WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM UN WOMEN EVALUATIONS?

A META-SYNTHESIS OF EVALUATIONS

September 2019

Guatemala: A house of art and memories seeks to bring closure. San Juan Comalapa, Guatemala. April 2018
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This meta-synthesis reviewed and aggregated insights from 39 evaluation reports against selected development and organizational effectiveness and efficiency criteria. The synthesis also captured internal and external enablers that are reported to drive or impede progress. While this is the first synthesis during the current UN-Women Strategic Plan 2018–2021, the insights contained are reflective of performance of programmes and interventions designed and implemented during the previous UN-Women Strategic Plan 2014–2017.

What did the meta-synthesis conclude?

Evaluations indicated that UN Women has achieved and sustained its strategic positioning across its integrated mandate often under volatile, complex and resource-constrained settings.

Despite relatively limited resources, there is growing recognition that UN Women has contributed to a stronger enabling environment to support gender equality and women's empowerment. The synthesis in particular revealed important results achieved in the normative work of UN women through strategic partnership. UN Women's partnerships have, to a great extent, led to strategically positioning gender issues in national agenda and debates, and localized implementation. Although not large scale, programmatic interventions have yielded positive changes in a number of women's lives. UN Women also achieved important results in greater prioritization and coordination of gender equality and women's empowerment related issues in the United Nations Development System.

However, UN-Women's continued effectiveness critically depends on its ability to protect and sustain policy gains and to establish clear and robust policy–practice linkages to influence social norm changes at community, household and individual levels.

What needs to be improved?

While there have been many important achievements, several internal and external constraints and challenges persist. In particular, evaluations stressed the need for increased attention to protecting and sustaining policy gains and further transforming normative gains into operational results. Evaluations have also made a strong case to expand and deepen the focus on social norm change more coherently and consistently within programmes and strategic notes.

Despite gradual improvements, the relative efficiency and fitness for purpose of result-based management culture needs to be further improved, including through stronger monitoring mechanisms to better gather evidence on medium- and longer-term changes and to use the evidence to support mid and long-term course corrections.

UN Women could do more through the United Nations Development System (UNDS) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) to further promote the gender equality and women's empowerment agenda by more forcefully highlighting gaps, suggesting areas of collaboration, joint advocacy, research, policy engagement and joint resource mobilization. UN Women should also engage with donors to secure multi-year resource commitments to produce tangible and lasting results. In general, evaluations called for UN Women to strike an appropriate balance between its scare resources and the most relevant and effective interventions where its comparative and collaborative advantage is best enhanced to yield greater impact.

Key insights

RELEVANCE:

UN-Women supported programmes and interventions remain highly relevant. They are suited to the needs of target groups and are aligned with national priorities and international normative frameworks.

EFFECTIVENESS:

UN-Women supported programmes and interventions have been effective in achieving their objectives and have contributed towards the realization of gender equality and women's empowerment. Nonetheless, the relatively small-scale interventions, limited human and financial resources, weak partner capacity and monitoring systems have at times affected performance. The extent of success also varies across countries.

EFFICIENCY:

UN-Women has reportedly improved its programme and management efficiency, but its success largely hinges on its ability to operate with limited resources and to leverage funds, capacity of partners, predictability of resources, and other internal and external factors.
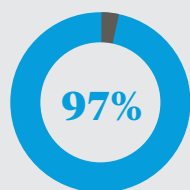
RESULTS CULTURE:

While notable progressive efforts have been made to improve monitoring and the use of results-based management systems, capacity across Country Offices varied and constraints in establishing a functional and useful results-based management system at the country level still remain.
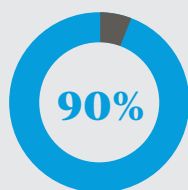
SUSTAINABILITY:

Sustainability of UN-Women supported programmes and results are mixed and highly influenced by the different contexts and complex situations in which UN-Women operates.

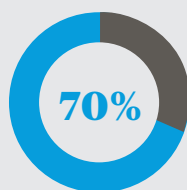## Performance of development effectiveness criteria
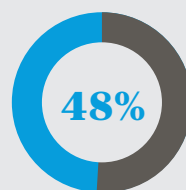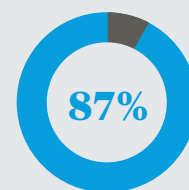
SATISFACTORY RATINGS (%) [1]

97%	90%	70%	48%	87%
Relevance	Effectiveness	Efficiency	Culture of Results	Sustainability

1 This includes "satisfactory" and "highly satisfactory" ratings based on positive findings reported in the evaluations

Opportunities and the way forward

- Further strengthen the strategic positioning of UN-Women and its participation in broader system-wide initiatives through the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), including joint programmes.

- Boost the achievement of results through multi-pronged advocacy, capacity building and strategic and diverse partnerships to support sustained social norm change.

- Increase efforts to improve the efficiency of UN-Women supported programmes and interventions.

- Intensify efforts and continue investments to strengthen the culture of results.

- Enhance the sustainability of UN-Women supported programmes and interventions through exit strategies and sustainability plans.

DRIVERS OF CHANGE

ENABLING FACTORS

- ✓ **Ability to operate with limited resources** and leverage funds
- ✓ **Committed personnel** willing to over-stretch
- ✓ **Strategic partnerships** with CSOs and women's groups/networks
- ✓ **Joint programming** and UNCT coordination
- ✓ **Synergistic and holistic approaches**
- ✓ **Multi-pronged advocacy** and innovative approaches

HINDERING FACTORS

- ⚙ **Challenging political environment** and security situation
- ⚙ **Deep-rooted cultural/social norms**
- ⚙ **Limitations in core resources** and the unpredictability of non-core resources
- ⚙ Highly stretched **human resources**
- ⚙ **Shifting priorities** and limited capacity of partners
- ⚙ **Inadequate monitoring/RBM practices** and inadequate data on costs and outcomes
- ⚙ **Small scale interventions** and short duration of projects

SCOPE OF THE META-ANALYSIS

39

DISTRIBUTION OF EVALUATIONS

1 - AMERICAS AND THE CARIBBEAN (AC)	7
2 - ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (AP)	2
3 - ARAB STATES (AS)	6
4 - EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA (ESA)	10
5 - EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA (ECA)	5
6 - WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA (WCA)	7
7 - GLOBAL/CORPORATE	2

META-SYNTHESIS EVALUATIONS

GLOBAL	2		REGIONAL	5		COUNTRY LEVEL	32
- PROGRAM	1		- PROGRAM	2		- PROGRAM	16
- THEMATIC	1		- THEMATIC	3		- THEMATIC	3
						- PORTFOLIO	13