successful capacity development work.<sup>37</sup>

Monitoring tends to be at the activity/output level (e.g. recording the number of participants) and does not identify changes over time at the outcome level. The infrequent development of theories of change for capacity development initiatives – articulating how initiatives should contribute to change and how change plausibly occurs – also limits the extent that contributions to outcomes can be traced and analysed; although the evaluation did identify some notable exceptions to this, such as the Jordan Country Office's work on institutional capacity development. The meta-synthesis of evaluations also highlighted the lack of baseline assessments to undertake an analysis of how beneficiaries are selected, and whether programmes are reaching the most vulnerable women.<sup>38</sup>

Most monitoring is also focused on short-term results using, for example, pre- and post-training assessments, and surveys for beneficiary feedback at the end of an initiative. There is a lack of follow-up to ascertain the medium and long-term results from capacity development initiatives. Rarely are programmes planned that follow up with participants over a year after an event to track the progress after participation in an event. Often when project is completed, funds or resources are not available to follow-up. This short-term monitoring is a common challenge found not only among UN Women Country Offices and programmes, but was also identified as an issue in the wider literature, and by other agencies within the benchmarking exercise.

The benchmarking exercise showed that other agencies are also generally grappling with the challenges of monitoring capacity development initiatives, particularly in moving beyond activity-based indicators to develop measurable output and outcome level indicators; capturing the medium to long-term impact of capacity development after a programme has ended; and establishing the appropriate monitoring skills required.<sup>39</sup> Useful frameworks for monitoring outcome level changes have been developed by UNDP<sup>40</sup> and the World Bank Institute.<sup>41</sup>

## FINDING 4:

**Most results are at the individual level, with a substantial amount also at institutional level, and few results at the enabling environment level. There is insufficient focus on working in a holistic way across these three levels for greater impact.**

Capacity development can take place at the level of the individual, organization and enabling environment.<sup>42</sup> These levels are generally interconnected and action is often required across all three to support meaningful change.

The evaluation found that the majority of UN Women's capacity development interventions are focused on developing individual level capacities, both of rights holders and duty bearers. Interventions to develop individual capacity tend to be strongly focused on developing the knowledge and skills of beneficiaries.

The personnel and external partners surveyed reported that applying new knowledge and skills in ways that contribute to gender equality is the most commonly achieved result from capacity development work. The Senegal case study and a Cameroon Country Portfolio Evaluation presented significant evidence of capacity development support at individual and output level. The three programmes studied as part of the Senegal case study showcased provision of knowledge and skills at the individual level; similarly, this was shown in the Cameroon Office's work on women's political participation.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>37</sup> UN Women, 2021, Meta-Synthesis of Evaluations

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

<sup>39</sup> Interviews with other agency staff; ILO, 2018, An independent evaluation of ILO's capacity development efforts 2010–2017 September

<sup>40</sup> UNDP, 2009, Capacity Development: A UNDP Primer

<sup>41</sup> World Bank, 2009, The Capacity Development Results Framework: A strategic and results-oriented approach to learning for capacity development

<sup>42</sup> UNDP, 2009, Capacity Development: A UNDP Primer

<sup>43</sup> Cameroon Country Portfolio Evaluation 2018-2020. UN Women, p.28

However, capacity development at this individual level tends to focus far less on addressing attitudes or supporting individuals to act as change agents to advance gender equality. It is questionable whether just equipping individuals with knowledge and skills, without also addressing attitudes and supporting individuals to act in ways that promote change, is likely to have a transformative impact.

The evaluation found a range of capacity development initiatives at organizational level, although these were less common than initiatives at individual level. Capacity development work at organizational level tends to combine the development of personnel skills and knowledge with support for the development of organizational structures, policies and procedures that advance gender equality. These organizational-level initiatives were frequently better connected to existing local frameworks, priorities and processes than individual-level capacity development work – for example developing the capacity of an institution to deliver on its own gender equality commitments – meaning that they tended to have greater ownership. Where capacity interventions focused on embedding new capacities within an organization over time, rather than just transferring knowledge, they appeared more likely to lead to sustainable results. Strong examples were found in Georgia, Ethiopia and Guatemala. However, most organizational capacity development lacked sufficient focus on addressing gender discriminatory norms and attitudes within organizations, or on identifying and addressing resistance. Overlooking these important factors is likely to significantly hinder impact.

The evaluation found that capacity development support on gender statistics and gender-responsive budgeting has generated some of the most tangible and demonstrable results at organizational level across multiple countries. For example, resulting in the production and use of gender statistics, or the development of gender-sensitive budgets, plans, objectives and performance indicators by government partners. It is important to mention that this refers to concrete skills-building capacity development support. For example, UN Women's capacity development support to the Ministry of Gender and National Institute of Statistics in Mozambique contributed to the availability of quality, comparable and regular gender statistics to address national data gaps and meet policy and reporting commitments under the SDGs, CEDAW and Beijing. Similarly, in Morocco, UN Women's comprehensive capacity development support for gender-responsive budgeting across multiple government institutions has significantly enhanced implementation and monitoring

of gender-responsive budgeting in the country, including by supporting multiple ministries to conduct sector gender analyses and integrate recommendations from these analyses in their budget programming, objectives and performance indicators.

Capacity development support at the enabling environment level can involve work on formal aspects such as laws, rules and policies, as well as informal aspects such as social norms and power relations. Overall, the evaluation found very few capacity development interventions that focused at the enabling environment level, and almost all of those that did focused on formal elements of the enabling environment. There is therefore a major gap, both in terms of capacity development work at the enabling environment level in general, and particularly in terms of work in areas such as social norm change. Both the UN Women personnel and external partners surveyed reported that the result least achieved at the environment level is "social norms, attitudes and behaviours support achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment outcomes". Personnel recognize that change at this level is critical for impact, and that individuals and institutions are unlikely to act in new ways unless there is also a shift in the enabling environment, including norms and power relations. However, personnel view this as a challenging area for capacity development and one where it is hard to demonstrate results within relatively short project time frames.

Examples of where capacity development support focused on the formal aspects of the enabling environment include work in Moldova where, through capacity development combined with policy advocacy, UN Women contributed to development or improvement of the national policy framework in all three impact areas prioritized in the 2018–2022 Strategic Note (Leadership and Governance Women's Economic Empowerment and EVAW). Examples of UN Women's work on the informal aspects of the enabling environment include capacity development support to CSOs working to promote positive masculinities in Colombia; and capacity development with traditional and religious leaders in Sierra Leone, given their role in influencing community-level norms and attitudes related to child marriage and harmful traditional practices.

Despite the fact that gender equality change at the individual, organizational and environment levels is closely interconnected, the evaluation found very limited evidence of holistic approaches that engage across all three levels towards a given gender equality goal.

**Box 5: Jordan – institutional capacity development approach**

The institutional capacity development (ICD) approach of the UN Women Jordan Country Office stands out as an innovative model for comprehensive, sustainable and impactful support to organizational capacity development. The office provides ICD for gender mainstreaming to government ministries and public institutions to support national partners in developing the capacity and systems required to deliver on national and international gender equality and women's empowerment frameworks and commitments. The first ICD initiative was with the Ministry of Social Development, which is being used as a model to roll out capacity development on gender mainstreaming with other ministries in response to government demand. The Jordan Country Office is now making ICD a cross-cutting approach in its Annual Work Plan and within all its work with the government, working in close collaboration with the Jordan National Women's Commission.

**Key results reported so far include:**

- Strengthened ministry staff knowledge on gender equality, gender mainstreaming, and national gender equality and women's empowerment policies.
- Cohorts of skilled gender trainers within ministries, and tools to guide gender mainstreaming within ministries.
- Improved staff attitudes to become more supportive of gender equality and reduced resistance to the gender mainstreaming agenda.
- Ministry-level gender policies, strategies and plans in place, as well as specific policies and plans related to areas such as gender-based violence, social protection or curriculum development.

Source: Created by the evaluation team

**FINDING 5:**

### There is very limited evidence on impact. This is partly explained because monitoring and reporting of results is largely focused on outputs or lower-level outcomes.

The evaluation found that the reported results from capacity development work frequently focused on outputs only (e.g. the number of training courses held, or learning materials produced) or lower-level outcomes (e.g. beneficiaries reporting increased knowledge, development of a new strategy). This is extremely common across Country Offices, thematic areas and types of capacity development intervention. For example, reported results from the WILG programme in Ethiopia<sup>44</sup> from 2018–2021 included: 553 women leaders trained on Transformative Leadership and Gender Equality at Federal level; nearly 7,000 data users and producers globally were trained in the context of Women Count to enhance their skills to produce and use gender data; 350 women candidates trained on political leadership and campaigning skills; an interparty political debate on gender equality; and the establishment of a cross-party network of women politicians. Such outputs and lower-level outcomes provide little insight into how the programme contributed to women taking leadership roles and successfully championing gender equality issues within politics and governance.

There are a number of reasons why evidence on impact is so weak. As highlighted in Finding 3, monitoring of results is inconsistent, with limited focus on tracking how outputs or lower-level outcomes contribute to higher-level outcomes and impact (this is a common challenge among UN and other agencies in monitoring capacity development initiatives). Similarly, as discussed in Finding 3, relatively few capacity development interventions are based on a clear and realistic theory of change.

Overall, there is limited investment across the organization in learning about how capacity development support contributes to change over time, which could both help to better understand the impact of existing interventions and inform the development of more impactful interventions in the future.

