


# TRANSFORM



**Insights on organizational effectiveness and efficiency: META-SYNTHESIS OF UN WOMEN EVALUATIONS**

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## Dear Readers,

This year's meta-synthesis captures evidence-based progress and lessons related to UN Women's organizational effectiveness and efficiency outputs. The analysis includes 68 corporate and decentralized evaluations conducted between 2017 and 2019, with a well-distributed geographical coverage. The synthesis showcases evidence of progress in key organizational effectiveness and efficiency areas, including UN coordination efforts, strategic partnerships, knowledge management, results-based management and improvements in the management of financial and human resources.

The synthesis presents results, good practices and impediments for each of the four organizational effectiveness and efficiency outputs identified in the UN Women Strategic Plan 2018–2021. The report also highlights opportunities for the way forward in the areas of effective UN coordination, enhanced partnerships, diverse networks, improved monitoring systems, strengthened gender databases and improved efficacy of business processes.

The meta-synthesis aims to contribute new insights to UN Women's knowledge base and learning. We hope that colleagues will find the analysis interesting and make use of the emerging lessons and good practices.

**Inga Sniukaite**

*Chief, Independent Evaluation Service*  
Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS)

## **Think Beyond. Stay Ahead.**

### **EDITORS**

Inga Sniukaite  
Tara Kaul  
Soo Yeon Kim

### **META-SYNTHESIS TEAM**

Tara Kaul (Lead, Report Author)  
Christina Sollito ( Report Author)  
Lou Akusua De Giuli (Research Assistant)

### **COPY EDITOR**

Lisa Ernst

### **DESIGN**

Yamrote Alemu Haileselassie

### **UN WOMEN**

Independent Evaluation and Audit Services  
220 East 42nd Street  
New York, New York 10017  
[ies@unwomen.org](mailto:ies@unwomen.org)  
[www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/evaluation](http://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/evaluation)  
Twitter: @unwomenEval

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**THE META-SYNTHESIS ISSUE**



**Why meta-synthesis?**

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**ON THE COVER - Indonesia - Community Peacebuilding Discussions:** Discussions on how women contribute to peacebuilding in their communities at a massive gathering in Pesantren Annuqqayah, Indonesia.

Photo ©UN Women/Ryan Brown



A woman with dark hair, wearing a black textured sweater, is shown in profile, looking towards the left. She is standing in front of a wall with a complex geometric pattern of black lines forming various triangles and polygons. Some of these shapes have small red dots at their vertices. The lighting is soft, highlighting her features and the texture of her clothing.

**Insights on organizational effectiveness and efficiency:**  
A META-SYNTHESIS OF UN WOMEN EVALUATIONS



## ***Why meta-synthesis?***

*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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This meta-synthesis brings together evidence on UN Women's organizational effectiveness and efficiency outputs. In alignment with UN Women Strategic Plan 2018–2021, the synthesis focuses on issues related to UN coordination efforts, strategic partnerships, knowledge management, innovation, results-based management, resource mobilization, streamlining business processes and improvements in the management of financial and human resources. In addition to highlighting progress, the synthesis captures commonly identified drivers of change in the form of good practices, innovations and impediments.

The purpose of this synthesis is to contribute to UN Women's knowledge base and learning on the organizational effectiveness and efficiency outputs of the Strategic Plan. The findings are also intended to inform the forthcoming evaluation of Flagship Programme Initiatives and thematic priorities, as well as other corporate processes.

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**OVERVIEW****UN WOMEN STRATEGIC PLAN  
2018–2021:  
ORGANIZATIONAL  
EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY  
OUTPUTS**

- **OUTPUT 1:** Enhanced coordination, coherence and accountability of the UN system commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment
- **OUTPUT 2:** Increased engagement of partners in support of UN Women's mandate
- **OUTPUT 3:** High quality of programmes through knowledge, innovation, results-based management and evaluation
- **OUTPUT 4:** Improved management of financial and human resources in pursuit of results



Insights on organizational effectiveness and efficiency:  
[A meta-synthesis of UN Women evaluations](#)

## Scope and methodology

*Given the specialized focus of this synthesis, a wide sample of evaluations was selected to provide sufficient context and capture any changes in approach during the current Strategic Plan period. The scope of this synthesis covers all evaluations conducted by UN Women between 2018 and 2019, as well as corporate evaluations in 2017.*

