COUNTRY OFFICE AUDIT

INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

UN WOMEN COUNTRY OFFICE IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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INDEPENDENT EVALUATION AND AUDIT SERVICES (IEAS)
Internal Audit Service (IAS)
UN WOMEN

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Audit objective, scope and background

The UN Women Internal Audit Service (IAS) of the Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS) conducted a remote internal audit of the UN Women Country Office in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) between March and December 2021, with key audit field work performed in May–July and October 2021. The audit was conducted in conjunction with the Independent Evaluation Service's country portfolio evaluation (CPE) of the Country Office, which began in late 2021.

The objectives of the internal audit were to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of the governance arrangements, risk management and control processes relating to the following areas and subareas:

- **Strategic priorities, programme planning and implementation:** strategic positioning, priorities setting, programme and project management, management of programme partners, coordination of gender mainstreaming, advocacy and resource mobilization.
- **Governance, risk management and internal controls:** office structure and delegation of authority, control environment, risk management, data quality, internal control framework and implementation of prior oversight recommendations.
- **Operations:** management of procurement, human resources (HR), finance and budget, information and communication technology (ICT), travel, assets, and safety and security.

The internal audit covered the state of governance, risk management and internal controls, based on a sample of Country Office activities primarily from 1 January 2019 to 31 March 2021. However, some areas were reviewed up to 31 December 2021. Atlas-recorded expenditure for the Country Office totalled US$ 3.0 million in 2019 and US$ 3.6 million in 2020. As indicated in Observation 17, there was a scope limitation relating to transactions totalling US$ 29,059, for which the Country Office could not provide supporting documents.

IAS followed the *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing* in conducting this audit.[1]

Audit opinion and overall audit rating

IAS assessed the overall state of governance, risk management and internal controls in the Country Office as **Major Improvement Needed** meaning that *"the assessed governance arrangements, risk management practices and controls were established and functioning, but need major improvement. Issues identified by the audit could significantly affect the achievement of the objectives of the audited entity/area."*

IAS found the following areas generally **satisfactory**:

- **Strategic priorities, programme planning and implementation**: the Country Office's advocacy efforts, coordination of gender mainstreaming, donor reporting and project closure.

  UN Women was well respected in the country and seen as a leader for gender equality and the empowerment of women. It had supported the creation of multiple civil society platforms (mobilizing women leaders from various society sectors e.g. politics, education, media, small business, agriculture, crafts) and other gender advocacy and coordination platforms, involving government, civil society,

[1] https://na.theiia.org/standards-guidance/recommended-guidance/practice-guides/Pages/Auditing-Third-Party-Risk-Management-Practice-Guide.aspx

the UN Country Team (UNCT) and donors. The Country Office had mobilized significant donor funds for its programmes in 2021. It was also leading the coordination of gender mainstreaming in UNCT and was an active UNCT member co-chairing the UNCT's Programme Management Team, Operations Management Team and various working groups.

IAS identified areas of **some improvement needed** in:

- **Strategic priorities, programme planning and implementation**: the Country Office needed to strengthen communications, handling of resource mobilization (including non-standard donor agreements), project portfolio planning, project design and implementation arrangements, and programme partner management.
- **Governance, risk management and internal controls**: the Country Office needed to strengthen risk management.
- **Operations**: the Country Office needed to strengthen safety and security management.

IAS identified areas of **major improvement needed** in:

- **Strategic priorities, programme planning and implementation**: there was a need to improve delivery on the Country Office's Strategic Note and some donor-funded projects, noting the Country Office's record-low financial implementation rate in 2021. The Country Office undertook measures to accelerate its implementation rate, but results were yet to be achieved. The Country Office needs to streamline future development or revision of its Strategic Notes (and also limit frequent changes to Strategic Note and Biennial Work Plan results framework indicators, which did not allow for the objective assessment of the Country Office's reporting on programme progress); establish a monitoring and evaluation function; and strengthen project governance, management structure, oversight, monitoring and knowledge management.
- **Governance, risk management and internal controls**: the Country Office needed to strengthen its ethical and control environment, and fraud prevention; streamline delegation of authority and the internal control framework; and follow up and consistently implement previous oversight recommendations.
- **Operations**: the Country Office needed to strengthen HR, financial, travel and asset management.

The following areas were considered **unsatisfactory:**

- **Governance, risk management and internal controls**: the Country Office experienced structural gaps and issues with internal governance, management, coordination, and data and knowledge management, leading to regular internal and some external complaints about serious operational obstacles in the Country Office's daily work. This affected programme implementation and coordination with external counterparts. Key challenges were due to:

  (a) The former Country Representative's second role (since November 2019) as UN Women's Special Representative to the African Women Leaders Network, which required a considerable amount of time and may have partially diverted the former Country Representative's attention from the Country Office's portfolio. The former Country Representative's functional reporting to the Executive Director in this regard, limited the West and Central Africa Regional Office's (WCARO) oversight of the Country Office. As commented by the former Country Representative, from September 2017 to November 2018 she also acted in parallel as interim Country Representative to the UN Women Côte d'Ivoire Country Office. While performing these simultaneous and demanding roles, she intended to make strategic decisions based on the countries' complex contexts and prioritize overall UN Women's interests at global, regional and country levels.

  (b) Lack of a Head of Programme or a Deputy Representative since September 2020, despite the Country Office having mobilized substantial donor funds in 2021.

  (c) Extensive personnel separations and slow recruitments in 2020–2021, particularly an understaffed Operations Team. As commented by the Country Representative, to temporarily compensate the limited size and profile of their team, some donor-funded and UN volunteer (UNV) personnel were brought on board but also left subsequently for better opportunities or personal reasons.

(d) Challenges with personnel supervision, oversight, reporting lines and delegation of authority.

(e) Potentially weak budget planning and pooling practices for essential staffing needs and other support requirements, and limited HR management capacity, leading to limited competitiveness of the Country Office's personnel contracts compared to other UN organizations.

(f) Unsatisfactory knowledge and records management.

(g) Greater corporate support required for, or temporary strengthening of, the understaffed Operations Team to establish critical procedures and controls, and overcome capacity gaps.

(h) Potentially weak management, not exploring options to transfer empty sub-office space in Bukavu (leased from United Nations Development Programme, UNDP) to another UN organization; spending of US$ 150,000 in 2018–2021 for the empty space; and employing a driver in the empty sub-office (approximately US$ 16,000 per year) for three years. As commented by the former Country Representative, one of the reasons why the sub-office was not timely closed was the donors' interest in UN Women's presence at more locations.

The Country Office had undertaken some measures to address the systemic issues, also seeking to address them in personnel retreats in June and September 2021. However, these areas remained to be addressed. WCARO and several headquarters teams provided operational and programmatic support to the Country Office, including a functional review by WCARO in 2020–2021. However, in IAS' view, overall, insufficient corporate attention was given to the Country Office's significant portfolio. A new Country Representative took office in January 2022.

- **Operations:** the Country Office needed to substantially strengthen procedures and controls in procurement and ICT management. The Country Office had received procurement training from WCARO and had requested headquarters' assistance in ICT management; however, these areas remain to be addressed.

IAS made 21 recommendations and provided further advisory notes to address the areas requiring improvement. Eight recommendations were ranked as High priority and 13 as Medium priority.

The eight High (Critical) priority recommendations mean that *"prompt action is required to ensure that UN Women is not exposed to high risks. Failure to take action could result in major negative consequences for UN Women."* These were addressed to the Country Office and related to the following issues:

- Strengthening the Country Office's monitoring and evaluation framework and function though pooled budgeting or other funding; recruitment of dedicated monitoring and evaluation personnel; standardized project-level monitoring plans and monitoring and evaluation tools; project monitoring missions; and oversight of monitoring and evaluation activities.
- Implementing the recommendations made by WCARO during its functional review of the Country Office; performing a capacity gap analysis; establishing clear personnel reporting lines; and ensuring continuous position planning supported with flexible budget management, well-integrated with resource mobilization to ensure sufficient **direct project cost** and **direct project management cost** recovery.
- Strengthening the Operations Team through temporary corporate support and establishing or strengthening critical operational processes.
- Reinforcing fraud and corruption awareness through mandatory ethics and fraud prevention training for all personnel, and discussing ethical issues and policies in the Country Office.
- Implementing a centralized electronic filing system for programme, operations and other documents; assigning focal points for data entry into corporate systems; establishing a proper handover process during personnel departures; implementing a tracking system for requests for operational services; and ensuring electronic reviews, approvals and filing of transactions.
- Consistently implementing previous oversight recommendations, with assigned accountabilities and seeking headquarters and WCARO support, where the

Country Office has less capacity.

- In line with corporate ICT standards, designating a focal point for ICT services, seeking local ICT support and, as necessary, requesting WCARO or the Information Systems and Telecommunications Team (IST) to provide the postponed ICT support to the Country Office and ICT training to its personnel.
- Enquiring about the safety and security measures for home-based personnel in remote locations; and ensuring that all personnel complete the mandatory safety and security training.

The 13 Medium (Important) priority recommendations mean that *"action is required to ensure that UN Women is not exposed to risks. Failure to take action could result in negative consequences for UN Women".*

One of these recommendations is addressed to the Strategic Planning Unit (SPU) at headquarters and recommends extending corporate Strategic Note Guidance about revisions and extensions of the Strategic Notes.

Twelve recommendations are addressed to the Country Office and focus on: considering stakeholder feedback in the Country Office's work; implementing a communication strategy; consolidating resource mobilization planning practices and records, and monitoring the plan's effectiveness; ensuring adequate project oversight; strengthening programme partner management, particularly capacity building, monitoring, records management and communications; establishing a new service-level agreement with UNDP; deciding on the closure of the sub-office in Bukavu, and using other UN organizations' facilities for services to new Country Office personnel stationed in remote locations; embedding risk management in the Country Office's decision-making and programme cycle, and tracking risk mitigating actions; delegating the required authorities in the Country Office's internal control framework (ICF) to ensure adequate segregation of duties and processing, verifying and approving transactions; improving the procurement process and accountability through coordinated procurement planning, refresher training on policies and fraud prevention; using the e-Procurement system and generic email address (for the receipt of quotations, bids and vendor inquiries), spot checks, and consulting the UNCT on market surveys, vendors and use of UNCT procurement services; strengthening HR management by identifying a dedicated HR personnel, maintaining a recruitment tracker, completing priority recruitments, improving performance management, learning and development, and consultant management, and monitoring personnel leave; using the budget monitoring tool and payment checklists for supporting document completeness, and minimizing cheque payments; complying with the Duty Travel Policy and consistently using travel checklists; and prioritizing the necessary maintenance or replacement and insurance of official vehicles.

Management comments and action plans

Management comments have been taken into account in this report, where appropriate. Low priority issues are not included in this report but were discussed directly with management. The Country Office and relevant organizational units accepted the above recommendations and provided action plans included in this report. The new Country Representative held a personnel retreat in February 2022 and prepared to implement the recommendations, also seeking headquarters' and WCARO support. Several headquarters' teams intended to provide support to the Country Office in early 2022.

Lisa Sutton

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CPE	Country Portfolio Evaluation
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAMS	Digital Asset Management System
DMA	Division of Management and Administration
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DRF	Development Results Framework
EVAW	Ending Violence Against Women and Girls
FACE	Funding Authorization and Certificate of Expenditures
FMS	Financial Management Section
GATE	Global Accountability and Tracking of Evaluation system
HR	Human Resources
IAS	Internal Audit Service
ICF	Internal Control Framework
ICT	Information Communications Technology
IEAS	Internal Audit and Evaluation Services
IST	Information Systems and Telecommunications Team
LTA	Long-Term Agreement
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
OEEF	Organizational Efficiency and Effectiveness Framework
PAPDU	Political Analysis and Programme Development Unit
PGAMS	Partner and Grants Agreement Management System
PSMU	Programme Support and Management Unit
RMS	Results Management System
SPRED	Strategy, Planning, Resources and Effectiveness Division
SPU	Strategic Planning Unit
UN	United Nations
UNCT	UN Country Team
UNDAF	UN Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDSS	UN Department for Safety and Security
UNFPA	UN Population Fund
UNSDCF	UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UNV	UN Volunteer
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
US$	United States Dollar
WCARO	West and Central Africa Regional Office's
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
WPHF	Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund
WPP	Women's Political Participation
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

I. BACKGROUND

About the Country Office

The UN Women Office in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was designated as a Country Office in November 2012: since June 2016, it reports to the West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO).

The Country Representative at the time of the audit had served in the position since January 2017. However, since November 2019, the Executive Director appointed the Country Representative to serve simultaneously as UN Women's Special Representative to the African Women Leaders Network. In this capacity, the Country Representative functionally reported directly to the Executive Director, while being in regular contact with WCARO. A new Country Representative took office in January 2022. The Country Office's previous Deputy Representative served from May 2017 to September 2020. Subsequently, this position was removed by WCARO. At the end of the audit, a Head of Programme (national staff) position was created, to start recruitment.

In 2020–2021, the Country Office experienced a significant turnover of personnel with 13 separations, 8 personnel (not including some consultants) joining and multiple other recruitments ongoing at the end of 2021. As of December 2021, the Country Office employed 24 personnel: 3 international staff, 4 local staff, 8 local service contractors, 1 international and 3 local UN volunteers (UNVs) and 5 local consultants. In addition to the office in Kinshasa (17 personnel), the Country Office had sub-offices in Goma (4 personnel) and Bukavu (no personnel since November 2020). The Country Office also employed three home-based personnel in Tshikapa (two) and Matadi (one).