It is important to note that some Country Offices have developed more effective monitoring systems to capture and assess results. For example, the UN Women Colombia Country Office has developed indices to support both the design and monitoring of capacity development initiatives (see Finding 3). The UN Women Moldova Country Office and its partners have also developed a number of tools, including questionnaires focused on identifying changes and follow-up contact with beneficiaries. However, even such strengthened monitoring systems do not necessarily capture how improved capacity contributes to actual impact for women and girls. A major reason for the lack of evidence on impact is that capacity development interventions are often financed by short-term, output-oriented funding from donors. Given that meaningful capacity development can take time, short-term projects are potentially less likely to deliver significant outcomes and impact. For example, the Moldova case study found that a major challenge to effectiveness was lack of financial resources in beneficiary institutions to sustain implementation. Similarly, where projects are short-term, it is more difficult to track any longer-term results that go beyond the life of the project. These challenges are exacerbated by high personnel turnover and reliance on short-term project personnel, which further hinders follow-up over time to track longer-term outcomes and impact.

<sup>44</sup> UN Women, 2022, Summary of Key Results 2021 Ethiopia Country Office

**FINDING 6:****Much capacity development support lacks a systems approach, reducing its potential to contribute to impact. There are some promising examples of more comprehensive and strategic approaches.**

The effectiveness of UN Women's support for capacity development is limited by the fact that much of the support does not employ a systems approach, in which initiatives are based on an understanding of the wider system and are well connected to it. Given that 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 and processes of change to make the maximum possible contribution to impact.

The evaluation identified several examples of small-scale initiatives with very few beneficiaries. For example, reported results for UN Women's Transformative Leadership Programme in Timor Leste included that at municipal level 18 women leaders increased their leadership and advocacy skills, and 17 people were trained as trainers and went on to then train over 200 others; while at national level 49 managers from national-level institutions increased their leadership capacity for advancing gender equality. Similarly, in women's economic empowerment programming in Uganda, one reported result was that 562 women entrepreneurs received capacity development to increase their ability to participate in public procurement, and as a result 10 female-led enterprises were registered and prepared to bid for business opportunities with the government. Clearly, where the size of capacity development initiatives is so small, it is critical that these initiatives are linked to wider change processes – for example providing a pilot or model to be taken forward by others – to contribute to impact at scale.

The evaluation also found examples of one-off or short-term capacity development interventions that are unconnected to wider strategy. For example, in Papua New Guinea, evidence showed that UN Women frequently undertakes ad hoc capacity development activities that are not integrated with the Country Office's wider work and for which results remain at the output level. This sometimes occurs to respond to the government's request for training, but where the Country Office does not have the resources to conduct a full capacity development cycle. Similarly, CSO partners are frequently engaged in short-term projects which encompass some capacity-building activities, but that lead to poor and unsustainable results because of lack of time and follow-up.

There were positive examples of Country Offices having developed more comprehensive and strategic approaches to capacity development, working over time, at multiple levels and with multiple actors in ways that have greater potential for impact.

For example, through its subnational office in Nariño, the UN Women Colombia Country Office has developed strong relationships and detailed context knowledge, enabling the office to provide strategic capacity development that is well connected to understanding local priorities and processes to strengthen women's mobilization and empowerment; improve local government capacity and responsiveness; and address the wider enabling environment. In the Europe and Central Asia region capacity development support to advance the use of gender data for decision-making has involved sequenced interventions with multiple actors over time. This support developed institutional capacity to collect gender data; strengthened the capacity of officials to use gender data; and is now being used to strengthen the capacity of parliamentarians to receive and understand gender data.

The evaluation found examples of initiatives that have sought to institutionalize capacity development support within partner organizations in order to provide sustainability and scale, and to overcome the challenges of short-term project approaches. One such example is UN Women's institutional capacity development work in Jordan, which focused on embedding expertise and systems within government institutions that will allow these institutions to roll out capacity-building for gender mainstreaming by themselves, including to local level personnel and service providers such as social workers or teachers. The Jordan Country Office has also involved the Jordan National Women's Commission in this work so that the body can become a source of expertise to support capacity development for gender mainstreaming over the longer term.

A different approach to institutionalizing capacity development is establishing a new institution that can provide sustained capacity development support over the longer term. For example, through the Spotlight Initiative in Papua New Guinea, UN Women established a local CSO Capacity Development Hub to strengthen CSOs' institutional and technical capacities to support the women's movement in promoting gender equality. INGOs, Oxfam and Care International, were contracted to lead this hub; although due to capacity challenges, in practice, UN Women continued to play a central role. Similarly, as part of the WILG programme in Ethiopia, UN Women supported the establishment of a Centre for Transformative Leadership, hosted within a university but 'owned' by the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, which was open to a range of stakeholders including politicians, government officials, and the public and private sectors.

**FINDING 7:****The most effective approach to capacity-building is a combination of modalities, with accompaniment critical to support beneficiaries in applying new learning.**

Training is the most common modality for capacity development and was used in all the capacity development initiatives reviewed for this evaluation. The following most common modalities (in order) are technical support, mentoring, coaching, development of learning materials, training of trainers, study tours and peer exchanges. UN Women personnel and partners also reported that UN Women sometimes provides partners with more general ‘accompaniment’ as they implement activities, although this is mostly as an ad hoc response to partners’ needs and tends not to be captured in reporting.

The evaluation found that the most effective approach to capacity building was to use a combination of modalities, chosen based on an analysis of context and the needs of beneficiaries. The combination of modalities is **focused on imparting knowledge and skills, such as training, with ongoing support such as coaching or mentoring to support individuals and/or institutions in applying their new learning**. For instance, as part of the UN Women Ethiopia WILG programme, individuals who had received training were provided with longer-term mentoring and coaching, with those who had been through the process then coaching others.

The need for a broader mix of capacity development modalities and the importance of modalities that offer ongoing support has been identified by previous country and programme-level evaluations. For example, the evaluation of the first phase of the UN Women Originarias project in Chile identified a need for personalized follow-up through individual mentoring to support women to develop entrepreneurial projects, as well as opportunities for peer learning, confidence building and network building through meetings and workshops among indigenous women entrepreneurs. These elements were included in the second phase of the project. Evaluations of UN Women’s capacity development support in Türkiye also identified mentoring and accompaniment as more effective in enhancing skills and knowledge than training alone – especially in the case of service providers – and recommended more intensive use of these modalities.

Interestingly, the IES survey of stakeholders revealed a significant difference between personnel and partners regarding which modalities are considered most effective. UN Women personnel as represented by business units in the survey responded that the most effective modality for capacity development with CSO partners was mentoring and coaching (56 per cent/N=15 of respondents) and the most effective with government partners was technical support (85 per cent/N=22 of respondents). Both of these modalities have a strong element of ongoing accompaniment for applying learning. Meanwhile partners identified training (58 per cent/N=68) and workshops (57 per cent/N=64) as the most effective modalities, both of which tend to be more focused on imparting knowledge. A number of the stakeholders interviewed suggested that training of trainers is a particularly useful modality for ensuring both sustainability and scale, as it enables learning to be cascaded over time.

Most Country Offices have experience of delivering capacity development support online, primarily in response to COVID-19 related restrictions. Virtual capacity development support has some clear cost and outreach advantages. However, it can be inaccessible for some beneficiaries either because they lack internet access, or lack technical skills to fully benefit from the training. Virtual capacity development support also limits the networking benefits provided by some in-person capacity development modalities. In some cases, it was decided to adopt different approaches to overcoming COVID-19 related restrictions, because of accessibility issues related to online capacity development. For example, in Colombia, communication activities with the Country Office’s partner CSO Hombres en Marcha were conducted over radio rather than online because of the target groups’ limited access to the internet.

**Figure 9: Three most effective types of capacity development by stakeholder type**



Source: internal UN Women survey

**FINDING 8:**


---

**The quality and breadth of partnership and the degree of ownership by partners are key enabling factors for effective capacity development. Particularly important is developing the capacity and commitment of multiple actors to advance gender equality goals.**

---

The evaluation found that capacity development support that meets demand from partners or that is clearly related to partners' priorities and needs is more likely to generate ownership, result in action and contribute to meaningful change. For example, in Jordan, capacity development was clearly framed as supporting government partners to deliver on their own commitments and frameworks; in Mozambique interest and ownership by powerful government actors (including the President and House Speaker) was a key enabling factor; and, in Colombia, the peace agreement created a framework and demand among partners for capacity development on gender and specifically on women, peace and security.

Conversely, where partners were not interested or committed to the capacity development agenda advanced by UN Women, results were limited. For example, in Moldova, a major challenge was insufficient ownership among national stakeholders over capacity development results.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Colombia's capacity development work with the Consejería Presidencial produced limited results because of political sensitivities and resistance.

The evaluation found that the choice of partner is critical in influencing the effectiveness of capacity development support. For example, the UN Women Mozambique Country Portfolio Evaluation (2021) found that a key enabling factor for effective capacity development programming was the choice of an implementing partner that was well suited to the work. In some cases, personnel in the field stated that UN Women's sometimes lengthy rules and regulations were a barrier to working with the most appropriate partner.<sup>46</sup> This was reportedly the case with the Safe and Prosperous Districts programme in Papua New Guinea, where apparently regulations meant that the Country Office could only work with implementing partners (CSOs) that were already registered in the UN Women system, which created delays and limited the choice of partners. In Colombia, in some cases, the Country Office indicated it could not work with the most appropriate partner, because the partner was apparently unable to meet UN Women's administrative standards or manage the burden of the administrative demands. On occasions, this has reportedly resulted in the office

working with a partner that was less acceptable to the target beneficiaries. However, where the Colombia Country Office had a subnational presence, this facilitated partnering with and supporting local groups which would have otherwise been too small to engage with.

