

COUNTRY OFFICE AUDIT

INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT  
UN WOMEN COUNTRY OFFICE IN  
BANGLADESH



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**INDEPENDENT EVALUATION AND AUDIT SERVICES (IEAS)**

Internal Audit Service (IAS)

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Audit objective and scope

The UN Women Internal Audit Service (IAS) of the Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS) conducted an internal audit of the UN Women Country Office in Bangladesh from April to May 2024.

UN Women management is responsible for adequately designing and effectively maintaining governance, risk management and control processes to ensure that UN Women's objectives are achieved. IAS is responsible for independently assessing the adequacy and effectiveness of these systems and processes.

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

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

The audit covered the state of governance, risk management and internal controls based on a sample of Country Office activities related to strategic priorities and programme and operations controls from 1 January 2022 to 30 April 2024. Expenditure for the Country Office totalled US\$ 8.14 million in 2022 (as per Atlas) and US\$ 5.73 million in 2023 (as per Quantum), respectively.

The audit was conducted in conformance with the *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing* of The Institute of Internal Auditors. The audit included an anonymous survey of personnel for which there were 34 respondents.

## Audit opinion and overall audit rating

IAS acknowledges the following achievements and good practices:

- During its visits to two Multi-Purpose Women Centres, IAS collected positive feedback from a targeted population of UN Women's interventions. This included good knowledge management in the form of quality guidance explaining how to set up and run the centres, which can be applied in other contexts.
- In August 2022, together with the Bangladesh UN Procurement Group, the Country Office organized a workshop and launched an Expression of Interest Notice to disseminate information and knowledge on gender-responsive procurement among potential women-owned businesses. The purpose of this initiative was to increase the number of women-owned businesses and gender-responsive vendors in UN supply chains. As a result of the Expression of Interest, management informed that 240 applications were received, and 160 women-owned businesses were pre-qualified.
- The Resource Mobilization and Partnerships Strategy for 2022–2026 (last updated in January 2023) is a robust document, which other Country Offices could learn from and potentially replicate.
- In 2021 and 2022, as part of the Women Count Programme, the Country Office worked with the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and undertook a Time-Use Survey, the final report was published in July 2023.
- The Country Office conducts secondary bidding between long-term agreement holders for travel to help to ensure the best price is obtained.
- The Country Office proactively requested and assisted several management oversight missions and evaluations, which shows its maturity to learn lessons and

enhance its governance, risk management and control compliance.

- The Country Office proactively reaches out to the Regional Office, PSMU and IEAS for advice on how to handle cases of complaints and potential concerns related to its vendors and partners. As part of this process, the Country Office keeps a detailed document of its management action to address referrals, mitigate high inherent risks and reduce control gaps.

IAS assessed the overall state of governance, risk management and internal controls in the Country Office as **Satisfactory** meaning that “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.” IAS noted there was some need for improvement on resource mobilization, project design and monitoring, programme partner management, organizational structure and authority, risk management, procurement and travel management.

IAS identified the following areas for enhancement to consolidate good practices and lessons learned, and advance the Country Office’s mandate and priorities:

- The Country Office needs to monitor the effectiveness of its resource mobilization efforts for the Cox’s Bazar sub-office. The existing strategy could explain the funding environment in Cox’s Bazar and link to the Strategic Note, addressing the Country Office’s future goals with respect to the changing nature of the Rohingya refugee crisis.
- The Country Office could strengthen its project monitoring and streamline its monitoring and evaluation function through better linking programmatic and financial monitoring; and monitoring plans which track planned results and agreed targets. This would also help to monitor value-for-money.
- The Country Office could review and streamline the process for selection and contracting of programme partners. It could also improve the process for reviewing budgets submitted by programme partners and consider the need for additional training and support to partners on completing FACE forms.
- The Country Office needs to assess the feasibility of the recommendations and action plans arising from the 2022 Functional Review and 2023 Business

Transformation Review of its office due to rapidly changing contexts and risks.

IAS made eight recommendations to address the areas for improvement, all of which are ranked as medium priority.