The Country Office's non-core budget increased significantly in 2021. Budget and expenditure are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Country Office budget[2] and expenditure, US$

	2019	2020	2021
DRF budget target	1,835,900	4,985,151	9,049,625
DRF actual ('original') budget	2,576,379	4,434,378	8,905,408
of which rephased to next year	(505,577)	(2,330,319)	(3,962,637)
DRF expenditure	1,289,742	2,380,935	3,212,270
Financial implementation rate	50%	54%	36%
OEEF budget target	3,183,967	3,263,834	3,588,994
OEEF actual ('original') budget	2,153,188	2,092,692	1,961,656
of which rephased to next year	(22,679)	(16,691)	(97,862)
OEEF expenditure	2,062,667	1,935,802	1,335,159
Financial implementation rate	96%	93%	68%

Source: Results Management System (RMS), Project Delivery Dashboard and Atlas data

In 2019–2021[3] the Country Office's country field programme (apart from core, institutional budget and extra-budgetary resources totalling US$ 5.9 million) comprised the following non-core funding (US$ 13.3 million):

- Multi-Partner Trust Funds' global funding for 11 projects, sourced from multi and bilateral donors (US$ 5.8 million);
- host government funding for one project, sourced from a multi-lateral loan (US$ 3.4 million);
- one bilateral donor's funding for the Country Office's Strategic Note based on two agreements (US$ 1.8 million);
- one private donor's global funding for one project, through an agreement with one of UN Women's National Committees (US$ 0.9 million);
- funding for eight United Nations (UN) joint programmes with four UN organizations, sourced from multi and bilateral donors (US$ 0.7 million); and

[2] Yearly actual 'original' budgets were calculated by IAS, adding to year-end budgets the net budget amounts, which were rephased in October–December of each year to the next year.

[3] Project Delivery Dashboard data corrected by IAS, adding to 2019–2021 year-end budgets the net budget amounts (Atlas data), which were rephased in October–December 2021 to the next year.

- bilateral global or locally mobilized funding for seven projects from three donors (US$ 0.7 million).

The Country Office's original Strategic Note 2014–2017, which was extended and followed until 2020 (because the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2013–2017 for DRC was extended until 2019), focused on six result areas: (i) coordination on gender equality and women's empowerment; (ii) gender responsive planning and budgeting; (iii) Ending Violence Against Women and Girls [EVAW]; (iv) women, peace and security (WPS); (v) women's political leadership and participation (WPP); and (vi) women's economic empowerment and female entrepreneurship (WEE) under the Development Results Framework (DRF) and four clusters under the Organizational Efficiency and Effectiveness Framework (OEEF). The Country Office's draft Strategic Note 2021–2024, which may have guided the Country Office's programme since 2020, focused on three Strategic Impact areas (governance and women's political participation; women's economic empowerment; and peace, security and humanitarian action, including Ending Violence Against Women) under DRF and four clusters under OEEF. At the end of the audit, this draft Strategic Note was close to its finalization.

The Country Office's Partnership and Resource Mobilization Strategy 2021–2024 included targets for non-core funds for 2021–2022 only totalled US$ 14.2 million, of which the Country Office had secured US$ 5.0 million in 2021 as well as about US$ 7.9 million in unused funds rephased to 2022 or funds committed by donors.

Atlas-recorded expenditure for the Country Office totalled US$ 3.0 million in 2019 and US$ 3.6 million in 2020. Overall, this consisted of: staff costs (30 per cent); other personnel costs (19 per cent); procurement of goods and services (15 per cent); maintenance, utilities and common services (15 per cent); personnel travel (9 per cent); training and hospitality costs, including external participant travel (6 per cent); and support cost charges (6 per cent). Seventeen per cent of the total expenditure was incurred through liquidation of advances or reimbursements to programme partners.

II. AUDIT RESULTS

A. Strategic priorities, programme planning and implementation

See Background Section for more details. Both aforementioned Country Office Strategic Notes were generally aligned with the earlier UNDAF or UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2020–2024, UN Women's Strategic Plans 2018–2021 and 2022–2025, and regional and national strategy documents.

Based on the audit sample, IAS assessed that key aspects of the Country Office's advocacy, coordination of gender mainstreaming, donor reporting and project closure were satisfactory. UN Women was a well-respected partner among various stakeholders in the country. The Country Office was seen as a leader for gender equality and the empowerment of women, and had supported the creation of multiple civil society platforms, mobilizing women leaders and representatives from various sectors (e.g. politics, education, media, small business, agriculture, crafts), including the national chapter of the African Women Leaders Network, and other gender governance and advocacy platforms, including the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund's (WPHF) National Steering Committee and structures within the government. UN Women was seen as a leader in the coordination of gender mainstreaming in the UN Country Team (UNCT) and had created and co-chaired multiple gender thematic groups, involving UNCT, donor, government and civil society members, including in 12 provinces. The Country Office contributed to a gender-responsive UNSDCF 2020–2024; co-chaired the UNCT's Programme Management Team and Operations Management Team; and was referred to as an active member of the COVID-19 impact assessment.

However, it became evident, particularly during the audit period, that the Country Office needed major improvement to deliver on its Strategic Note and some donor-funded projects (this was also reflected in the Country Office's record-low financial implementation rate), which was mainly due to weakened internal governance, major operational bottlenecks and capacity gaps, as well as delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic (see findings in section 'Governance, risk management and internal controls'). The Country Office undertook measures to address the root causes and accelerate financial implementation, including through ongoing recruitments and some improvements to planning, but results were still to be achieved. The Country Office also needed major improvement to streamline the future development or revision of its Strategic Notes (limiting frequent changes to Strategic Note and Biennial Work Plan results framework indicators, which hindered objective assessment of the Country Office's reporting on programme progress); establish its monitoring and evaluation (M&E) function; and strengthen project governance, management structure, oversight, monitoring and knowledge management. The Country Office needed some improvement in communications; handling resource mobilization (including non-standard donor agreements); project portfolio planning; project design and implementation arrangements; and programme partner management.

KEY OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Observation 1: Opportunities for improved gender advocacy, communication and coordination in the country

While noting the Country Office's active leadership role in this field, various stakeholders indicated areas where UN Women had less comparative advantage or could strengthen its impact by:

- Exploring the extension of UN Women's publicity, visibility and presence, and increasing the scale of its interventions, either directly or indirectly (e.g. through other UN organizations or civil society organizations [CSOs]) and across the country, especially in regions where the UN Stabilization Mission in DRC (MONUSCO) no longer operates.

- Supporting finalization of the Ministry of Gender, Family and Child's 'National Gender Policy', 'National WPP Strategy', 'National Report on Gender' and 'Gender Training Manual', updating the 'National Gender Profile', and involving CSOs more in national gender planning.
- Strengthening synergies and sustainability of some women leaders' civil society platforms, and the sustainability of provincial gender thematic groups that lacked resources (all of which were created by UN Women).
- Strengthening Ending Violence Against Women and Girls interventions, increasing visibility of the Spotlight Initiative, and ensuring regular gender-based violence evaluations in collaboration with the UN Population Fund (UNFPA).
- Increasing donor coordination on gender (e.g. through donor mapping).
- Further diversifying the selection of beneficiaries across the country and society sectors, focusing on less prosperous women, women with disabilities and indigenous women, and establishing a beneficiary management database to improve beneficiary selection and minimize repeated efforts.

The IEAS survey of Country Office personnel also suggested the need for: more balanced resource distribution between the Country Office's programme domains, focusing on country and beneficiary needs; increasing work on positive masculinity in programmes; more work with influencers on innovative projects, and with women's organizations in provinces; and promoting better implementation of gender laws in government and CSOs' own structures and decision-making.

A UNCT stakeholder indicated that UN Women could have provided more gender-related advice during development of the UNSDCF 2020–2024, where some gaps had to be filled with external expertise engaged by other UN organizations. It is expected that UN Women will actively support the gender theme in UNSDCF monitoring and the upcoming mid-term review.

The Country Office did not have a communication and advocacy strategy (this area was slightly elaborated on in the draft Strategic Note). This need was discussed at a personnel retreat organized in June 2021 to strengthen communication and visibility.

The Country Office did not have a complete focal point list of all stakeholders and partners, which complicated scheduling meetings for the country portfolio evaluation (CPE) and audit, but may also impact effective advocacy, communication and programme implementation.

IAS understands that stakeholder expectations may at times exceed UN Women's capacity, which is an inherent risk. However, Country Office management may benefit from considering stakeholder feedback on its work.

Recommendation 1 (Medium):

The Country Representative to take into account the various feedback provided by stakeholders during the 2021 CPE, audit, and personnel retreats, for consideration and action in the Country Office's advocacy, communication and coordination work, strategic planning, programme implementation and office governance. In particular, the Country Representative to:

(a) Take stock of key stakeholders' expectations and periodically align them with the Country Office's own vision.

(b) Establish and implement a communication strategy, accompanied by key success or performance indicators, roles and accountability for its implementation, and regular assessment on whether it is cost-effective or needs adjustment.

(c) Establish, regularly update and share with personnel a complete focal point list of all Country Office stakeholders and partners.

Advisory note:

The Regional Director, WCARO, in collaboration with the Chiefs, Political Analysis and Programme Development Unit (PAPDU) and Programme Support Management Unit (PSMU), should closely assist the DRC Country Office, as a corporately important portfolio, in implementation of the 2021 CPE and audit recommendations, where applicable.

See also **Recommendation 14.**

Observation 2: Lessons learned from previous strategic planning to be used for streamlining the future development or revision of Strategic Notes, Biennial Work Plans and their results frameworks

IAS understands that the Country Office experienced challenges with capacity and management availability necessary for the timely development or revision of its Strategic Notes, their consequent approval or their subsequent revisions. IAS notes that corporate Strategic Note Guidance does not specify provisions on revision or extension of Strategic Notes. Apparently, the Country Office had limited capacity to meet all internal and external expectations for approval of the extension of the earlier Strategic Note and the timely completion of all the required revisions for the new Strategic Note. The Country Office did not have a strategic planning specialist (work on the Strategic Notes was performed either by a consultant or by programme personnel with many responsibilities); its knowledge management required improvement; and it did not have an M&E function. The Country Office also had significant staff turnover in 2020–2021.

The 2013–2017 UNDAF for DRC was extended twice until 2018 and 2019, due to national elections and other factors. Accordingly, the Country Office requested extensions of its Strategic Note 2014–2017 through WCARO and headquarters. Multiple exchanges took place on the matter. WCARO and headquarters requested further revisions to the Strategic Note, including expected compliance with 2017 CPE recommendations and re-focusing the Country Office's programme on Flagship Programme Initiatives, with transition in three strategic domains (WPP, WPS and WEE) and adjusting Strategic Note outcomes and outputs to reflect Flagship Programme Initiative principles. IAS understands that the expected revisions were substantial, while the Strategic Note primarily needed to be extended in response to the UNDAF extensions. The revisions were addressed, at least in part, by the Country Office, but it was challenging to secure corporate approvals for extensions of the Strategic Note.

During this period, the Strategic Note's DRF and OEEF targets and indicators were updated as 'DRF/OEEF for 2018–2021', and Annual Work Plan targets and indicators were also updated during Annual Work Plan approvals. However, due to the frequent changes to the Country Offices' strategic targets and indicators, it was difficult for IAS to objectively assess the Country Office's reporting on programme progress over this period.

In 2020, the Country Office developed its draft Strategic Note 2020–2024 and requested approval through WCARO and headquarter, package was reviewed several times by WCARO and the corporate Peer Review Group, for compliance, accuracy and consistency, and had to be revised by the Country Office, with the latest draft updated and reviewed by WCARO, SPU and PAPDU in February 2022. Headquarters services awaited the Country Office to complete final minor changes to the draft to secure its approval. One of the stakeholders interviewed by IAS indicated that UN Women's performance, particularly in coordination and communication, had improved in 2020, but that several of the first drafts of the new Strategic Note were too ambitious in terms of Country Office capacity; and in which some external feedback had largely not been taken into account, i.e. to deepen the focus of the Strategic Note. Some other stakeholders also indicated that UN Women's programme (the Strategic Note) was ambitious compared to its capacity. Most respondents to the IEAS survey of Country Office personnel rated the Country Offices' strategic planning as 'unsatisfactory'. However, IAS noted that, in the latest draft Strategic Note, the Strategic Impact areas were combined from five into three, and the results frameworks had also been revised.

Programme implementation without a clear, well-budgeted and approved strategy may not meet stakeholder expectations; results in more implementation challenges; and may impair resource mobilization. An ambitiously designed programme may also hinder successful implementation and the focus on key feasible programme needs; while frequent changes to performance targets and indicators may not permit an objective assessment of programme performance (or evaluability).

Recommendation 2 (Medium):

The Chief, SPU, to include in corporate Strategic Note Guidance the circumstances (e.g. mid-term review of the Strategic Note, UNSDCF extension) and reasonable requirements for revisions and extensions of Strategic Notes.

Advisory note (as lesson learned):

The Country Representative should abstain from frequent changes to Strategic Note and Biennial Work Plan results frameworks (unless required by headquarters) to ensure they are stable and measurable for a longer period, and to take this (as well as stakeholder feedback provided during the 2021 CPE, audit and personnel retreats) into account in the Strategic Note's 2021–2024 mid-term review.

See also **Recommendations 3, 4 and 16.**

Observation 3: Need for clearer resource mobilization targets and records

The Country Office actively managed its project portfolio. Apart from locally mobilized resources, the portfolio included a substantial share of projects funded globally from Multi-Partner Trust Funds or by bilateral or private donors (see Background section). These varied from larger and smaller projects, and partial Strategic Note funding, which showed good practice in terms of programmatic approach to Strategic Note implementation and is cost-effective from a project management point of view.

The Country Office had not fully achieved its non-core resource mobilization targets; however, resource mobilization significantly improved during 2021. It was challenging to reconcile the Country Office's resource mobilization records from various sources. Resource mobilization targets for the draft Strategic Note 2021–2024 were not clear, with different estimates in the draft and the attached versions of DRF, OEEF, 'project register', or Annex to the Partnership Resource Mobilization Strategy. Most attachments included estimates for only two years ('project registers' included them for three years), while the Strategic Note had a four-year duration. To log and track its resource mobilization data, the Country Office used the following systems: LEADS (pipelines), DAMS (donor agreements) and RMS (Annual Work Plans). However, LEADS was not updated systematically to reflect the latest status of resource mobilization pipelines.

