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Evaluation

Report on the corporate thematic evaluation of UN-Women's support to women's political participation: Insights from the field

Summary

     This report 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. To that effect, the evaluation aimed to examine the impact, effectiveness, relevance, coherence and sustainability of UN-Women's support to women's political participation at the country level. The evaluation also included an equity-focused lens on gender equality and "leave no one behind".

     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. The geographic scope covered UN-Women's programming across all six regions through a representative sample of country offices.

     The evaluation is intended for use primarily by UN-Women's Executive Board, senior management, governance and participation section, and 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.

I. Background

1.   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 March 2023 and completed in January 2024. This evaluation, which covered the period from January 2018 to June 2023, includes the previous Strategic Plan 2018–2021 and the first year and a half of the current Strategic Plan 2022–2025. The focus and coverage of the evaluation were informed by extensive internal stakeholder interviews; detailed portfolio reviews of UN-Women's programmes; and desk reviews of relevant evaluations, strategic documents and other key reports.

2.   The primary focus of the evaluation was to assess 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.

3.   The key evaluation questions were:

- 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 the country level?

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

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

4.   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.

II. Evaluation approach and methodology

5.   The evaluation was conducted using a theory-based approach, which included the development of an evaluation framework[1] to map changes in key outcomes and impact across various stages of women's entry into the political sphere. The

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[1] The framework was adapted from UN-Women's theory of change for women's political participation: Output 4 under Strategic Plan 2018–2021.

framework also highlighted contextual factors that have enabled or hindered women's political participation in different countries.

6.   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, the Central African Republic, Colombia, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Liberia, Papua New Guinea, the Republic of Moldova, Samoa, the United Republic of 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.

7.   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, United Nations 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, the Republic of 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.

8.   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 the global and regional levels; fielded an online survey to UN-Women personnel engaged in women's political participation at the 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.

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

10.   The evaluation incorporated a gender-responsive and human rights-based approach that aligned with the UN-Women evaluation policy and the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms and standards. The evaluation aligned with the UNEG guidance on integrating human rights and gender equality in evaluation, the UNEG ethical guidelines, the UNEG code of conduct for evaluation in the United Nations system and the UNEG guidance on integrating disability inclusion in evaluation.

III.   Evaluation context

Global context

11.   Women's political participation is a fundamental right enshrined in international and regional human rights instruments, from the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights (1948) and the international Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952) to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), reinforced by international political commitments such as the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the 2030 Agenda. It is also a critical aspect of women's autonomy and capacity to freely make decisions that affect their lives under conditions of equality.

12. During the period under review, progress was made in women's political participation. The share of women parliamentarians in single or lower houses increased from 23.4 per cent in 2018[2] to 26.5 per cent in 2023[3] and at the local level, women currently hold 35.5 per cent of elected seats in deliberative bodies, up from 33.9 per cent in 2020.[4] The number of women Speakers of Parliament has also increased to 22.7 per cent in 2023[5] compared with 19.1 per cent in 2018.[6] Gender quotas have played a key role in such progress: on average, women's representation is 5 per cent higher in national parliaments and 7 per cent higher in local government in countries with legislated candidate quotas.[7] However, gender parity continues to be an exception: only six countries have 50 per cent or more women in their lower/single chambers of national parliaments[8] and only three countries have 50 per cent or more women in their local legislatures.[9] The number of countries where a woman is Head of Government increased from 11 countries in 2018[10] to 19 countries in 2023.[11]

13. Despite overall progress in terms of more women participating in political decision-making worldwide, gender equality in political participation remains elusive. Deeply entrenched discrimination persists worldwide and continues to hinder women's full participation in political and electoral processes.

14. While the countries selected for this evaluation are extremely diverse in their characteristics and contexts, common barriers emerged that are likely to relate to the underlying patriarchal structure in societies and institutions that continues to affect women's full enjoyment of their political rights. These barriers range from issues such as illiteracy and lack of national identity documentation to social norms that perpetuate gender stereotypes against women in politics. Those who decide to run for

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[2] Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Women's political leadership: Striving for a 50 per cent balance in 2030", 8 March 2019. Available at https://www.ipu.org/news/statements/2019-03/womens-political-leadership-striving-50-cent-balance-in-2030.

[3] UN-Women, "Women in politics: 2023", 2023. Available at https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/03/women-in-politics-map-2023.

[4] UN-Women, "Global data on women's political participation", Women in Local Government database. Available at https://localgov.unwomen.org/data (accessed 24 April 2024).