This meta-synthesis is theory-based and used an analytical framework to map the pathways of progress on organizational effectiveness and efficiency. It began by constructing a theory of implementation describing the approach of UN Women using elements from the Strategic Plan 2018–2021 and the accompanying Integrated Results and Resources Framework. This was then used to design a coding structure to analyse and map evaluation evidence.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was used to identify emerging trends and

highlight good practices and impediments. The quantitative analysis assessed the strength of evidence on emerging insights and lessons by mapping relative frequencies and geographical coverage. The qualitative analysis used a structured synthesis with a view to refining trends, identifying common lessons and highlighting any innovative approaches to achieving the outputs. Given the focus on organizational effectiveness and efficiency, the analysis and findings were organized around the related four outputs of the UN Women Strategic Plan.

**68**  
evaluations  
2017-2019



Combination of quantitative and qualitative methods



Coding structure to analyse and map evaluation evidence

**53** country-level evaluations

**9** global evaluations

**6** regional evaluations



Theory-based analytical framework



Reconstructed theory of implementation

What methods and tools are available to advance gender-responsive evaluation?

What can we learn from successful gender-responsive evaluation approaches?

How can we empower rights holders and maximize their participation?

## GOOD PRACTICES IN GENDER-RESPONSIVE EVALUATIONS

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UN  
WOMEN



Photo ©UN Women

## KEY FINDINGS

# What did the meta-synthesis find?

### OUTPUT 1



**Enhanced coordination, coherence and accountability of the UN System for gender equality and women's empowerment commitments**

UN Women plays a pivotal role in the United Nations system to enhance coherence on issues related to gender mainstreaming, gender parity and system-wide accountability in these areas. The achievements of UN Women in UN coordination efforts are acknowledged and well documented in most evaluation reports covering this area. Many evaluations also highlighted the established role of UN Women as a technical expert on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Through its convening power, UN Women brings together diverse UN stakeholders. Several evaluations highlighted UN Women's ability to work effectively with partners to deliver stronger and more comprehensive programmes. Effective coordination between UN Women and other UN entities is a key contributor to the delivery of successful programmes, especially for UN joint programming. UN Women has succeeded in strengthening programmes by partnering with other UN agencies to harness relative comparative advantages.



To strengthen accountability, UN Women has worked with partner agencies to develop Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) measurement indicators and monitor progress towards results. Some evaluation reports also highlighted UN Women's technical support through training on gender mainstreaming.

Establishing clarity on roles and governance structure, harnessing implementation synergies and leveraging the comparative advantages of partners are some of the good practices that UN Women employs. These have implications for joint programmes to build on ongoing or complementary initiatives and reduce operational costs while improving implementation efficiency.

#### HIGHLIGHT

### BANGLADESH COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION

*"Collaboration between ILO and UN Women and IOM is a good example of how UN Women's distinct expertise and mandate can be leveraged to gain traction on recognition of gender issues and responses to these across mandates managed by other UN agencies. It has involved:*

- **Formal collaboration** in shared programmes in ways that use the comparative advantages and distinct specializations of involved agencies.
- **Informal collaboration**, including beyond the project framework, sharing technical expertise to fine-tune translation of policy into implementation so that the intent of gender-responsive policy can be fulfilled.
- *Understanding of each other's comparative advantage and a desire to combine analytical weight to **optimize mutual objectives**. All three agencies have clarity with regard to their common goal and are working towards common strategic results and national priorities."*



OUTPUT

2



**Increased engagement  
of partners in support of  
UN Women's mandate**

*UN Women has played a key role in building synergies amongst gender equality advocates. This is especially true in cases where UN Women's country and regional strategies align with existing programmes.*

UN Women has shown its expertise in bringing together diverse stakeholders to comprehensively and efficiently address issues related to gender equality and the empowerment of women. Approximately one third of the evaluations in the sample noted its success in identifying and engaging with a wide range of partners, including national gender machineries, government ministries, the private sector and civil society organizations (CSOs). Each of these partners is important for bringing about change, contributing unique strengths and local and international connections to facilitate successful programme implementation on the ground.