IAS understands that resource mobilization work was scattered among multiple personnel; the Country Office had significant staff turnover in 2020–2021; there were no systematic programme and project oversight meetings; and the use of LEADS was not always integrated in the project cycle workflow. As a result, the Country Office's resource plans and targets for the Strategic Note were not fully clear to inform further resource mobilization needs. Shortfalls against targets also indicated that the Country Office's earlier strategic planning was not fully realistic.

See also **Observation 5,** which is partially addressed through this Recommendation.

Recommendation 3 (Medium):

The Country Representative to finalize the Country Office's resource mobilization plan, and consolidate its practices and records (i.e. programme and project budget preparation, and negotiation with donors). In particular, the Country Representative to:

(a) Include consistent and up-to-date resource mobilization estimates for the Strategic Note in corporate systems and any documents submitted for corporate review.

(b) Regularly update the LEADS system for effective project pipeline monitoring. LEADS could serve as a pipeline monitoring tool for regular Country Office project oversight meetings.

(c) Regularly monitor the resource mobilization plan for its effectiveness and revise, if necessary, addressing any related implications.

See also **Recommendation 7.**

Observation 4: Need for a dedicated M&E function and an adequate M&E framework to enable the Country Office to monitor results, and collect and validate data for its reports

The Country Office did not have a segregated M&E function, which had been raised as an issue at least since the 2017 CPE. The CPE recommended that the Country Office create an M&E function in charge of results reporting and knowledge management. The headquarters Peer Review Group, when reviewing the Country Office's draft Strategic Note 2021–2024 in May 2021, raised a concern over the lack of an M&E function to validate performance and results. These concerns were also raised by Country Office personnel: half of respondents to the IEAS survey of Country Office personnel rated the Country Office's M&E system 'unsatisfactory'. The Country Office's mitigation strategy proposed to include these duties in project managers' job descriptions, which, in IAS' view, is insufficient, as project managers are already overburdened and probably do not provide the required independence and necessary skills. At the time of the audit, M&E and results reporting responsibilities were still dispersed among programme and project specialists. The Country Office cited resource limitations but did not, or did not know how to, budget and pool non-core project resources to hire a dedicated M&E specialist – important for the Country Office's increasing portfolio and strengthening the Country Office's overall M&E framework. Some respondents to the IEAS survey indicated that many projects functioned without funds allocated to M&E.

At the same time, the draft Strategic Note indicated that the Country Office would "*completely refine and strengthen its M&E framework, in line with CPE recommendations*", by recruiting two international UNVs as M&E specialists and a reporting specialist. While the Country Office also indicated that it had approached one of its stakeholders to provide funding for, or to second, an M&E officer IAS was informed that funds for this purpose were already included in existing non-core contribution to the Country Office's Strategic Note, and that there were concerns about the long delay to recruit an M&E specialist. In IAS' view, there was a lack of follow-up or a misunderstanding on the matter.

The Country Office had an M&E and Research Plan for its draft Strategic Note, including diverse M&E activities at a high level and monitoring missions. However, the missions did not always occur, or there was little evidence provided. In 2020, travel was challenging, and limited missions took place. Some project managers indicated that they undertook remote monitoring and follow-up with programme partners when partners submitted Funding Authorization and Certificate of Expenditure (FACE) forms for liquidation of received advances. For example, there was systematic follow-up on WPHF projects, with remote training and capacity building sessions. However, this did not cover the Country Office's broader project portfolio. Respondents to the IEAS survey indicated the need for monitoring missions, as they did not take place regularly for all projects. Moreover, pre-pandemic monitoring missions that were conducted were not always documented. IAS noted the Country Representative's reminders in October and November 2019 staff meeting notes, to submit mission plans, binders and reports for their review.

For the reviewed projects, M&E activities were integrated in project documents, along with the expected results and indicators. For some projects, the development of a detailed M&E plan was scheduled as part of phased implementation. IAS noted these exceptions: (a) in one project reviewed by IAS, only high-level targets and indicators were included in the concept note, to be determined later in detail; however, such details were not provided; and (b) for one of the UN joint programmes, a joint M&E plan for all recipient organizations had to be developed; therefore, M&E was not UN Women's single responsibility. However, the Country Office did not have an M&E plan at the time of the audit.

IAS understands that proper budgeting and establishment of an M&E function were not prioritized in the Country Office. There were also gaps in overall project oversight (see Observation 5). As a result, lack of independent M&E capacity; oversight in implementing a consolidated M&E framework; and standardized monitoring practices, may lead to lower reliability of data, challenges in identifying and reporting results and overall lower credibility of programme results.

See also **Observation 5,** which is partially addressed through this Recommendation.

Recommendation 4 (High):

The Country Representative to:

(a) Ensure that the Country Office's M&E framework and function are strengthened through pooled budgeting for programme and project M&E (or identifying other funding), recruitment of M&E personnel and establishment of standardized Strategic Note and project-level monitoring methodology, plans and M&E tools, to facilitate data collection and monitoring.

(b) Institutionalize a process for periodic oversight of planned M&E activities, reporting on findings and follow-up to ensure accountability for results. Project monitoring missions to be held as often as required, depending on project activity risks and materiality.

See also **Recommendations 5, 7 and 16.**

Observation 5: Project management needs to be enhanced (project governance, risk management and oversight)

Donor reporting and project closure

The Country Office provided regular reports and feedback to donors or overseeing project counterparts at headquarters or in other UN organizations, and projects were operationally and financially closed as required. Based on sample testing, IAS did not identify material charges of unrelated expenditure to projects. Between January 2019 and November 2021, the Country Office submitted 2 of 26 donor reports with a delay of over five months and over one month. In addition, the interim financial report for one of the projects reviewed by IAS was never submitted because the donor requested a more detailed financial report than UN Women could provide based on Atlas data (the donor agreement had stated that financial reports would be provided based on UN Women's procedures). This issue was not resolved by Country Office management or escalated further. As a result, the donor did not disburse the second tranche of US$ 46,680 (of the total US$ 233,399 donor agreement amount) to UN Women and the Country Office could not disburse part of the required funds to programme partners who had to interrupt activities. The project then remained pending for closure, impacting the relationship with the donor. IAS was not provided with further exchanges about the project.

More positively, several of the donors interviewed were generally satisfied with the Country Office's donor reports, project activities and results. Half of the respondents to the IEAS survey of Country Office personnel rated the Country Office's donor reporting as 'satisfactory'.

Project governance, management structure, oversight and knowledge management

The issues in these areas were due to: limited internal office governance, resulting from the Country Representative's numerous responsibilities; absence of a Deputy Representative or a Head of Programme; significant personnel turnover with fewer personnel performing multiple or interim roles; no centralized knowledge management; and lack of information and communications technology (ICT) expertise in the office. See also Observations 7, 10 and 11 for more details.

This resulted in: poor project portfolio governance; very limited management and operations support for programme personnel; inability to identify and address project issues in an organized and timely manner, affecting personnel and project performance and UN Women's reputation with donors; available resources not being used for programme implementation; and potential non-compliance with procedures.

The Country Office's previous Deputy Representative ran systematic project oversight meetings and ensured the necessary Country Office management reviews and approvals during project development and implementation. After the Deputy Representative's departure in September 2020, according to personnel, these meetings generally did not take place, creating a gap in project oversight and approvals. The Country Representative's availability for project oversight was limited given their significant external representation and advocacy role in the country and with the African Women Leaders Network. Some staff meeting minutes for the audit period were shared with IAS, which showed discussion of project updates and issues in some instances, with actions assigned to personnel with deadlines. However, the notes were few, their format varied and there was no evidence of consistent follow-up on action points.

Despite the Country Office having an organization chart, after the departure of the Deputy Representative and due to numerous vacancies, the programme management reporting structure in the Country Office became quite unclear. Several personnel each became responsible for multiple projects and, in some cases, outside their stated area of expertise. Reporting lines in programme teams became increasingly unclear, with multiple personnel, including consultants, reporting directly to the Country Representative who could not ensure sufficient direct supervision of all personnel and their projects, or provide timely responses to all personnel requests, including necessary approvals. IAS noted that junior programme personnel recruited in 2021 were assigned to report to programme or project managers.

The Country Office did not use a shared document repository (such as SharePoint) and several programme personnel left UN Women during the audit period without transferring documents and data to colleagues who would assume their responsibilities. In some cases, it was not known at the time of departure who would assume them. During the audit, two programme personnel also left the Country Office, resulting in gaps in project management.

Action plans for some of these issues were proposed in personnel retreats in June 2021 (organized by the Country Office Officer-in-Charge) and September 2021 (organized by the Country Representative).

Non-standard donor agreements, project design and implementation arrangements

The Country Office used standard donor agreements, where applicable. For one major project (US$ 6.5 million), a non-standard donor agreement was negotiated by UN Women Legal with the multi-lateral financial institution. In February 2021, the Country Office obtained a delegation of authority at the Deputy Executive Director level to sign the agreement with the government and did so in March 2021. However, the agreement was not immediately cleared by the Financial Management Section (FMS) who had outstanding queries about the agreement. Consequently, an amendment had to be negotiated and was signed in June 2021, to ensure full release of funds to the Country Office by FMS. This caused project start-up delays and additional workload. According to the Delegation of Authority Policy, all non-standard donor agreements must be cleared by relevant services in the clearance system and approved by the Director, Division of Management and Administration (DMA), prior to signing the agreement. The Country Office may not have fully understood these requirements.

Project design, documentation and implementation arrangements varied for the reviewed projects, with instances of well documented and implemented projects. For example:

- Several projects reviewed by IAS had comprehensive and clear project documents, workplans, budgets, and clear project governance structure. Funding of the Country Office's Strategic Note was overall a success factor to maintain capacity. The Strategic Notes and related Annual Work Plans served as the main project documents for funding agreements. Each programme pillar (WPP, WPS, WEE and coordination) had workplans overseen by relevant project managers.
- Projects reviewed had varied financial implementation rates due to: prolonged negotiations; programme and operations personnel departures and learning curve for newly recruited personnel; limited project monitoring due to the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore, less visibility of project activities and results; and changes in activities and capacity of its programme partners.
- Project counterparts referred to a positive experience in collaborating with UN Women. While the Strategic Notes funding seemed to be well managed and the Country Office's performance was largely positively seen by external stakeholders, IAS was not provided with workplans and related work documents. In its 2019 audit of the UN Women Country Office in Afghanistan,[4] IAS recommended that PSMU provide guidance for the cost-effective implementation and transparent reporting of results for Strategic Notes with unearmarked funding. Such guidance was being completed, also noting the prioritization of direct funding of Strategic Notes in UN Women's Strategic Plan 2022–2025.
- Projects had adequate strategies for targeting or selection of beneficiaries. Project sustainability was largely considered in project documents and, where applicable, project results demonstrated sustainability elements. Many projects involved skills transfer through implementation by programme partners, involvement of various women leaders' networks, or training or capacity building for

[4] https://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/accountability/audit/internal-audit-reports

beneficiaries. National and provincial government counterparts were involved, where appropriate, either in steering committees, beneficiary selection or implementation.

IAS acknowledges that project implementation was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with some project activities postponed or cancelled due to restrictions on movement and social gatherings, a challenging vaccination rollout and vaccine hesitancy. However, project implementation issues and delays were primarily due to limited project portfolio oversight and monitoring (see above), delegation of authority issues (see Observations 7 and 11) and significant personnel turnover, impacting the Country Office's operational and programme performance. The understaffed Operations Team lacked the capacity to process the volume of programme requests in a timely manner and the Country Office had no tracking system to prioritize requests.

In addition, projects did not have project risk registers; and while project documents identified project risks, there was no clear link between project risks and the Country Office's overall risk register. Project risks were not followed up in a systematic manner other than to identify issues and risks in donor reports. This was because risk management in the Country Office was largely a compliance exercise and not embedded in the Country Office's project management.

Recommendation 5 (Medium):

The Country Representative to ensure that:

(a) Non-standard donor agreement approval procedures are well-understood and implemented by the Country Office.

(b) Regular project oversight meetings are held to discuss Country Office project performance, budgets, risks and issues, and to ensure smooth coordination between Programme and Operations.

See also **Recommendations 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 16 and 18.**

Observation 6: Programme partner management (capacity assessment, building and monitoring) needs to be strengthened

Partner records – The Country Office used the PGAMS system (launched in February 2020) to log partner agreement-related documents and data. However, the data in the system was not complete, especially partner reports and FACE forms which were not always uploaded, and there were very limited documents for the 'small grants' issued. Therefore, IAS or other offices could not easily estimate the total number and value of the Country Office's partner agreements, or assess further details. Not all reviewed projects had a combined list of partner agreements. WPHF projects had such a list that helped to track the agreements. Documents on partner agreements were provided to IAS upon request.

Selection process – The Country Office selected most programme partners through calls for proposals and documented the process. For one partner who had a US$ 100,238 advance in November 2019, justified US$ 73,746 of the expenditure in mid-2021 and continued project implementation, there was no evidence (therefore, no assurance) of a selection process. The Country Office indicated that some records for this project had been lost due to the previous project manager's departure.

Capacity assessments – Capacity assessments were generally completed jointly by programme and operations personnel for every programme partner, at times involving another UN organization's representative. Where applicable, capacity weaknesses and follow-up items were identified. In 2019, the assessments were often conducted during field missions to partners. For WPHF projects, which involved most partners, assessments were particularly detailed.

For other projects, there were areas for improvement. One partner had not yet developed financial and procurement procedures, and the Country Office reviewed only one year of the partner's financial statements, instead of the required three years. The capacity building plan was also very generic, e.g. to reinforce knowledge of UN Women procedures. For another partner, the capacity building plan indicated the partner as weak in financial management with little further information on how to address the gap. The project manager explained this could be achieved through closer monitoring. These instances indicated insufficient scrutiny by programme or operations personnel during partner capacity assessments, which may result in partner underperformance, non-achieved results and loss of funds.

Partner agreements – The Country Office engaged programme partners through appropriate agreements, generally including Terms of Reference, workplans, and detailed budget and results frameworks. Agreement budgets appeared reasonable. Any required budget revisions followed a review process.