The 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*”. These recommendations are focused on: monitoring the effectiveness of resource mobilization in Cox’s Bazar; strengthening project monitoring and streamlining the monitoring and evaluation function; reviewing and streamlining the programme partner selection process; reviewing partner budgets for accuracy and reasonableness; assessing the need for FACE form training for programme partners; assessing the feasibility of the recommendations and action plans contained in the 2022 Functional Review and 2023 Business Transformation Review of the country office; enhancing the existing end-to-end risk management process; updating and improving procurement planning; maximizing the benefits offered by Quantum for the travel process; and ensuring completion of outstanding business continuity protocols in the security application.

## Management comments and action plan

The Country Representative accepted the above recommendations and provided action plans which are included in this report. Implementation of some of the recommendations has already begun. Management comments and additional information provided 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, and actions have been initiated to address them.

*Lisa Sutton*

Lisa Sutton, Director

**Independent Evaluation and Audit Services**

## **ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>BCCMA</b>	<b>Business Continuity and Crisis Management Application</b>
<b>DRF</b>	Development Results Framework
<b>IAS</b>	Internal Audit Service
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communication Technology
<b>IEAS</b>	Independent Evaluation and Audit Services
<b>LTA</b>	Long-Term Agreement
<b>OEEF</b>	Organizational Efficiency and Effectiveness Framework
<b>RMS</b>	Results Management System
<b>UNCT</b>	United Nations Country Team
<b>UNSDCF</b>	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
<b>UN Women</b>	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

## I. BACKGROUND

UN Women has worked in Bangladesh since 2010. The Country Office reports to the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. The main office in the country is located in Dhaka, with a large sub-office in Cox's Bazar.

The Country Office mainly focused on the following key thematic areas: income security, decent work and economic autonomy for women; ending violence against women; governance, national planning and budgeting for gender equality; and sustainable peace and resilience, prevention of natural disasters and conflicts, and humanitarian action. The Country Office's Strategic Note and Biannual Work Plans covered the period 2022–2026. The 2024–2025 Biannual Work Plan included five Outcomes under the Development Results Framework (DRF). It also included five Outputs under the Organizational Efficiency and Effectiveness Framework (OEEF).

According to the OneApp HR dashboard, as of 24 June 2024, the Country Office employed 13 personnel with staff contracts (D, P, GS, NO); engaged 30 individuals on service contracts; 13 consultants on Special Service Agreements; and 10 individuals on other contract types. This includes a large number of personnel headed by a Programme Coordinator in the sub-office in Cox's Bazar.

The Country Office's budget and expenditure are summarized in Table 1.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 1. Office target and actual budget, total expenditure and delivery rate**

Total resource requirements	2022	2023	At 2-Aug-2024	Total
Total budget target, US\$	9,752,744	7,918,052	8,924,591	26,595,387
Total actual budget, US\$	8,628,822	6,614,331	8,520,903	23,764,056
Resource mobilization	88%	84%	95%	89%
Total expenditure, US\$	8,141,000	5,727,016	1,934,747	15,802,764
Financial implementation	94%	87%	23%	66%

**Source:** Budget target used RMS Plan; Actual budget 2022 used the Project delivery dashboard from Legacy data on OneAPP; Actual budget 2023–2024 used the Project utilization dashboard on OneAPP; Total expenditure 2022 used the Project delivery dashboard from Legacy data on OneAPP; and Total

expenditure 2023–2024 used the Project utilization dashboard on OneAPP but only the expenses, not "total utilization"

In 2023 and 2024, the country field programme comprised 23 non-core funded projects with a total budget of US\$ 10.9 million, funded by a range of donors, including:

- Multi-Partner Trust Fund funding for five projects (US\$ 1.3 million).
- United Nations funding for eight projects, sourced from multi and bilateral donors (US\$ 1.9 million).
- Donor government or organization funding for ten projects (US\$ 7.6 million).

Quantum-recorded expenditure for the Country Office totalled US\$ 5.1 million in 2023. Overall, this consisted of non-staff personnel costs (34 per cent); staff costs (28 per cent); learning and recruitment costs (15 per cent); travel costs (5 per cent); non-capital assets and their maintenance (4 per cent); contracts with service companies (4 per cent); rent and maintenance (3 per cent); common costs (2 per cent); communication costs (2 per cent); and other costs (5 per cent).

<sup>1</sup> OneAPP RMS as of June 2024 (planned budget), as of June 2024 (actual budget).

## II. AUDIT RESULTS

### A. Strategic priorities, programme planning and implementation

See Background section for information on the Country Office's Strategic Note components. Development of the Country Office's Strategic Note 2022–2026 followed UN Women's processes and was linked to the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2022–2026 for Bangladesh.

