

# TRANSFORM



## The UN Women's Regional Architecture Evaluation Issue

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## Dear Readers,

We are pleased to present you our ninth issue of TRANSFORM, addressing another critical topic: the evaluation of the regional architecture of UN Women. UN Women was designed with a regional architecture that aims to maximize the organization's ability to deliver on its mandate.

This evaluation brings to light important findings, conclusions and recommendations on the implementation of the regional architecture that can enhance UN Women's contribution to gender equality.

This corporate evaluation assesses the implementation of the regional architecture from its launch in 2012 to the first quarter of 2016, with the aim of informing future plans for strengthening the institutional set-up, especially in the framework of designing the new Strategic Plan 2018–2021. The evaluation covers the relevance, organizational effectiveness and administrative efficiency of UN Women's regional architecture, including its organizational capacity to deliver on all aspects of the UN Women mandate—normative, operational and United Nations (UN) coordination at the global, regional and country levels.

We hope you find this new issue of TRANSFORM engaging and the information within useful in strengthening the work of UN Women and its partners worldwide.

**Marco Segone**

*Director, Independent Evaluation Office*

✉ [marco.segone@unwomen.org](mailto:marco.segone@unwomen.org)

🐦 [@msegone](https://twitter.com/msegone)

## *Think Beyond. Stay Ahead.*

### EDITORS

Marco Segone

Florencia Tateossian

### EVALUATION MANAGERS

Inga Sniukaite

Florencia Tateossian

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Encompass LLC

Charles Lusthaus, Evaluation Advisor  
UN Women Evaluation Reference Group  
Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific  
Morocco Multi-Country Office  
Colombia Country Office  
Liberia Country Office  
Tajikistan Programme Presence Office

### COPY EDITOR

Margo Alderton

### ART DIRECTION & DESIGN

Ultravirgo

### UN WOMEN

220 East 42nd Street  
New York, New York 10017

[ieo@unwomen.org](mailto:ieo@unwomen.org)

[www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/evaluation](http://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/evaluation)

Twitter: @unwomenEval

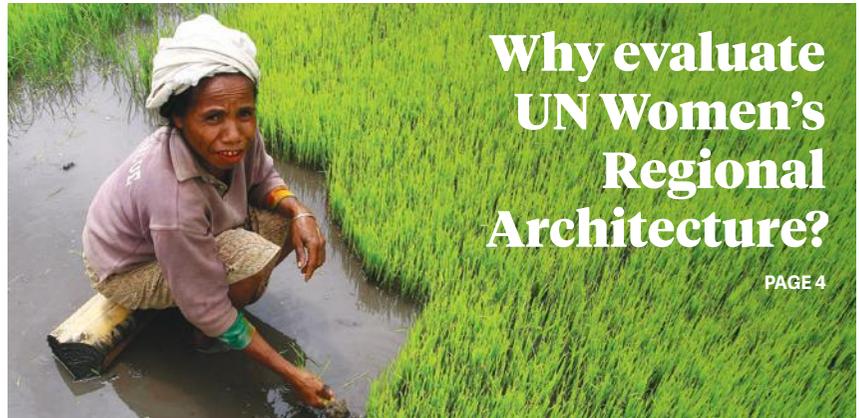
Full report available at  
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The analysis and recommendations in this magazine do not necessarily reflect the views of UN Women, its Executive Board or the United Nations Member States. The designations in this publication do not imply an opinion on the legal status of any country or territory, or its authorities, or the delimitation of frontiers. The text has not been edited to official publication standards and UN Women accepts no responsibility for error.

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**ON THE COVER** In the Democratic Republic of Congo, women refugees rebuild lives, with determination and hope. In the midst of all the daily challenges, women attending a dance performance have a moment to laugh together. One of the goals of the centres is to help refugee women socialize, make new friends and rebuild their social networks. "We should not give up but fight for a better life for our children!" say the women in the Lusenda refugee camp.

# *The* **Regional Architecture of UN Women: What is it?**

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**The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) was established by General Assembly Resolution 64/289 on system-wide coherence to assist Member States and the United Nations (UN) system in progressing more effectively and efficiently towards the goal of achieving gender equality and women's empowerment.**

The mandate of UN Women brought together four pre-existing entities, calling on the new entity to have universal coverage, strategic presence and ensure closer linkages between the norm setting intergovernmental work and operations at the field level. It entrusted UN Women with a leading role in normative, operational and coordination work on gender equality and women's empowerment in the UN system.

In 2012, and pursuant the Executive Board Decision 2011/5 on the UN Women biennial institutional budget 2012-2013, UN Women presented its plans for the new regional

architecture. The overall goal of the regional architecture was to delegate authority to maximize the organization's ability to deliver on its mandate in a more effective and efficient way and bring capacity closer to the field in order to increase contribution to the achievement of results.

The regional architecture identified key elements that were necessary in order to better support Member States and to leverage the UN system. Those elements were informed by consultation with Member States, civil society partners, UN agencies and UN Women staff, in addition to an external study including lessons from other

organizations both within and outside the United Nations. The new institutional arrangement shifted decision-making and policy, programmatic and operational support to six regional offices and six multi-country offices, as well as country offices that would continue to be strengthened and report directly to regional offices. Five guiding principles were identified to strengthen effectiveness and efficiency: (a) decentralize authority to the field with the required operational support functions; (b) get the maximum impact from existing resources and synergies with other organizations; (c) best serve the coordination function of UN Women in the UN system; (d) ensure quality and accountability across all levels of the organization; and (e) ensure coherence for the role, messaging and mandate for UN Women.

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The new regional architecture consisted of: (a) the establishment of six regional offices and six multi-country offices, including the transformation of the existing sub-regional offices into either regional, multi-country or country offices; (b) the decentralization of day-to-day managerial oversight functions for UN Women country presences from Headquarters to regional offices; (c) the transfer of some technical and operational functions from Headquarters to the regional level; and (d) accompanying changes at Headquarters to support higher-level oversight and global technical and policy knowledge and support to the field.