Monitoring and FACE forms – Programmatic and financial monitoring of programme partners was performed by project managers, dedicated associates for 'programme finance' or 'partner monitoring', or the Operations Team. In 2019, field missions to partners included capacity assessments and, subsequently, review of partner records and supporting documents for expenses. In 2020, monitoring missions were challenging or not possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For WPHF projects, online sessions with partners were conducted for capacity building, training and monitoring, including the completion of FACE forms. Partner narrative reports and FACE forms were available and reviewed by the Country Office. Supporting documents for FACE forms (detailed expense reports with 100 to 300 expense lines) were in paper format that were kept in binders by the Country Office. Based on the IAS sample, FACE forms were generally well documented. There was excessive use of receipts issued by partners for expenses, where partner vendors apparently could not provide their own invoices or receipts. Such receipts were systematically numbered and countersigned.

Partners feedback on the Country Office – Several programme partners highlighted significant delays by the Country Office in reviewing their FACE forms or releasing further advances, sometimes "without explication by UN Women", and "limited advice" about the required supporting documents. Sometimes, this resulted in interruption of project activities, gaps in partner performance and impacted UN Women's reputation. In some cases, the Country Office asked for the same reports and documents for a second time from the partner, as they had not been handed over internally during the departure of Country Office personnel. Some partners highlighted that their logos were not reproduced in UN Women publicity for activities they had implemented. Some stated that their personnel had previously received financial training from UN Women but were no longer able to use these skills, because the partners were no longer selected. If a partner was programmatically beneficial to UN Women but had limited financial capacity, the Country Office could consider engaging it without advancing funds but reimbursing partner's vendors.

The Country Office indicated that multiple partners lacked capacity in project or financial management, or worked with delays, while also recognizing that personnel departures had resulted in insufficient partner monitoring and delayed responses to partner queries. Respondents to the IEAS survey of Country Office personnel indicated the need for more partner training and improved partner selection.

Recommendation 6 (Medium):

The Country Representative to ensure a holistic approach to programme partner management, particularly strengthening the capacity, sustainability and monitoring of partners, and examining opportunities for their longer-term sustainability, making sure that:

(a) Capacity building plans and associated risk-based monitoring plans are clearly articulated and followed; and are based on capacity assessment results and quarterly FACE form and narrative report reviews. Partner capacity gaps and risk profiles should be incorporated in monitoring plans and subsequently addressed and monitored during project implementation.

(b) PGAMS is systematically used for the development and recording of partner agreements and small grants agreements, and that all key documents in the programme partner management cycle are uploaded.

(c) Partner expenses without vendor invoices are limited within pre-agreed ceilings and such expenses are confirmed by the Country Office with vendors, on a sample basis.

(d) Communications with partners are regular, responsive and explanatory, to assure the partners that their queries will be dealt with.

See also **Recommendations 4, 5, 7, 8 and 12.**

B. Governance, risk management and internal controls

See also Background section for statistics. The Country Office's total (originally approved) budgets were US$ 4.7 million in 2019, US$ 6.5 million in 2020 and US$ 10.8 million in 2021. At the end of 2021, the Country Office employed 7 staff and 17 personnel on other contracts.

IAS assessed that, overall, the Country Office's internal governance, organizational structure, and data and knowledge management were unsatisfactory. The Country Office undertook some measures to strengthen its internal governance and structure, including through ongoing recruitments and attempts to improve internal coordination, and had requested the Information Systems and Telecommunications Team's (IST) assistance to strengthen data management. However, these areas remained to be fully addressed. The Country Office needed major improvement in: strengthening its ethical and control environment, and fraud prevention; streamlining the Country Office's delegation of authority and internal control framework; and follow-up and consistent implementation of previous oversight recommendations. The Country Office needed some improvement in risk management.

KEY OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Observation 7: Weak internal governance was one of the main root causes of issues with implementation of Country Office priorities, and needed strengthening

The Country Office experienced structural gaps and internal governance, management and coordination issues, leading to regular internal and some external complaints about serious operational obstacles in the Country Office's daily work, affecting programme implementation and coordination with external counterparts. Challenges related to this included:

- Since November 2019, the Country Representative also served as UN Women's Special Representative to the African Women Leaders Network, assisting with the establishment and support of numerous national chapters across Africa. This additional corporate responsibility took a considerable amount of the Country Representative's time (including extensive travel prior to the COVID-19 pandemic) and may have partially diverted attention from the significant Country Office portfolio. The Country Representative also functionally reported to the Executive Director, limiting WCARO's oversight and authority.
- The Country Office lacked a Head of Programme or a Deputy Representative, following the departure of the previous Deputy in September 2020 and WCARO's conversion of this position into another position based at the Regional Office, in line with Change Management's Country Office typology guidelines (the Country Office had low resource mobilization until 2020 and was categorized as a 'small' office). However, this resulted in significant gaps in programme oversight and overall internal governance within the Country Office, particularly following the substantial mobilization but low financial implementation of programme resources in 2021 (see below).

  As indicated by WCARO, the Country Office's Head of Programme (as in several other Country Offices in the region) was converted to a national staff position (NOD level), recruitment for which had to start at the end of the audit. If necessary, the position could be upgraded in future, in line with Country Office typology guidelines and if the office could use (pooled) non-core funds for such an upgrade. Some stakeholders expressed concern about the absence of a Head of Programme in the Country Office, considering the possibility of providing funds or seconding an incumbent for the position.
- The Country Office did not have an M&E team or a dedicated M&E specialist, particularly needed with the growth of its portfolio (see Observation 4).

- As in many other UN Women Country Offices, the Country Office in DRC engaged numerous personnel on non-staff contracts for core functions. Less attractive contracts and lower job grades than in other UN organizations contributed to multiple departures of experienced personnel (or junior personnel, once they had gained experience). Multiple stakeholders raised concerns about UN Women's lesser competitiveness and the excessive number of personnel leaving the office. These issues were also discussed in personnel retreats in June and September 2021.

- Thirteen personnel left the Country Office in 2020–2021, creating vacancies in significant roles, such as operations, programme management and gender-based coordination. The Operations Team was particularly weakened, obstructing the Country Office's ability to accelerate multiple ongoing or necessary recruitments (some were assisted by the Regional HR Business Partner); provide timely and satisfactory operational support to the Country Office's fast-growing programme; and coordinate seamlessly with external counterparts, such as programme partners and vendors. Recruitments for four operational vacancies that started in early 2021 were still ongoing at the end of 2021 (some delays were due to external obstacles). Personnel interviewed by IAS commented that some recruitment took long time, because the Operations Team could not timely support them, leading to delays in project implementation.

  In 2020–2021, WCARO conducted a functional review of the Country Office following the Change Management's Country Office typology guidelines. The Country Representative stated that, at some point, the Country Office was instructed not to hire any new personnel until the office's typology was decided and the review completed. The review was completed in mid-2021, providing the Country Office with a recommended staffing table, but there was no functional review report.

- As mentioned in Observation 5, after the departure of the Deputy Representative, reporting lines in programme teams became increasingly unclear, with multiple personnel reporting directly to the Country Representative who could not ensure sufficient direct supervision of all personnel, or timely responses to all their requests, including necessary approvals. After the June 2021 personnel retreat, the Officer-in-Charge of the Country Office proposed a revised organization chart.

- After the departure of the Deputy Representative and Finance Associate in 2020, the Country Office's 'internal control framework' (ICF) was left with only one senior manager with approval authority (the Country Representative) and very limited verifying authorities among Operations personnel (see Observation 11). Programme personnel commented about the bottlenecks in operational decision making.

- There was a lack of regular staff meetings to exchange updates and issues, and to help personnel to readjust and accelerate their workplans. Some personnel also indicated that certain information exchanges (e.g. for office reporting) should be bilateral, to avoid spending many colleagues' time in long meetings.

- The Country Office is French speaking, while most UN Women policies, procedures and guidance are in English. Drafts of Strategic Notes, various other documents and forms for submission to and most communications with headquarters are also expected in English (while noting that the Country Office's first reference point on various matters should be WCARO). The language barrier increases the burden for the Country Office and makes some communications more difficult or incomplete. Country Office personnel sometimes hesitated to seek headquarters' advice.

- Since the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, personnel increasingly worked from home, with some limited work conducted in the office by essential personnel. Work from the office somewhat increased from mid-2021, also due to the increase in vaccinations. As noticed by the CPE missions to Kinshasa and Goma offices in October/November 2021, very few personnel came into the office (or came late), with most personnel reportedly working from home. However, working from home was very challenging, depending on living conditions, frequent power cuts and very poor internet connectivity. According to the Country Representative, a survey indicated that most personnel preferred continuing the flexible work arrangements, but working from the office was encouraged when necessary or possible, and vaccinations were also encouraged. This situation occurred as most personnel lived far from the office, they indicated that they did not have cars and therefore needed to travel on congested public transport, plus not all personnel had been reportedly vaccinated. Each UN organization in DRC followed a different approach to returning to work in the office following the COVID-19 restrictions. No recent directives on this matter had been issued from headquarters or UNCT leadership. As indicated by the new Country Representative, work from the office was more systematic since early 2022.

- The Country Office's sub-office in Bukavu had always had a low occupancy due to its limited programme. Furthermore, in July and November 2017, respectively, its last Administrative Assistant and Programme Analyst were separated from the organization. Some personnel from Kinshasa and Goma rarely went on missions to the Bukavu sub-office. However, the Country Office continued to pay UNDP, during the last four years, the shared common premises and services charges for the empty sub-office space (about US$ 150,000 in 2018–2021). Payments were continued due to an existing lease with UNDP. The Country Office also continued to employ a driver in the empty sub-office for three years (approximately US$ 16,000 per year) until November 2020. In IAS' view, the Country Office could have explored options to transfer sub-office space to another UN organization to save funds.
- The Country Office had not yet signed a new service-level agreement with UNDP for operational support services (based on UN Women DMA and UNDP joint instruction in June 2018).

The Country Office, particularly its Operations Team, needed corporate support in the following 'operational priority areas', where the office had limited capacity (and sometimes limited expertise) in the difficult period around the time of the audit:

(a) Preparation and negotiation of project budgets with donors to ensure sufficient budgeting of 'direct project costs' and sufficient pooled budgeting of 'direct project management costs' for all necessary support requirements, also taking into account UN Women's extrabudgetary income reform from January 2022.

(b) Pooling of such project budget funds to establish or upgrade necessary personnel positions and to fund other support requirements. For example, almost all positions in the Country Office's staffing table were projected for funding from a single source which impacted business continuity, while diverse funds could also be pooled to fund necessary and justified positions. See Observation 14.

(c) HR management, particularly position management and timely recruitment. The Country Office was supported by the Regional HR Business Partner; however, it needed more support in its current difficult understaffed situation. See Observation 14.

(d) Extending relevant ICF authorities to other Country Office staff who are trained and held accountable for budget management. See Observation 11.

(e) ICT management, including appropriate choice and timely procurement of ICT equipment, internal network and connectivity management, and compliance with corporate ICT security requirements. See Observation 16.

(f) Knowledge management, i.e. establishment of a centralized records management system and minimizing paper records. See Observation 10.

(g) Establishment of a tracking system (e.g. 'online service request') to log and track requests for operational services (rather than use extensive emails), based on the practice of some headquarters services and several Regional and Country Offices, and consulting with IST, as required. See Observation 10.

(h) Procurement, particularly implementation of e-Procurement system, including guidance to vendors. See Observation 13.

(i) Vehicle management, to ensure the maintenance and functioning of vehicles for programme needs and replacement of malfunctioning vehicles. See Observation 18.

Personnel surveyed also highlighted the need to:

- Employ more personnel to avoid cumulation of roles and tasks, balancing the resource mobilization vis-à-vis results focused delivery; define roles and reporting lines; and improve planning, prioritization and accountability, noting some imbalanced work distribution.
- Improve personnel contracts and work conditions. For example, some personnel worked without office computers or office space, or went on missions without an advance of daily subsistence allowance; and some non-staff personnel stated that they had not received their remuneration on time.

- Improve the Operations Team's services (especially for personnel in provinces), which involved long delays and inadequate response time that adversely affected programme partners and vendors.
- Promote better knowledge exchange, induction, training, meetings (with updates on organizational news and procedures) and handovers during personnel departures.

Action plans for some of the above-mentioned issues were proposed in personnel retreats in June and September 2021. According to WCARO, it also regularly provided operational and programmatic support to the Country Office in DRC, including three support and training missions by WCARO Operations personnel and one support mission by WCARO monitoring and reporting personnel to the Country Office in 2021. In 2021, the Country Office also received a 'remote' support mission from PAPDU and PSMU. However, as noted, the Country Office needed more continuous support to overcome its difficult situation in 2021.

In IAS' view, although notable, corporate attention was still insufficient to assist the Country Office with its rapidly growing portfolio and existing problems, and the need to overhaul the office's internal governance to support increased programme. The substantial number of personnel departures in 2020 and 2021, COVID-19 crisis and Country Representative's limited availability in 2021 also affected the situation.

This led to missed opportunities; gaps in accountability, transparency and value-for-money; personnel demotivation, overwork and departures; and, as a result, lower programme delivery and impact for the women and girls of DRC; and affected UN Women's reputation with donors, programme and other partners, and vendors. The Country Office had low financial implementation rates (see Table 1) for its DRF portfolio, with a 50 per cent rate in 2019, a 54 per cent rate in 2020 and a record-low rate of 36 per cent in 2021.

Recommendation 7 (High):

The Country Representative to:

(a) Implement the recommended structure and any other recommendations from the WCARO functional review. Where required, carry out a staffing and capacity gap analysis of the office's current or recommended structure by mapping existing and required capacities and skill sets required to implement the Country Office's Strategic Note.

(b) Establish and communicate clear roles and responsibilities, and reporting lines for all personnel, in line with the Country Office's strategic priorities and job descriptions; and reinforce a single point of accountability for each reporting line.

(c) Ensure continuous position planning for all personnel categories, so that appropriate personnel contracts and grades are planned or updated. This should include post reclassifications/upgrades where necessary, which are duly justified and approved in line with the policy, and for which additional funds are identified in the Country Office's portfolio for such upgrades.