[5] UN-Women, "Women in politics: 2023", 2023. Available at https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/03/women-in-politics-map-2023.

[6] Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Women's political leadership: Striving for a 50 per cent balance in 2030", 8 March 2019. Available at https://www.ipu.org/news/statements/2019-03/womens-political-leadership-striving-50-cent-balance-in-2030.

[7] E/CN.6/2021/3.

[8] UN-Women, "Women in politics: 2023", 2023. Available at https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/03/women-in-politics-map-2023.

[9] UN-Women, "Global data on women's political participation", Women in Local Government database. Available at https://localgov.unwomen.org/data (accessed 24 April 2024).

[10] Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Women's political leadership: Striving for a 50 per cent balance in 2030", 8 March 2019. Available at https://www.ipu.org/news/statements/2019-03/womens-political-leadership-striving-50-cent-balance-in-2030.

[11] UN-Women, "Women in politics: 2023", 2023. Available at https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/03/women-in-politics-map-2023.

office are adversely affected by difficulties in terms of accessing campaign funds; visibility in the media; and obtaining better positions in electoral lists, as well as exclusion from key decision-making spaces within their own parties and time constraints due to care work.

15.   In some cases, the design of temporary special measures and lack of enforcement mechanisms to ensure their implementation also constitute key barriers; as do political parties, who often function as the main gatekeepers to women's political participation. Similarly, violence against women in politics stands out as an issue of growing concern and is cited as having a dissuasive and negative effect on women's entry and/or permanence in politics. Therefore, in its efforts to advance women's rights and gender equality, UN-Women recognizes women's political participation as a key area of focus.

UN-Women's key initiatives for women's political participation

16.   UN-Women's key initiatives on advancing women's political participation during the period under review included developing and implementing legal frameworks and constitutional and legislative reforms; advocating for temporary special measures, including legislated quotas; mainstreaming gender equality through electoral management bodies; working with governments, national statistical offices and other partners to produce data (e.g. Sustainable Development Goal [SDG] Indicator 5.5.1b on women in local government, or prevalence surveys on violence against women in politics) and implement laws, policies and programmes that address violence against women in politics at all levels; promoting social norms change to recognize women as political leaders; expanding the pool of women considering running for office and serving as elected officials through training and coaching; and building the capacity of women office holders, such as members of parliamentary committees and parliamentary women's caucuses, women elected in local government and women members of political parties.

17.   UN-Women led the advocacy efforts and strategic partnerships to build a case for women's representation in local government as a means of measuring progress towards gender equality, and SDG Indicator 5.5.1b (proportion of positions held by women in local government) was adopted as part of the SDG framework in 2015. UN-Women has since been the sole custodian of the indicator and has supported data compilation, coordinated national statistical capacity-building with United Nations regional commissions, developed a baseline for monitoring and analysing national, regional and global trends in women's representation in local government, and undertaken annual data compilation.

18.   UN-Women also supported normative advancements and frameworks on women's political participation and ending violence against women in politics; and has leveraged its coordination mandate through partnerships with key United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and its Electoral Assistance Division, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and several United Nations regional commissions; and inter-agency mechanisms (including the Inter-Agency Coordination Mechanism for Electoral Assistance, the Praia Group on Governance Statistics and the Inter-Agency Task Team on Temporary Special Measures).

19. Furthermore, UN-Women built an extensive library of knowledge products related to women's political participation that is informed by regional and country-level inputs. Key knowledge products to date have included UN-Women's political leadership and candidate training curriculum, programming guidebooks, guidance notes and action kits. In addition to the Women in Local Government global knowledge hub, UN-Women led and contributed to several other global databases and hubs, including the United Nations Gender Quota Portal developed within the framework of the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Team on Temporary Special Measures and the iKNOW Politics platform developed with UNDP, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. In partnership with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, UN-Women publishes the "Women in politics map" to visualize data for women in executive positions and national parliaments.

20. UN-Women's current and preceding Strategic Plans present the Entity's corporate approach to this area of work. UN-Women's Strategic Plan 2018–2021 included a detailed theory of change for women's leadership in political decision-making and a Flagship Programming Initiative dedicated to women's political participation. The current UN-Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025 presents a more cross-cutting approach, while continuing to emphasize governance and participation in public life as one of four key thematic areas for UN-Women. Of the 10 newly established Gender Equality Accelerators developed to drive policy coherence and programmatic results, Gender Equality Accelerator 1 (Women's Equal Participation in Political Decision-Making and Institutions) directly aligns with women's political participation. Gender Equality Accelerator 1 is a programmatic framework that aims to leverage UN-Women's normative, United Nations system coordination and operational mandates to foster new knowledge and innovation, evidence-based programming, policy advice and system-wide accountability.