*In its strategic plan, UN Women describes as “its highest priority the restructuring and upgrading of its effectiveness and presence on the ground, at both regional and national levels.”*

**UN WOMEN STRATEGIC PLAN 2011–2013**



## UN WOMEN LEADERSHIP CHARTER

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED, EMBODYING AND UPHOLDING THE CORE VALUES OF THE UNITED NATIONS, AND RECOGNIZING THAT COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP IS ESSENTIAL TO REALIZING THE MISSION AND VISION OF UN WOMEN, WHOLEHEARTEDLY COMMIT OURSELVES TO THIS LEADERSHIP CHARTER.

**In UN Women, a leader is a person who:**

- Has Vision**
  - Anticipates and seizes opportunities that others may not see
  - Develops, articulates and communicates vision clearly
- Empowers Others**
  - Respects, values and acknowledges others
  - Encourages people to grow and mentors
- Has Integrity and Honesty**
  - Has strong moral compass
  - Lives what s/he believes in
  - Has resolve
- Is Courageous**
  - Stays true to own principles, in spite of apathy and resistance
  - Takes hard decisions and stands by them
  - Steps out of comfort zone
- Is Committed and Passionate**
  - Is the change s/he wants to see
  - Drives to promote transformative change
- Is Accountable and Results-Oriented**
  - Favours transparency
  - Defines, plans, manages, measures, and learns from results
  - Is accountable to the impact we create
- Communicates**
  - Transfers and receives information effectively, completely and appropriately
- Demonstrates Humility**
  - Puts the cause before self
  - Is self-aware with dignity
  - Is able to change his/her own view
- Inspires Others**
  - Engages and energizes others toward positive change
  - Leads by example

*Signed in Pollsodes, New York, on 3 September 2015.*



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## Why evaluate UN Women's Regional Architecture?

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*Are we doing the right things?*

*Are we doing things right?*

*Are we doing these things on a scale that makes a difference?*

*To get better results, we need to know what works.*

*We also need to know what doesn't work and how to fix it.*

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The corporate evaluation of UN Women's regional architecture was undertaken as part of the Corporate Evaluation Plan 2014–2017. The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the relevance, organizational effectiveness and administrative efficiency of UN Women's regional architecture.

The evaluation analysed the design, planning and implementation of the regional architecture from its launch in 2012 to the first quarter of 2016. The scope of the evaluation included field presence and divisions in Headquarters. The evaluation was based on gender and human rights

principles, and adhered to the UN Evaluation Group's norms and standards for evaluation. A specific evaluation objective on human rights and gender equality was included, and specific questions on gender responsiveness were mainstreamed across the evaluation criteria.

The evaluation was commissioned and managed by the Independent Evaluation Office of UN Women and was conducted by an external independent evaluation team between September 2015 and August 2016, with the active involvement of the UN Women Reference Group.

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UN WOMEN LEADERS CAME TOGETHER ON 1-3 SEPTEMBER 2015 IN NEW YORK TO DISCUSS THE POSITIONING OF UN WOMEN WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND CALIBRATE THE ORGANIZATION'S INTERVENTIONS FOR MAXIMUM IMPACT.



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**How relevant,  
effective and efficient is  
UN Women's Regional  
Architecture?**

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### A RELEVANT REGIONAL INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP TO ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY

**1** UN Women's overall ability to respond to stakeholder needs has significantly increased at all levels (global, regional and country), with some limitations by different office types.

With its significant increased presence from 59 offices in 2011 to 96 offices in 2015, including regional and sub-regional presence, UN Women has positioned itself in many of the right platforms and fora to enable it to listen and respond to its external stakeholders. There is clear documentation from previous external assessments that the regional architecture has increased UN Women's relevance with key external stakeholders. Various assessments found that UN Women has been successful at adapting to

country-level needs, relevant to external stakeholders, and strong in all areas of relationship management, including supporting national priorities, adjusting procedures and using country systems. These findings from past evaluations and reviews were confirmed in this evaluation's case studies, portfolio review and survey.

UN Women works within the regional architecture to ensure the universality of its mandate through the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment in global and regional agreements, and by Headquarters and regional offices providing support, including to

non-presence countries. On a global level, UN Women's universality is seen in its normative work through the Commission on the Status of Women, which has been key in providing governments and other partners with the necessary frameworks to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in their own countries and organizations. On a regional level, UN Women's normative work in regional platforms, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, has enabled member states to enact policies and programmes that support gender equality and women's empowerment in their countries. The role of regional offices

*UN Women has positioned itself in many of the right platforms and fora to enable it to listen and respond to its external stakeholders*



*While UN Women has made significant progress in promoting universality, it experiences limitations by office type*

to respond to non-presence countries has increased UN Women's universality and ability to support gender equality and women's empowerment in as many countries as possible throughout the world.

While UN Women has made significant progress in promoting universality, it experiences limitations by office type. At the country level, country offices responded best to all stakeholders, while multi-country offices and programme presence offices were more limited in their capacity. Multi-country offices were challenged by the additional responsibility to support satellite programme presence offices because they are assigned similar staffing as country offices but have to support multiple countries instead of one. Also, because this was not an explicit criterion in the designation of countries across the typology, in some instances, UN Women may not have been considering systematically the

presence and capacity of UN partners in countries in order to complement its own capacity in an effort to maximize delivering on the universality of its mandate.

Programme presence offices, originally designed in the regional architecture to implement programmes only, have two constraints: (a) limited access to key stakeholder platforms because they are not recognized as actors of equal standing as other UN agencies; and (b) limited capacity to respond—on average, their workforce is one fourth that of the workforce of country offices and the budgets they manage are six times smaller than country office budgets. UN Women capacity to respond to stakeholders in non-programme presence countries is limited and is best served by global and regional agreements incorporating gender equality and women's empowerment.