UN Women has played a key role in building synergies amongst gender equality advocates. This is especially true in cases where UN Women's country and regional strategies align with existing programmes. Alignment encourages high levels of national and local ownership of programmes, which increases the likelihood that they will be sustained beyond UN Women's established time frames.

UN Women has demonstrated expertise in engaging and coordinating with relevant government bodies in order to build their capacities and enable them to take ownership of projects. Several evaluations highlighted the support UN Women has provided to CSOs on capacity development, innovative methods of advocacy and networking opportunities. There is strong evidence of UN Women's commitment to ensuring the participation of CSOs in decision-making processes and ensuring inclusion and participation

of marginalized groups of women and gender equality champions at the grassroots level. Strategic partnerships with digital or media based private sector institutions have also proved beneficial in socializing the gender equality and women's empowerment agenda and empowering media personnel to recognize and report on gender-related issues.

The identification and selection of strong local partners was found to significantly contribute to the success of gender equality initiatives. Strong partners from the public and private sectors add significant value by contributing their expertise in implementing women's social, political and economic empowerment activities. UN Women can support these capacities with its own organizational strengths and utilize local connections to create spaces for dialogue and improve community-level engagement.

While UN Women's partnership engagement strategy has been quite successful in achieving the objectives and expected results of interventions, evaluations identified some common risks when engaging with outside actors. Inadequate outreach and weak coordination with partners were reported in several evaluation reports. Weak partner capacity was also identified as an impediment, with several evaluations recommending greater support to develop capacities, especially in knowledge management, gender mainstreaming within organizations and monitoring and evaluation strategies.





#### HIGHLIGHT

### EVALUATION OF UN WOMEN'S ECONOMIC INTERVENTIONS UNDER THE LEADERSHIP, EMPOWERMENT, ACCESS AND PROTECTION IN CRISIS RESPONSE (LEAP) PROGRAMMING IN THE ARAB STATES REGION

UN Women partnered with the Safadi Foundation in Lebanon to facilitate the dual approach of providing training and job placements.

*“The Safadi Foundation’s experience and understanding of the market is that there is a strong need for women’s capacity development when starting up their own businesses and managing small sub-grants.*

*These innovative experiences can be the foundation for lobbying the private sector for its commitment to provide employment to women post-training, with internships or job placements provided by the private sector and facilitated by UN Women as direct support to the private sector. The experience gained in engaging with the private sector in Jordan and Lebanon might be of benefit to the work being undertaken in Egypt and Iraq, where private sector engagement is currently being established. Because of the context and the legal restrictions on the hiring of refugees by the private sector, UN Women has an advocacy role in demonstrating how hiring women (both local women and refugee women) would benefit industry.”*

PHOTO: ©UN Women/Joe Saade



OUTPUT

3



**High quality of programmes through knowledge management, innovation, results-based management and evaluation**

Many evaluation reports found that UN Women has been engaged in various efforts to develop internal and external monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacity. There is evidence that UN Women has worked to improve M&E of interventions by clarifying definitions of outcomes and outputs and explicitly defining measurable indicators and targets. The integration of specialized personnel, the utilization of in-house experts from regional offices and headquarters and the hiring of external M&E consultants have also proven to be beneficial in the development of monitoring strategies.

Improving capacities on gender responsive results-based management (RBM) continues to be a priority area for UN Women. While several evaluations indicated a strengthening of UN Women RBM systems

over time, there is room for improvement. Implementation of these systems is most successful when accompanied by a logical framework or theory of change that is closely aligned with the objectives, expected results and outputs. Evaluations highlighted the importance of developing a strong theory of change by engaging multiple stakeholders and using a participatory process. A few evaluation reports indicate that UN Women country offices are committed to utilizing an RBM system in all phases of project implementation and there is a consistent effort to ensure that offices have sufficient RBM capacity and systems. Evaluations also indicate that RBM training provided to partners is seen as valued and useful, but it requires continuous follow-up for partners to fully adopt it.

Photo © UN Women/Christopher Herwig





Photo ©UN Women/ Itayi Usaiwevhu

UN Women's knowledge platform and products help to identify strategic priorities and provide updated gender statistics and data. Several evaluations highlighted success in strengthening gender data and disseminating evidence from knowledge products. Once disseminated to stakeholders and decision-making authorities, these products can inform national responses to gender related issues, contribute to increased commitment from partners and provide a foundation for dialogue on issues affecting women and girls. UN Women has succeeded in providing technical support to partners for the development of digital databases and information management systems, particularly in the areas of violence against women and girls and women's empowerment.