IV. Key evaluation conclusions

21. Key conclusions (drawn from evaluation evidence and findings) were organized into three interrelated 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 levels.

Design and Approach workstream

22. 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.

23.   The design and approach of UN-Women's programmes are strategically focused on the key drivers of improvements in women's political participation: gender-responsive legal reforms; addressing social norms; building women's confidence, knowledge and skills; and preventing and mitigating violence against women in politics. There is evidence that programmes can rapidly adapt to make best use of work with key political actors in each country context, particularly in mobilizing coalitions and partnerships to deliver changes in legal and policy frameworks.

24.   During the evaluation period, UN-Women (in coordination with United Nations partners and national stakeholders) advocated for and supported the passage and effective implementation of legislated quotas. In addition, there have been intense efforts to invest in building women candidates' confidence and skills. While these efforts have been successful in raising the number of candidates standing for election and being elected, there was some evidence that a more tailored approach is needed. Women value the wider benefits of learning about political participation: mentoring, social support and developing networks with other women candidates or women-led civil society organizations. Greater attention to women's needs, motivations and experiences as they enter, participate and leave politics is needed to strengthen support.

Conclusion 2. There was some evidence that knowledge and learning within UN-Women's programmes at the 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.

25.   UN-Women's programmes at the country level included periods of gathering insights, standardizing approaches where relevant, reflecting on progress and providing spaces to convene relevant stakeholders to advance women's political participation. As programmes encounter persistent forms of opposition to women's political participation, such as online bullying, and continue to focus on areas such as shifting social norms, or working at the subnational level, there is a need to further strengthen use of data and assessment tools, which is an area of ongoing work. Country programmes would benefit from guidance on what types of gender data in political participation to advocate for to address key gaps in information (such as sex-disaggregated voter registration and turnout data) while working in collaboration with partners. Further use of evaluation and measurement tools, such as media-tracking surveys, and surveys of women's participation in political parties, would help to improve the capacity of programmes to learn and focus on key areas of change. There are a few examples of such tools being used in some countries, but further consolidation would ensure a more consistent approach to measurement, where needed and appropriate.

26.   Building on UN-Women's efforts to compile quantitative measures of women's political participation, country programmes could consider context-relevant, additional measures (qualitative and quantitative) to demonstrate impact and progress. In some countries, programmes collect data on women's confidence to participate in politics, which offers a broader view that could be strengthened. In general, feedback

mechanisms need to be strengthened for women across their entrance into and out of politics.

27. The evaluation also found there was scope to increase donors' appreciation of the importance of longer time periods required for training women political aspirants and the importance of working between election cycles. Improved reporting of results, along with sharing lessons learned and demonstrating impact, is a key component of supporting longer programmes.

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.

28. UN-Women's support to women's political participation included sustainable approaches such as strengthening related legal frameworks, fostering national ownership and supporting networks of women leaders. However, programmes (and funding) tended to focus on election cycles, which was a concern raised by stakeholders in many countries.

29. Therefore, UN-Women's approach at the country level needs to go beyond election cycle-based programmes, to long-term and strategic country-level initiatives that support sustainable change. This should include a stronger emphasis on effective implementation of policies; protection against persistent forms of backlash, including violence against women in politics; support for newly elected women leaders in the post-election phase; sustained support for young women leaders; grass-roots, community and media engagement for social norms change; and strategies to tackle barriers to women's participation arising from resource constraints and resistance from political parties.

Delivery workstream

30. The Delivery workstream focused on the coherence of UN-Women's partnerships with United Nations and non-United Nations 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 United Nations 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, potential risks related to these partnerships should continue to be assessed.

31. UN-Women has largely been valued, trusted and successful in working with broad coalitions. Many of the Entity's successes in legal and policy reforms have depended on building trusting partnerships, particularly with parliaments, government entities such as electoral management bodies, offices of registrar of political parties, and women's ministries and machineries. UN-Women's reputation for being

politically impartial, flexible and open has enabled the Entity to build broad coalitions with political actors. UN-Women's political neutrality is viewed as a critical value add, enabling the organization to play a strong convening role and brokering political access for women's civil society organizations and coalitions.