## RAPID ROLLOUT WITH SOME EXCEPTIONS

**2** The regional architecture has been rolled out rapidly and in accordance with the Executive Board Papers' guidance and expectations with two exceptions: Headquarters' structure has not been adequately adjusted to support regions and countries, and the prescribed robust knowledge management and internal communication functions have not been adequately developed.

UN Women has succeeded in rolling out the regional architecture overall in accordance to the Executive Board Papers, especially around the establishment of the different types of offices, approving the delegation of authority, transferring some operations functions to regional offices, and increasing capacity at regional



*Given the speed of regional architecture rollout, it is not surprising that there are aspects that still require completion*

and country levels.

Given the speed of regional architecture rollout, it is not surprising that there are aspects that still require completion, including making adjustments in Headquarters to support the regional architecture and establishing robust knowledge management and internal communication functions. At this time, the field reports to the Programme Division, while there are weak structural and reporting linkages (not even a technical reporting line) between the field and other parts of Headquarters—specifically the Policy Division in Pillar A, Pillar B and the Division of Management and

Administration (except for Regional Security Specialists based in regional offices who have a direct reporting line, both technical and supervisory, to the Headquarters Security Team). In fact, only ad hoc linkages were reported between Headquarters and the Policy Division and Division of Management and Administration. The existing weak linkages in Headquarters and the gap in knowledge management and communication create inefficiencies and duplication of effort, which constrain the organization's ability to provide clear direction and priorities, as well as support effective delivery on the mandate.

### AN INTEGRATED MANDATE IN THE FIELD

**3** The regional architecture has increased UN Women's overall ability to implement the integrated mandate in the field (normative, coordination and operational) with some limitations by programme presence countries.

This evaluation found ample evidence in the field of UN Women delivering on all aspects of the mandate and that UN Women delivery created synergy between the three aspects of the mandate. This finding is aligned to similar ones from previous external assessments and evaluations.

The evidence showed that the global and regional levels appropriately fulfil the normative and coordination mandates. The regional level is also delivering on the operational aspect for regional funds

and supporting countries to deliver on their own programmes. There is evidence that multi-country and country offices deliver on all aspects of the mandate, with country offices being the most effective overall because they have the highest capacity. Programme presence offices experienced challenges to deliver on the normative and coordination aspects of the mandate because they have limited access to relevant governmental and UN platforms and more limited staffing. Programme presence countries seemed best organized to manage programmes and were less able to fulfil the normative and coordination roles because they are not recognized as actors of equal standing as other UN agencies.

Furthermore, this evaluation found that the challenges related

to integration of the mandate were mostly because of capacity limitations to implement all the existing workplans completely and at a high level of quality. Document review, portfolio review and the case studies showed that UN Women staff at regional and country levels were well aware of and inspired by the synergies between the three aspects of the mandate, and strategically integrated all three aspects of the mandate in their workplans, leveraging access to and influence on

*Country offices are the most effective overall because they have the highest capacity*

key stakeholders, as well as access to funds to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. In other words, this evaluation found little resistance anywhere in the organization against any aspect of the integrated mandate, and there was widespread pride and recognition of the power of leveraging all three aspects of the mandate.

The issues with integration were, in fact, uncertainties on whether UN Women is allocating its resources at each level in an optimal way to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, and whether it has enough capacity to achieve all of its goals and enough access and gravitas to be successful. This is an issue that relates more to capacity, corporate strategy, direction and priorities, and not to mandate integration. There was evidence in the Normative and Coordination Evaluations, as well as the portfolio review and case studies, that Headquarters is not providing enough guidance on how to prioritize each mandate and how to develop a coherent strategy with realistic boundaries at the country level to fit the budget and local capacity. This difficulty in setting priorities for the organization is linked to challenges in Headquarters, discussed more in conclusions 2 and 6, and to weaknesses in knowledge management, discussed more in conclusion 4.



## TRACKING THE REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE'S PROGRESS

**4** UN Women has some systems and information for monitoring the performance of the regional architecture, and is in the process of developing additional systems and refining the existing ones. At the time of the evaluation, gaps remained in information availability due to flaws in systems and processes for monitoring and reporting.

UN Women has recently established several systems to monitor the performance of the regional architecture and is rapidly refining those systems and developing additional ones to enable more effective monitoring and reporting. This emphasis on monitoring and reporting was also recognized by the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network. UN Women continues to focus on results-based management and roll out new systems to improve the monitoring of effectiveness, four of which were rolled out during the course of this evaluation.

At the time of this evaluation, UN Women gathered information through planning and reporting processes in strategic plans, annual workplans and annual reports. This information is incorporated into the Country Office Assessment Tool, a tool used by the organization that offers a snapshot in time of performance against indicators, such as delivery rates, resource mobilization targets and donor reporting statistics, among others. Another example of a useful monitoring process is the consistent annual issuance of



*Capacity to understand the regional architecture's functioning through the data collected is currently limited and inefficient*

certified financial statements, which provides useful financial information and is used as an accountability tool with donors.

Capacity to understand the regional architecture's functioning through the data collected is currently limited and inefficient, and capacity building for monitoring

was offered sporadically and just-in-time at the time of rollout. Previous evaluations have noted limitations in the UN Women monitoring and reporting system, citing a lack of baseline data and identification of results and performance indicators, which results in presenting an incomplete picture of UN Women's



# ACCOUNTABILITY S LEARNING

## **GATE System: The Global Accountability and Tracking of Evaluation Use**

An on-line based Public Information Management System, which facilitates UN Women's effort to strategically plan and effectively use evaluations for accountability, management for results, and knowledge management.