Working with those beyond UN Women's 'usual partners' was found to be particularly important to develop ownership and capacity on gender equality among wider institutions and actors, and to support action to advance gender equality from multiple sites. For example, in Ethiopia, the UN Women WILG programme focused on capacity development with non-traditional ministries and institutions – such as the National Electoral Board. In Jordan, ICD is being used to strengthen capacity and collaboration on gender mainstreaming across a range of different government institutions.

Evidence from the case studies showcased that partners very much value UN Women's participatory and collaborative approach to partnerships. This included UN Women's focus on inclusivity and joint decision-making, and UN Women's focus on building strong and supportive relationships with partner personnel. In the case study countries, it was reported that Country Office personnel are responsive to requests from partners for support and advice, and that they regularly 'check in' with partners to see how they are progressing and what further support UN Women can provide. For example, in Senegal, stakeholders reported that a key enabling factor was the Country Office's inclusiveness and participatory way of working, with Country Office personnel supporting implementation and reflecting on progress together with partners. In the IES survey, external partners ranked a 'strong relationship and continuous engagement with partner' as the most important enabler for capacity development (84 per cent/N=168).

Resistance within partner organizations and among wider stakeholders was a barrier in some cases. For example, for the UN Women Ethiopia WILG programme, discriminatory gender norms that hinder women's political leadership have been a challenge, resulting in men sometimes now passing on invitations for training to female colleagues.

---

<sup>45</sup> According to the Moldova Country Portfolio Evaluation, while capacity development was successful in increasing the level of awareness on human rights and gender equality in institutions and in reducing resistance to the agenda, with the exception of individual champions, ownership and agency has not yet been built.

<sup>46</sup> It is important to note that the evaluation did not study this issue in depth with the relevant UN Women corporate business process owner.

Recognizing and addressing such resistance has been an important enabler in few capacity development interventions. The UN Women Jordan ICD project faced resistance from within some partner ministries, as well as from groups in wider society, driven by beliefs that gender equality is in contradiction with the country's culture and religion. The ICD project responded to this by supporting activities to directly address this resistance and share information about gender equality and gender mainstreaming.

The evaluation found that capacity development support could benefit from a stronger focus on working with partners to identify, address and overcome resistance. This is critical given how widespread resistance to gender equality change tends to be, even within partner organizations that make gender equality commitments.

## 5.2 To what extent is UN Women's support for capacity development coherent in approach and coordinated across the organization and with external stakeholders?

### FINDING 9:

#### UN Women's comparative strengths within capacity development at the national level include its relationships with gender equality and women's empowerment actors; its ability to convene across different stakeholders; and its collaborative approach to partnerships.

The case studies and survey responses identified a number of areas in which UN Women is considered to have comparative strengths within capacity development at the national level.

UN Women's overall mandate on gender equality and women's empowerment is valued by stakeholders for raising awareness and bringing prominence to the gender equality agenda. In some contexts, UN Women is identified as the only agency working specifically on gender equality. Working in a multi-partner and multi-sectoral way, the Entity is valued for bringing the gender perspective into capacity development initiatives. For example, in Senegal, within the AgriFED<sup>47</sup> programme, while other partners focused on farming training, capacity development around women's empowerment was only brought in by UN Women. For many, it is not only the focus on gender equality and women's empowerment generally, but UN Women's normative mandate, that while other partners do capacity development, UN Women specifically links this to international and national normative frameworks.

A key area in which UN Women is considered to add value is its strong networks across different levels and its ability to bring together grassroots organizations, national civil society and government-level actors to learn from each other. This was recognized as particularly important within capacity development, taking more of a 'systems' approach and working to support the enabling environment as well as organization and individual levels.

For example, the relationships that the UN Women Jordan Country Office has established at multiple levels has helped to foster its more systems-orientated approach.

UN Women's ability to provide research and knowledge related to gender equality and women's empowerment was highly valued by some stakeholders, including the capacity to produce gender disaggregated data. UN Women's ability to provide research and knowledge was also tied more specifically to thematic areas/programmes and the ability to provide a package of support, for example in the case of Women Count, the unique value added mostly related to a combination of gender statistics expertise and the pool of resources to respond to the needs of national statistical offices.

UN Women's role in supporting national gender machinery was also highlighted, particularly strengthening the capacity of organizations to plan, coordinate and mobilize resources. It was noted that these organizations tend to be directly involved with the specific needs of each organization as well as considering the sector as a whole.

A recurrent theme raised within interviews and survey results is UN Women's particularly collaborative and participatory approach to partner engagement. Multiple partners across the case studies highlighted their appreciation of the ongoing open dialogue and ease of communication that they have with UN Women personnel in Country Offices.

<sup>47</sup>The UN Women AgriFed programme in partnership with BNP Paribas implements the "Support for Women in Agriculture and Sustainable Development" project – PAF/AgriFED.

**FINDING 10:****Capacity development tends to be formulated programmatically, rather than systematically and strategically integrated in Country Offices' work. There was also limited synergies across country portfolios.**

The evaluation case studies, and in-depth reviews found that, in general, capacity development is conceptualized and formulated programmatically, within thematic areas. This limits the potential for multiple capacity development interventions at national level to work in synergy across thematic areas, connecting to and building upon each other to contribute to gender equality goals. Although 85 per cent (N:28) of survey respondents "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that UN Women's support for national capacity development of partners is coherent within and between thematic areas, the evaluation found only limited examples of Country Offices that had made deliberate efforts to enhance consistency across programmes, or to have a Country Office-wide plan for capacity development. Country Office Strategic Notes showed that for many countries, capacity development is generally articulated at thematic outcome and output levels rather than integrated within broader Country Office objectives, e.g. within Strategic Notes for the UN Women Country Offices in Cameroon, Chile (PPO), Guatemala, Senegal, Timor Leste, Türkiye and Uganda.

An innovative example noted by evaluation team, was the integrated approach to capacity development by the UN Women Jordan Country Office, which had developed a specific Institutional Capacity Development (ICD) strategy for gender mainstreaming to government ministries and public institutions. The goals of ICD were (a) to foster national ownership, sustainability and expertise to mainstream gender equality in all national priorities, frameworks and sectoral goals responding to international commitments on gender equality and women's

empowerment in an integrated approach with the internal mandates of line ministries; and (b) to support national partners to own the knowledge, skills, tools and internal strategic approach to mainstream gender equality into their internal mandates and services. The UN Women Jordan Country Office takes a cross-cutting approach to ICD, integrating it across its different areas of work. There are also plans to develop an integrated approach for the Jordan Country Office's support to CSOs.

A few UN Women Country Offices have also included capacity development within their theories of change (including Ethiopia, Papua New Guinea, Mozambique) as a means to achieve results (or the 'if' within the theory of change formulation). For example, the Mozambique Country Office's theory of change includes the need for policies, systems and capacities to address gender inequalities and women's leadership; and the Ethiopia Country Office includes the strengthening of government institutions and officials as duty bearers and supporting the strengthening rights holders around influencing and advocacy of government policies. While stated in these theories of change, the evaluation did not find any systematic strategy or operational lens to enhance coherence and build synergies across the different thematic or programme areas in capacity development.

The inconsistent levels of synergy across portfolios that include capacity development programmes at the country level, may be intertwined with the lack of an overarching strategy for capacity development (see Finding 2).

**FINDING 11:****Coordination roles and systems for capacity development across the different internal UN Women levels – corporate, regional and country – are unclear. Coordination with national partners is variable.**

The evaluation did not find any corporate documentation that sets out roles, responsibilities or processes for coordination of capacity development work across UN Women's different levels – corporate, regional and country – and thematic areas.

This lack of defined systems means that when coordination occurs, it takes place without guidance and direction, and is reliant on the good sense of UN Women personnel.

## SUPPORT TO COUNTRY OFFICES BY PROGRAMMATIC AND POLICY UNITS, INCLUDING THEMATIC SECTIONS AT HEADQUARTERS

The evaluation found that headquarters support is valued by some for its technical support related to capacity development in each thematic area. Some capacity development resources are highly valued by Country Offices, for example manuals and guidance regarding gender-responsive budgeting, the Gender Equality Handbook, and the Counted and Visible toolkit produced by Women Count. These are valued for their explanation of international norms and standards; quality; and the ability to adapt the resources to national contexts. It is not clear whether all of the materials are accessible or accessed by Country Offices, and there is a call for more standard toolkits as well as help in how to use the tools that are shared to be able to support partners. Approximately 75 per cent (N=25) of internal survey respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that strategies, guidance and materials for national capacity development of partners developed by headquarters are useful for Regional and Country Offices; 15 per cent (N=5) of respondents “disagreed”.

Evidence from the evaluation pointed to concerns regarding *programmatic and policy, including thematic sections at headquarters* not adequately understanding the country context or providing appropriate support. It was also reported that in some cases headquarters pushes for a particular programme to be implemented, or for a particular partner to be involved, when this is not appropriate for the country context, thereby disempowering Country Office personnel.

UN Women systems for sharing knowledge, best practice and guidance on capacity development were considered highly inadequate as part of the evaluation country case studies. Country Office personnel reported that because headquarters thematic sections do not facilitate their access to relevant knowledge materials or examples from elsewhere, they often end up *‘reinventing the wheel’*, or having to draw on external contacts and resources for guidance. There is currently no repository of capacity development materials, and lack of a system for Country Offices to share materials. Twenty-one per cent of personnel disagreed that lessons, good practices and materials on capacity development generated at regional and country levels are shared with headquarters and used to inform organizational approaches for capacity development.