32. Programmes are now seizing opportunities to work at a subnational level, along with addressing social norms. Partnerships at the grass-roots level offer the opportunity to tackle patriarchal barriers to women's participation in more effective ways. However, these partnerships (including with faith-based organizations and traditional leaders) could carry concomitant risks of being politically co-opted or of reinforcing traditional gender-based norms that may be appealing to some local audiences, but ultimately undermine women's broader political empowerment.

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 United Nations programming on political participation.

33. At the global level, the evaluation found evidence of synergies between UN-Women's normative, United Nations system coordination and operational mandates in the area of women's political participation. The Entity developed key United Nations system knowledge products and hubs (including data and guidance documents); worked with inter-agency/intergovernmental mechanisms; and developed system-wide messaging on United Nations priorities, including temporary special measures and violence against women in politics. This global work was an important pillar in achieving results at the country level. However, the United Nations system coordination mandate was somewhat unevenly applied in the area of women's political participation across countries and remains an area that requires strengthening. In comparison, UN-Women's normative and operational mandates were leveraged relatively strongly in many countries.

34. While some challenges persist in coordinating efforts with other United Nations entities, UN-Women is well respected by United Nations partners and acknowledged as a leader on women's political participation due to its technical strength; the expertise of its staff; and its long-term and effective engagement with civil society organizations, women's organizations and governments. Therefore, UN-Women is well positioned to play a stronger role in gender mainstreaming across United Nations programming on women's 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.

35. The leave no one behind principle was a core concern of country programmes working on women's political participation, and there were several examples of work with specific marginalized groups, including a deep intersectional approach. There was evidence that, in some contexts, UN-Women's support resulted in these groups having a strong voice and influence in political spaces. There was also evidence that

UN-Women's support pushed diverse actors (government and non-government) to consider the needs of and work inclusively with groups such as younger women, people living with disabilities, and poor, rural, Indigenous and Afrodescendent women.

36. However, both the survey results and country case studies showed that programmes needed to make difficult trade-offs. Some groups were difficult to include, given the contextual environment, and some programmes with fewer resources could not invest in reaching marginalized groups at the community level. This suggested that further guidance and sharing of good practices could support country programmes on ways to work inclusively, without having to reduce their reach to women political aspirants.

Performance workstream

37. 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.

38. There has been strong progress to date in legal and policy reforms that have substantially facilitated women's access to political positions, and across several other long- and short-term outcomes, such as building women's skills and confidence and developing means to address and mitigate violence against women in politics. There were strong examples where UN-Women's programmes have contributed to wider impact. For instance, in the Republic of Moldova, UN-Women played a significant role in supporting legislation for a 40 per cent quota for women in national and local government, and advocating for placement provisions to ensure successful implementation of the quota (39.6 per cent women's representation in parliament achieved in 2021). In addition to supporting comprehensive training for women candidates and aspirants, UN-Women also brought together parliamentarians and women mayors on policy issues such as the refugee crisis and the COVID-19 response. UN-Women's support to women mayors, particularly newly elected mayors, was impactful and helped "set them up for success", enabling them to serve as role models for other women.

39. The evaluation also validated evidence of improvements in gender-responsive law and policymaking in other contexts as a result of working with diverse stakeholders, including electoral bodies, parliaments and women's caucuses.

40. Data from country case studies suggested that progress in getting women elected has been relatively slow, particularly for countries that do not use legislated quotas. Even where legislated quotas were implemented, further increases in women's political participation were slow or stagnant, or, in a few cases, reversed. While contextual factors played a strong role in preventing women's progress, often the

experience, threat, or fear of violence against women in politics (and other forms of harassment) dissuaded many women from engaging in political and public affairs, or pursuing or continuing a political career. In other cases, the targets set by quotas were not achieved, given a lack of quota enforcement mechanisms and effective implementation as well as other contextual and socioeconomic factors such as levels of insecurity or women's lack of resources.

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.

41.   UN-Women has made a strong contribution to legal and policy reforms, which now include many provisions for gender equality, e.g. updates to constitutions, improved gender strategies for the management of electoral processes and improved mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of gender equality by political parties. Across the country case studies, a wide range of stakeholders indicated that political parties were the main barrier to women's inclusion in political participation, with interventions such as voluntary legislated quotas largely ineffective.