Overall, there was a reasonable link between the Country Office's Strategic Note impacts, outcomes and outputs, and activities were coherent. The Country Office has a small Partnerships function consisting of a Coordination and Partnerships Officer (NOB, core funded) supported by a Coordination Support Officer (IUNV, non-core funded). Partnership functions are also undertaken by the Representative, Deputy Representative, Head of Operations and Communications Analyst, with support from personnel in their teams and other personnel as needed. Stakeholders confirmed that UN Women was a well-respected partner and was seen as a leader in gender equality and the empowerment of women in Bangladesh. The Country Office leads the Gender Equality Theme Group and UNSDCF Strategic Priority 5 (SP-5) on Gender Equality and Eliminating Gender-Based Violence. IAS assessed these areas as satisfactory, with some improvement needed on resource mobilization, mainly to take into consideration development around international funding of Cox's Bazar and its impact on the UN Women sub-office, which is already monitored by the Country Office.

## KEY OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

### Observation 1: Communication strategy for the Cox's Bazar sub-office

#### Key stakeholder feedback

The stakeholders interviewed by IAS recognized the important role that UN Women plays in Bangladesh, both within the UN system and in the country at large, in advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women, and coordinating key actors in these areas.

Stakeholders acknowledged UN Women's contributions in areas such as national advocacy and policy support on gender empowerment and the equality of women.

Stakeholders also saw the useful contributions UN Women made to the Rohingya crisis response in Cox's Bazar. The audit team visited two Multi-Purpose Women's Centres in the Rohingya refugee camps. IAS interviewed a group of the targeted population, who

had positive feedback about the centres, and UN Women and its partner's roles in establishing and operating the centres.

Stakeholders said they had good working relationships with the Country Office, and open lines of communication with clear focal points. Some stakeholders mentioned that UN Women could explore programmatic expansion into areas such as the linkages between climate change and women's economic empowerment. Stakeholders also thought that UN Women sometimes lacked sufficient resources to expand its impact and support the sustainability of its programmes.

#### Communication and advocacy

The Country Office's Strategic Note 2022–2026 contains a section on communication and advocacy; however, it is quite general and does not specifically mention Cox's Bazar, the sub-office or the Rohingya response.

The Country Office has a separate Communication Strategy for 2022–2026, which was developed in November 2022, and recognizes communication as central to the functioning of the office. The strategy includes a SWOT analysis, four key objectives, a



framework for applying communication activities to gender equality and the empowerment of women, target audiences, key outputs, a short risk assessment and key action points.

The strategy mentions Cox's Bazar several times, albeit briefly. This could be improved by more specifically addressing the communication strategy, objectives and needs of the sub-office, including the Rohingya crisis. While there is evidence of coordination between the Communications functions in Dhaka and Cox's Bazar, inclusion of a specific Cox's Bazar communications strategy would formalize such coordination.

The limited systematic approach to communication in Cox's Bazar could impact the Country Office's ability to communicate successes and challenges/opportunities and may limit the effectiveness of resource mobilization activities. IAS understands that the Country Office plans to update the strategy.

***IAS advises the Representative to include a component for the Cox's Bazar sub-office in the Country Office's Communication Strategy that is aligned with the Strategic Note.***

### **Observation 2: Coordination of gender mainstreaming**

The Country Office leads the coordination of gender mainstreaming in the country through key thematic groups on gender, UNSDCF development and implementation, UNCT (UN Country Team) SWAP, and effective support to the government and civil society organizations in developing and implementing the country's gender equality policies, priorities and programmes. Stakeholders recognized UN Women's role in and efforts towards coordination of gender equality and the empowerment of women actors in Bangladesh and on gender mainstreaming in the UNCT.

The Country Office has co-chaired Strategic Priority 5 (SP-5) of the UNSDCF on Gender Equality and Eliminating Gender-Based Violence. It also leads the Gender Equality Theme Group. IAS saw evidence that UN Women is leading on advancement of the UNCT-SWAP action plan. The Bangladesh UNCT is reported as exceeding requirements on four indicators, meeting requirements on eight, approaching requirements on three and missing requirements on none.

