

IN BRIEF

CORPORATE EVALUATION OF UN WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT BY ADVANCING GENDER-RESPONSIVE LAWS, FRAMEWORKS, POLICIES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

This brief summarizes the independent corporate thematic evaluation of UN Women's contribution to the economic empowerment of women by advancing gender-responsive laws, frameworks, policies and partnerships. The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the relevance, effectiveness, coherence, efficiency and sustainability of UN Women's contribution to women's economic empowerment (WEE) by advancing gender-responsive laws, frameworks, policies and partnerships, and to develop recommendations and insights to strengthen this area of work. The thematic scope covers the UN Women's entire WEE portfolio, with particular focus on sub-thematic areas where there is a stronger emphasis on laws, frameworks and policy strengthening. The geographical scope includes UN Women's work globally and across all regions. The evaluation includes both a retrospective view of results achieved and forward-looking insights to support implementation of the Strategic Plan 2022–2025.

EVALUATION SCOPE AND PURPOSE

The independent corporate thematic evaluation was conducted by UN Women's Independent Evaluation Service of the Independent Evaluation and Audit Services. The evaluation was initiated in February 2022 and completed in January 2023. This evaluation covered the period from January 2018 to June 2022, which includes the entirety of the previous Strategic Plan 2018–2021 and the first two quarters of the current Strategic Plan 2022–2025.

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the relevance, effectiveness, coherence, efficiency and sustainability of UN Women's contribution to women's economic empowerment (WEE) by advancing gender-responsive laws, frameworks, policies and partnerships and to and to develop recommendations and insights to strengthen this area of work.

KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS



To what extent is UN Women's work on gender-responsive laws, frameworks and policies for WEE **aligned with global normative frameworks, priority policy areas, and the needs of beneficiaries?**



To what extent is UN Women's work in WEE **coherent with the work of partners and other key thematic areas?** How effectively does UN Women leverage its integrated mandate?



To what extent have UN Women's efforts in this area led to **demonstrable impact/outcomes?** What metrics exist to measure progress?



What efforts have been made to ensure **efficiency of programming and sustainability of benefits and efforts** in this area?



To what degree are **human rights, leave no one behind** – including **disability inclusion** and **gender equality** — principles integrated in this area of work?

The findings from this evaluation are expected to contribute to strategic decision making, learning and accountability at UN Women, and implementation of the UN Women Strategic Plan 2022-2025. The primary intended users of the evaluation are the UN Women Executive Board, senior management and programme personnel. The evaluation is also intended to be useful for other actors directly working on, or with an interest in, WEE including governments, civil society organizations (CSOs), UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and development partners.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation adopted a theory-based approach, drawing on various methodologies for measuring policy influence to develop a conceptual framework on the contribution of gender-responsive laws, frameworks and policies to the economic empowerment of women. The evaluation methodology included contribution analysis and employed a gender-responsive and human rights-based approach.

Both primary and secondary data sources were consulted to gather evidence to address the key evaluation questions. A comprehensive stakeholder mapping exercise was conducted to identify a relevant range of internal and external stakeholders.

In total, 211 internal and external stakeholders were engaged through key informant interviews, focus group discussions and surveys. While most of the interviews were conducted virtually, the evaluation team undertook an in-person data collection mission in Kenya, where interviews and focus group discussions with 25 stakeholders were held. Additionally, the evaluation team designed and fielded an online survey for internal and external partners which received responses from 128 stakeholders (90 UN Women personnel, 38 partners). The evaluation team also developed ten case studies, including two global cases and eight country case studies to explore promising practices and lessons learned from each region.

SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY FOR DATA COLLECTION



83 STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured & mostly virtual

Internal* (38 female, 11 male)
External** (23 female, 11 male)



300+ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Desk review, synthesis & portfolio analysis of work plans, evaluations, project documents, reports, etc.



MIXED-METHODS DATA

Qualitative & quantitative data collected & triangulated

Sourced from ATLAS, DAMs, RMS, OneApp



10 CASE STUDIES

8 country case studies (with regional representation) and 2 global case studies



2 ONLINE SURVEYS

UN Women personnel
(n = 90/309; 29% response rate)

UN Women's partners
(n = 38/128; 29% response rate)



2 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Focus group discussions with ministry representatives & CSOs while on mission in Kenya

* Internal stakeholders from UN Women Headquarters (n=19), Regional Offices (n=5) and Country Offices (n=24)

** External stakeholders from Academia/Think tanks (n=2), Beneficiary Representatives (n=3), CSOs/NGOs (n=7), Donors (n=2), IFIs (n=1), National/Sub-national Government (n=9), Private Sector (n=1), UN system (n=6)