>>>> <http://gate.unwomen.org/>



expected contributions to the outcomes identified in the results framework. According to the portfolio review interviews and the case studies, the focus on delivery over impact-level data in the Results Management System was another limitation to effective monitoring and reporting.

Finally, as knowledge management has not been prioritized by the organization, there are challenges in the “ownership” of data quality and knowledge-sharing responsibilities in the organization, which makes it more difficult to lead and expedite knowledge sharing and use from the existing and new data, even with improved systems. Challenges in knowledge management were identified in previous reviews and also confirmed through the case studies, portfolio review and the survey.

Current re-engineering process initiatives at UN Women have a strong monitoring and reporting

component, including improvements through Programme Division initiatives in the Results Management System, donor reporting, and fast tracking processes to enable quick response in humanitarian crisis situations. The new peer review process for strategic planning is generally received well by countries but still needs refinement to reduce inefficiencies and streamline the process (not surprising, given the fact that it is new).

Senior management has a compelling vision for how the integrated monitoring systems will work, but this vision is not yet fully shared and understood throughout the organization. Nonetheless, and in spite of feeling challenged by the speed of change, all levels of the regional architecture are working hard to support the rollout of new systems and comply with evolving requirements.

## REACHING THE WOMEN LEFT BEHIND

**5** The regional architecture has increased UN Women’s overall ability to focus and capacity to apply rigorous gender analysis and human rights approaches in programme design, monitoring and implementation at regional and country levels. At the same time, it has created a need to redefine UN Women’s pathways to reach and support the most vulnerable women.

UN Women’s regional architecture has increased the inclusion of rigorous gender and human rights approaches in programme design—for example, through the Flagship Programming Initiatives and through UN Women’s growing role in mainstreaming gender equality into the peace process in some countries. Stakeholders recognize



UN Women's ability to reach and bring civil society to the table as an important comparative advantage that makes UN Women a valued partner in important deliberations on policies and programmes. This is supported by evidence in previous reviews, as well as the case studies and portfolio review.

While the regional architecture has resulted in UN Women needing to balance its attention between civil society organizations and governments, it has also created opportunities to increase participation of vulnerable women's voices at higher levels of the system. The UN Women approach to engaging civil society has not fully defined UN Women's new roles enabled by the regional architecture, including how to prioritize reaching the most vulnerable women as a larger and more formal organization. At present, the existing UN Women procedures for engaging partners and vendors

(the Project Cooperation Agreement and procurement procedures in the Programme Operations Manual) are not appropriate and create challenges for reaching the most vulnerable women's groups. Yet, even as UN Women is becoming more formalized, trust funds situated at Headquarters enable UN Women to identify and collaborate with emerging civil society organizations, helping UN Women's partnerships not to become hierarchical and closed, and instead creating pathways for inclusion of new partners and voices—especially those of the most marginalized women.

Previous reviews present evidence on capacity limits to influence others in gender analysis. Part of the limitations relate to the shortage of UN Women staff to provide this support, e.g., shortage of adequate numbers of policy advisors at regional levels to cover every impact area. Additionally, while

the Headquarters Policy Division supports a range of countries, the staff with policy expertise at Headquarters are not always easily accessible to all countries who need their support and do not have the capacity to support all substantive programmatic needs of the field, especially given the high demands they receive from others in Headquarters.

#### **DESPITE GOOD INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT, THERE ARE SOME MISALIGNMENTS**

**6** Overall, the different levels in the regional architecture support each other well, with some limitations.

The field appreciates support from UN Women Headquarters in administration and backstopping; regional office support in operations is

*Regional and country offices were best positioned to use the delegation of authority to increase their efficiency, making faster decisions tailored to their contexts.*

valued by countries; multi-country office support is valued by satellite programme presence offices; and regional offices and Headquarters appreciate the field's responsiveness. Specific positive feedback was received about the Programme Division, which is the field's main backstopping team; the useful and timely advice of the Finance Section; the easy access and communication of the Human Resources Division; and the support by the Policy Division in certain thematic areas. As evidenced in this evaluation's efforts to obtain valid and up-to-date data, there are responsiveness, flexibility and strong informal working relationships between different levels of the regional architecture in UN Women.

There are a few limitations that create inefficiencies in the organization. Headquarters' structure is not aligned to provide adequate and much needed thematic support to regional offices. This finding was also supported with evidence in previous reviews. Furthermore, there is no technical reporting line between policy advisors, coordination staff, and Division of Management and Administration staff in Headquarters (except for Regional Security Specialists based in regional offices who have a direct reporting line, both technical and supervisory, to the Headquarters Security Team) and counterpart staff in regional offices. This results in weak communities of

practice, knowledge management and knowledge sharing, and also makes Headquarters responsiveness uneven—especially given the many intra-Headquarters demands from offices with greater proximity and seniority than field colleagues.

Furthermore, the more even distribution of capacity to the field mandated by the Executive Board Papers has not been completely implemented: 42 per cent of UN Women senior leaders are in Headquarters; regional offices do not have adequate numbers of policy advisors to fulfil the requirements at the regional level and respond to country needs; and there are also challenges in regional office capacity in financial management, human resources and procurement (also shown in recent UN Board of Auditors findings). Additionally, regional offices have some challenges to link their regional programmes to country priorities. Regional offices are encouraged to mobilize funds at the regional level for both regional and country-level activities, taking into account that regional projects should be implemented by country offices. However, this has presented a limitation from the regional office perspective because funders of regional initiatives require accountability and reporting at the regional level and are not comfortable working with country offices as their counterpart.

Regional and country offices were best positioned to use the

delegation of authority to increase their efficiency, making faster decisions tailored to their contexts. Their ability for faster approvals has increased donor confidence and supported UN Women fundraising goals at regional and country levels. This greater independence and capacity of regional and country offices has also enabled them to express more clearly what they need from other levels. There are, however, significant differences between country offices in terms of delivery, resource mobilization, staffing, budgets and budget-to-staff ratios. There are few patterns in these variations, with changing contexts and special circumstances providing important insights. This means that the ability of country offices to fundraise and to expend the resources they have budgeted delivering services is influenced by many contextual factors, and such variation means that the office typology in the regional architecture should not be too rigid.

