

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

META-SYNTHESIS OF UN WOMEN EVALUATIONS ON ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATIONS

Photo: UN Women/Antoine Tardy – Regional civil society forum

The aim of the meta-synthesis is to contribute to UN Women’s knowledge base and learning on the Entity’s advocacy and communications work by synthesizing evidence from corporate and decentralized evaluations. The meta-synthesis focuses on awareness-raising, campaigns and social mobilization in the context of implementing UN Women’s Strategic Plans 2018–2021 and 2022–2025.

Advocacy and communications are integral to UN Women to proactively advance the Entity’s strategic positioning and its unique tripartite mandate, encompassing normative support, UN system coordination and operational activities, to mobilize urgent and sustained action to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Since the inception of UN Women, advocacy and communications work have grown exponentially, including the need to produce relevant content, enhance media outreach and collaboration, and develop new media and communications partnerships.

In the previous UN Women’ Strategic Plan 2018–2021, advocacy and communications were defined as one of six types of support (advocacy and social mobilization). In the new Strategic Plan 2022–2025, advocacy and communications are one of the cross-cutting levers and functional approaches to achieve UN Women’s mandate. Advocacy and communications encompass various initiatives and strategies at global, regional and country levels. These initiatives include using advocacy and communications tools; digital and social media campaigns; production and dissemination of knowledge in various forms; engaging stakeholders through facilitating dialogue, organizing events and generating media coverage; and activities related to resource mobilization.

This meta-synthesis collates evaluation insights and evidence on the advocacy and communications efforts related to the key results areas of UN Women’s Strategic Plan: Governance and Participation in Public Life; Women’s Economic Empowerment; Ending Violence Against Women; and Women, Peace and Security, Humanitarian Action and Disaster Risk Reduction. Based on available evaluation evidence, the report outlines key results, trends, enabling factors, impediments and lessons learned with a geographic and thematic focus.

METHODOLOGY

The meta-synthesis covers corporate, regional and country portfolio evaluations conducted by UN Women between 2018 and 2022. Evaluations with a Global Evaluation Report Assessment and Analysis System (GERAAS) rating of good and above are included, bringing the total sample to 162 evaluations. The meta-synthesis employed a theory-based approach by developing a framework analysis to link advocacy and communications activities to UN Women’s broader theory of change. As UN Women did not have corporate definitions of awareness-raising, campaigns and social mobilization, the meta-synthesis team developed definitions for each of the categories to create a comprehensive coding structure. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was used to assess the evidence and extract emerging trends and lessons learned and develop opportunities for the way forward.

LIMITATIONS

As with any meta-synthesis, the analysis and findings in this report are limited to the level and depth of insights provided in the evaluation sample. Certain types of advocacy and communications are covered more comprehensively in some evaluations than others, and the insights in these areas are richer and more nuanced. To the extent possible, the analysis takes this caveat into account when mapping the evidence.

The key objectives of the meta-synthesis were to:



1. Synthesize evidence from evaluations on the implementation and results of key types of UN Women's advocacy and communications work during 2018–2022.