Limited availability of monitoring data emerged as a recurring issue of concern. Some evaluations cited a lack of partner capacity to establish mechanisms to systematically capture data and a lack of good baseline data. Evaluations also highlighted issues such as an overabundance of indicators leading to technical complications, the use of incomplete indicators and a lack of identification of measurable indicators. Weaknesses in the design and utilization of M&E systems can also be attributed to low budget allocations for these activities, which result in inadequate human and financial resources.

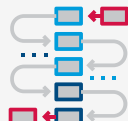
#### HIGHLIGHT

### EVALUATION ON IMPROVING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AS PEACEBUILDING AMBASSADORS IN SIERRA LEONE

*"One unique approach the project supported was the development of an early warning and elections monitoring tool that was gender specific. For example, 150 community-based monitors from 6 districts were capacitated and reported incidents of violence during elections in real time, using the tool. Data generated from the use of this tool was used to highlight incidents of violence to key government institutions; to engage the security system; to notify electoral management bodies, the international community and civil society leaders; and to advocate for action (preventative and mediation measures) to mitigate the violence."*

OUTPUT

4



### Improved management of financial and human resources in pursuit of results

#### HIGHLIGHT

#### PROJECT EVALUATION FOR EID BI EID IN JORDAN

*“The pooled funding mechanism instituted by UN Women to raise donor funds for Eid bi Eid allowed the programme to bridge the time gap while waiting for MOPIC approval of new funding streams. Thus, the programme was able to maintain the management and operations of the four Oases (Za’atari and Azraq camps) during the time gap period and afforded a relative continuity in the programme services to the camp population. This continuity was essential in maintaining trust of the women engaged in the programme and retaining UN Women’s position among the donor community engaged with Syrian refugees in camps.”*

Many evaluations reported efficiency in the use and management of funds to be satisfactory. UN Women offices were found to allocate resources responsively and efficiently. UN Women improved operational efficiencies by streamlining systems and leveraging the operational capacities of other United Nations agencies, where possible. In some cases, projects were able to reach more beneficiaries than originally planned. UN Women was also able to co-locate with UN partners in some countries to save on operational costs.

In terms of human resources, many evaluations highlighted the value of the experienced and committed personnel of UN Women in managing demanding workloads. Other factors, such as the supportive and responsive management of UN Women and efforts to remove operational bottlenecks, were also identified as contributing to overall improvements. Key gaps related to this output emerged around fund raising and donor management, with very few evaluations referencing these issues.

One of the good practices identified as contributing to the improved management of human and financial resources was the creation of multi-donor coalitions and pooled funding to support UN Women interventions. The pooled fund allowed for increased collaboration among donors, highlighting UN Women’s effectiveness in securing funds and generating donor support. Pooled funds also allow for the participation of non-traditional donors by attracting and accepting smaller contributions that can be combined with a larger pool.

The most commonly highlighted impediment was insufficient financial resources that limit the scope, effectiveness and impact of UN Women interventions. Other factors negatively affecting efficient management of financial resources included uncoordinated resource mobilization efforts, short funding cycles, delays due to the tranche payment system and an over-reliance on non-core funding. Risks related to human resources were predominantly linked to inadequate staffing and in-country expertise as well as notably high rates of personnel turnover.





# SUMMARY

## Good practices and impediments

<p><b>OUTPUT 1</b></p>  <p><b>Enhanced coordination, coherence and accountability of the United Nations System for GEWE commitments</b></p>	<p><b>OUTPUT 2</b></p>  <p><b>Increased engagement of partners in support of UN Women's mandate</b></p>	<p><b>OUTPUT 3</b></p>  <p><b>High quality of programmes through knowledge management, innovation, RBM and evaluation</b></p>	<p><b>OUTPUT 4</b></p>  <p><b>Improved management of financial and human resources in pursuit of results</b></p>
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GOOD PRACTICES