(d) Ensure that position planning is supported with budget management, which is as flexible as necessary, pooling multiple project funds, where necessary, and justified for establishing or upgrading positions, and obtaining position approvals as required for each budget source by the Delegation of Authority Framework Policy.

(e) Ensure that position planning and related budget management are well integrated with the Country Office's resource mobilization and donor negotiation practices at an early stage in the process, including sufficient **direct project cost recovery** and **direct project management cost recovery** in early budget negotiation or, where necessary, re-negotiation with donors, in line with the latest Change Management, Budget Section and Cost Recovery Working Group's guidance. The Country Office should consult headquarters services in this regard, if required.

Recommendation 8 (High):

The Country Representative to identify resources and implement a medium-term measure to strengthen the Country Office's Operations Team and establish or strengthen various operational processes recommended in this audit, particularly the highlighted 'operational priority areas'.

Recommendation 9 (Medium):

The Country Representative to:

(a) Establish a renewed service-level agreement with UNDP, based on the latest DMA guidance, to promote the smooth running of operational support services, especially in problem areas identified in this audit.

(b) Provide justification for its continued presence or a closure plan, for the sub-offices, in accordance with 'Procedure for Annual Review of Sub-Offices' in 'UN Women Presence Governance Procedure', and explore opportunities to cease the sub-office lease or transfer the space to another UN organization.

(c) Explore opportunities for better use of other UN organizations' facilities in remote locations, for better servicing of the Country Office's new personnel stationed at these locations.

Advisory notes:

The Country Representative should:

- Have short but regular staff meetings to exchange important updates and issues, and encourage personnel to readjust and accelerate their workplans. Action points decided in these meetings should subsequently be followed up.
- Reassure personnel to contact WCARO, as the first reference point, in French as necessary. Where required, WCARO or the Country Office should be able to contact the headquarters for necessary advice in English or French.

See also **Recommendations 3, 4, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 18 and 20.**

Observation 8: Embedding risk management in the Country Office's decision-making and programme and project management

The Country Office updated its risk register annually, and the latest register listed 25 risks. However, risks and mitigating actions were defined broadly and at a high level. Mitigating actions did not always address actual root causes (e.g. for a risk related to recruitment and succession planning), or it was not clear how the actions would be validated or would address the risks. For example, for procurement fraud risk, the Country Office indicated that it had developed a standard operating procedure for procurement; however, this did not address the lack of awareness of potential fraud in this area. The Country Office did not employ a monitoring tool to follow up on mitigation actions.

In 2019, the Country Office received training from WCARO on risk management and fraud prevention. However, risk management in the Country Office was largely a compliance exercise (risk registers were prepared for Annual Work Plans) and not embedded in Country Office decision-making and programme and project management. Half of respondents to the IEAS survey of Country Office personnel rated the Country Office's risk management as 'unsatisfactory', e.g. in relation to programme implementation 'target areas' or programme partner implementation capacity. As a result, the Country Office's identification of risks was not comprehensive and mitigation not always effective.

See also **Observation 5,** which is partially addressed through this Recommendation.

Recommendation 10 (Medium):

The Country Representative to embed comprehensive risk management in the Country Office's decision-making process and programme and project life cycle, and track the risk mitigating actions (for example, by using an M&E tool).

Observation 9: Strengthening the ethical and control environment, and fraud prevention

Based on the Country Office's training register, in mid-2021 just 15 personnel had completed the mandatory online ethics training. The training register did not track completion of the mandatory online fraud prevention training. In 2019, the Country Office received training from headquarters on fraud prevention and, in 2020, the Operations Manager conducted a refresher training course on ethics. Some personnel interviewed stated that fraud prevention and ethics were discussed in staff meetings, but meeting notes did not support this. The Country Office had a procedure for the recovery of costs for personal use of official vehicles.

Half of respondents to the IEAS survey of Country Office personnel responded that they did not remember that standards of conduct were discussed in staff meetings, that they did not know all relevant UN Women's policies in this area and that, in recent years, there might had been instances of incompliance with such standards in the Country Office. Most respondents also responded that they did not remember that fraud risks were discussed in staff meetings, they either did not know how to or did not feel comfortable to report wrongdoing and, in recent years, there might had been instances of inappropriate use of official resources in the Country Office. Some respondents highlighted the need to address various issues with standards of conduct in the Country Office. IAS understands that some of these issues were discussed in personnel retreats in June and September 2021.

As IAS' audit was remote, it could not observe whether the Country Office's fraud prevention controls were adequate. However, non-compliance findings relating to procurement (see Observation 13) indicated lack of awareness of red flags and the absence of necessary controls in this area. Some personnel interviewed raised red flags in this area. IAS also observed an incomplete audit trail for part of sampled transactions (see Observations 15 and 17), which indicates gaps in fraud preventive and detective controls.

IAS notes that Country Office management had not established a strong control environment, probably due to many competing priorities and existing capacity gaps. Although the organization of personnel retreats in 2021 showed the intention to improve this area, the gaps in control environment, culture and awareness contributed to personnel demotivation and gaps in awareness of existing standards of conduct, ethical values and fraud prevention policies.

Recommendation 11 (High):

The Country Representative to reinforce fraud and corruption awareness, particularly ensuring that the mandatory ethics and fraud prevention online training is completed by all personnel; refresher fraud prevention training is conducted periodically; and ethical issues and policies are discussed in staff meetings and the annual leadership dialogue workshop. The Country Office should request WCARO or headquarters support in these areas, where necessary.

See also **Recommendation 15.**

Observation 10: Data, knowledge and records management was unsatisfactory and needed urgent attention

The Country Office's data, knowledge and records management was unsatisfactory in key aspects. Obtaining documents and information for this audit was challenging due to the following issues:

- No centralized records management system (e.g. in a shared drive) was used for projects or other work areas, and multiple personnel departed without proper handover of files, which were difficult or impossible to obtain at a later stage. The Country Representative indicated that the lack of a shared drive was a significant problem: in early 2020, they had asked WCARO and IST to create a shared drive and other IT support (see also Observation 16) but, as of late 2021, this had not been done, first due to COVID-19 related travel restrictions, and later the issue had not been revisited. IAS understands that not all Country Office personnel know how to use the more recent OneDrive technology for sharing and joint use of data, and joint archiving was not enforced.
- As already mentioned, IAS noted and numerous Country Office personnel indicated long delays in processing and approvals of requests for various operational services. The Country Office relied on email requests and did not use a tracking system (e.g. online service requests) to log and track requests, as implemented by some headquarter services and various Regional and Country Offices. Respondents to the

IEAS survey of Country Office personnel also highlighted the need to develop a follow-up process on the workflow of files between the Programme and Operations teams.

- For Atlas transactions, supporting documents were maintained mostly in paper records (except for scanned documents sent from the Goma sub-office). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Country Office moved to electronic approvals of some project activities, purchase orders and vouchers (which was an opportunity to establish electronic filing). However, the approved documents were still printed and stored in paper format. There were also gaps in records: not all supporting documents were provided to IAS for transactions in the audit sample (see Observation 17). Several personnel stated there were instances of 'forgotten and rediscovered' or 'entirely lost' vendor invoices (see Observation 15).
- In some cases, data uploads in corporate information systems, e.g. DAMS, LEADS and PGAMS, were not complete or up-to-date. Uploads in Enterprise Risk Management system, RMS or year-end closure checklists in FMS' Sharepoint were generally complete. However, IAS could not find uploads of most monthly closure checklists, which were either not prepared or not uploaded and could not be provided upon request.

Adequate support was not sought when needed and, thus, was not received from the local UNDP office, WCARO or IST. Good knowledge management practices were not embedded in the Country Office's daily work, and there were substantial gaps in maintaining proper records. The Operations Team also lacked sufficient personnel to properly handle the volume of requests for operational services.

This resulted in delays in programmes and projects; gaps in institutional knowledge and corporate information systems' data to ensure proper monitoring and oversight; limited real-time access to data for Country Office or other personnel; extended use of office space for physical document storage; limited assurance about the justification of transactions and functioning of operational controls; and reputational issues with suppliers and other partners.

Recommendation 12 (High):

The Country Representative to ensure that supporting infrastructure and processes are in place for smooth office workflow, adequately supported by documentation. In particular:

(a) In line with corporate guidelines, with assistance from WCARO or IST, and based on practices of other field offices, establish a centralized electronic filing system for programme, project, operations and other office documents, and enforce its use through regular spot-checks, ensuring restricted access to and confidentiality of files that require it (e.g. procurement or recruitment files).

(b) In line with corporate guidelines, with assistance from WCARO or IST, and based on practices of some headquarters services and various Regional and Country Offices, implement a tracking system (e.g. online service request) to log and track requests for operational services.

(c) Ensure electronic reviews, approvals and filing of transactions (using a checklist of key supporting evidence to ensure completeness of audit trail), only accepting paper supporting documents produced by external parties that can be kept in originals and, where required, scanned and recorded in the Country Office's centralized electronic filing system or relevant corporate systems.

(d) Assign dedicated focal points for data entry into corporate systems and verify compliance through periodic spot checks.

(e) Establish a process for the proper handover of documents and information during personnel departures, including supervision of each handover to ensure its completeness. Proper handover should be a prerequisite for personnel separation clearance.

Advisory note:

The Country Representative should ensure that month-end closure checklists are completed in a timely manner and uploaded in the corporate SharePoint site.

Observation 11: Streamlining the Country Office's Delegation of Authority Framework

The Country Office had significant personnel departures in 2020–2021, restricting approval and operational authorities in the Country Office, based on its internally approved ICF:

- Following the departure of the Deputy Representative in 2020, only the Country Representative was left with the Senior Manager committing officer authority, with no alternate approvers at that level. Several personnel indicated that the Country Representative did not always have time to review and approve documents in a timely manner.
- Only the Deputy Representative had Programme Manager authority, this role being vacant following their departure. This resulted in significant gaps in programme and project oversight and approvals (see Observation 5).
- The Operations Manager was the sole 'Level 2' Manager committing officer, while overseeing procurement, HR, finance, asset management, safety and security, and other administration areas.
- The Finance Associate had Atlas roles of Verifying Officer, Finance User and Asset Focal Point, which became vacant in 2020. Another Administrative Assistant, who performed the first two roles as an only alternate, went on prolonged leave in 2021. The Country Representative was assigned as the alternate Asset Focal Point.

IAS understands that an update of the Country Office's ICF was not prioritized. The limited assigned authorities led to frequent delays in verifications and approvals of programme and project transactions, and gaps in segregation of duties. IAS understands that personnel in the Goma sub-office experienced particular delays. Action plans for these issues were proposed in personnel retreats in June and September 2021, including expansion of the ICF among other more senior personnel. The Country Office was in the process of recruiting for four operational vacancies.

Recommendation 13 (Medium):

The Country Representative to:

(a) Prioritize the relevant recruitments for authorities in the Country Office's ICF and clarify interim measures and authorities (if necessary, with backup from WCARO) to ensure adequate segregation of duties and personnel to process, verify and approve transactions, and enable oversight by the Operations Manager.

(b) Consider alternate committing authorities in the Country Office (and, if needed, in any sub-offices), in the case of increased workload of the Country Representative or the Operations Manager.

Observation 12: Need for follow-up and sustained implementation of relevant previous oversight recommendations

The last internal audit of the Country Office (by the UNDP Office of Audit and Investigations) was completed in 2013 with an **Unsatisfactory** rating, with a follow-up audit in 2015 and recommendations closed by UNDP in 2016. However, it was evident during this IAS audit that some of the previous audit findings remained to be addressed.

In 2017, the Country Office underwent a CPE, which focused on the Strategic Note for 2014–2017 and made seven recommendations. However, the status of all recommendations in the GATE system was 'overdue' or 'not yet started'. It was evident from the 2021 CPE and audit that a number of previous CPE recommendations were still relevant and had not been implemented. IAS noted some progress for some of the recommendations.

In 2019, UN Women's outsourced programme partner audit services provider undertook audits of two partners, issuing 'qualified' opinions for both partners and eight audit recommendations in total. However, at the time of this audit, the Country Office had not uploaded the required follow-up action plans for the recommendations in the corporate portal. In 2021, the programme partner audit services provider undertook audits of six partners, issuing two 'qualified' and four 'unmodified' opinions, and 32 audit recommendations in total. The Country Office also needs to follow up on these recommendations.

IAS understands that follow-up on previous oversight recommendations was not prioritized in the Country Office, while their consistent implementation was not embedded in its business processes. This led to missed opportunities to learn from past reviews; increased risks of programme, project or operational ineffectiveness; and limited the value of the audits or CPEs, in ensuring accountability and contributing to the achievement of results.

Recommendation 14 (High):

The Country Representative to establish a process for the consistent follow-up and sustainable implementation of previous oversight recommendations in the Country Office’s purview (CPEs, internal, external and programme partner audits), ensuring that action plans are updated in corporate systems in a timely manner. Accountability for these recommendations should be clearly assigned to managers who should periodically report on their progress. The Country Representative should actively seek headquarters and WCARO advice and support in areas where the Country Office has less capacity to implement recommendations.

C. Operations

See Background for more details. According to corporate dashboard data on procurement and travel, in 2019–2020 the Country Office processed 111 purchase orders (not including purchase orders below US$ 2,500) for goods and services totalling US$ 1.4 million (85 per cent for services and 15 per cent for goods), 'non-purchase order vouchers' totalling US$ 0.2 million, as well as 482 purchase orders for travel totalling US$ 0.4 million. The Country Office's Operations Manager co-chaired the UNCT Operational Management Team, led its Finance Working Group and was actively involved in development of its Business Operations Strategy, including the planning of long-term agreements (LTA) for UNCT. However, IAS assessed that, overall, the Country Office's procurement and ICT management were unsatisfactory. The Country Office received recent procurement-related training from WCARO and, in 2020, requested IST's assistance to strengthen ICT management; however, these areas still required improvement. The Country Office needed major improvement in HR, financial, travel and asset management, and some improvement in safety and security management.