2. Summarize trends, emerging themes and common lessons.



3. Identify enabling factors (internal and external) and good practices.

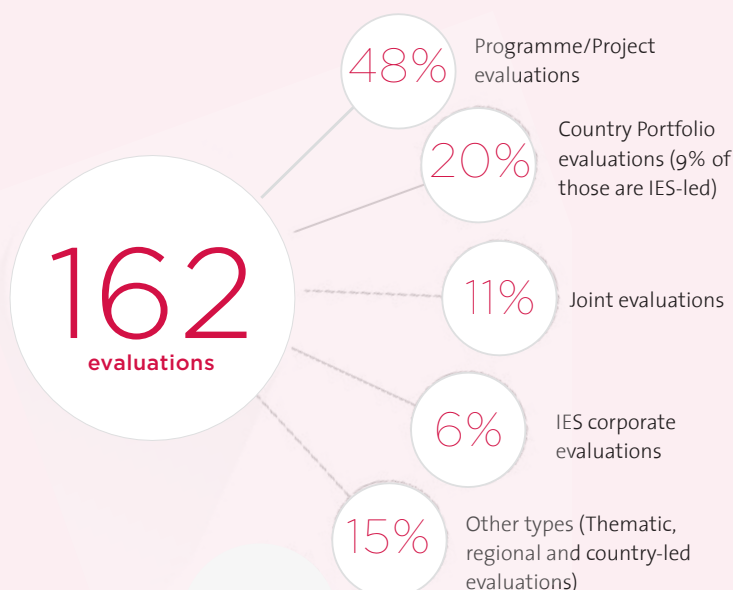


4. Identify risks and challenges



5. Highlight innovative approaches in advocacy and communications.

Scope and methodology of the meta-synthesis



Theory-based approach



Development of a framework of advocacy and communications analysis



Creation of a comprehensive coding structure

KEY INSIGHTS

AWARENESS-RAISING

UN Women employs a diverse range of awareness-raising initiatives to amplify its key messages on gender equality and to reach a wider audience of stakeholders. These initiatives aim to change existing attitudes and norms that hinder women's empowerment. Some of these activities include facilitating awareness-raising dialogues; disseminating communications products in various formats such as videos or photography; actively engaging with gender equality advocates and champions; and utilizing multiple media channels and online platforms to disseminate key messages effectively.

Evaluations revealed that awareness-raising initiatives were frequently organized in combination with other types of support, such as capacity-building initiatives, provision of technical support and knowledge product development as part of broader thematic and programme approaches.

UN Women effectively used a combination of different channels to support interventions or a mix of online and in-person events to amplify messages and reach a wider audience. In some instances, UN Women offices organized in-person events at regional and national levels, aligned with the launch of key initiatives or products at the corporate level.

Although there is limited evidence to directly attribute changes in the lives of women and girls to awareness-raising initiatives alone (and this may also be linked in part to the constraints of a meta-synthesis where communication and advocacy were not the key areas of enquiry of most evaluations), many evaluations revealed that such initiatives have contributed to increasing the awareness of women and girls about their rights and gender equality, as well as strengthening the capacity of key stakeholders and driving behaviour changes at the individual level.

These initiatives also enhanced the visibility of UN Women's work and raised awareness of gender issues on a broader scale.

Several evaluations found that UN Women's awareness-raising initiatives enhanced the awareness and capacity of women and girls, along with other national and local stakeholders such as government officials, the justice sector and community leaders. This was often achieved through disseminating knowledge and information on the rights of women and girls, accessible services and by providing tools and resources shared during awareness-raising initiatives. Evaluations highlighted innovative approaches and trends in UN Women's awareness-raising initiatives. In the sample, evaluation reports highlighted the development of digital initiatives, video games and virtual platforms that enabled UN-Women to reach a more significant number of people, scale up activities and have more impact, often with fewer resources.

Some evaluations found that awareness-raising initiatives such as community and intergenerational dialogues and sensitization sessions that focused on harmful practices, specifically aimed at men and boys, played a part in changing attitudes and behaviour. Awareness-raising initiatives also increased the visibility of UN Women's work and public awareness of gender-related issues through video production, social media and press releases.

CAMPAIGNS

UN Women used a variety of initiatives at global, regional and country levels, designing campaigns to reach a large audience. UN Women's campaigns intended to change existing attitudes and norms that hinder women's empowerment and raise awareness of women's rights and the intersecting forms of gender discrimination. UN Women's campaigns were organized as part of communications strategies for long-term behavioural change and awareness-raising.

UN Women was active in creating partnerships with civil society and the private sector to conduct campaigns and used a variety of communication methods, including social media, online platforms, newsletters, key influencers and pro-bono partnerships. Many evaluations mention the global UN Women HeForShe campaign as an innovative campaign that was well-received by a wide range of partners. Several evaluations found that UN Women's awareness-raising campaigns worked to shift the social narrative towards the empowerment of women and to provide an entry point for discussion of controversial topics such as gender-based violence, property rights, mental health, disabilities, and motherhood.