### Box 6. Good practice – Women Count Initiative



An example of knowledge sharing good practice is that of the Women Count Initiative – a programme to transform how gender statistics are used, created and promoted.

Organizing training on gender statistics is mainstreamed as a key activity across all Women Count projects and contributes towards the programme’s efforts to improve data production and use globally. It does this through organizing dedicated training for data producers and users on how to collect and use data in key areas; partnering with training institutes (e.g. Asia and the Pacific Regional Office partnered with SIAP to develop the gender statistics training curricula); and developing global guidance and toolkits and improving the accessibility of those tools through the Women Count Data Hub.

The Women Count Data Hub is a platform that has enabled access to guidance, tools and training to increase the capacities of data users and producers across countries in the production and use of gender data (e.g. Counted and Visible Toolkit; Gender Statistics Training Curriculum).

The website also offers a repository of gender statistics training experts.



### SUPPORT TO COUNTRY OFFICES BY REGIONAL OFFICES PROGRAMMATIC AND THEMATIC SECTIONS

The evaluation did not identify any Regional Office strategies or plans dedicated to capacity development. The breadth, scope and degree of involvement of Regional Offices varied significantly.

Although available data was limited, the desk review showed that Regional Offices undertake work related to capacity development in thematic areas, rather than following an aligned portfolio in capacity development based on an overarching strategy or framework. The evaluation did not identify any documentation that set out a comprehensive rationale for the selection of certain capacity development initiatives. Examples of initiatives undertaken include: training of trainers courses conducted at the regional level in women's political leadership and candidate training, by both the East and Southern Africa and West and Central Africa Regional Offices; training of trainers on gender-responsive budgeting in the Europe and Central Asia Regional Office; and a regional workshop on gender equality in auditing in the Europe and Central Asia Regional Office. The Americas and the Caribbean Regional Office has a very extensive programme of training courses, which are provided through partnerships with research institutions and partners and vary from training women in politics to develop gender-sensitive agendas, to strengthening the skills of women entrepreneurs. As an example, in 2020 the UN Women Americas and the Caribbean Regional Office – jointly with UNDP and International IDEA and in collaboration with FLACSO Argentina (the Argentinian section of the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences) – developed and launched a Virtual Platform for Political Training addressed to the diversity of women in politics and female leaders in Latin America. In addition, since 2018, the Americas and the Caribbean Regional Office has been collaborating with the Interamerican Institute of Human Rights as a strategic stakeholder to specifically address representatives of Latin American and the Caribbean electoral bodies.

Case studies revealed differing levels of involvement of Regional Offices in supporting Country Offices with their capacity development work. For some, the provision of capacity development knowledge products was greater at the Regional Office (than headquarters).

Others felt there was insufficient support, additional support was not provided during particularly demanding periods, such as during the national elections in Ethiopia. Similarly, the Papua New Guinea Country Office expressed the need for support and technical advice related to policies and programmes for capacity development; although there is no evidence of this support being given. The Country Office has reportedly used some toolkits, hand-outs and other material originating from the Regional Office yet it was expressed that UN Women needs to document processes related to capacity development programming and standard toolkits that can be shared and adapted across the organization.

### COORDINATION WITH NATIONAL PARTNERS

Case studies found that coordination with national stakeholders tends to be strong, with national partners speaking very highly of the effective working relationships, highlighting the collaborative and partnership approach. The importance of working through national coordination mechanisms was emphasized. UN Women also tends to play an important coordination role in linking state, civil society and international cooperation actors. Indeed, some of the initiatives are specifically, and commendably, focused on supporting existing or new coordination mechanisms for example the network on women's shelters in Ethiopia (which has led to enhanced referral systems and resource mobilization). Where issues were found, this was linked to insufficient coordination with other national partners resulting in some duplication of efforts. The evaluation found that in some cases coordination on capacity development was hampered by weak in-country coordination systems.

Within the survey, 89 per cent of external respondents "agreed" (N=99) or "strongly agreed" (N=68) that UN Women's support for capacity development is well coordinated with their organization to best respond to the needs of women and girls, while 6 per cent disagreed (11). Among personnel, 54 per cent of respondents "agreed" (N=16) or "strongly agreed" (N=2) that UN Women's capacity development initiatives are well coordinated with other relevant organizations in-country, while 33 per cent "disagreed" (N=11). This may be due to the relative experiences of working with other external partners, or perhaps that UN Women personnel have a more complete picture of coordination with other partners.

### 5.3 How are human rights, gender equality and inclusion incorporated into UN Women's support for capacity development?

#### FINDING 12:

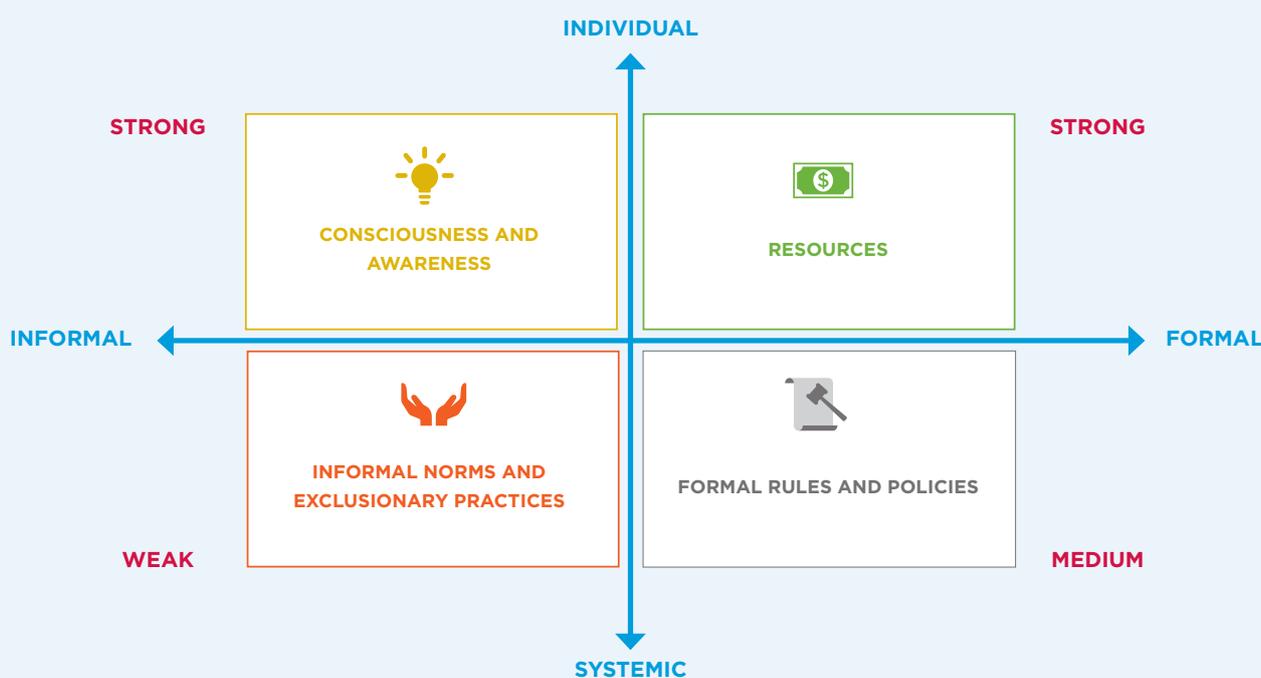
**Most capacity development initiatives seek to advance gender equality by empowering individual women or strengthening institutional and policy frameworks. There is a very mixed picture regarding the extent to which capacity development initiatives integrate intersectionality and leave no one behind principles.**

The evaluation used the Gender at Work Framework<sup>48</sup> to assess the focus of UN Women's capacity development work on advancing gender equality. It found that the majority of UN Women's capacity development support focuses on empowering individual women by strengthening their consciousness, capabilities and access to resources. In some cases, this was carried out with a very limited and specific focus, for example the WE-Fi project in Senegal provided women with knowledge and skills to participate in bids for public procurement (15 per cent of public procurement in Senegal has been earmarked for women-owned businesses). In other cases, capacity development work takes a more holistic approach to individual women's empowerment, for example in Nepal UN Women's support for women's economic empowerment

has involved strengthening vocational skills, awareness-raising, knowledge-building support, leadership development and psychosocial support.

Individual level empowerment can be important for collective action for gender equality, as seen in the Ethiopia Country Office's work on WLIG, where capacity development of individual women candidates for elected office resulted in the spontaneous development of a cross-party network of women politicians. However, transformative change requires going beyond individual empowerment to address the systemic drivers of gender inequality, which has been far less of a focus for UN Women's capacity development support.

**Figure 10: UN Women capacity development support assessed using the "Gender at Work" Framework**



<sup>48</sup> See <https://genderatwork.org/analytical-framework/>

As discussed under Finding 3, the evaluation identified a range of capacity development initiatives that seek to strengthen formal rules and policies, with the aim of addressing formal systemic drivers of gender inequality and developing a more enabling policy and institutional environment. These include capacity development work that supports gender mainstreaming, gender-responsive budgeting and gender-responsive policy making, among other areas. However, there are fewer capacity development initiatives that address the informal norms and exclusionary practices that drive gender inequalities. One example of such an initiative is the UN Women Safe and Prosperous Districts project in Papua New Guinea which combines developing individual women's capacity to engage in markets with sensitization activities with market authorities to overcome exclusionary norms and practices and create an enabling environment.