 <p><b>CLEAR GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE</b></p> <p>Establishing clarity on roles and governance structure</p>	 <p><b>STRONG LOCAL PARTNERS</b></p> <p>Selecting strong local partners and building partner capacities</p>	 <p><b>INNOVATIVE KNOWLEDGE PLATFORMS</b></p> <p>Innovative knowledge platforms to help identify strategic priorities and provide gender statistics</p>	 <p><b>POOLED FUNDING</b></p> <p>Multi-donor coalitions and pooled funding</p>
 <p><b>HARNESSING SYNERGIES</b></p> <p>Harnessing implementation synergies and leveraging comparative advantages of partners</p>	 <p><b>MULTI-STAKEHOLDER NETWORKS</b></p> <p>Strengthening multi-stakeholder networks of gender-equality advocates</p>	 <p><b>RESPONSIVE MANAGEMENT</b></p> <p>Adaptive approach to M&amp;E and responsive management</p>	 <p><b>FINANCIAL TRAINING</b></p> <p>Financial training for implementing partner staff</p>

IMPEDIMENTS

 <p><b>LACK OF STREAMLINED COMMUNICATION</b></p> <p>Lack of streamlined communication and implementation (e.g. in Country Teams)</p>	 <p><b>INADEQUATE OUTREACH</b></p> <p>Inadequate outreach and weak coordination with partners</p>	 <p><b>LIMITED AVAILABILITY OF DATA</b></p> <p>Limited availability and validation of monitoring data</p>	 <p><b>UNCOORDINATED RESOURCE MOBILIZATION</b></p> <p>Uncoordinated resource mobilization efforts</p>
 <p><b>INADEQUACY OF RESOURCES</b></p> <p>Inadequacy of resources (human, financial and technical) allocated to coordination</p>	 <p><b>CAPACITY OF PARTNER AND TURNOVER</b></p> <p>Weaknesses in partner capacity and partner staff turnover</p>	 <p><b>INADEQUATE USE OF RESULTS FRAMEWORKS</b></p> <p>Inadequate use of results management frameworks and weak output-level indicators</p>	 <p><b>INADEQUATE STAFFING</b></p> <p>Inadequate staffing and in-country expertise</p>

# UN WOMEN RAPID ASSESSMENT TOOL

To Evaluate Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Results In Humanitarian Contexts



Download the interactive PDF [here](#)





Photo ©UN Women/ Tsitsi Matope

## KEY INSIGHTS

# Opportunities and the way forward

  
***Strengthen organization-wide learning and ensure a broader application of lessons from previous successes in United Nations coordination***

The ability of UN Women to coordinate and mainstream gender within the United Nations system is widely acknowledged as one of its key strengths. UN Women has experience successfully collaborating with partner agencies and has helped smooth the implementation of joint programmes (and other collaborative projects) in many countries and contexts. This is a good opportunity for organization-wide learning and a broader application of lessons from previous engagements, including fostering effective and consultative management systems, strengthening effective and participatory stakeholder engagement, leveraging in-country links with partner agencies to garner local support, reducing operational costs through coordination on complementary interventions, ensuring sufficient resources for coordination work

and strengthening the culture of collaborative work. UN Women should continue to draw on its key assets for United Nations coordination, including its unique mandate focused on gender equality and women's empowerment and its access to networks (such as women's groups and national gender machineries). At the United Nations Country Team level, UN Women should continue to strengthen coordination and contribute to the coherence of programmes (particularly joint programming), avoid duplication of efforts by multiple United Nations agencies, improve integration with Flagship Programme Initiatives and the thematic priorities of UN Women Strategic Plan 2018–2021 and ensure better articulation of the roles and contributions of different gender working groups including the Gender Theme Groups.



  
***Enhance partnership  
governance and  
engagement  
frameworks to foster  
strong partnerships  
and build on existing  
local relationships***

UN Women aims to foster diverse strategic and catalytic partnerships in support of its mandate. One of the key risks to successful partnerships is a lack of coordination among partners. Partnerships with less engaged actors lead to issues such as overlapping activities, weak accountability and implementation delays that require time and resources from UN Women to resolve. This suggests an opportunity

to develop partnership strategies that avoid these pitfalls by explicitly defining roles and responsibilities, using participatory consultative approaches and aligning with existing programmes where possible. UN Women should continue to use a flexible approach to engagement when working with strong local partners and build on existing relationships.