42.   There was strong consensus among stakeholders that new ways of working to influence political parties need to be found. This requires partnering with key national stakeholders such as the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties, multiparty international foundations, United Nations entities leading the work with political parties (e.g. UNDP) and donors to open up new areas of work. Promising practices were emerging in this area, such as working with non-governmental organizations that focus on political actors and women's political wings, and with male allies. There were also examples of UN-Women working directly with the executive branch and leaders in government to support messaging and advocacy on women's political participation.

43.   Where inclusion of women is seen as a zero-sum game, meaning that men will lose power, further investments are needed to change wider political perceptions of women's inclusion, and on agreeing key advocacy messages to be endorsed beyond UN-Women.

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) was also widely applied. However, regional-level collaboration could be strengthened in some areas.

44.   The evaluation found evidence that UN-Women's support was well tailored to the needs of programme personnel at the country level. Consolidation of learning, responsive technical support – especially in complex areas of legal reform and advocacy – and deployment of toolkits for training enabled programmes to rapidly hone their approaches. Work on research and data, such as SDG Indicator 5.5.1b, enabled programmes to advocate for better representation at local levels.

45.   There were some examples of cross-regional learning that were beneficial, such as the adoption of specific training curriculums. Some stakeholders indicated the need to strengthen regional-level technical support. Regional mechanisms and organizations had a strong influence on national stakeholders (e.g. the African Union and the African Women Leaders Network) and UN-Women has already leveraged these organizations for support and influence. However, some stakeholders advocated

for stronger learning and collaboration within and across regions, particularly in countries where results were lagging behind those of regional counterparts.

V. Key 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.

46.   UN-Women should develop knowledge products focused on strategies to address financial and resource barriers for women, and advocacy for alternative funding mechanisms. The Entity should continue to support women's networks for political aspirants and leaders and strengthen focus on social norms work to oppose resistance to women's political participation. UN-Women should also strengthen linkages with broader work on ending violence against women in politics, particularly in the emerging area of online violence and technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

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.

47.   UN-Women should consider creating technical communications resources to support regional and country offices to develop regional and/or country-specific technical communication and advocacy plans. This could also include an overarching communications plan outlining key messaging on women's right to political participation for all levels of the United Nations.

48.   UN-Women should further develop specific advocacy and engagement approaches for stakeholders including entities (government and non-government) mandated to work with political parties, donors, new groups of partners (male allies, traditional leaders), etc. The Entity should undertake regional-level analyses and synthesize lessons on advocacy related to legislated quotas, legislative changes for increasing women's political participation, introducing legislation related to violence against women in politics, etc. UN-Women should also draw on its technical expertise and leverage its coordination role to further strengthen gender mainstreaming across United Nations programming in this area of 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.

49.   UN-Women should develop donor outreach approaches to position women's political participation programming at the country level at a strategic, long-term level as opposed to being based on election cycles. This would respond to the strong demand from diverse stakeholders across countries for the Entity to continue and strengthen its longer-term support in this area of work. The approach should include a renewed focus on the implementation of laws and policies; sustainability of support (including to young women leaders); and protection against backlash, including violence against women in politics.

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.

50.   UN-Women should consult with country programmes to synthesize lessons from diverse approaches to leave no one behind and working with marginalized groups. The Entity should develop specific guidance for country programmes seeking to broaden work at subnational levels and on community-level social norms change. UN-Women should also develop guidelines on working inclusively across different types of activities, such as technical support; advocacy at different levels of the political system; and finding and working with coalitions of civil society and women's organizations.

Recommendation 5. UN-Women should enhance measurement of key results on women's political participation to better contextualize and demonstrate the impact of its work at the country level.

51.   UN-Women should map and support country-level data gaps and needs, including the availability of key statistics for women's political participation and the representativeness of elected/appointed officials (with suitable disaggregation from the perspective of leave no one behind). The Entity should develop tools that can be adapted for rapid assessments (e.g. on women in political parties, representation of women leaders in traditional and social media) and consider the feasibility of using qualitative tools.

Annex 1

Evaluation findings and key questions

Key question 1. In what ways has UN-Women's support been tailored to the local political context?

Finding 1. UN-Women's approach to designing country-level programmes on women's political participation was adaptive and allows flexibility to leverage contextual drivers and work strategically with political influencers and actors. The Entity is also starting to make inroads in working at the subnational level in some contexts.

Finding 2. The Entity's support to women political aspirants and leaders was relevant and responsive to the strong demand from stakeholders. Scaling this support can be a challenge, but there was some evidence of strategic models of engagement that could be more widely replicated.