KEY OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Observation 13: Procurement process often did not comply with procurement policy and needed improvement

During the audit period, micro-purchasing (generally, under US$ 5,000) and Requests for Quotation (generally, between US$ 5,000 and US$ 50,000) were used, including for some larger purchases of COVID-19 resiliency and prevention kits, and beneficiary training kits. Procurement management required significant improvement to increase transparency and efficiency, and strengthen control and fraud prevention as detailed below:

- *E-Procurement* – The Country Office did not use the e-Procurement system mandated since April 2020 for all competitive procurements above US$ 5,000. In 2020, operations personnel were trained in its use by WCARO but indicated that when local vendors were asked to register to submit bids through the system, they were reportedly reluctant to do so, primarily because many vendors were said to lack stable internet connection. Training to vendors was not provided. In 2021, during the audit, WCARO undertook two operations support missions to the Country Office, including for personnel.
- *Planning and timeliness* – The Country Office's procurement plans for 2019–2020 in the Procurement Dashboard totaled US$ 25,400 and, therefore, were not comprehensive, as the value of actual procurement was US$ 1.6 million during this period. The Country Office had a more comprehensive procurement plan and tracker spreadsheet but indicated that it was not regularly updated as it should be between Programme and Operations teams. Programme personnel characterized procurement timelines as lengthy and required frequent follow-up on their part. The number of procurement requests was high for the small Operations Team to manage, several vacancies compounded the situation. The personnel retreat in June 2021 emphasized the use of procurement plans. A more detailed plan was prepared for the largest project.

- *Methods and authority* – The budget for the two kit[5] procurements was estimated above US$ 50,000, and the purchase orders awarded were US$ 66,600 and US$ 61,485, requiring a Request for Proposal process. A Request for Quotation process was followed in each case, given the urgency due to the COVID-19 pandemic, based on Rapid Response Procurement Procedures. However, the Country Office had not requested the required authority to use Rapid Response Procurement Procedures, and the procurements were not reviewed by the Regional Procurement Committee, as required, but by the Local Procurement Committee.

- *Solicitation* – The solicitation process did not comply with policy in multiple reviewed procurements, with red flags indicating potential exposure to fraud:

  (a) The Country Office did not use a generic email address for receipt of procurement offers and vendor inquiries. Names and email addresses of Country Office personnel were included in Requests for Quotation or solicitation emails sent to vendors.

  (b) Quotations were often gathered in person by Country Office personnel by visiting vendors pre-selected by Operations personnel. The Country Office indicated that vendors often did not respond to requests and, to obtain the required number of quotations, personnel travelled to solicit them.

  (c) Quotations for the two kit[6] procurements were delivered to the Country Office by hand. However, some quotations were not signed by vendors and some vendor contact information was handwritten by Country Office personnel. These incomplete quotations were still considered in the procurements.

  (d) For one equipment rental micro-purchase (US$ 3,500), the winning quotation was significantly lower than the other two quotations, which were nearly identical in font and format with the winning quotation, suggesting the losing quotations might have not been authentic.

  (e) For one micro-purchase related to hospitality (venue rental and catering, US$ 3,600), UN Women was requested to host a government-organized event at short notice. Programme personnel submitted a procurement request to the Operations Team 16 days prior to the event. After repeated reminders, the Operations Team sought one quotation two days before the event, one quotation one day prior and one quotation on the day of the event.

  The above-mentioned practices are generally not permitted in procurement, several of them creating opportunities for potential and inappropriate supplier–purchaser relationships to develop or not be detected in a timely manner.

- *Quality and evaluation of quotations* – For the two kit[7] procurements, multiple vendors submitted quotations for different quantities of goods than specified in the Request for Quotation and, in some quotations, the quantities or weight were not specified. Therefore, the quotations did not match to enable a thorough evaluation of the bids. The Country Office explained that quotation values were also adjusted by the evaluation committee to respect the programme budget. However, this was not explained in evaluation committee minutes. Further, some of the quotations submitted in April 2020 (with different quantities) were re-used in a later procurement in August 2020.

- *LTAs* – The LTA list used by the Country Office was short, including some LTAs for ICT equipment, travel and vehicle maintenance. However, the Country Office did not share the prices agreed in the LTAs, nor was there any evidence in quotation comparisons that actual prices bid by LTA holders and paid were compared with original LTA prices to ensure that LTA holders honored their promised prices and discounts.

These issues arose primarily because competitive and transparent procurement practices were not well embedded in the Country Office's work and there were gaps in knowledge of procedures, despite Operations personnel having received training in this area. Procurement was carried out by an Administrative Associate and overseen by an Operations Manager, who were overburdened with other work because of the shortage of Operations personnel. Due to limited coordination between Programme and

[5] COVID-19 resiliency and prevention kits, and beneficiary training kits
[6] As above
[7] As above

Operations personnel, the latter did not always have enough time to ensure a competitive procurement process and could not advise Programme personnel on effective contingency planning. The COVID-19 pandemic also contributed to changes in programme activities and procurement delays.

This resulted in procurements with low assurance of value-for-money; non-compliance with procurement policies; lack of transparency and competition; potential exposure to fraud or collusion; and programme and project delays.

The Country Office needed to engage a broader base of better qualified vendors, and should seek advice or assistance from larger UN organizations in the country. The Country Office Officer-in-Charge also recommended using UNCT procurement services, e.g. 'Procurement as One'.

Recommendation 15 (Medium):

The Country Representative to improve the procurement process to ensure it is competitive and transparent, in particular to ensure:

(a) Adequate accountability and coordination between Operations and Programme teams for effective procurement planning and contingencies, including regular meetings to monitor progress and update procurement plans.

(b) Country Office personnel receiving regular refresher training on procurement policies and fraud prevention, e.g. from WCARO.

(c) E-Procurement system is used as mandated; training is broadly advertised and provided to interested vendors; and they register in e-Procurement.

(d) Exclusive use of a generic email address for all Country Office procurement where not conducted through e-Procurement.

(e) The Operations Manager is accountable for the completeness of procurement actions, supporting documentation and controls, including for LTA transactions; and WCARO is requested to implement periodic spot checks of Country Office procurement.

(f) Periodic market surveys to broaden the Country Office's vendor base (or use of UNCT's market surveys and vendors) and consultation with UNCT, including UNDP, about use of their procurement services and systems, where the Country Office's capacity is limited.

Observation 14: HR management requires major improvement

HR management was overseen by the Operations Manager who also managed multiple other administrative areas, and was supported by an Administrative Associate who also performed various other administrative duties. The Country Office was supported by the Regional HR Business Partner, e.g. during the Country Office's functional review in 2020–2021, for international and some local recruitments, as well as oversight, training and advice, at the same time as overseeing all other offices in the region. The lack of operational capacity in the Country Office led to long recruitment delays and other gaps in HR management as outlined below:

- *Recruitment planning and timeliness* – The Country Office did not have a clear and complete 'recruitment tracker'. A desired staffing table had been prepared for the draft Strategic Note 2021–2024 and another recommended staffing table from WCARO's functional review, which differed and did not indicate recruitment plans or status. In 2020–2021, the Country Office onboarded eight new personnel (excluding some consultants) and more recruitments were under way at the end of 2021; however, it was unclear how many personnel were to be recruited in total and at what stage the recruitment process was at. Country Office personnel indicated that the recruitment process was too lengthy and adversely affected programme and project management and delivery, as well as operations (see also Observation 7). In the absence of any 'recruitment tracker', IAS could not objectively test the timeliness of recruitment.
- *Performance management* – In 2019, no mid-year performance evaluations were completed for staff members, and the final performance evaluation completion rate was 75 per cent. Based on other HR data, in 2020, final performance evaluations were completed for at least two staff members and, in 2021, performance goals were completed for at least one staff member (there were temporary data gaps in the corporate performance management dashboard). In

2021, the Regional HR Business Partner sent an instruction and five reminders to the Country Office on completion of performance plans and evaluations, and provided training to Country Office personnel in August 2021.

In 2019-2021, there were no mid-year or final performance evaluations and, in 2020-2021, there were either no performance goals for the Country Representative.

- *Learning and development* – The Country Office had a learning plan for 2019–2020 (it had not been updated for 2021) and a training register for 2019–2021. The register was not comprehensive and did not cover all mandatory training (see Observations 9 and 19). The Regional HR Business Partner periodically shared a corporate report on the completion of mandatory training with the Country Office, which the Country Office had to follow up. Respondents to the IEAS survey of Country Office personnel highlighted the need for new personnel induction and more training. Respondents also noted that the same colleagues were usually repeatedly sent on training courses; the acquired knowledge was not always disseminated further; and other longer-term personnel did not benefit from such training.
- *Leave monitoring* – IAS did not comprehensively test leave monitoring in the Country Office; however, it noted that, in one case, certified sick leave was not fully recorded in Atlas.
- *Consultant selection and management* – IAS reviewed seven consultant selections during the audit period and noted that a competitive process was documented in all cases. IAS noted these areas for improvement in consultant management:

  (a) The Country Office's delegation of authority for amendment of one consultant contract was exceeded. The contract was extended seven times with total payments of US$ 193,600. The Country Office did not submit a request for review by the headquarters Procurement Review Committee for the third contract extension, when its total value reached US$ 100,000, but realized the oversight and submitted a post-facto request only for the fifth extension, when US$ 132,000 had already been paid under contract.

  (b) For the same contract, the consultant was hired to perform functions that were a blend of specialized expertise and core functions in the Country Office which should be performed by regular personnel. The consultant was responsible for updating the Strategic Note 2014–2017; partial development of the earlier version of Strategic Note 2020–2024; and managing relationships with a bilateral donor who partially funded the Strategic Note.

  (c) For all consultant contracts reviewed, performance evaluations were at a high-level with little or no details. For one contract (US$ 12,950), the evaluation form was completed five months prior to contract completion. Although the final payment was made after contract completion (October 2019), no proof of contract deliverables was provided.

Respondents to the IEAS survey of Country Office personnel also noted potential conflicts of interest in the preparation of Terms of Reference and selection of consultants.

These issues were primarily due to an overburdened Operations Team, no dedicated HR Associate and an increase in required recruitments, given the number of personnel departures and programme growth. IAS understands that there were some gaps in personnel's knowledge of HR policies and procedures in the Country Office. Gaps in HR management and, particularly, long recruitments adversely affected the Country Office's overall performance, ability to deliver, personnel workload, morale and skills, and compliance with procedures.

See also **Observation 7,** which is partially addressed through this Recommendation.

Recommendation 16 (Medium):

The Country Representative, in consultation with the Regional HR Business Partner, to:

(a) Once the Operations Team is completely staffed, identify dedicated personnel responsible for HR functions.

(b) Maintain a complete recruitment plan and tracker for all personnel categories, and complete all priority recruitments as soon as possible.

(c) Ensure full and timely compliance with performance management requirements for all personnel categories, as well as personnel accountability and performance improvement plans for any poor performance.

(d) Ensure that a learning and development plan for all personnel (inclusive of all mandatory training) is updated on an annual basis, new personnel inductions and other important training is regularly planned, and the plan is regularly monitored for completion.

(e) Ensure comprehensive leave monitoring, verifying that all leave taken by all personnel categories is accurately entered in Atlas as soon as possible and at least on monthly basis, to ensure that no leave is forgotten after it has been taken, especially when frequent work-from-home arrangements are in place.

(f) Ensure that the Special Service Agreement Policy for consultant management and the Country Office's delegation of authority are closely followed, and implement periodic spot checks to ensure compliance.

See also **Recommendation 7.**

Observation 15: Strengthening financial management

IAS noted the following areas for improvement in financial management:

- *Budget monitoring* – The Country Office indicated that it held weekly budget reviews. However, no budget monitoring tool was shared with IAS. As mentioned earlier, after the departure of the Deputy Representative, no regular project oversight meetings were held.
- *Payment justification* – Based on IAS samples reviewed, most payments were justified and standard checklists were used for clearance of some payments. However, supporting documents for payments and other accounting transactions were variable (see also Observations 13, 14 and, particularly, 17). Examples also included: payments for vehicle fuel cards not supported with logs or summaries on fuel use; payments for official mobile phone not supported with links between invoices and phone numbers or holders; and incomplete supporting documents for other smaller payments.
- *Payment timeliness and loss of vendor invoices* – Long delays in vendor payments (including occasional loss of vendor invoices) and programme partner payments were noted by several programme personnel and several programme partners. Respondents to the IEAS survey of Country Office personnel highlighted that some vendors had not been paid for a long time; some invoices were lost, resulting in follow-ups by vendors; in the past, the Operations Team had identified unpaid invoices of US$ 30,000, for a closed project; and accountability for these issues was not always enforced.
- *Payment method* – The Country Office needed to be stricter with vendors and other recipients, and minimize the use of cheque payments. Reportedly, the Country Office made approximately 90 per cent of payments by cheque and 10 per cent by bank transfers, while UNDP and UNFPA had 'opposite statistics'. The Country Office referred to difficulties with some vendors who preferred to be paid by cheque.

These issues were due to various reasons, including: limited project and budget oversight practices (and no formalized budget monitoring tools) in the Country Office; payment oversight and reviews not always prioritized to ensure document completeness; gaps in handling vendor invoices; lack of centralized records management and gaps in Operations' record management; departure of Operations personnel; not following other UN organizations' best practices more closely; and gaps in accountability in the Country Office.

This led to: a lack of assurance for project managers on projects' precise budget situation; limited justification of payments; potential for disallowances, fraud or abuse to occur or not be detected in a timely manner; reputational issues with vendors and programme partners, and disinterest of some vendors to work with UN Women; reputational issues with donors in the case of incomplete expense reporting and need for cross-subsidies from other budgets; and increased risk of cheque misuse.

Recommendation 17 (Medium):

The Country Representative to:

(a) Based on Atlas and other relevant data, establish a budget monitoring tool for regular programme and project budget monitoring, including for use in programme oversight meetings.

(b) Ensure that payment checklists are systematically and effectively used for supporting document completeness; that personnel are aware of these requirements and compliance is enforced; and any unjustified payments are settled.

(c) Minimize the use of cheque payments.

