

IN BRIEF

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CORPORATE THEMATIC EVALUATION OF UN WOMEN'S SUPPORT TO WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: **INSIGHTS FROM THE FIELD**



This brief summarizes the corporate thematic evaluation of UN Women's support to women's political participation, with a focus on insights from the country level. The purpose of this evaluation was to contribute to strategic decision-making, learning and accountability. The evaluation time frame spanned from January 2018 to June 2023, combining a summative assessment of results achieved during the previous UN Women Strategic Plan 2018–2021, with an exploration of insights to support implementation of the current UN Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025. It also included an equity-focused lens on gender equality and leave no one behind. The geographic scope covered UN Women's programming across all six regions through a representative sample of Country Offices.

Evaluation scope and purpose

This corporate thematic evaluation was conducted by UN Women's Independent Evaluation Service of the Independent Evaluation and Audit Services. The evaluation was initiated in March 2023 and completed in January 2024.

The primary focus of the evaluation was on assessing the impact, effectiveness, relevance, coherence and sustainability of UN Women's efforts to support women's political participation at the national (and subnational) level. Additionally, the evaluation identified lessons learned; examined the contribution of regional and global level support/guidance; and tracked both positive and negative unintended consequences, including cases of backlash against women's political participation.

The key evaluation questions were as follows:



In what ways has UN Women's support been tailored to the local political context?



What is the impact of UN Women's support to women's political participation at country level?



How well does UN Women work with its partners (UN and others) on the ground?



How effectively is UN Women's triple mandate (normative, UN system coordination, operational) leveraged in support of achieving results at country level?



What aspects of equity are targeted by UN Women's interventions (leave no one behind and gender equality)?



What is UN Women's approach to safeguarding the sustainability of its impact and efforts in this area?

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 evaluation is intended for use primarily by the UN Women Executive Board, senior management, UN Women’s Governance and Participation section, and the UN Women Regional and Country Offices designing and implementing women’s political participation programming, in addition to other personnel and partners directly working on or with an interest in women’s political participation.

Evaluation methodology

The evaluation was conducted using a theory-based approach, which included the development of an evaluation framework¹ to map changes in key outcomes and impact across various stages of women’s entry into the political sphere. The framework also highlighted contextual factors that have enabled or hindered women’s political participation in different countries.

Given the focus on country-level impact, the evaluation team consulted with key stakeholders to select a representative sample of 12 country case studies (Brazil, Colombia, Central African Republic, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Liberia, Moldova, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe) across all six regions. The sample of countries selected was heterogenous in terms of country size; political and economic context; proportion of women in parliament; extent of UN Women’s programming; and types of implementing partners in the area of women’s political participation.