While several recent initiatives aim to strengthen linkages and the responsiveness of Headquarters to the field, corporate strategies are not fully communicated throughout the regional architecture, challenging UN Women in setting priorities. Given the rapid pace of quality improvement of UN Women's processes driven by Headquarters, there is also unclear understanding of the sequencing and benefits of changes being rolled out. Visibility and understanding of the regional architecture—the role of different levels, updates on changes, and understanding of linkages and expectations—vary by level.



## TRANSITIONING WITH FLEXIBILITY

**7** In the absence of clear criteria for different types of offices, a process for transitioning from one type of office to another and flexibility to make such transition possible, UN Women is constrained in its ability to maximize its effectiveness for a given level of funding.

Based on feedback on the portfolio review, case studies and survey, staff are unsure about the plans and process for any given country designation according to the regional architecture typology. In fact, some staff thought that the purpose of programme presence countries was

to graduate to country offices, while unsure on who and where would make that decision; while others thought the regional architecture was complete and would not change. Document review, including recent internal documents, revealed that there are no written or shared criteria considered in designating the type of presence UN Women ought to have in different countries, nor was there an agreed process of transitioning countries to a different

type of presence. Thus, this is not an internal communication issue but an area where the organization does not have a policy at present.

There is a trade-off between the number of countries where UN Women can be present and the quality and capacity of presence in any given country in terms of the organization's ability to deliver on the mandate. Senior management is currently in the process of trying to clarify a corporate policy on this issue.

*There is a trade-off between the number of countries where UN Women can be present and the quality and capacity of presence in any given country*

## PROGRESS ON A ROCKY ROAD

**8** UN Women has made progress in some administrative and management systems in terms of efficiency, yet, there still remain significant inefficiencies in several systems, which UN Women is in the process of studying and improving at a rapid pace.

UN Women has been successful in addressing several independent audit findings as reported by the UN Board of Auditors in 2016 and an external auditor in 2011. One of the greatest strengths for UN Women's efficiency is in its financial management capacity, as previously reported by an assessment by the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network in 2014 and confirmed during this evaluation by all office types.

In areas with challenges, this evaluation found evidence that UN Women is now engaged in numerous initiatives to re-engineer and improve systems efficiency, particularly human resources and donor reporting. Evidence of improvements in human resources efficiency were found in several initiatives outlined in the 2015 Human Resources Annual Report and in the rollout of a new fast-track process to increase efficiency and flexibility in humanitarian situations. The Donor Agreement Management System, which was rolled out in February of 2016, is the corporate database for all signed donor agreements, including terms and conditions. The design remedies inefficiencies by tracking overdue donor reports and sending reminders to offices of



*UN Women staff are engaged, entrepreneurial and work hard to create alternative options to deliver*

report deadlines. Therefore, many inefficiencies identified by this evaluation are the subject of internal improvement efforts and likely to be rectified in the coming months.

The issues that continue to be a challenge without a clear solution are procurement and human resources staffing capacity. Procurement challenges were reported in the most recent audit of the UN Board of Auditors and the 2015 Human Resources Annual Report, and confirmed by all country level types. The most recent recommendation by the UN Board of Auditors added that UN Women must ensure that the appropriate staff resources are available and an automation tool is developed so as to expedite the financial closures of projects. However, implementation of this recommendation

is still unclear. In addition, limited human resources capacity (human resources' staffing ratio to employees is 0.6 human resources staff to 100 employees), and the high proportion of non-staff (58 per cent of the total workforce) continues to challenge the organization's efficiency.

In spite of these limitations, UN Women staff are engaged, entrepreneurial and work hard to create alternative options to deliver—even when that means duplication of effort and significant workloads and stress. The pace of recent, current and planned changes is extremely fast, allowing minimal time for capacity building and adjustments, which has resulted in additional stress in the organization, even as staff work hard to keep up and comply with new requirements.

## MATCHING EXPECTATIONS AND RESOURCES

**9** UN Women has been challenged from a regional architecture design based on budget availability assumptions, which had not materialized at the time of the evaluation.

Although the regional architecture was rolled out with almost half of the funding originally promised, UN Women continues to work tirelessly to improve and grow the organization's funding stream. An analysis of financial statements and UN Women reports shows that core funding decreased from \$163.7 million in 2014 to \$136.1 million in 2015. At the same time, non-core resources continued to grow, reaching \$170.9 million, a 7 per cent increase from 2014. Private sector contributions reached \$11.8 million in 2015, a 31 per cent increase from the previous year, bolstered by the first-ever Business and Philanthropy Leaders' Forum in 2015. The organization continues to diversify funding resources, as the most recent midterm review of the strategic plan reported—26 donors contributed to UN Women for the first time in 2015, 44 contributed multi-year pledges. Evidence of increased funding was reported in audited financial statements for 2014 for both regular and other resources with a decrease in

regular resources reported for 2015.

UN Women still falls short of the originally envisioned \$500 million budget to which its design is based. The organization is making efforts to adapt to this reality but has not yet adjusted its expectations of what each level of the regional architecture and the organization as a whole can deliver at the current level of funding. As reported in previous evaluations, including the Normative and Coordination Evaluations and assessment by the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network, the lack of funding has constrained UN Women ability to completely fulfil its integrated mandate in the way it was originally envisioned. The funding shortfall, coupled with the Headquarters structural challenges, has weakened Headquarters to serve the field efficiently and has resulted in overly ambitious expectations and weak coordinated action.