  
***Further strengthen  
partner networks  
and expand outreach  
to include diverse  
actors and donors***

UN Women has shown its expertise in bringing together diverse stakeholders to comprehensively and efficiently address issues related to gender equality and the empowerment of women. The capacity to coordinate between partners such as government ministries, civil society organizations and, more recently, the private sector, is widely recognized as one of the key comparative advantages of UN Women. It can build effective alliances that bring stakeholders together and encourage knowledge-sharing,

coordination and cooperation among partners. UN Women has also successfully brought together donors by encouraging pooled or joint funding mechanisms. Pooled funds increase collaboration among donors and allow a wider range of smaller donors to contribute and engage with programming. Pooled funds can also support programmes that are longer, more sustainable and more flexible, increasing their potential to have transformational effects.

  
***Intensify efforts to  
strengthen gender  
databases and  
knowledge platforms***

The UN Women website is a point of entry for external organizations to gather data and develop awareness-raising materials to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. UN Women can augment and leverage the development of digital databases of gender-disaggregated data (including Women Count) at the global and local levels. UN Women should continue to provide technical support to external partners

to develop gender-disaggregated databases and encourage gender-disaggregated baseline data collection. The UN Women knowledge management platforms provide a space to share lessons and good practices to advance gender equality and should be strengthened to support knowledge-sharing and evidence-based advocacy on issues related to gender equality and women's empowerment.



***Improve the effectiveness of monitoring systems and strengthen institutional mechanisms for results-based management, learning and planning***

UN Women should continue to work on enhancing the effectiveness, efficiency and application of its monitoring and evaluation systems. This includes initiatives such as improving the clarity and measurability of project indicators, standardizing indicators and monitoring where possible, ensuring development of clear theories of change, establishing project management principles, embedding risk management, establishing clear guidelines for project closures and incorporating innovative monitoring approaches that are responsive to institutional and political environments. Accountability mechanisms for

results-based management, including comprehensive project management systems and improved data quality, should be strengthened to encourage regular monitoring and evaluation of project activities. The dedicated personnel of UN Women are recognized as one of its key assets, and the organization should continue to foster internal sharing of knowledge and experiences. There is also an opportunity to adapt reporting systems (including the Results Management System) to improve alignment with outcome and country-level results and enhance learning by fully capturing progress and challenges.



***Continue to address key constraints on financial and human resources through prioritization, resource mobilization and improved efficacy of business processes***

Lack of funds remains a key challenge for UN Women. The organization should continue to strategically prioritize and protect key work areas from vulnerabilities caused by reliance on non-core funding, changes in donor priorities and short funding cycles. In terms of resource mobilization, UN Women should build on its efforts to improve coordination and strengthen mechanisms such as pooled funding, multi-year funding, partnerships with the private sector and Flagship Programme Initiatives. These, which seek funding at a strategic level, have contributed to UN Women unearmarked funds

and should be developed further.

UN Women is currently carrying out a change management process and functional analysis of various offices. Given the varying needs by region and country, the organization should ensure resourcing is responsive to individual contexts and maintain personnel continuity insofar as possible at the country level. UN Women should also continue to streamline internal business processes and take steps towards addressing commonly identified causes of delays and risks.



## OPPORTUNITIES AND THE WAY FORWARD



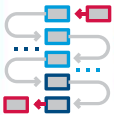
**STRENGTHEN ORGANIZATION-WIDE LEARNING** and a broader application of **lessons** from previous successful engagements on UN Coordination.



**FURTHER STRENGTHEN PARTNER NETWORKS** and expand outreach to include diverse actors and donors.



**ENHANCE PARTNERSHIP GOVERNANCE** and engagement frameworks to foster strong partnerships and build on existing local relationships.



**IMPROVE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MONITORING SYSTEMS** and strengthen institutional mechanisms for results-based management, learning and planning.



Intensify efforts towards **STRENGTHENING GENDER DATABASES** and knowledge platforms.



Continue to **ADDRESS KEY CONSTRAINTS IN FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES** through prioritization, resource mobilization and improved efficacy of business processes.

Photo ©UN Women/Christopher Herwig





# EVALUATING IMPACT IN GENDER EQUALITY

Guidance note to evaluate impact in gender  
equality and women's empowerment



Download the Guidance Note [here](#)



# LEARN MORE ABOUT GENDER-RESPONSIVE EVALUATION