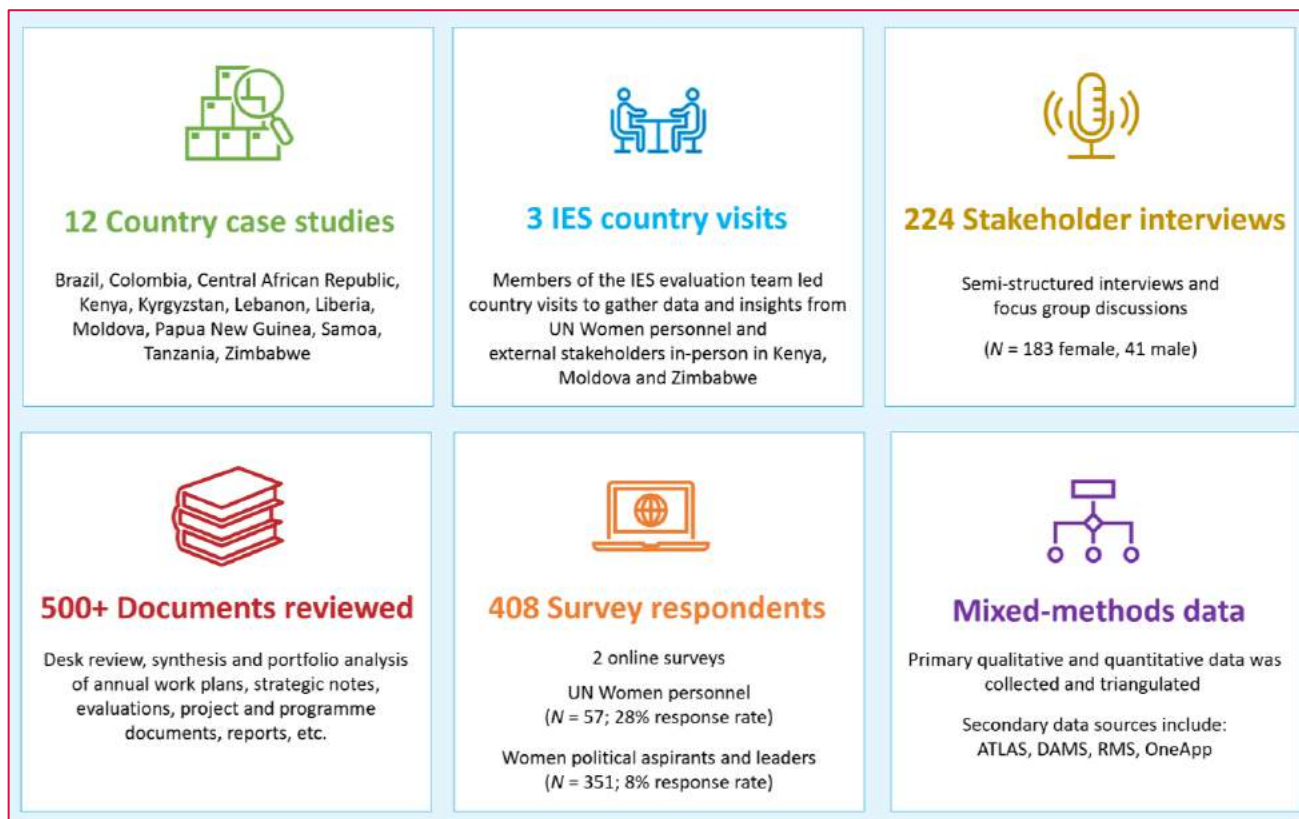
Both primary and secondary data was gathered for evidence to address the key evaluation questions. In developing the case studies, the evaluation team conducted semi-structured key informant interviews and focus group discussions with country-level internal and external stakeholders (including government agencies, electoral management bodies, UN agencies, civil society implementing partners, women’s organizations, donors, women political aspirants and leaders, elected officials, traditional leaders and the media) and fielded an online survey to a sample of women political aspirants and leaders who have been supported by UN Women.

The evaluation team undertook in-person data collection visits to Kenya, Moldova, and Zimbabwe, with the remainder of data collection being undertaken virtually. Contribution analysis and qualitative comparative analysis were employed to analyse UN Women’s key initiatives/approaches and related results for each of the country case studies.

Concurrent with the 12 country case studies, the evaluation team conducted interviews with key stakeholders supporting the delivery of UN Women’s portfolio on women’s political participation at global and regional levels; fielded an online survey to UN Women personnel engaged with women’s political participation at global, regional and country levels; and conducted desk reviews of strategic documents and monitoring and reporting data to examine linkages in programming and results across different levels of UN Women.

In total, 224 stakeholders were engaged through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions at the global, regional, and country level. The online surveys received a total of 408 responses (57 responses from UN Women personnel and 351 responses from women political aspirants and leaders).

Sources and methodology for data collection



Key conclusions

Key conclusions (drawn from evaluation evidence and findings) were organized into three inter-related workstreams. These workstreams – Design and Approach, Delivery and Performance – relate to the key evaluation questions but also take into account synergies between UN Women’s strategies and activities at the country, regional and global level.

DESIGN AND APPROACH WORKSTREAM

The "Design and Approach" workstream assessed the relevance of UN Women’s approach to women’s political participation; the extent to which strategies were tailored to local political contexts; and UN Women’s approach to sustainability in different contexts. This workstream explored how well UN Women’s programme design and approach aligned with the needs and nuances of the contexts in which programmes were implemented.