Campaigns run by UN Women have contributed to important results, although a limited number of evaluations have covered them in sufficient detail to confirm the evidence. Several evaluations found that UN Women's campaigns have contributed to changes in attitudes and behaviours, engaging men and boys to raise awareness of gender equality and social norms change. UN Women also used its comparative advantage in UN system coordination for gender equality, participating successfully in joint programme campaigns to raise public awareness and further contributed to policy development, mainly through media engagements, press briefings, and policymaker and community engagements.

Many evaluations confirmed that the campaigns which used social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram) were particularly effective in raising public awareness, especially when conducted in the local language and with support from local influencers. Evaluations also noted the effective use of various arts and sports events in a number of public awareness campaigns to deliver complex messages on controversial topics.

SOCIAL MOBILIZATION

UN Women supported social mobilization initiatives in various forms through coalitions, the establishment of forums or dialogues, building alliances, mobilizing supportive constituencies and engaging with less committed actors. Many evaluation reports recounted the organization of forums and dialogues with key stakeholders at global, national and community levels as the leading form of social mobilization. Evaluation reports underscored UN Women's convening role, and its capacity to mobilize both high-level stakeholders and the voice of women through strong partnerships with women-led and civil society organizations. Whether supporting women's participation in global policy forums or creating opportunities for dialogue with local leaders at the community level, these spaces provided a platform for women to advance gender equality.

Evaluation reports highlighted the role of UN Women in the creation of action coalitions and alliances to drive social mobilization. The evidence showed that action coalitions and alliances responded to different contexts and circumstances but have advancement of gender equality at their core. Actors involved ranged from national and local governments to civil society organizations, the private sector, the UN system, academia, faith-based and community-based organizations, and marginalized groups, such as women workers, migrants and refugees, among others.

UN Women supported mobilization of communities around ending violence against women and entrenched social norms that discriminate against women more broadly. There are references to increased confidence, empowerment and development of critical thinking among those mobilized, as well as increased cohesion and trust derived from creating shared spaces. Several evaluation reports pointed to the mobilization and coordination of UN partners, particularly around key dates, such as the 16 Days of Activism against violence against women; and for key processes, such as reporting to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and participation in the Commission on the Status of Women.

Support for participation in the Commission on the Status of Women expresses UN-Women's social mobilization work through fostering engagement in policy dialogues among member states, civil society organizations and experts. UN Women also enhanced capacities for evidence-based advocacy among women's organizations; facilitated participation in the conference (and other inter-governmental processes); and organized relevant side-events to discuss issues critical to the gender equality agenda.

ENABLING FACTORS

- Strategic partnerships and alliances
- Adaptive and comprehensive approach during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Engaging influential leaders
- Creation of multi-stakeholder platforms for dialogue
- Social will

IMPEDIMENTS

- Lack of strategy/coherence with wider theories of change, or the absence of a well-planned programme approach
- Limited consideration of local context
- Weak monitoring practices

WAY FORWARD



Place continuous focus on ensuring a coherent corporate approach and investment in advocacy and communications



Promote the development of monitoring and evaluation frameworks, follow-up mechanisms and sustainability/exit strategies for advocacy and communication initiatives



Adapt advocacy and communication initiatives to the local context, including using local language and appropriate communication channels



Prioritize using social media and mobile content to deliver effective advocacy and communication initiatives and ensure that the most vulnerable women can access them



Establish further strategic partnerships with government partners, UN agencies, CSOs, private institutions, academia, gender equality advocates, religious groups and indigenous communities to pool resources and create a multiplier effect



Scale up the development of digital initiatives to support advocacy and communication efforts



Prioritize non-traditional advocacy and communication approaches, including sports, plays, music and theatre activities appealing to younger people and rural audiences



Place long-term and sustained focus on advocacy and communications.