The Country Office does not have a coordination strategy. Elements of a strategy are included in the resource mobilization and communications strategies and the Strategic

Note. A dedicated coordination strategy that consolidates key priorities, implementation approach and resources is a best practice that the Country Office could implement, especially in the absence of a formal corporate coordination strategy.

Country Office management noted that UN Women may want to decide how to advance the United Nations System-wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan announced in April 2024 before country-level coordination strategies are updated.

***IAS advises the Representative to consider integrating all the elements of the Country Office's coordination-related work into a formal coordination strategy to ensure a cohesive approach, agreed objectives, success indicators and dedicated resources and capacities.***

### **Observation 3: Resource mobilization in Cox's Bazar**

The Country Office has experienced success in resource mobilization and is supported by a Resource Mobilization Strategy that is regularly updated. Despite this, resource mobilization remains a critical risk for the Country Office and efforts are under way to ensure its continued success.

The Resource Mobilization and Partnerships Strategy for 2022–2026 (last updated in January 2023) is a robust document, which other Country Offices could learn from and potentially replicate. The document is linked to the Strategic Note and UNSDCF.

The strategy proposes engagement with a wide range of partners, including bilateral and multilateral partners, international finance organizations, women's movement actors and South-South cooperation. It also expresses interest in and caution regarding engagement with the private sector.

The Cox's Bazar funding environment is becoming very challenging. Donor fatigue and the onset of numerous crises around the world has created increased demand for funding. This has limited the funding available for the Rohingya crisis, which has moved from an onset crisis to a protracted crisis. Bangladesh is also on the cusp of graduating to lower middle-income country status, which further exacerbates funding challenges.

How to navigate this challenging environment is the main concern for the Country Office. The Country Office has not had time to develop a specific resource mobilization strategy for the Rohingya refugee crisis in Cox's Bazar and a placeholder has been put in the existing strategy.

The strategy could do more to specifically address the requirements of the Cox's Bazar sub-office. The Strategy states "To further bolster the Strategy, the Cox's Bazar Sub-Office will develop contextualized actions for resource mobilization, to be annexed to this Strategy, in light of the changing context in Cox's Bazar". This has not been provided or included in the strategy: the strategy needs specific and measurable actions to be taken to strengthen resources in Cox's Bazar, as noted in feedback from evaluations and the Business Transformation Review.

### Recommendation 1 (Medium):

The Country Representative to continue to monitor the effectiveness of the Country Office's resource mobilization efforts for the Cox's Bazar sub-office. The existing strategy could detail the funding environment in Cox's Bazar, and link to the Strategic Note, addressing the Country Office's future goals with respect to the changing nature of the Rohingya refugee crisis.

### Observation 4: Project design and management

**Project design:** Generally, projects had well-designed project documents with relevant objectives, a workplan and budget based on a complete logical framework and an appropriate management structure.

IAS could not identify exit or handover strategies for several sampled projects. Defined exit and handover strategies should support and facilitate the sustainability of outcomes as well as maintain the results achieved once a project is closed. While there was no specific phase-out strategy for some projects, some activities and approaches have been undertaken towards sustainability and handover. This included strengthening the organizational capacities of responsible parties such as local women-run organizations; building the capacity of women leaders and community-based organizations to lead community initiatives and develop action plans; strengthening referral mechanisms and

linkages with government and non-governmental organization services; and engaging community stakeholders through workshops, dialogues and awareness sessions. Through these activities, steps are being taken to transition ownership to local actors, which aligns with the Sub-Office's Sustainability Plan.

For Cox's Bazar projects, it might be difficult to ensure sustainability of outcomes due to the nature of the camps, facilities available and the restricted movement of Rohingya women. While IAS understands it might be challenging to implement long-term, sustainable projects in Cox's Bazar, especially as the crisis is seen as protracted, projects are short-term in nature and funding is decreasing, it is important that projects have more sustainable benefits. While some projects had elements of sustainability included in their design (e.g. vocational training of women to provide marketable skills), the same projects did not have what would be considered cohesive and formal exit strategies. Given the changing nature of the crisis in Cox's Bazar (onset to protracted crisis) the Country Office may need to adjust its exit and sustainability strategies to address this.

**Project management:** Generally, the Country Office actively manages the project portfolio, regularly reporting on individual projects. The sampled projects were in line with their workplans, and within budget parameters and other donor requirements. The Country Office prepared and submitted the required reports to donors in a timely manner.