Even though there is a formal mobilization strategy, it is still unclear and lacks cohesion from the field's perspective. Evidence from a staff survey, portfolio review and case studies reported a need for greater support in strategic resource mobilization from regional offices and Headquarters. Although the Flagship Programming Initiatives are starting to address this problem, their purpose and relevance was still reportedly unclear to many in the field.



## POWERFUL MIX OF COMPETENCIES AND CULTURE

**10** UN Women has important strengths in the mix of its staff competencies and culture in the field that, if managed and maintained, help position UN Women well to implement its integrated mandate and deliver on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

A key asset for UN Women is staff's strong commitment to the mandate and a culture of collaboration in the field for all office types. Challenges in the field include the staff/non-staff inequities and the high level of stress under which staff operate due to unclear organizational priorities. The overall UN system's bureaucratic hierarchy is still felt within UN Women, especially at Headquarters. Ultimately, the combination of staff with substantive programmatic (feminist) backgrounds and operations staff with strengths in programme management place the organization in a unique position to implement a transformative mandate in line with the global 2030 Agenda.

*UN Women still falls short of the originally envisioned \$500 million budget to which its design is based*



MOVING FORWARD

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# 4 ways to adjust the UN Women institutional set-up for a more impactful organization

*The evaluation identified four recommendations that are critical*

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## UN Women should build greater flexibility into the regional architecture and deploy its types of presence strategically, while defining a clear process and criteria to be considered in making decisions about typology of presence.

**The delegation of authority has provided the flexibility to UN Women to adapt its approach and programming at the country level, and the regional architecture should include more flexibility in shaping the presence of UN Women in the field. There is significant variation between countries, and one size does not fit all. Also, UN Women has a finite number of resources that it needs to deploy for maximum coverage and impact toward gender equality and women's empowerment.**

**A strategic and cost effective regional architecture.** UN Women should adjust its expectations of what each type of presence can achieve in a country and organize its regional architecture to best leverage its assets. UN Women should think about how its regional architecture enables it to deliver on its integrated mandate as a whole, rather than in each country. Different types of presence have differing abilities to deliver depending on capacity (workforce and budget), the delegation of authority, and official recognition by the host government. In this more diverse and flexible typology, countries may benefit from UN Women in a number of ways including:

- A strong presence in a country implementing reforms and leading the UN family and other partners in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment
- A more limited presence in a country leveraging programmes (including joint programmes) to influence and encourage UN partners and other strategic partners to promote gender equality and women's empowerment
- No physical presence and supporting a country through policy assistance that shapes country legislation

### **Potential criteria for type of presence.**

The type of presence in a country may depend on availability of co-financing by the government, openness of the country to partner on the gender agenda, existing opportunities for influencing the legislative framework (such as if the country is in the process of reform or peacebuilding), existing opportunities and need to reach and prioritize women's needs (especially the most vulnerable women), and existing capacity of other UN agencies to implement parts of the gender agenda.

### **A clear process for deciding on type of presence.**

To make flexibility work,

it will be important to have a clear process and transparent criteria for making decisions on the most appropriate typology of country presence or non-presence, including making changes over time. The evaluation recommends embedding this process in UN Women's existing strategic planning process that currently involves the development of the Strategic Note. Regional offices and Headquarters should share the responsibility for reviewing, confirming or changing decisions for type of presence or non-presence in each country through well-defined steps.

UN Women should have the flexibility to make decisions to invest its limited resources in a regional architecture that maximizes its impact. In this way, UN Women would fulfil the universality of its mandate—maximizing for the whole world—rather than stretching to achieve the exact same things in every country.



## UN Women should strengthen Headquarters integration within the regional architecture framework, as mandated in the Executive Board Papers.

# 2

**UN Women Headquarters serves a dual role of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in global platforms and supporting the field. The evaluation recommends developing a better orientation of Headquarters toward serving the field as its "back office." Headquarters should conduct a full functional review of its divisions and prioritize its functions strategically to serve the field, matching its allocations of resources accordingly.**

**Orientation to the field.** Headquarters divisions other than the Programme Division need to be better structurally linked with the field and work more coherently—building on the Flagship Programming Initiatives and Integrated Annual Work Planning. Allocations of funds across Headquarters functions should be made with a clear consideration of field needs, possibly even with input from the field about what they appreciate the most from Headquarters services and what they need additionally. This field orientation cannot occur on top of the existing push and incentives to serve internal requests at Headquarters level, because it will only add to the overwork and stress. It needs to be accompanied by defining more limited boundaries of what UN Women will and will not do in Headquarters platforms. Otherwise, staff will continue to be pulled in two different directions.

**Harmonize priorities and allocation of resources through functional analysis of Headquarters.** UN Women senior management is clearly passionate about the world of UN Women and its mandate, and this commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment needs to drive

the functional analysis. As a small organization, UN Women needs to choose strategically where and how it will be present at Headquarters, where it will not be present (and possibly rely on strategic partners), and maximize how it will be organized best to serve the field. In the chain of impact for gender equality and women's empowerment, UN Women Headquarters has a critical role to play in supporting its regional architecture, and it needs better and stronger boundaries to create the space and incentives for Headquarters staff to orient themselves to serving the field. UN Women currently does many things that are important and add value, and it will be difficult to choose. However, by not making the difficult choice to be strategically selective, staff become stretched and less time remains for responding to field requests. Therefore, the evaluation recommends senior management work together to make adjustments to Headquarters to support the regional architecture in the best possible way.

**Implement an internal communication strategy.** UN Women has already recognized the need for better internal communication. The evaluation recommends Headquarters develop an internal communication strategy for the whole organization that will communicate plans for changes, the rationale and message of why these changes are important and how they benefit the organization, and provide a progress report on how the organization is doing, what it is learning, and what is coming next. Especially at this time of rapid ongoing changes in the regional architecture, UN Women needs to communicate new developments and updates, as well as continue to share the motivation and goals of those changes. This communication will create greater visibility within UN Women and encourage every division and office to feel part of a great whole, understand what is happening or about to happen, and become inspired in the way these changes are positioning UN Women to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the best way.