The evaluation found a very mixed picture regarding the extent to which capacity development initiatives integrate intersectionality and leave no one behind principles or purposefully target the most marginalized women. There appears to be no systematic approach to doing this and practices varied widely between Country Offices. While most personnel surveyed strongly agreed or agreed (71 per cent - N=20) that "UN Women's capacity development support at national level purposefully seeks to reach marginalized groups and those most at risk of being left behind", case studies and desk reviews found that this was often not the case. This discrepancy may be partly explained by personnel believing that an initiative that targets a vulnerable group, such as rural women, is by its nature reaching the most marginalized and those at risk of being left behind – as was expressed by personnel in a number of interviews. However, the evaluation was looking for purposeful inclusion of the most marginalized people within this given target group. The majority of personnel (47 per cent/N=13) surveyed believe that UN Women does not sufficiently take into account the special circumstances and needs of people living with disabilities, while the majority of partners surveyed (75 per cent/N=93) believe that the organization does do so.

The evaluation found that UN Women's work in the Americas and Caribbean region has a particularly strong focus on integrating intersectionality and leave no one behind principles into capacity development support. This is perhaps unsurprising given the prominence of intersectional identities within political discourse and mobilization in some parts of this region. For example, Colombia Country Office personnel report that the starting point for capacity development is a recognition of the wide diversity of Colombian women and the ambition to leave no one behind; and that capacity development support focuses on the experiences of women from different ethnic groups, regions and ages, including a particular focus on empowering young women, as well as an increasing focus on disability.

This intersectional focus can be seen in capacity development work to support the integration of a transversal gender focus within the indigenous rights organization Akubadaura. The Guatemala Country Office has mainstreamed leave no one behind principles by establishing results and targets that focus on rural women, women belonging to indigenous ethnic groups, women in prison and women living with HIV/AIDS; has supported indigenous peoples' organizations to work on gender equality; and is strengthening its efforts to engage with young women and youth organizations. A number of Country Offices in other regions have also demonstrated a strong focus on leave no one behind principles in their capacity development programming. Among these is Timor Leste, which has a strong intersectional approach within its Strategic Note, including a focus on addressing multiple grounds of discrimination and empowering marginalized populations such as young people, the LGBTIQ community, women with disabilities and rural women. The 2021 Nepal and 2022 Brazil country-level evaluation also found strong evidence of an intersectional approach.

Among thematic areas, evidence showed that capacity development related to EAW and second chance education more commonly had an explicit focus on intersectionalities and marginalized women. For example, the UN Women's Spotlight work in Papua New Guinea includes a focus on intersectional forms of vulnerability to violence. The Country Office is planning work on social norms with a range of groups including rural women and youth, men and adolescent boys, women with disabilities, sex workers, women living with HIV, lesbians and trans women. The Georgia Country Office's work on EAW has a focus on strengthening the capacity of national partners to provide EAW related services to LGBTIQ people. In the area of second chance education, there are various examples of a focus on intersectionality. For example, the majority of beneficiaries of the UN Women Cameroon Second Chance Education programme were people living in precarious situations, including internally displaced persons, refugees and host populations. Meanwhile in Chile, the Second Chance Education programme targets young women with socio-economic vulnerabilities, migrants and indigenous women.

The Ethiopia case study highlighted some of the external challenges that hinder the inclusion of an intersectional and leave no one behind focus. Within the EAW programme, capacity development seems more about encouraging women's shelters to think about how to make the shelters more disability friendly. In addition, work that addresses ethnicity is particularly sensitive in the context of the current conflict, while addressing sexual diversity is sensitive given current norms.

The Colombia and Papua New Guinea case studies highlight that UN Women's policy framework could be a barrier to working with grassroots groups that often represent the most marginalized. In Papua New Guinea the 2020 Annual Report noted that smaller CSOs and women rights' organizations missed out on an opportunity to apply for Spotlight Initiative funding because they did not meet the criteria for funding (e.g. operational capacities). The Colombia Country Office reported that UN Women's policy requirements, especially administrative capacities, made it difficult to partner with small, grassroots women's organizations.

Inappropriate capacity development delivery emerged as a barrier to the inclusion of vulnerable populations in some cases. In a number of contexts, it was reported that moving capacity development online resulted in groups that lacked internet access being excluded.

For example, in Papua New Guinea, when training was moved online due to COVID-19, some participants with limited internet access could no longer participate. The language that capacity development was delivered in was also an issue in some settings. In Mozambique training for women on gender equality, women's economic empowerment and climate change was conducted in local languages, but the training materials were disseminated in Portuguese, which meant that the majority of participants were not able to understand the materials. Meanwhile, in Senegal, training modules are usually designed and delivered in French, which can exclude more vulnerable women, although translation is sometimes provided.

#### 5.4. 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?

### FINDING 13:

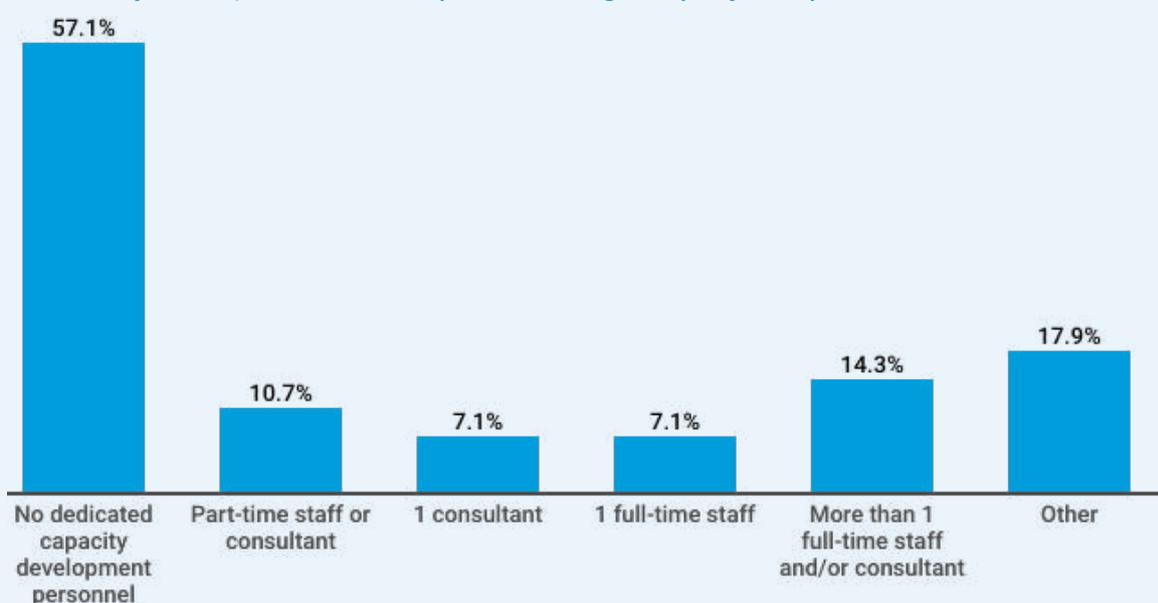
#### There are limited human and financial resources specifically for capacity development support.

There is a need to ensure that human and financial resources dedicated to capacity development support are adequate to properly implement the activities and achieve the intended results. In the survey conducted for this evaluation, 57 per cent (N=16) of respondents indicated that there is not always dedicated capacity development personnel.

However, capacity development is often embedded as a key expectation in programme positions. An analysis of job descriptions for 15 positions related to programme implementation revealed that capacity development was included among the tasks to be performed.

**Figure 11: Dedicated personnel for capacity development**

Does your office/unit have dedicated personnel in charge of capacity development as an intersectional area?



Source: internal UN Women survey

Based on evidence from Country case studies, human resources devoted to capacity development initiatives were perceived as limited, albeit adequate from a technical expertise point of view; and, in many cases, there is heavy reliance on consultants and short-term personnel to address limitations in capacities. Such heavy reliance is considered a constraint as it limits any follow-up and monitoring activities; does not allow for planning beyond the short-term project level; and does not assure continuity of work. In the Papua New Guinea Country Office, for example, interviewees highlighted that organizational processes and structures, as well as human, financial and technical resources are not adequate to provide capacity development support to partners. The office does not have a position for capacity development; however, plans were in place to recruit a consultant to roll out the capacity development activities foreseen in the Spotlight Initiative. However, concerns have been expressed regarding the technical support personnel require to be able to deliver on capacity development adequately. In the Ethiopia Country Office, the reliance on consultants and short-term posts created a barrier for the office given that the Government of Ethiopia only allowed personnel with more than a one year contract to visit the unstable Tigray region to follow up activities, but most personnel were on contracts of less than one year.

The above is mainly due to the nature of most funding for capacity development which is non-core (and short-term and project-based), and often considered insufficient to contribute to sustainable transformational change (65 per cent (N=18) of internal personnel disagreed or strongly disagreed that financial resources are adequate for capacity development). The lack of sufficient and long-term funding for capacity development results in small-scale interventions, with case study evidence showing difficulties in taking forward the good work initiated once a project ends.

This has happened in Jordan, where the Country Office's initial work on ICD was part of a project funded by Italy. Since the end of the project, demand for ICD support from the government has increased and the scope of work has expanded, but resources have not increased. This is a challenge for the Jordan Country Office, particularly to ensure that it can maintain the dedicated ICD personnel it needs to lead this area of work.

#### **FINDING 14:**

### **Personnel perceive delivery of individual capacity development initiatives as mostly efficient. This includes perceptions of planning, organization, delivery, timeliness, logistics and costs.**

Despite few cases, evidence shows that the delivery of capacity development support has been efficient overall. Case studies and the survey from the perspective of both internal personnel and external partners, confirmed that activities were mostly well planned and organized.