See also **Recommendation 12.**

Observation 16: Strengthening ICT management

The Country Office did not have any ICT personnel and received ICT support from UNDP. IAS' remote audit could not make physical inspections in this area. However, documents, various feedback and observations by CPE missions indicated significant issues in ICT management:

- Based on headquarters IST feedback, the Country Office in DRC was among the most non-compliant field offices worldwide in terms of corporate ICT security requirements (based on IST's global report of March 2021, the Country Office's overall compliance was rated at 17 per cent). The Country Office's service-level agreement with UNDP was outdated and did not formally cover ICT services.

- There were various reports that certain Country Office computers (or their connection devices) were probably incompatible with other ICT devices in the Country Office or did not match UN Women corporate standards; and that other computers and office equipment were outdated or not functioning well. One computer was reported to have exploded in the office. Some new personnel had to use personal computers (with limited access to corporate systems), because official computers were not provided to them in a timely manner. There were also regular internet connectivity issues in the Country Office. See Issue 10.

In February 2020, the Country Representative requested an IST mission to review ICT in the Country Office, particularly: the establishment and management of databases and digital platforms; establishment and maintenance of a shared drive; creation of email addresses; support with regard to the lack of dedicated ICT personnel; planning and coverage of ICT costs, including for satellite access to the internet; and management of ICT relationships with partners and service providers. Terms of Reference were prepared for an IST mission planned for April 2020, but it did not take place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This matter had not been revisited by the Country Office, nor had remote support been provided. WCARO indicated that its ICT specialist regularly undertook support missions in the region, but the Country Office in DRC needed to request such support. IST indicated that it also provided support to other offices, including through corporate standards for local office ICT setup and conducted regular meetings and trainings with offices.

These issues were due to very limited ICT capacity in the Country Office (including for ICT procurement specifications); limited communication, escalation or follow-up for corporate or regional support; and delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This increased the Country Office's vulnerability to ICT security threats (e.g. loss of data); created difficult working conditions for Country Office personnel; led to communication problems with external partners.

Recommendation 18 (High):

The Country Representative to designate a local focal point for ICT services, identify adequate resources and seek local ICT support, in line with corporate ICT standards. For necessary support in this regard, to request WCARO or IST to provide the postponed (in-person or remote) ICT support, involving UNDP, as required, and provide relevant ICT training to Country Office personnel, particularly on ICT security and OneDrive use.

See also **Recommendation 12.**

Observation 17: Strengthening travel and hospitality management

Travel and hospitality management required significant improvement, principally with regard to records management:

- The Country Office could not provide supporting documents for 12 of 41 transactions in IAS' sample of travel and hospitality expenditure. The unjustified transactions totaled US$ 29,059. Quality and completeness of supporting documents for other transactions varied. Justifications were generally complete for transactions accompanied with a travel authorization or checklist. However, this was not the case for travel claims or liquidation of travel advances, which usually lacked travel Terms of Reference, to show the approved budget, or travel authorizations for purchase of tickets.
- For one transaction, the daily subsistence allowance was overpaid by US$ 860 for the dates of the traveler's departure and return, which is not payable according to policy, considering overnight travel in both directions. This travel was approved by WCARO.

These issues were primarily due to records for travel transactions being largely paper-based and probably poorly managed: they were also not easy to find based on IAS' requests. The Atlas Travel module had not been rolled out to field offices, and all travel claims had to be monitored manually after travel advances were issued. The Operations Team was understaffed and overworked. These issues limited IAS' ability to express an opinion on the Country Office's travel and hospitality management; led to the potential for disallowances, fraud or abuse to occur or not be detected in a timely manner; late travel bookings; and some incorrect travel expenditure.

Recommendation 19 (Medium):

The Country Representative to:

(a) Ensure compliance with the Duty Travel Policy.

(b) Hold travellers and travel approvers accountable for any overpayments.

(c) Ensure consistent use of travel authorizations and checklists, facilitating proper justification of travel expenditure.

Observation 18: Strengthening asset management

The Country Office had general procedures for safeguarding its assets, including asset tagging, inventory and disposal procedures. IAS' remote audit could not make physical inspections in this area; however, the following areas for improvement were noted:

- The Country Office had no inventory of UN Women-financed assets held by programme partners (normally purchased by partners). In January 2019–March 2021, partner expenditure on assets totaled approximately US$ 88,000. The Country Office indicated that it followed standard procedures for asset transfers to partners at project closure.
- The Country Office did not comply with DMA's instructions on the biannual self-reporting of assets held by each personnel (particularly where working from home) through the corporate SharePoint site. The Country Office indicated that, instead, it required each personnel to sign an asset loan form. However, such forms were not provided to IAS upon request.
- Feedback from personnel and CPE missions in Kinshasa and Goma showed that some official cars[8] were not properly functioning (i.e. they could not be used at all or were not air-conditioned), while some could not be driven because the Country Office had not purchased the mandatory liability insurance on time. Reportedly, not a single official car could be driven during the CPE mission in Goma.

The Country Office indicated that its controls focused on assets held by the office and that assets held by personnel were not many, for which simpler procedures were followed. In IAS' view, vehicle management may not have received sufficient attention by the overburdened Operations Team, and there was no local Operations support in Goma for a certain period. IAS noted that the Country Office acquired four new cars in November 2021.

[8] Based on Atlas asset report, in May 2021 the Country Office had six cars and three motorcycles.

The observed gaps in asset management indicated an increased risk of asset loss or theft, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic with prevalent working from home by programme partners and Country Office personnel. The gaps in vehicle management adversely impacted Country Office personnel (and increased safety and security risks), contacts with external counterparts and programme effectiveness.

Recommendation 20 (Medium):

The Country Representative to prioritize any necessary maintenance, insurance or replacement of official vehicles, where required, in line with existing procedures, identifying resources for this purpose.

Advisory note:

The Country Representative should also:

- Ensure and verify that an inventory of assets provided to programme partners is conducted on an annual basis, as per partner agreements, and that this is monitored during project monitoring missions. In its Audit of Assets and Lease Management,[9] IAS recommended that PSMU requires field offices to verify programme partner assets as part of regular monitoring.
- Ensure DMA's asset self-reporting procedures are followed by personnel and randomly tested to confirm an asset's existence.

Observation 19: Strengthening safety and security management

In Kinshasa, Goma and Bukavu, the Country Office was co-located in compounds leased by UNDP, which was responsible for their compliance with the local Minimum Operating Security Standards. The Country Office was represented in UNCT's Security Management Team in Kinshasa and Goma; had security focal points in both locations; and applied local Residential Security Measures for its international staff. IAS noted the following areas for improvement in safety and security management:

- In 2021, the Country Office hired two home-based local project personnel in Tshikapa and one in Matadi. There were plans to hire more such personnel in remote locations. IAS is not aware if the Country Office followed any specific safety and security measures for these personnel.
- The Country Office completed its 2019–2021 annual security compliance checklists for Kinshasa, Goma and Bukavu in the headquarters Security Team's portal, with overall self-reported compliance rates between 88 and 100 per cent. According to the checklists, all personnel had completed the 'BSafe' online training, mandatory as of 30 June 2019, and all personnel in Kinshasa and Goma had completed 'SSafe' in-person training, mandatory for personnel operating in hostile or hazardous environments. However, the Country Office's training register for 2019–2021 only tracked the expired 'Basic Security in the Field' and 'Advanced Security in the Field' training, with only a 56 per cent completion rate. Therefore, there were discrepancies between the training register and security compliance checklists submitted to headquarters. The Country Office hired multiple new personnel in 2020–2021, who had yet to complete the 'BSafe' and, if applicable, 'SSafe' training.
- The Country Office indicated that the Kinshasa and Goma offices were accessible to disabled people. However, some respondents to the IEAS survey of Country Office personnel stated that the offices were not equipped for this purpose.
- Respondents also stated there was a need 'to acquire security equipment like bulletproof jackets, helmets and appropriate vehicles for more secure work in regions, where armed groups were active'.

These factors increased the existing safety and security risks to personnel (particularly in remote locations) in the case of any adverse events, and new personnel may not be adequately trained in safety and security measures.

[9] https://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/accountability/audit/internal-audit-reports

Recommendation 21 (High):

The Country Representative to:

(a) Enquire with the UN Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS), what safety and security measures should be followed for home-based personnel (or hosted by other UN organizations) in remote locations.

(b) Ensure that all personnel complete the mandatory safety and security training and completion data is tracked by the Country Office.

(c) Ensure that all remote missions comply with UNDSS requirements (e.g. security clearances, briefings, equipment) and, where necessary, have the required security equipment (borrowed from another UN organization, if necessary).

III. RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

Observation	Recommendation	Process	Responsible Unit	Priority	Action Plan	Implementation date
1. Opportunities for improved gender advocacy, communication and coordination in the country	1. The Country Representative to take into account the various feedback provided by stakeholders during the 2021 CPE, audit, and personnel retreats, for consideration and action in the Country Office's advocacy, communication and coordination work, strategic planning, programme implementation and office governance. In particular, the Country Representative to: (a) Take stock of key stakeholders' expectations and periodically align them with the Country Office's own vision. (b) Establish and implement a communication strategy, accompanied by key success or performance indicators, roles and accountability for its implementation, and regular assessment on whether it is cost-effective or needs adjustment. (c) Establish, regularly update and share with personnel a complete focal point list of all Country Office stakeholders and partners.	Advocacy and communications	Representative	Medium	Communication strategy aligned with the global communication plan is now available and has been validated by the team during the last retreat. The communication officer has been assigned with the responsibilities for partnership and resource mobilisation, and will be virtually inducted by SPD colleagues, As part of the critical actions, the focal person will establish a complete list of stakeholders and partners.	Immediately (March 2022)
2. Lessons learned from previous strategic planning to be used for streamlining the future development or revision of Strategic Notes, Biennial Work Plans and their results frameworks	2. The Chief, SPU, to include in corporate Strategic Note Guidance the circumstances (e.g. mid-term review of the Strategic Note, UNSDCF extension) and reasonable requirements for revisions and extensions of Strategic Notes.	Strategy and resource mobilization	Chief, SPU	Medium	SPU: 1. Issue the updated Strategic Notes interim guidance for Country Offices that are developing new Strategic Notes in 2022, ensuring the guidance and requirements on Strategic Note revision and extension are provided. 2. Develop the full procedure document on Strategic Notes at Country Office level (as a part of the Procedure development for Country Office level) with the full elaboration of the guidance and requirements on Strategic Note revision and extension. DRC CO: Strategic Note 2020 – 2024 mid-term review will be conducted.	By the end of Q2 2022 By the end of Q4 2022 2023
3. Need for clearer resource mobilization targets and records	3. The Country Representative to finalize the Country Office's resource mobilization plan, and consolidate its practices and records (i.e. programme and project budget preparation, and negotiation with donors). In particular, the Country Representative to: (a) Include consistent and up-to-date resource mobilization estimates for the Strategic Note in corporate systems and any documents submitted for corporate review. (b) Regularly update the LEADS system for effective project pipeline monitoring. LEADS could serve as a pipeline monitoring tool for regular Country Office project oversight meetings. (c) Regularly monitor the resource mobilization plan for its effectiveness and revise, if necessary, addressing any related implications.	Strategy and resource mobilization	Representative	Medium	Resource mobilization plan will be developed: (a) Completed; (b) Action will be taken; (c) Action will be taken.	Mid 2022
4. Need for a dedicated M&E function and an adequate M&E framework to enable the Country Office to monitor results, and collect and validate data for its reports	4. The Country Representative to: (a) Ensure that the Country Office's M&E framework and function are strengthened through pooled budgeting for programme and project M&E (or identifying other funding), recruitment of M&E personnel and establishment of standardized Strategic Note and project-level monitoring methodology, plans and M&E tools, to facilitate data collection and monitoring. (b) Institutionalize a process for periodic oversight of planned M&E activities, reporting on findings and follow-up to ensure accountability for results. Project monitoring missions to be held as often as required, depending on project activity risks and materiality.	Strategic Note and Biennial Work Plan implementation	Representative	High	(a) The M&E person will be on board; (b) Reclassification of the current NOC position to NOD for programme coordination and oversight through weekly coordination meetings.	Mid 2022 Mid 2022
5. Project management needs to be enhanced (project governance, risk management and oversight)	5. The Country Representative to ensure that: (a) Non-standard donor agreement approval procedures are well-understood and implemented by the Country Office. (b) Regular project oversight meetings are held to discuss Country Office project performance, budgets, risks and issues, and to ensure smooth coordination between Programme and Operations.	Programme management	Representative	Medium	(a) The programme and operations teams will follow series of trainings by PPID; (b) See above. Project ID#115109 has been financially closed.	April 2022
6. Programme partner management needs to be strengthened (capacity assessment, building and monitoring)	6. The Country Representative to ensure a holistic approach to programme partner management, particularly strengthening the capacity, sustainability and monitoring of partners, and examining opportunities for their longer-term sustainability, making sure that: (a) Capacity building plans and associated risk-based monitoring plans are clearly articulated and followed; and are based on capacity assessment results and quarterly FACE form and narrative report reviews. Partner capacity gaps and risk profiles should be incorporated in monitoring plans and subsequently addressed and monitored during project implementation. (b) PGAMS is systematically used for the development and recording of partner agreements and small grants agreements, and that all key documents in the programme partner management cycle are uploaded. (c) Partner expenses without vendor invoices are limited within pre-agreed ceilings and such expenses are confirmed by the Country Office with vendors, on a sample basis. (d) Communications with partners are regular, responsive and explanatory, to assure the partners that their queries will be dealt	Programme partner management	Representative	Medium	(a) & (b) – See above; (c) The Country Office does no longer use offline contracts. All agreements with programme partners are raised through PGAMS. The office will monitor the use of PGAMS, and no agreement can be signed offline; (d) Action will be taken.	Immediately (March 2022)