CONCLUSION 1

The design and approach of UN Women’s work allowed for adaptation to country contexts, while remaining strategically focused on accelerators of women’s political participation. UN Women has aligned well with contextual drivers and worked with political actors to build networks of influence. As programmes scale efforts to bring women into politics, particularly at the subnational level, issues arise of how to effectively respond to growing needs.

CONCLUSION 2

There was some evidence that knowledge and learning within UN Women’s programmes at country level worked well to enable consolidation and rapid implementation of successful practices and approaches. However, further strengthening of tools to measure progress will help to strengthen programme responsiveness and engage donors in critical areas of learning.

CONCLUSION 3

Resistance to women’s political participation remains a salient issue in many countries, requiring comprehensive and sustained efforts to preserve gains. UN Women’s approach at the country level would benefit from developing longer-term, strategic programming that goes beyond typical election cycle-based initiatives.

DELIVERY WORKSTREAM

The "Delivery" workstream focused on the coherence of UN Women's partnerships with UN and non-UN partners and included insights on leveraging UN Women's integrated mandate at the country level. This workstream also examined which aspects of equity (leaving no one behind) are targeted by UN Women's interventions.

CONCLUSION 4

Partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders across government, women's networks, civil society organizations and others have been critical to support various initiatives related to women's political participation. Partnerships between UN agencies at the country level have enabled mainstreaming of women's political participation into wider electoral efforts and partners recognize UN Women's value add, and flexible ways of working. While engagement with new partners in the context of social norms change and working at subnational levels will enable reach and access, any potential risks related to these partnerships should continue to be assessed.

CONCLUSION 5

At the global level, UN Women's triple mandate has been leveraged in support of advancing women's political participation. While the Entity's normative and operational mandates were leveraged concurrently across most countries, there is room to strengthen the coordination role at the country level, particularly in gender mainstreaming across UN programming on political participation.

CONCLUSION 6

UN Women has worked to ensure that the 'leave no one behind' principle and the needs of marginalized groups were included in its programming by improving access to resources such as training and building more equitable representation. While committed to the principle of equity, less well-funded programmes would benefit from further guidance on the trade-offs between working inclusively versus reaching more women at scale.

PERFORMANCE WORKSTREAM

The "Performance" workstream related to the impact of UN Women's support to women's political participation. The analysis under this workstream sought to measure and contextualize the real-world effects and contributions made by the Entity in driving positive changes within the countries under review.

CONCLUSION 7

UN Women's programmes have contributed to positive impacts on the legal and policy environment, and movement-building and capacity-building across various contexts. Legal reform, particularly legislated quotas, have been key drivers of higher numbers of women in political positions. Evidence from case studies showed that in some countries this was translating into gender-responsive policymaking. However, there was also evidence of gains stagnating or reversing in other countries, driven by a number of factors.

CONCLUSION 8

While progress has been made in areas of legal and policy reforms, support to women's participation from political parties remains a key challenge.

CONCLUSION 9

Support from headquarters was well-tailored to country-level needs and contributed to the effectiveness of programmes. Technical support was responsive, learning was accessible and work on data and in developing standard models (e.g. for training) were also widely applied. However, regional-level collaboration could be strengthened in some areas.

Recommendations



Recommendation 1: UN Women should continue to address key barriers to women's political participation, while including a focus on persistent constraints and forms of backlash, such as violence against women in politics.



Recommendation 2: UN Women should strengthen its advocacy and convening role by providing further guidance on navigating and communicating with diverse coalitions of partners in support of women's political participation.



Recommendation 3: UN Women should aim to develop strategic and long-term programmes to support women's political participation at the country level.



Recommendation 4: UN Women should strengthen guidance on effectively mainstreaming considerations of leave no one behind into women's political participation, particularly as programmes scale and work with new partnerships for social norms change.



Recommendation 3: UN Women should enhance measurement of key results on women's political participation to better contextualize and demonstrate the impact of its work at country level.