Particularly when talking about individual learning modalities such as training and workshops, feedback from partner interviewees suggested that UN Women was able to efficiently deliver activities both in terms of logistics (e.g. venue, accommodation, childcare services) and in relation to timing, budget spent as planned, expected results achieved, and a high standard technical and logistic support (Ethiopia, Senegal, Colombia, Jordan). This is also confirmed by the survey results, with 84 per cent (N=102) of external respondents being satisfied with the efficiency of UN Women capacity development activities and only 16 per cent (N=26) not being satisfied.

However, there are some broader, recurrent issues that might challenge the overall efficiency of interventions, including capacity development activities.

Case studies revealed how organizational rules and procedures create a heavy administrative burden for both UN Women personnel, especially at country level, and partners – often to an extent which is considered by some to be out of proportion compared to the small amount of funds and programmes being administered.<sup>49</sup>

Slow and rigid corporate processes, which are often necessary to comply with UN Women's accountability to its donors and Board members, may at the same time undermine offices' operational agility, sometimes resulting in delays in the delivery of the activities, impacting their quality and effectiveness. For example, the Colombia Country Office reported that its project to develop capacity of women in sport took so long to go through the approval process that the office was forced to rush implementation to finish the activities by the deadline set by the government. Rushed implementation does not allow for capacity to be effectively developed or embedded.

<sup>49</sup> It is important to note that the evaluation did not study this issue in depth with the relevant UN Women corporate business process owner.

Corporate policy may also lead to slow and often delayed disbursement of funds, creating challenges both for UN Women and its partners. Several examples from case studies have been highlighted. In Senegal, the slow disbursement of funds resulted in challenges for partners to start implementing programmes on time. In Ethiopia, where the ‘payment by deliverables’ modality was used, some small CSOs highlighted that the long time taken for approval of deliverables and consequent disbursement can cause significant cashflow issues.

Critically, slow and unwieldy processes mean that Country Offices cannot respond in a timely manner to evolving contexts or emerging priorities, which is also critical in complex conflict-affected contexts. This was raised in the Evaluation of UN Women Crisis Response in Asia-Pacific referring to bottlenecks to timely delivery. In another example, in Nariño, the subnational office needed to respond rapidly to a situation of displacement and vulnerability, but to do this, the office had to undertake a competitive bidding process for an implementing partner, which was said to have significantly hindered UN Women’s ability to provide timely support.

## FINDING 15:

### UN Women supports the operational capacity of implementing partners but this is often ad hoc and the process is not well documented.

All data sources recurrently show that one of the biggest challenges for UN Women is the difficulty in working with implementing partners, especially CSOs, due to weakness of their operational capacities. Among the main shortcomings are the lack of monitoring and reporting, project management, and financial management and reporting capacities.

If the requirements necessary to work with UN Women ensure that the selected organizations can effectively take forward the work (most of the time), they may also prevent or discourage the organization to go beyond working with the partners that it usually works with. Small and grassroots women’s organizations, which are often representing the most excluded, do not easily get the chance to interact with UN Women due to their weak capacities (both in numbers and in expertise), although these organizations would benefit more from funds and capacity development interventions. In the case of Colombia for example, it was reported that some CSOs and state institution partners are deterred from working with UN Women because of their limited administrative capacities compared to UN Women’s heavy operating procedures. In Papua New Guinea, the long and complex process necessary to sub-contract new training specialists that are not already in UN Women systems led to delays in the implementation of capacity development activities in the different market locations.

Evidence shows that UN Women is making great efforts to support implementing partners with operational and administrative capacity development sessions, mostly through training. While this aspect requires a lot of personnel time and effort, the results of any type of operational/administrative capacity support to implementing partners are rarely documented or captured in reports.

This is because the work is mostly ad hoc and responsive in nature and, despite often being implemented within the framework of existing projects, capacity development is not an explicit outcome (e.g. UN Women offices in Colombia, Papua New Guinea, Senegal).

With regard to the effectiveness of this support, data showed mixed perceptions. The majority of interviewees highly valued the support provided by UN Women. In Colombia, many partners reported that the Colombia Country Office has provided strong capacity development on operational and administrative issues, which have enabled the partners to comply with UN Women procedures and has equipped them to partner with other international agencies in the future. However, in Papua New Guinea the efficiency of the Spotlight CSO Capacity Development hub has some limitations in its efficiency, mainly due to shortcomings in delivery and follow-up. A more systematic approach to capacity development support, based on implementing partner capacity assessments, would strengthen the response to implementing partner needs. Currently, capacity assessments are not always used to inform capacity development plans, or monitor and measure performance, making it more challenging to assess the capacity of implementing partners as well as the results of UN Women’s support.

Lastly, there is not strong evidence of knowledge sharing related to strengthening the capacities of implementing partners. Given that UN Women requirements and the capacities needed to work with the organization are often much the same, greater knowledge sharing (e.g. of learning materials, tools, best practices) and uniform guidance would greatly enhance efficiency.

---

The evaluation found some good practices in terms of operational capacity development in the organization.

These include:

---

**UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women.** Each year the UN Trust Fund funds CSO projects to prevent violence against women, increase access to services and strengthen implementation of laws. To ensure that CSOs are able to implement projects effectively and efficiently, within the first three months of the projects, the UN Trust Fund provides a systematic training package which has to be attended by at least two people in each organization. One of the three components of the package, on project management, is directly provided by the UN Trust Fund. It is composed of six modules and delivered through webinars and a handbook. At the end of the training, participants must take a test, which is hosted on the UN Women Training Centre platform. In addition, the UN Trust Fund provides tailored support through a portfolio manager; grantees are grouped and assigned to one manager, who supports them throughout the three-year project life cycle of the UN Trust Fund grant. Other than being a risk management strategy for the UN Trust Fund, this approach proved to be successful in developing the organizational capacities of grantees, which are better equipped to undertake future programming even outside the UN Trust Fund. In 2022 alone the UN Trust Fund registered 1,730 attendances across 17 thematic webinars delivered through 27 live sessions. The most recent capacity development survey sent to focal points that undertook the mandatory training, revealed that in terms of the retention of learning, 58 per cent of respondents indicated they had fully retained and used the learning after the training for implementation and/or management of the UN Trust Fund funded project. The remaining 39 per cent of respondents said they had partially retained and used the learning.

**Spotlight CSO Capacity Development Hub.** In the context of UN Women's work related to the Spotlight Initiative in Papua New Guinea, a CSO Capacity Development Hub was established to strengthen institutional and technical capacities of 15 CSOs to support women's movements in promoting gender equality. The hub was developed to address the strong operational and technical gaps that emerged from the preliminary needs assessments conducted to capture the needs of implemented partners.

While feedback on the effectiveness and efficiency of the hub varies, especially with regard to its management (the hub was supposed to be entirely managed by OXFAM but, due to internal challenges, UN Women ended up actively providing capacity development), the idea of creating a platform to strengthen the capacities of implementing partners could have positive implications in a context where UN Women struggles to source skilled implementing partners. In such contexts, UN Women might consider institutionalizing and systematically incorporating a CSO capacity development hub in its approach (taking the hub in Papua New Guinea as a model) as a way to provide long-term support to CSOs that goes beyond one-off training and creates a path for CSOs to become more independent and able to deliver effectively and efficiently.

**Second Chance Education programme.** The Second Chance Education programme enables women to re-enter formal education, access vocational training, learn entrepreneurial skills and connects them to employment and business opportunities. It is currently implemented by UN Women in six countries: Cameroon, India, Mexico, Jordan, Chile and Australia. Some of these countries experienced similar issues at the start-up phase of the programme, which created delays in implementation. Such issues included the ability to source implementing partners that: (a) meet the minimum standards required for UN Women due diligence; (b) had capacity for the narrative reporting required by Second Chance Education/UN Women; (c) had experience/capacity to ensure financial reporting and accounting compliance; and (d) had the hands-on, community-based expertise and experience that was required to implement the technical model. In Mexico, as the programme wanted to work directly with grassroots organizations, but the organizations did not have the capacities, the Operations unit provided them with hands-on support for six months in order to bring their monitoring, reporting and financial management capacity to the level required by UN Women. The hands-on support approach is considered a good practice and could be an essential element to be replicated in new Second Chance Education countries.

**Box 7: UN Women Training Centre**

The UN Women Training Centre is a global and innovative platform dedicated to supporting the UN and other stakeholders to realize their commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment through transformative training and learning. The centre serves government counterparts, CSOs, the UN system and all individuals across the globe who are interested in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. It offers more than 85 courses linked to different UN Women strategic areas of intervention, which are provided in different modalities such as self-paced, moderated, blended and face to face. Through its e-learning platform, the centre reports that it has trained over 100,000 people and serves over 150,000 users from nearly 200 countries.

In the context of this evaluation, while the Training Centre wasn't the focus of analysis, limited references were raised by interviewees, the survey and through case studies as to how the centre fed into wider capacity development efforts. However, a dedicated management assessment of the centre is ongoing, which will provide relevant information on the centre's past work and its future activities.

**5.5. How sustainable are the results from UN Women's support for capacity development?****FINDING 16:****Lack of ownership and follow-up are the main factors limiting the sustainability of results**

With a few outstanding exceptions, sustaining the results of capacity development interventions was considered a key challenge across the different UN Women thematic areas and regions. Despite the different methods and types of capacity development implemented, some recurrent issues have emerged, which show the challenges UN Women encounters in making sure the changes produced are owned by the recipients and sustained in the long term.