## UN Women should make specific adjustments to each level in the regional architecture, adapting to more realistic expectations corresponding to each level's capacity.

**Stakeholders should try to ensure that promises of budget are maintained to match coherence between mandate and institutional set up. However, if this is not taking place at the magnitude requested, UN Women should consider making some specific adjustments to different levels of the regional architecture with an aim to create more realistic expectations of what different office types can achieve.**

**Regional offices.** To respond to country needs, regional offices require increased capacity in substantive programmatic areas. The evaluation recommends adding policy advisor specialists to regional offices and allowing for more P2, P3 and national staff with language capacity relevant to the region in the required competencies. The evaluation further recommends a rotation policy between Headquarters and regional offices, especially to include policy advisors. This will greatly contribute to making UN Women a learning organization and also strengthen linkages between levels in the regional architecture. In addition, the evaluation echoes the recommendation of the recent UN Board of Auditors to ensure that the appropriate staff resources are available and an automation tool is developed to expedite the financial closures of projects. Finally, UN Women should revisit the guidance on the role of regional offices in fundraising, especially in regions where funds are available for regional and sub-regional programmes, with a review of the role of regional offices tailored to each region, coordination between Headquarters and countries on managing donor outreach, and clarification of the path through which countries will be substantively

involved and benefit from regional programmes.

**Multi-country offices.** The evaluation recommends that UN Women adjust its expectation of multi-country offices, taking into account the significant differences in the contexts of the six existing multi-country offices and the generally lower capacity of multi-country offices to deliver fully on the UN Women mandate.

- Fiji and the Caribbean multi-country offices should be retained as are, because the multi-country office structure allows the most efficient coverage of small island countries.
- India and South Africa multi-country offices (countries with big operations), should either receive a great deal more capacity or be transitioned to country offices, given the size of their host country, but still remain engaged both with programme presence and country offices of neighbouring countries with sub-regional affinity. The advantage of a transition to country offices is that they will no longer have to support programme presence countries operationally but will still remain in relationships based on cultural and geographical affinity, thus enabling sub-regional coordination.

- Morocco and Kazakhstan multi-country offices (countries with smaller operations), should be transitioned to country offices. Satellite programme presence countries should be considered to transition to country offices or remain as programme presence countries. All satellite programme presence countries should be moved to the corresponding regional office and the transitioned offices should still remain in relationships based on cultural and geographical affinity, thus enabling sub-regional coordination.

**Country offices.** Country offices should continue to operate and, where possible, should receive a higher delegation of authority depending on capacity. Country offices with high budgets should receive additional support in operational management in order to increase efficiency and compliance with administrative and financial standards.

**Programme presence offices.** Programme presence countries should focus on managing programmes and fundraising (especially in upper middle income countries), with delivery on the normative and coordination mandates as secondary, as they do not have the formal standing, access to platforms, or capacity to deliver on the normative and coordination mandates, except through the programmes they manage.



## 4

## UN Women should develop and strengthen knowledge sharing and learning communities.

**Active and robust learning communities will contribute to stronger programme design, increased creativity and greater success with fundraising. The regional architecture and the delegation of authority have enabled UN Women to get involved in substantive programmatic areas and reform activities in many countries, leading partnerships and creating greater involvement of women's groups in policy platforms. To support this work on the front lines and to learn from the work in countries, UN Women needs to develop knowledge management systems and processes.**

**Placement of knowledge management.** The evaluation recommends that the functional analysis in Recommendation 2 include this important priority and the tasks that enable it. The natural place for knowledge management in substantive programmatic areas seems to be the Policy Division because of its thematic expertise and the Division of Management and Administration for administrative support to the knowledge management function. However, determining the placement of knowledge management should happen only after a functional analysis to inventory and map capacity and priorities for different parts of Headquarters is undertaken.

**Prioritizing and shaping knowledge management.** Headquarters and regional office staff have already been undertaking knowledge management and knowledge sharing activities, many of which are much appreciated by their colleagues in countries and are reported to be very useful. The evaluation recommends increasing the profile of knowledge management and providing guidance on good practices in knowledge management so that

learning communities in thematic areas and operations include some useful features, as resources permit. For example, data repositories (probably on SharePoint) should be organized in similar or parallel ways so that staff are easily oriented to new areas; each community would benefit from consistent communications, possibly through an informal newsletter; staff mapped to a learning community should easily know who is in the group and where to address questions; and every

learning community should encourage presentation and discussion featuring country knowledge and expertise. By sharing in appropriate settings, UN Women staff initiatives can benefit others, and that emulation is its own reward for those who figured out a solution to a shared challenge. Such a practice of peer learning is an energizing, non-hierarchical way to enable UN Women to be a learning organization. Continued investment in knowledge management systems, relationships and collaboration, as well as incentives and recognition, will enable UN Women to build strong learning communities. Finally, the overall knowledge management strategy of UN Women should also include appropriate connections to the existing knowledge platforms and networks of partners.



# Learning from this formative evaluation

## *Reflections from management*

by Daniel Seymour

*Deputy Director, Programme Division*

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UN Women's Regional Architecture was endorsed by the Executive Board at the end of 2012. The proposal that was approved represented in part a formalization of changes that were already underway. But it also articulated the first step of transitioning UN Women from the foundations of UNIFEM to a new vision of how our mandate—the normative, coordination and operational combined—would play out at the country level. Back in 2012, UN Women made a number of decisions in terms of structure, business processes and, of course, staffing and investments. Some of these we were confident would work; others were more tentative. That is why UN Women's proposal to the Executive Board, and ultimately the Board's decision on that proposal, included the provision that the regional architecture would be constantly reviewed. It also included the provision that a major evaluation would take place once the architecture had been implemented to see what worked and what needed to change.