Some projects experienced delays and/or disruptions in implementation. However, this was mainly due to factors beyond the control of the Country Office and/or its sub-office, such as delays in project approvals involving external stakeholders; delays in receipt and allocation of project funding; and delays occurring due to political sensitivities and changes in the security situation.

IAS viewed evidence of programmatic delivery monitoring taking place as well as financial monitoring (discussed in more detail below). This was also corroborated through reports from external stakeholders who either saw UN Women conduct monitoring, or even accompanied UN Women on joint monitoring exercises (as recently as the month before the audit fieldwork with key donor representatives). However, while some project documents included details on how the respective projects would be monitored, these mainly referred to resourcing and were quite broad.

The following issues were noted by IAS in its review of projects:

- Only two of the seven ProDocs included high-level details linked to monitoring and/or evaluations.
- None of the projects had formalized/documented monitoring plans describing the individuals involved, what data would be collected and the frequency of monitoring. Based on discussions with sub-office personnel, the team understood that some projects did not require separate monitoring and evaluation plans, such as where UN Women is providing technical support to implementation.
- IAS was provided with the latest available indicator tracking worksheet for the sub-office and while the spreadsheet includes outcomes, indicators, targets and baselines it seemed incomplete. For example, linked to “Indicator B Number of women and girls subjected to or at the risk of different forms of sexual and gender-based violence receive awareness raising, mediation, and case referral support by the women leaders and GFOs supported through the project” the target was 1,600 for 2023; however, in 2023 there was no progress. The spreadsheet does not state whether the indicator is on track or not, neither does it provide additional comments linked to this indicator. While tracking projects at indicator level is a very good practice, the sub-office should ensure that the information is regularly updated.

The Thematic Evaluation of the Humanitarian Response Programme (2023) recommended that the Country Office consider developing a harmonized monitoring framework with outcome-level statements and indicators for the Means to Lead project. This is a good practice that could be consistently implemented across the portfolio.

### Recommendation 2 (Medium):

The Country Representative to strengthen project monitoring. This could be achieved through better linking programmatic and financial monitoring, and monitoring plans which track planned results and agreed targets.

The Country Representative to ensure that new projects and extensions to new phases of projects include defined exit/handover strategies to facilitate the sustainability of outcomes.

### Observation 5: Programme partner management

Country Office management generally applied adequate implementation modalities and instruments; diligently selected programme partners; and monitored their performance through FACE forms and quarterly progress reports.

For several projects sampled, IAS noted that the selection and contracting of programme partners process took several months to be finalized, which could negatively impact partners’ delivery as well as implementation of related projects.

**Target population feedback mechanisms:** IAS met with a sample of UN Women’s target population and while they were generally aware of grievance mechanisms, including how to contact UN Women, IAS noted that in the Rohingya camps complaints boxes were in the open and members of the target population may not be comfortable with placing complaints in the boxes.

**Partner agreements:** IAS noted that while the duration of agreements varied, some were quite short. For example, two partners had agreements for less than one year. There were also a significant number of amendments with no cost extensions linked to several partners. Programme partners support the Country Office with implementation of projects and partner agreements are dependent on the duration of respective projects. Based on its analysis, IAS noted that the average agreement duration was decreasing and that the average duration of partner agreements by project was 1.1 years overall, with an average value of US\$ 128,000 ranging from a duration of 0.3 years to 1.8 years. Nine projects had a partner agreement duration of 0.8 years or less. This appears consistent with stakeholder feedback obtained during the audit which highlighted the need, where possible, for longer partner agreement durations to support the effectiveness of implementation and the sustainability of results.

**Capacity development and training:** IAS noted that often programme partners experienced a high turnover of personnel, with the Country Office then having to train new personnel. This was challenging for both the partners and the Country Office. In addition, several partners mentioned that they often struggled with completing FACE forms as they found them complex.

In 2022, the Country Office had 13 partner audits. All audits were unmodified, mainly

with medium findings in 10 of the 13 reports. The audit noted that cut-off errors as well as lack of supporting documents/basis for allocating costs were common findings.