Evidence showed that, in some cases, capacity development activities were designed with a clear sustainability strategy in mind. For example, the Türkiye Country Office has conducted training of trainers for newly recruited legislative experts on gender mainstreaming during the transition from a parliamentary to a presidential system, initiated in 2017. The training of trainers modality was preferred to pure individual learning modalities for its multiplier effect and for building institutional capacity, which reduces the risk of losing the capacities built due to personnel turnover. The same approach was used by the Cameroon Country Office to increase the capacities of national stakeholders. In Senegal, both the capacity development component of the Women Count project and AGRIFED envisioned plans for sustainability and ownership. Project documents and interviews showcase this commitment and implementation of the initiatives have proven sustainable. In both initiatives, partnerships with government counterparts were shown to be strong operationally but heavily dependent on the continuation of financial resources.

In Ethiopia, some individual training activities supported by UN Women include mechanisms for medium/long-term change: in the WILG programme, the training of candidates included a workbook in which they wrote individual plans for their campaigns; and the trainees of the EAW programme developed an action plan for shelters, with the support and follow-up of UN Women.

Nevertheless, in most cases, there does not appear to be a clear vision or planned sustainability strategy for capacity development activities. As discussed in Finding 3, this often leads to capacity development being intended as a one-off training or other learning events, circumscribed to short-term projects – and budget.

When this happens, in most cases, there is no follow-up, while evidence suggests that the most successful interventions were those that were followed by an accompaniment (mostly mentoring and coaching). This was also highlighted in the "Meta-synthesis of UN Women Evaluation (2017-2018)"<sup>50</sup> as well as the IES Brief on "Key Lessons Learned on capacity development,"<sup>51</sup> where limited or no follow-up on capacity development efforts was recognized as one factor hindering the sustainability of interventions. In addition, limited sharing and transfer of knowledge and skills among trainees, as well as the frequent turnover of personnel and officials, also pose a threat to the development of sustained institutional capacity.

<sup>50</sup> Meta-synthesis of UN Women Evaluation (2017-2018), IES, UN Women, 2019

<sup>51</sup> Brief "Key Lessons Learned on capacity development", IES, UN Women

Another element considered fundamental to ensure the sustainability of results is building and transferring ownership, a process that requires time, commitment and long-term investment in relationships. There have been good examples that showed how supporting government institutions to respond to nationally owned priorities and frameworks (Jordan) as well as ensuring a participatory approach in project design and implementation (Georgia) proved successful in building ownership. Nevertheless, the analysis of documentation showed that building and transferring ownership is rarely planned in the project design phase, nor is budget allocated, or included in any sustainability strategy. The lack of ownership, especially by government stakeholders, might lead to low political commitment and creates concern that the results of the interventions may lose their effect and recipients' support once UN Women funding comes to an end. For example, personnel from the Defensoria del Pueblo (Ombudsman) in Colombia raised concerns that the state may not continue to provide support or space for their work once international funding is over.

In addition, as referenced in Finding 3, the lack of mid and long-term monitoring mechanisms to evaluate the extent to which capacity development interventions are producing the expected results limits their sustainability. The absence of monitoring practices makes it difficult to assess which interventions and modalities are more likely to produce long-lasting effects as well as whether the interventions are able to embed individual capacity-building efforts into the institutional or systemic level, limiting the knowledge available to plan future interventions more effectively.

Another important point that was made by stakeholders relates to the development of institutional capacity not only at central level but also at local level. This was particularly evident with government partners, for instance in Jordan, where stakeholders recognized that a major challenge for sustainability and impact over the longer-term is the need to go beyond national level ministries and bring gender mainstreaming to local level service provision. Similarly in Senegal, stakeholders referred to the need to plan for a decentralized approach to ensure the sustainability of results at national and local levels. This requires capacity development to be scaled up more widely to personnel working across countries, ensuring multiple entry points for gender mainstreaming.

This need was also evident in the Safe and Prosperous District project in Papua New Guinea: given that the provincial or district administration oversees the market authorities, there is a need to engage them and strengthen their capacity to ensure changes in the markets are sustained. This local approach has shown success in Mozambique, where the Country Office has developed the capacities of both ministries and local leaders on gender mainstreaming, particularly in EAW. While at national level the sustainability of capacity development efforts was hindered by a lack of funding and high turnover of personnel in the ministries, the situation appears different at grassroots and community level, where local leaders who have benefitted from capacity development interventions keep operating and maintain the dynamic with the accompaniment of civil society focal points.



Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

# 6 LESSONS LEARNED

A number of lessons can be derived from the evaluation findings and process. A few key lessons are highlighted below.



### LESSON 1

**An organizational capacity development strategy** that sets out a definition for capacity development, conceptual framework and operational approach can provide personnel with a shared understanding of what is meant by capacity development as well as 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.**

For some organizations a successful model - that UN Women may like to explore – is a systematized process of national partnership engagement offering a ‘package’ of gender equality and women’s empowerment capacity development services to national government partners, including with national governments.



### LESSON 3

**A systemic and holistic approach to capacity development is most effective, seeking to develop capacity at individual, organizational and environment levels in ways that are connected to and support wider change processes.** Many initiatives are currently short-term, small scale, disconnected and ad hoc, limiting their ability to contribute to transformative and sustainable impact. The organization could learn from capacity development initiatives that have moved beyond a model of ‘transferring skills and knowledge’ to individuals to supporting organizations and enabling environments to be more gender responsive and advance longer-term systemic change.



### LESSON 4

**Effective knowledge sharing can facilitate the spread of good practice and avoid ‘re-inventing the wheel’.**

Limited knowledge sharing on capacity-building across the organization currently results in personnel re-inventing training, e-learning platforms, or guidance that already existed in the organization. This is true particularly in the case of operational support to implementing partners. Limited knowledge sharing also means that, where particularly innovative and impactful approaches to capacity development are developed by Country Offices, these are not being captured, learned from, communicated or scaled up by the organization.



### 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.** This has proven to be an important lesson across the evaluation findings. Even those initiatives that are more advanced in terms of strategic frameworks for capacity development (such as Women Count) encountered issues in adequately following-up with all participants in a meaningful way that can contribute to change.

**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 quality data is almost non-existent and there is a growing recognition of the need to focus on results at the outcome level. Challenges include working beyond activity-based indicators to develop measurable outcome-level indicators; having an appropriate monitoring skill set in-house; and monitoring how strengthened capacity contributes to longer-term impact beyond the life of a given project. Better understanding of the outcomes and impact of capacity development support could inform stronger theory of changes and more effective interventions. This would require dedicated longer-term funding for monitoring.

**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. Programmatically, this may require longer-term projects or a long-term vision and multi-stage projects.

**LESSON 8**

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

The benchmarking exercise identified that those organizations that have developed an organizational strategy/ guidance and support personnel to implement this, have a dedicated team within headquarters (and to differing degrees) within Regional Offices. In some cases, more intense resourcing has been utilized in the development of the strategy and immediate roll-out, with some reduced dedicated resources thereafter.

**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 as it is mostly not a principal focus of interventions, but frequently happens in an ad hoc way in response to emerging partner needs.

# CONCLUSIONS

## CONCLUSION 1

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.

Among UN Women personnel perceptions vary about the definition of capacity development and the role it plays within UN Women's work. This lack of clarity contributes to the absence of a common approach to designing, delivering, monitoring, reporting on and communicating UN Women's capacity development work and results.

There is a clear need for an organization-wide strategy or framework that articulates the purpose of capacity development; how support for capacity development contributes to change; and the principles that should inform capacity development interventions.

## CONCLUSION 2

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.

There are very few examples of capacity development work across individual, organizational and enabling environment levels. There is also much stronger emphasis on capacity development that equips individuals with knowledge and skills, as compared to developing capacity across wider systems or addressing norms, attitudes and behaviours.

A more systemic and holistic approach is required in which capacity development initiatives are based on an understanding of, and well connected to, the wider system they seek to influence work at multiple levels and build different types of capacities.

A central strength of UN Women is its strong networks across different levels and its ability to bring together different types of actors. This can be drawn on to develop a more multilevel, 'systems' approach to capacity development, in particular working with those beyond UN Women's 'usual partners' to advance gender equality from multiple sites.

## CONCLUSION 3.

There is an insufficiently systematic approach to ensuring quality standards across the various stages of capacity development interventions. UN Women should 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.

While the evaluation found some examples of strong and systematic approaches to planning, delivering and monitoring capacity development programming, in most cases this process is carried out in an ad hoc way, with significant variety across the organization in how it is undertaken.

Follow-up emerged as a particularly weak part of the capacity development cycle, with follow-up absent in many smaller initiatives; although it is more likely to be undertaken within larger-scale capacity development programmes that are part of a wider package of interventions.

This lack of a consistent and robust approach to the various stages of capacity development means that interventions vary substantially in quality, results and impact.

**CONCLUSION 4.**

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. Similarly, UN Women's thematic areas develop their capacity development work 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 approach to coordination among headquarters, Regional and Country Offices on capacity development, with the extent and quality of such coordination depending largely on the initiative of individual personnel. Headquarters support to Country Offices is considered valuable in some cases for its technical inputs, particularly through engagement between thematic personnel within headquarters and Country Offices. Some capacity development resources produced by headquarters are also highly valued by Country Offices. There is little evidence of Regional Office strategies on capacity development and the scope of Regional Office involvement with Country Office capacity development work varies significantly.

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

**CONCLUSION 5.**

There is limited evidence of 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 and theories of change.

Reported results from capacity development work are frequently outputs or lower-level outcomes, which do not provide sufficient insight into how interventions may have contributed to gender equality goals. This is a common pattern across Country Offices, thematic areas and types of capacity development intervention.