In some ways, the term "Regional Architecture" was unfortunate. The actual proposal was never exclusively or even primarily about the regional architecture. Instead, it was about a business model that extended from Headquarters, through the regional level down to country level and the processes that would connect it.

The Regional Architecture Evaluation is, in my view, the best corporate evaluation UN Women has conducted. It makes clear that we have much to be proud of. Sometimes we seem so determined to do better that we highlight our flaws with much greater vigour than we do our successes. And the evaluation is clear on our successes. In just a few years, UN Women grew from a presence in 59 countries to 96; delegated authority to almost every regional office, multi-country office and country office; hired many new representatives and other senior staff; and rapidly changed the face and feel of the organization in the field. As our core was decreasing, in part due to exchange rate problems and other

factors, the field, facing exactly the same funding constraints, managed to grow year over year—sometimes dramatically. Dollar delivery grew similarly. The evaluators spoke to key stakeholders who unequivocally agreed that UN Women's relevance at the country level had increased. It is an encouraging picture.

At the same time, the evaluation shows how our approach of programme presence/country office/multi-country office as our three main modalities for presence needs to be adjusted. Often programme presence offices are trying to act like country offices, without the resources to do so. Our programme presence offices need to focus on programme management and resource mobilization, and not try to do more than their resources allow. Not all multi-country offices are finding it possible to balance due attention to the country in which they are based while also managing to cover the satellite countries they are tasked with. Where multi-country offices are overextended, they

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need to scale back their ambitions and focus on fewer countries or even just the country in which they are located. We are not yet serving non-presence countries consistently and effectively with global and regional capacity. As we try to deal with all these issues on a country-by-country basis, we lack clear criteria to guide (not decide) when we employ which of our options for country presence, meaning that the logic for why some offices are bigger, smaller or differently structured than others is not always clear. These are all areas we anticipated would need refinement when we designed the regional architecture, and the evaluation has provided valuable guidance in doing so.

The evaluation argues that we have not adequately structured Headquarters to serve the field. To the contrary, too often we are structured in ways that force the field to service Headquarters. As a key part of this, we have not succeeded in putting in place a knowledge management function that would join

our field presence together and make us greater than the sum of our parts. In addition, we have not truly delivered on our promise to decentralize. While we did a good job in shifting authority and decision-making to the field, our Headquarters remains large and expensive relative to the field. The evaluation argues that we need to review our Headquarters structures and identify the changes needed so that they better serve the field. This also includes looking at regional policy capacity and how it better serves programme design and development.

At a more operational level, the evaluation notes that our information and management platforms are not providing us with the management information we need, when and where we need it. As a result, we are partly managing blind, and have to prioritize strengthening those systems. In addition, our business processes are not always ideally designed for the work that we do. In particular, they do not facilitate us working with the poorest and most

marginalized groups, and instead push us towards partnership with bigger, wealthier, more capacitated parts of civil society.

As a final point, there is one additional overarching and very sobering message in the evaluation. We all know UN Women's funding constraints. The evaluation reminds us that while the money hasn't materialized as anticipated, we have still structured UN Women as if it has. And it makes clear that this is not sustainable. It highlights that we have two options: grow our resources, or shrink our workforce. While it is implicit, the evaluation makes clear the imperative of resource mobilization so that the vision of our regional architecture can be financed accordingly. Ultimately, for me the key message of the evaluation is that while we have done well, and we can and should make a number of strategic adjustments to do better, it will not make a lot of difference if we cannot find ways to finance the structure we want to have.

# Comprehensive methodology for a broad evaluation

The evaluation deployed a mixed-method approach, consisting of three levels of analysis from four streams of data collection including: (a) a document review; (b) an in-depth country portfolio review; (c) a global survey of UN Women staff; and (d) six case studies, one at Headquarters and five country visits. Each of the four streams of data collection served different, but complementary purpose: engage different stakeholder groups that could provide the most relevant and useful data to address the evaluation questions. This approach also allowed for triangulation of data across different sources and methods.

The desk review involved a systematic review and analysis of more than 300 documents pertinent to the UN Women's regional architecture. The portfolio review included the in-depth analysis of secondary data and semi-structured interviews in 6 regional offices, 6 multi-country offices, a representative sample of 14 UN Women country offices and 8 programme presence countries.

These data collection methods were supplemented with the perspectives of 331 UN Women staff who responded to a web-based survey.

The country case studies consisted of desk review and semi-structured interviews. The countries were selected based on the criteria of type of office, geographic distribution and country context. The final sample of country case studies was constituted of Colombia (Country Office), Liberia (Country Office),

Morocco (Multi-country Office), Tajikistan (programme presence country) and Thailand (Asia Pacific Regional Office).

The key primary data collection tool was semi-structured interviews that investigated the perspectives of key stakeholder groups on the relevance, effectiveness and administrative efficiency of the regional architecture. Overall, the evaluation team conducted 265 interviews, 38 at Headquarters and 227 in the field.

## Stakeholder data collected for this corporate evaluation

### EVALUATION APPROACH

Gender-responsive, organizational assessment, appreciative inquiry

### FOUR STREAMS OF DATA COLLECTION



Document Review

300+ documents



Case Studies

6 site visits  
209 interviews



In-depth portfolio review

32 countries  
56 interviews, quantitative analysis



Survey

331 respondents

### GENDER OF STAKEHOLDERS

**265 Interviews:** 200 Women, 65 Men

**Survey:** 241 Women, 76 Men, 13 No answer, 1 Other

### COUNTRY CASE STUDY VISITS

**Colombia** (Country Office), **Liberia** (Country Office), **Morocco** (Multi-country Office), **Tajikistan** (programme presence country) and **Thailand** (Asia Pacific Regional Office)

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