KEY CONCLUSIONS

- 1 UN Women has clear and well acknowledged comparative advantages in normative work and facilitating policy dialogues**, including through key intergovernmental processes, related to WEE. National (and regional priorities) inform WEE programming and are responsive to changing contexts, for example the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. There is scope to proactively plan for the need to adapt to current and emerging priority policy areas, such as climate change, the cost-of-living crisis, macroeconomic stagnation and the impact of ongoing conflicts.
- 2 UN Women works effectively to build consensus and facilitate a coherent voice within global policy dialogues on WEE.** While UN Women's approach to partnerships on WEE is generally sound and tailored to the operating context, engagement with international financial institutions on WEE-related policies could be further strengthened.
- 3 The lack of a WEE strategy and managerial vacancies have impacted the direction of UN Women's work on WEE**, the efficiency of internal architecture and personnel. While there has been substantial progress in various WEE sub-thematic areas, the absence of a specific overarching organizing framework for WEE has hindered coherence. The recent appointment of a Chief of EE and current development of a strategy provides an opportunity to strengthen the strategic focus and organization of UN Women's work on WEE, including more proactive and systematic cross-thematic linkages.
- 4 UN Women's reporting shows that the Entity has exceeded, or is close to achieving its targets on strengthening gender-responsive WEE policies**, including on decent work, social protection, care systems, gender-responsive procurement and land tenure systems. While there are some inconsistencies in interpretation and results reporting by countries, evidence collected from case studies shows significant contribution through constructive and agile engagement within the policy change process. There is limited monitoring of the impact of policy change on the lives of women and girls, which warrants further attention, for accountability purposes and learning and also to strengthen communication of UN Women's results.
- 5 The proposed Signature Initiatives provide opportunities to work programmatically and scale up activities on global priorities for WEE**, by embedding changes in laws, frameworks and policies within wider systemic change. While UN Women is in a position to lead and support on the care economy, decent work, and entrepreneurship at the global level, the Entity needs to strengthen its capacity on climate change if it is to play a supportive role in this area (including in gender-responsive approaches to the transition to green and blue economies and climate-resilient agriculture).
- 6 Financial and human resources are identified as the most significant challenges for UN Women** in advancing gender-responsive WEE laws, frameworks and policies. Personnel at all levels are over-extended and take on multiple functional roles. There is a need to improve support across headquarters, Regional Offices and Country Offices, for example, to support programme management, knowledge management and resource mobilization. While WEE was the least funded thematic area from 2018-2021, the increased planned budget for Strategic Plan 2022-2025 is more commensurate with WEE's broad mandate.
- 7 Supporting gender-responsive WEE policy is a suitable strategy for nationally owned, sustainable change and potential impact at scale.** Systematic attention needs to be placed on advocating for policies that are resourced, and have implementation plans and appropriate accountability frameworks. The inter-relationship between changes in laws, frameworks, policies and social norms is also important for sustainability and should be consistently articulated and integrated within UN Women programming.
- 8 UN Women's overall approach to WEE considers leave no one behind principles and is perceived to be relevant to the needs of marginalized groups.** The approach could be strengthened by translating global principles and approaches into practical and context specific tools; improving the availability of disaggregated data; and by strengthening considerations of the connected systems and structures of power.

RECOMMENDATIONS



RECOMMENDATION 1

UN Women should continue its support to the global discourse and normative frameworks on WEE, while advocating for gender-responsive approaches in emerging priority areas.



RECOMMENDATION 2

UN Women's WEE strategy should include a clear articulation of key definitions and a framework for WEE; an assessment of current financial and human resources allocated to WEE policy support; and clarity on the approach to harnessing cross-thematic linkages.



RECOMMENDATION 3

UN Women should refine and systematize its approach to partnerships for WEE and look to further strengthen its engagement with international financial institutions (and other global actors), where strategically advantageous.



RECOMMENDATION 4

UN Women should review and formalize the roles and responsibilities of headquarters, Regional Offices and Country Offices in the area of WEE, particularly in terms of knowledge sharing and management, research and data, and monitoring and reporting.



RECOMMENDATION 5

UN Women should develop sustainable approaches to addressing structural barriers that impede WEE and to supporting social norms change. Efforts should be focused on supporting governments and other actors to monitor the effects of WEE policy changes on women's lives and livelihoods.



RECOMMENDATION 6

UN Women should refine and contextualize its approach and strategy to leave no one behind and the inclusion of marginalized groups, as they relate to WEE.