The evaluation identified a need to increase the focus on and investment in tracking how outputs or lower-level outcomes contribute to higher-level outcomes and impact over time, information which could both help understand the impact of existing interventions and inform the development of more impactful future interventions. The short-term nature of many capacity-building projects contributes to the challenge of tracking impact over time. Moreover, some capacity development interventions do not involve a clear and realistic theory of change that elaborates how they are expected to contribute to change and against which progress can be measured.

**CONCLUSION 6.**

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 through developing their knowledge capabilities and access to resources, or by strengthening gender equality provisions within institutions and policies. There has been less focus on addressing informal systemic drivers of gender inequality, such as discriminatory norms and exclusionary practices.

There is a mixed picture regarding the extent to which capacity development initiatives integrate intersectionality and leave no one behind principles. As has been noted in several other previous assessments and studies, there is no corporate common understanding of or systematic approach to what integrating leave no one behind entails. While certain thematic areas and regions had a stronger focus on intersectionality and leave no one behind within their capacity development programming, in many programmes the evaluation found little evidence of a deliberate focus on these aspects, and in some programmes delivery modalities had in fact excluded the most marginalized groups.

## CONCLUSION 7.

---

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 specifically dedicated to capacity development are limited and there is a heavy reliance on consultants and short-term personnel to deliver this work (although capacity development responsibility is frequently embedded in programme positions). In terms of financial resources, a lack of sufficient, long-term funding for capacity development results in small-scale interventions and is an obstacle to maintaining or scaling up capacity development work once projects finish.

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

UN Women frequently supports implementing partners to develop operational and administrative capacity development. While this support is highly valued and involves significant UN Women personnel time, it is mostly not documented as it is ad hoc and responsive in nature and not an explicit project outcome.

## CONCLUSION 8.

---

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

---

Sustaining the results of capacity development interventions is a key challenge for UN Women, with barriers to sustainability including inadequate and short-term funding and staffing; limited follow-up activities; and the absence of sustainability strategies. Ongoing accompaniment emerged as particularly important for sustainability to support participants in applying and embedding the knowledge, skills and practices they have developed through capacity development initiatives.

Building ownership of capacity development agendas and initiatives is crucial for sustainability. While there were some strong examples, in general the evaluation found that interventions could include more focus on co-creation and developing ownership within project design and budgets.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the evaluation findings and conclusions. The recommendations were presented and discussed with reference group members and changes were adapted over the course of the evaluation process. The recommendations identify timelines, and key actors for taking action.

## RECOMMENDATION 1

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

Priority

HIGH

Timeframe

MEDIUM-TERM

#### Suggested steps to be taken:

- This approach should be based on a clear vision of the purpose of UN Women's capacity development support; how capacity development support contributes to change; and the principles that should inform capacity development support. The approach should be articulated in a strategy to guide all capacity development interventions.
- Create a small working group with key personnel working on capacity development with the responsibility to develop a practical approach to capacity development to guide the organization.
- The approach could be based on the United Nations Development Group framework for capacity development.
- The approach should be based on a clear vision of the purpose of UN Women's capacity development support; how capacity development support contributes to change; and elaborate the principles of capacity development support.
- Develop a plan to socialize this approach within UN Women headquarters, Regional, Country and Programme Presence Offices.
- Ensure that the current global Strategic Plan indicators fully capture the above-mentioned approach, and the indicators are reflected in Strategic Notes and project documents using a similar overarching approach to capacity development.
- Establish baselines for capacity development work and consider incorporating impact assessments at the Strategic Note level to systematize the measurement of the impact of capacity development's contribution to gender equality and women's empowerment.
- Develop a knowledge management function that can provide guidance, curricula and training materials, quality assurance, as well as share lessons and best practices on capacity development across the organization.

**To be led by:** Programme, Policy and Intergovernmental Division; Strategy, Planning, Resources and Effectiveness Division (SPRED) / Strategic Planning Unit (SPU)

**Impact:** Units (thematic; Regional, Country and Programme Presence Offices) working on capacity development initiatives, or using capacity development support as an intervention strategy for achieving gender equality goals will be able to apply the same overarching principles based on a framework that is directly relevant to UN Women's theory of change. It will be clear how all those interventions are contributing to UN Women's goals.

**Difficulty:** This recommendation is within UN Women's control; however, it will require additional time, capacity and consultation to be implemented.

**If not implemented:** UN Women's capacity development support work and its results will continue to rely on different understandings which will lead to insufficient tracking and reporting.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:**

**UN Women’s capacity development interventions should be strategic, holistic and based on a systems approach to supporting change, working with a variety of partners and using a range of modalities.**

Priority

**HIGH**

Timeframe

**MEDIUM-TERM**

**Suggested steps to be taken:**

- Ensure that interventions that include capacity development support reflect a systemic approach, including working in a joined-up way to develop capacity at the individual, institutional and enabling environment level.
- Ensure that theories of change that guide interventions which include capacity development support clearly elaborate a pathway to impact for capacity development enabling strong results-based management principles. This is needed to facilitate organizational learning about how capacity development contributes to gender equality goals, prioritizing those interventions that have greatest potential for impact.
- Ensure that personnel understand the importance of using a mix of modalities for capacity development initiatives, tailored to context and beneficiaries. Attention should be given to combining modalities that impart knowledge and skills, address beliefs and attitudes, provide ongoing support for participants to apply new capabilities, and embed sustainability.
- Ensure that capacity development interventions are co-created with partners; that issues of ownership and sustainability are purposefully built into all stages of the capacity development programme cycle; and that a sustainability strategy is developed.

**To be led by:** Programme, Policy and Intergovernmental Division – headquarters thematic divisions, Regional, Country and Programme Presence Offices.

**Impact:** Capacity development interventions will reflect a systemic approach that address a three-level approach, and measurements will be established to effectively monitor capacity development support interventions.

**Difficulty:** This is under UN Women’s control and will require consultation.

**If not implemented:** Capacity development support interventions will continue to be implemented in silos without looking at a holistic approach targeting the individual, organization and environment levels.

**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.**

Priority

**MEDIUM**

Timeframe

**LONG-TERM**

**Suggested steps to be taken:**

- Develop an understanding among personnel through webinars and guidance of how leave no one behind principles should be applied at every stage of capacity developing programming, including needs assessment, design, delivery and monitoring of results.
- Encourage personnel to use the Gender at Work Framework<sup>52</sup> to identify and address different types of drivers of gender inequality to help address informal systemic drivers of gender inequality such as discriminatory norms and exclusionary practices.
- Strengthen policy networks that can influence capacity development community-based work on using leave no one behind principles.

**To be led by:** Programme, Policy and Intergovernmental Division – headquarters thematic divisions, Regional, Country and Programme Presence Offices.

**Impact:** More inclusion to left behind groups in capacity development interventions.

**Difficulty:** This is under UN Women’s control but would involve consultations and clarity within the Entity of the extent to which it can reach the most marginalized groups in its field work.

**If not implemented:** The “leave no one behind” principle will not be fully incorporated in UN Women’s capacity development work.

<sup>52</sup> Gender at Work framework can be found at <https://genderatwork.org/analytical-framework/>

**RECOMMENDATION 4:**

---

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

---

**Suggested steps to be taken:**

- Explore the possible role of the Training Centre in providing support to capacity development.
- Identify learning opportunities from internal experiences and the experience of other organizations in relation to funding and staffing of capacity development work. Learning can take place in the form of webinars and knowledge products documenting innovative good practices.
- Ensure operational capacity development of implementing partners is explicitly included as a programme/project outcome to capture, measure and communicate this aspect of capacity development work.

---

**To be led by:** Programme, Policy and Intergovernmental Division; Programme Support Management Unit (PSMU).

---

**Impact:** Operational capacity development will be measured and documented as part of programme outcomes. Good practice exchanges will improve learning across the organization

---

**Difficulty:** This is under UN Women's control to identify learning opportunities and incorporate operational capacity development as part of programme outcomes.

---

**If not implemented:** Operational capacities will not be documented and acknowledged.

---

---

**Produced by the Independent Evaluation Service (IES) of the Independent Evaluation and Audit Service of UN Women (IEAS)**

The UN Women Independent Evaluation Service is co-located with the Internal Audit Service under the Independent Evaluation and Audit Service. The UN Women Independent Evaluation Service's main purpose is to enhance accountability, inform decision-making, and contribute to learning about the best ways to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment through the organization's mandate, including its normative, operational, and coordination work. The Independent Evaluation Service also works to strengthen capacities for gender-responsive evaluation within UN entities, governments, and civil society organizations.

© 2023 UN Women. All rights reserved.

*Disclaimer: The analysis and recommendations of this report are those of the Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS) and do not necessarily reflect the views of UN WOMEN. This is an independent publication by the UN WOMEN Independent Evaluation and Audit Services .*

**UN WOMEN IS THE UN ORGANIZATION  
DEDICATED TO GENDER EQUALITY  
AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN. A  
GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN AND  
GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS ESTABLISHED  
TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON  
MEETING THEIR NEEDS WORLDWIDE.**

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



220 East 42nd Street  
New York, New York 10017, USA  
Tel: 212-906-6400  
Fax: 212-906-6705

[www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org)  
[www.facebook.com/unwomen](https://www.facebook.com/unwomen)  
[www.twitter.com/un\\_women](https://www.twitter.com/un_women)  
[www.youtube.com/unwomen](https://www.youtube.com/unwomen)  
[www.flickr.com/unwomen](https://www.flickr.com/unwomen)