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**Recommendation 3 (Medium):**

The Country Representative to:

- (a) Review and streamline the process linked to the selection and contracting of programme partners.
  - (b) Assess the training provided to programme partners on completing FACE forms and how it can be further improved, e.g., include recorded training and standard induction packages.
  - (c) Ensure that partner audit findings are considered during the review of quarterly reports from programme partners and quarterly monitoring.
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## B. Governance, risk management and internal controls

See Background section for key Country Office data. According to the latest organization chart, the Country Office comprised 62 positions (including nine vacancies at the time of the audit). Nineteen of the 62 positions are part of Operations, which represents 31 per cent of the workforce. Thirty-seven of the 62 positions are part of the Programme team (60 per cent of the workforce). Two positions are part of the Executive function (3 per cent) and the remaining 4 are part of the Coordination, Communications and Partnerships function (6 per cent of the workforce). The office structure includes the Country Representative (P5), the Deputy Country Representative (P4), the Head of Sub-Office for Cox's Bazar (P4) and the Operations Manager (NO-C).

IAS assessed that the Country Office appears to have an appropriate structure, and the resources and authority to fulfil its mandate, with some need for improvement through assessing the feasibility and implementing where feasible outstanding recommendations from a recent functional review and business transformation exercise. The Country Office could also improve the extent to which risk management has been integrated in end-to-end business processes. Other areas found satisfactory included the control environment and culture, general internal control system and progress made on implementing previous oversight recommendations.

## KEY OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

### Observation 6: Organizational structure and authority

The Country Office appears to have an appropriate structure, human resources and authority to implement its mandate and has a clear concept of its current and potential staffing and technical requirements. However, there is a need for some improvement, which was identified and is being addressed by Country Office management. In 2022, the Country Office requested a Functional Human Resources Review by the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. The review produced a report with recommendations that are in the process of being implemented. In 2023, the Cox's Bazar sub-office requested a Business Transformation Review by the headquarters Business Transformation team. This review also produced a report with recommendations that are in the process of being implemented.

The Bangladesh Country Office is categorized as a "large" office in the UN Women Enterprise Data Management system. The corporate Presence Governance Guidance establishes a large office as having above US\$ 5 million in delivery of its DRF per year (excluding core); a resource mobilization target above US\$ 6 million per year; and more than 20 personnel (staff, service contractors and UN Volunteers). The Country Office has

a resource mobilization target of US\$ 7.5 million for 2024 and US\$ 6.2 million for 2025. It has a total mobilized non-core budget of US\$ 4.9 million in 2023 and US\$ 4.6 million in 2024. The Country Office has 54 personnel (13 staff, 31 service contractors and 10 UN Volunteers). The Country Office is currently meeting the requirements of a large office typology, although technically it is slightly below the DRF threshold. In future, the Country Office may need to revisit its typology should its delivery or resource mobilization size change. This could be impacted by the changing nature of the Rohingya refugee crisis which has changed from an onset crisis to a protracted crisis. In 2023, approximately US\$ 3.8 million of the total non-core budget (of US\$ 5 million) related to Cox's Bazar (Outcome 5 in the Strategic Note). This is approximately US\$ 2.1 million (of US\$ 4.6 million) as of June 2024. Based on the current projects including hard pipeline the proportion of funding by end of 2024 will change significantly.

There may be a need to clarify the leadership roles and responsibilities regarding the Cox's Bazar sub-office. While the Deputy Country Representative has overall responsibility for implementing the Country Office's programme and ensuring coherence in programming across all SN outcomes, the Head of Sub-Office of Cox's Bazar is directly responsible for implementing the Cox's Bazar programme, which forms a large part of the overall programme as discussed above. In reviewing projects, organizational structure, terms of reference and job descriptions, IAS noted a lack of clarity on who is

accountable for Cox's Bazar results. Acknowledging the Representative's overall responsibility for all activities, the Head of Sub-Office manages the Cox's Bazar sub-office, and the Deputy Representative is in charge of overall programmes, which provides some overlapping responsibilities. This may be exacerbated by some of the cross-office responsibilities noted in this report (e.g. the Cox's Bazar procurement officer conducting procurement for the Dhaka office). In such a situation, the Country Office should be clear about who is accountable for the results under which outcome, and who therefore has key decision-making authority/input.

#### **Recommendation 4 (Medium):**

The Country Representative to:

- (a) Address or assess the feasibility of the recommendations and action plans contained in the 2022 Functional Review and 2023 Business Transformation Review due to rapidly changing contexts and risks.
- (b) Monitor the Country Office typology and, in case of potential inability to reach the required targets, prepare business continuity plans for potential scaling down and office restructuring, if needed.
- (c) Clarify the authority and accountability for different DRF outcomes in the Country Office.