Observation	Recommendation	Process	Responsible Unit	Priority	Action Plan	Implementation date
	with.					
7. Weak internal governance in the Country Office was one of the main root causes of issues with implementation of its priorities, and needed strengthening	7. The Country Representative to: (a) Implement the recommended structure and any other recommendations from the WCARO functional review. Where required, carry out a staffing and capacity gap analysis of the office's current or recommended structure by mapping existing and required capacities and skill sets required to implement the Country Office's Strategic Note. (b) Establish and communicate clear roles and responsibilities, and reporting lines for all personnel, in line with the Country Office's strategic priorities and job descriptions; and reinforce a single point of accountability for each reporting line. (c) Ensure continuous position planning for all personnel categories, so that appropriate personnel contracts and grades are planned or updated. This should include post reclassifications/upgrades where necessary, which are duly justified and approved in line with the policy, and for which additional funds are identified in the Country Office's portfolio for such upgrades. (d) Ensure that position planning is supported with budget management, which is as flexible as necessary, pooling multiple project funds, where necessary, and justified for establishing or upgrading positions, and obtaining position approvals as required for each budget source by the Delegation of Authority Framework Policy. (e) Ensure that position planning and related budget management are well integrated with the Country Office's resource mobilization and donor negotiation practices at an early stage in the process, including sufficient **direct project cost recovery** and **direct project management cost recovery** in early budget negotiation or, where necessary, re-negotiation with donors, in line with the latest Change Management, Budget Section and Cost Recovery Working Group's guidance. The Country Office should consult headquarters services in this regard, if required.	Organizational structure, authority, capacity and reporting lines	Representative	High	The Country Office will have, in short time, two additional personnel members (Finance Associate and Procurement and Travel Assistant). The two will be on board by the end of April 2022. Also, the office plans to create an operations pool of all project assistants around the provinces to work together around the Operations Manager. Also, the Country Office requests support from PSMU to support on UN Women procedures and new policies.	April 2022
	8. The Country Representative to identify resources and implement a medium-term measure to strengthen the Country Office's Operations Team and establish or strengthen various operational processes recommended in this audit, particularly the highlighted 'operational priority areas'.	Organizational structure, authority, capacity and reporting lines	Representative	High	The Country Office will have, in short time, two additional personnel members (Finance Associate and Procurement and Travel Assistant). The two will be on board by the end of April 2022. Also, the office plans to create an operations pool of all project assistants around the provinces to work together around the Operations Manager.	April 2022
	9. The Country Representative to: (a) Establish a renewed service-level agreement with UNDP, based on the latest DMA guidance, to promote the smooth running of operational support services, especially in problem areas identified in this audit. (b) Provide justification for its continued presence or a closure plan, for the sub-offices, in accordance with 'Procedure for Annual Review of Sub-Offices' in 'UN Women Presence Governance Procedure', and explore opportunities to cease the sub-office lease or transfer the space to another UN organization. (c) Explore opportunities for better use of other UN organizations' facilities in remote locations, for better servicing of the Country Office's new personnel stationed at these locations.	Organizational structure, authority, capacity and reporting lines	Representative	Medium	The office has signed an old SLA with UNDP, but the draft of the new version will be signed early. Regarding the UN women presence, the office has made some steps for sub-office closure feasibility (plan). This point has been raised during the office retreat held in February 2022 and will be implemented as per the exit plan.	April 2022
8. Embedding risk management in the Country Office's decision-making and programme and project management	10. The Country Representative to embed comprehensive risk management in the Country Office's decision-making process and programme and project life cycle, and track the risk mitigating actions (for example, by using an M&E tool).	Risk management	Representative	Medium	The office has always conducted risk analysis and management, and most of burning issues have been taken into account in the decision making. Indeed, the Country Office decides to standardize this process in providing supporting documents to facilitate the eventual control.	April 2022
9. Strengthening the ethical and control environment, and fraud prevention	11. The Country Representative to reinforce fraud and corruption awareness, particularly ensuring that the mandatory ethics and fraud prevention online training is completed by all personnel; refresher fraud prevention training is conducted periodically; and ethical issues and policies are discussed in staff meetings and the annual leadership dialogue workshop. The Country Office should request WCARO or headquarters support in these areas, where necessary.	Control environment, workplace ethics and integrity	Representative	High	Just to flag that the Country Office used to conduct some training sessions on UN women procedures to all personnel each Friday afternoon. This has been stopped due to Covid-19, but the office decides to resume with this programme.	March 2022
10. Data, knowledge and records management was unsatisfactory and needed urgent attention	12. The Country Representative to ensure that supporting infrastructure and processes are in place for smooth office workflow, adequately supported by documentation. In particular: (a) In line with corporate guidelines, with assistance from WCARO or IST, and based on practices of other field offices, establish a centralized electronic filing system for programme, project, operations and other office documents, and enforce its use through regular spot-checks, ensuring restricted access to and confidentiality of files that require it (e.g. procurement or recruitment files). (b) In line with corporate guidelines, with assistance from WCARO or IST, and based on practices of some headquarters services and various Regional and Country Offices, implement a tracking system (e.g. online service request) to log and track requests for operational services. (c) Ensure electronic reviews, approvals and filing of transactions (using a checklist of key supporting evidence to ensure completeness of audit trail), only accepting paper supporting documents produced by external parties that can be kept in originals	Data quality	Representative	High	Regarding data recording and management matter, the Country Office plans to request WCARO and headquarters support on it, by providing ICT staff mission in DRC to actively help the office to reactivate data and records management.	April 2022

Observation	Recommendation	Process	Responsible Unit	Priority	Action Plan	Implementa-tion date
	and, where required, scanned and recorded in the Country Office's centralized electronic filing system or relevant corporate systems. (d) Assign dedicated focal points for data entry into corporate systems and verify compliance through periodic spot checks. (e) Establish a process for the proper handover of documents and information during personnel departures, including supervision of each handover to ensure its completeness. Proper handover should be a prerequisite for personnel separation clearance.					
11. Streamlining the Country Office's Delegation of Authority Framework	13. The Country Representative to: (a) Prioritize the relevant recruitments for authorities in the Country Office's ICF and clarify interim measures and authorities (if necessary, with backup from WCARO) to ensure adequate segregation of duties and personnel to process, verify and approve transactions, and enable oversight by the Operations Manager. (b) Consider alternate committing authorities in the Country Office (and, if needed, in any sub-offices), in the case of increased workload of the Country Representative or the Operations Manager.	Internal control framework	Representative	Medium	The Country Office has setup an ICF matrix with segregation of duties between personnel members as per the delegation of authority assigned by the Country Representative. With the new recruited personnel, this should be widened and adjusted accordingly to ensure office fluidity in workflow.	April 2022
12. Need for follow-up and sustained implementation of relevant previous oversight recommendations	14. The Country Representative to establish a process for the consistent follow-up and sustainable implementation of previous oversight recommendations in the Country Office's purview (CPEs, internal, external and programme partner audits), ensuring that action plans are updated in corporate systems in a timely manner. Accountability for these recommendations should be clearly assigned to managers who should periodically report on their progress. The Country Representative should actively seek headquarters and WCARO advice and support in areas where the Country Office has less capacity to implement recommendations.	Prior audit findings	Representative	High	Since the Cards system has been inactivated, the office used to conduct OAI audit recommendations follow-up offline. The Country Office will assign responsible focal points for each recommendation to ensure through a set-up team (operations and programme) that audit and CPE recommendations are quarterly implemented. IAS comment: Programme partner audit reports and follow-up on their recommendations are not maintained in Cards but on a SharePoint site maintained by PSMU (and previously by Audit Coordi-nation Unit).	April 2022
13. Procurement process often did not comply with procurement policy and needed improvement	15. The Country Representative to improve the procurement process to ensure it is competitive and transparent, in particular to ensure: (a) Adequate accountability and coordination between Operations and Programme teams for effective procurement planning and contingencies, including regular meetings to monitor progress and update procurement plans. (b) Country Office personnel receiving regular refresher training on procurement policies and fraud prevention, e.g. from WCARO. (c) E-Procurement system is used as mandated; training is broadly advertised and provided to interested vendors; and they register in e-Procurement. (d) Exclusive use of a generic email address for all Country Office procurement where not conducted through e-Procurement. (e) The Operations Manager is accountable for the completeness of procurement actions, supporting documentation and controls, including for LTA transactions; and WCARO is requested to implement periodic spot checks of Country Office procurement. (f) Periodic market surveys to broaden the Country Office's vendor base (or use of UNCT's market surveys and vendors) and consultation with UNCT, including UNDP, about use of their procurement services and systems, where the Country Office's capacity is limited.	Procurement management	Representative	Medium	The Country Office plans, with the support of Procurement team from WCARO, to reactivate the e-Procurement process started since last year. The Country Office is very involved in the UN procure-ment system and works to develop some additional LTAs through Business Operations Strategy mechanism to ensure a timely procurement process.	April 2022
14. HR management required major improvement	16. The Country Representative, in consultation with the Regional HR Business Partner, to: (a) Once the Operations Team is completely staffed, identify dedicated personnel responsible for HR functions. (b) Maintain a complete recruitment plan and tracker for all personnel categories, and complete all priority recruitments as soon as possible. (c) Ensure full and timely compliance with performance management requirements for all personnel categories, as well as personnel accountability and performance improvement plans for any poor performance. (d) Ensure that a learning and development plan for all personnel (inclusive of all mandatory training) is updated on an annual basis, new personnel inductions and other important training is regularly planned, and the plan is regularly monitored for completion. (e) Ensure comprehensive leave monitoring, verifying that all leave taken by all personnel categories is accurately entered in Atlas as soon as possible and at least on monthly basis, to ensure that no leave is forgotten after it has been taken, especially when frequent work-from-home arrangements are in place. (f) Ensure that the Special Service Agreement Policy for consultant management and the Country Office's delegation of authority are closely followed, and implement periodic spot checks to ensure compliance.	HR management	Representative	Medium	The office planned some recruitment processes to reinforce Operations team by creating a pool of operations where duties' distribution will cover HR function as well.	April 2022
15. Strengthening financial management	17. The Country Representative to: (a) Based on Atlas and other relevant data, establish a budget monitoring tool for regular programme and project budget monitoring, including for use in programme oversight meetings. (b) Ensure that payment checklists are systematically and effectively used for supporting document completeness; that personnel	Financial manage-ment	Representative	Medium	The Country Office plans to improve the use of checklists in the payment processes. Thanks to the new Finance Associate under recruitment, the finance function will be improved. The office decided to the use of transfers instead of cheque payments, by informing all the vendors on this decision.	March 2022

Observation	Recommendation	Process	Responsible Unit	Priority	Action Plan	Implementation date
	are aware of these requirements and compliance is enforced; and any unjustified payments are settled. (c) Minimize the use of cheque payments.					
16. Strengthening ICT management	18. The Country Representative to designate a local focal point for ICT services, identify adequate resources and seek local ICT support, in line with corporate ICT standards. For necessary support in this regard, to request WCARO or IST to provide the postponed (in-person or remote) ICT support, involving UNDP, as required, and provide relevant ICT training to Country Office personnel, particularly on ICT security and OneDrive use.	ICT	Representative	High	While planning to recruit an ICT local assistant, the Country Office requests WCARO ICT support to be reinforced.	March 2022
17. Strengthening travel and hospitality management	19. The Country Representative to: (a) Ensure compliance with the Duty Travel Policy. (b) Hold travellers and travel approvers accountable for any overpayments. (c) Ensure consistent use of travel authorizations and checklists, facilitating proper justification of travel expenditure.	Travel management	Representative	Medium	The office has already recruited a service contractor personnel to support operations team in travel and some logistical tasks, and some training sessions on UN Women procedures and policies are planned to all the personnel members.	March 2022
18. Strengthening asset management	20. The Country Representative to prioritize any necessary maintenance, insurance or replacement of official vehicles, where required, in line with existing procedures, identifying resources for this purpose.	Asset management	Representative	Medium	With the Finance Associate (as asset focal point) under recruitment, the office planned to reinforce the asset management.	March 2022
19. Strengthening safety and security management	21. The Country Representative to: (a) Enquire with the UN Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS), what safety and security measures should be followed for home-based personnel (or hosted by other UN organizations) in remote locations. (b) Ensure that all personnel complete the mandatory safety and security training and completion data is tracked by the Country Office. (c) Ensure that all remote missions comply with UNDSS requirements (e.g. security clearances, briefings, equipment) and, where necessary, have the required security equipment (borrowed from another UN organization, if necessary).	Safety and security management	Representative	High	The office has developed a tracking system of mandatory courses completion to ensure that all personnel is compliant with this requirement. Also, it is very strict that no mission can be undertaken without security clearance as well the UNDSS security measures.	March 2022

Annex 1: DEFINITIONS OF AUDIT TERMS, RATINGS AND PRIORITIES

A. AUDIT RATINGS

Satisfactory	The assessed governance arrangements, risk management practices and controls were adequately established and functioning well. Issues identified by the audit, if any, are unlikely to affect the achievement of the objectives of the audited entity/area.
Some Improvement Needed	The assessed governance arrangements, risk management practices and controls were generally established and functioning, but need some improvement. Issues identified by the audit do not significantly affect the achievement of the objectives of the audited entity/area.
Major Improvement Needed	The assessed governance arrangements, risk management practices and controls were established and functioning, but need major improvement. Issues identified by the audit could significantly affect the achievement of the objectives of the audited entity/area.
Unsatisfactory	The assessed governance arrangements, risk management practices and controls were either not adequately established or not functioning well. Issues identified by the audit could seriously compromise the achievement of the objectives of the audited entity/area.

B. PRIORITIES OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

High (Critical)	Prompt action is required to ensure that UN Women is not exposed to high risks. Failure to take action could result in major negative consequences for UN Women.
Medium (Important)	Action is required to ensure that UN Women is not exposed to risks. Failure to take action could result in negative consequences for UN Women.
Low	Action is desirable and should result in enhanced control or better value for money. Low-priority recommendations, if any, are dealt with by the audit team directly with management, either during the exit meeting or through a separate memorandum subsequent to the fieldwork. Therefore, low-priority recommendations are not included in this report.

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

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals is a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities: Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems; Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy; All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence; Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.

UN WOMEN

GENERATION EQUALITY

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