Key question 2. What is the impact of UN-Women's support to women's political participation at the country level?

Finding 3. UN-Women's programmes on women's political participation have contributed to progress in strengthening electoral frameworks and developing and sustaining a diverse cadre of women political leaders. In some countries, this is translating into more gender-responsive policies and legal reforms. This progress was due, in large part, to sustained investments in legal reforms, advocacy and strengthening women's skills and capacities at all stages of their path into politics.

Finding 4. UN-Women's country-level programmes have received effective and timely support from headquarters and multiple regional offices to support women's political participation. Technical support and learning were accessible and well

utilized, evidenced by improved programming practice. However, further support and guidance on advocacy and communications strategies could be developed, in addition to addressing some operational issues that limit UN-Women's effectiveness.

Finding 5. As progress is made across various types of initiatives to support women's political participation, many countries are encountering new, complex and intractable challenges. UN-Women should continue to adapt its programmes and focus on responding to these persistent barriers to women's political participation.

Finding 6. UN-Women's approach to relationship-building with diverse partners was found to be a key driver of success. There was some evidence that in fragile and more challenging political contexts, phasing of approaches and better articulation of how to work with different political actors would be beneficial.

Key question 3. How well does UN-Women work with its partners (United Nations agencies and others) on the ground?

Finding 7. UN-Women's partnerships at the country level to advance women's political participation have deepened, become more strategic over time and have worked to address key barriers to women's progress in politics.

Finding 8. UN-Women's partnerships, particularly with civil society and women's networks, have enabled effective advocacy, essential to progress in women's political participation. While partnerships have yielded new ways of working and enabled an expansion of reach into grass-roots levels, new partnerships at times caused friction with existing partners.

Finding 9. New ways of influencing and advocacy towards political parties were essential in addressing barriers to progress. Media engagement strategies, while promising, could also be further developed and clarified.

Key question 4. How effectively is UN-Women's triple mandate (normative, United Nations system coordination, operational) leveraged in support of achieving results at the country level?

Finding 10. UN-Women played a key role in advancing normative change, operational work and United Nations system coordination at the global level to support women's political participation. This "trickled down" effectively in many contexts and was an important pillar in supporting the Entity's efforts at the country level. At the global level, UN-Women has drawn on its operational, normative and United Nations system coordination mandates to advance women's political participation. UN-Women's role in highlighting areas such as violence against women in politics and data on women's representation in local government is widely acknowledged by partners. UN-Women-led knowledge products and hubs such as the Gender Quota Portal and Women in Local Government global hub were identified as critical in supporting research and advocacy to advance women's political participation.

Finding 11. The importance of UN-Women's triple mandate in advancing women's political participation was clear and evident, though there was variance in the extent to which countries leveraged all aspects of the triple mandate. While UN-Women's inclusive approach was appreciated by United Nations partners, the Entity could play a stronger coordination role in gender mainstreaming across United Nations programming on political participation.

Key question 5. What aspects of equity are targeted by UN-Women's interventions (leave no one behind and gender equality)?

Finding 12. UN-Women has been instrumental in advocating for incorporating principles of leave no one behind and gender equality into women's political participation, and there was evidence that equity of women's access to the political process was a key focus. While there were good examples of marginalized groups being included in political spaces, the strategy for improving equity of women's representation needs further guidance.

Finding 13. In some cases, country programmes faced difficult trade-offs between working at scale versus working truly inclusively. The consistency and availability of resources and data remain major barriers, but a tiered approach (working more in-depth with some groups) could be effective in some settings.

Key question 6. What is UN-Women's approach to safeguarding the sustainability of its impact and efforts in this area?

Finding 14. While sensitive to the fragility of gains in women's political participation, UN-Women's approach could benefit from a stronger emphasis (across all contexts) on effective implementation of women's political representation policies. In some countries, the Entity was making efforts towards fostering national ownership and sustaining partnerships with key national institutions and women's organizations/movements.

Finding 15. UN-Women's programmes supporting women's political participation tended to be based on election cycles and were relatively short-term. The Entity should consider developing more strategic, long-term programming at the country level. This would require UN-Women's internal capacity to be strengthened.

Finding 16. Support to newly elected women leaders in the post-election phase; sustained support for young women leaders; grass-roots/community engagement for social norms change; and a focus on tackling barriers to women's participation arising from resource constraints and resistance from political parties were identified as critical areas for sustainability.