#### **Observation 7: Risk management**

Various personnel in the Country Office have risk management responsibilities, including the Representative, Deputy Representative, Operations Manager, the Head of Sub-Office at Cox's Bazar and a Programme and Finance Analyst at Cox's Bazar. Programme personnel also have responsibility for identifying and managing the risks related to individual projects and programme partners. Key risks (e.g. resource mobilization) were discussed in some office-wide meetings. However, risk management was not included as a standard agenda item in major management and all-personnel meetings.

As of 1 January 2024, the Country Office's risk register contains 25 risks. Most of the risk ratings appear reasonable based on IAS' audit work. There are some disparities between the risk rating and the Country Office's risk appetite, which means that the office needs

to closely monitor these risks. For example, safety and security is rated as a high risk, while risk appetite is low. Engagement and management of third parties is rated medium and risk appetite is low. The Cox's Bazar sub-office does not have its own risk register. However, the Cox's Bazar office is mentioned throughout the existing set of risks and the planned mitigations. The sub-office is not required to have its own risk register and can form part of the overall Country Office register.

More could be done to fully integrate the concept of risk management in end-to-end project cycle management. This is not unique to the Bangladesh Country Office and has been noted by IAS across other offices. IAS noted some inconsistencies in documenting risks at the project level. Not all projects sampled had risk registers. These risks could also inform the Country Office-wide risk assessment.

#### **Recommendation 5 (Medium):**

The Country Representative to enhance the existing end-to-end risk management process starting with robust risk identification at project and partner management levels; feeding key recurrent risks to the Country Office risk register; and periodically discussing key risks in all personnel and senior management team meetings.

#### **Observation 8: Efficiency**

IAS observed some redundant procedures in the Country Office. For example, the Country Office is still completing the manual mission and leave plan document to support each travel booking process. However, since adopting Quantum, the travel planning approval process takes place online in the UNAll system, making the mission and leave plan document a redundant extra step.

The Regional Office noted it had encouraged offices in the region to continue use of the mission and leave plan. This is partly because the process step was viewed as having value despite the new online system as it provides a quarterly summary of an individual's leave plans.

In addition, IAS understands that finance transactions and procurement are generally

undertaken in Dhaka for Cox's Bazar and vice versa. The reason provided for this is to improve segregation of duties and oversight of both offices. While this may be helpful, it may also increase transaction times and could be inefficient unless the teams are operating in a highly coordinated manner. The Country Office is not currently tracking transaction processing times (e.g. how long it takes to complete each step of a procurement process or payment process).

*IAS advises the Country Office to consider adopting efficiency measures, including ceasing the use of steps made redundant since Quantum was adopted and using process time tracking to identify common bottlenecks.*

## C. Operations

According to Quantum, the Country Office raised 602 purchase orders from 1 January 2023 to 4 April 2024, including 321 purchase orders for procurement of goods and services (excluding purchase orders for non-staff personnel and travel) totalling US\$ 1.8 million; 200 purchase orders for travel-related expenses totalling US\$ 105,000; and 81 purchase orders for consultants totalling US\$ 500,000. Ninety-nine per cent of purchase orders issued by the Country Office were less than US\$ 50,000, including 508 purchase orders less than US\$ 5,000 each (totalling US\$ 539,000), 87 purchase orders between US\$ 5,000 and US\$ 50,000 (totalling US\$ 1.3 million) and 7 purchase orders greater than US\$ 50,000 (totalling US\$ 552,000).

The Country Office Operations team is led by the Head of Operations (NO-C) based in Dhaka. The team also includes a Programme and Finance Analyst (SB-4) based in Cox's Bazar. The Operations team has a Finance Associate (G7), a Finance Associate (SB-3) in Dhaka and another Finance Associate (SB-3) in Cox's Bazar. The team has an HR Associate (G6), Procurement Associate (G6), Administrative Associate (SB3), three Drivers and two Messengers in Dhaka; and a Procurement Associate (SB3), an Administration, HR and ICT Associate (SB3), three Drivers and one Messenger in Cox's Bazar.

IAS assessed that the Country Office's finance, ICT, human resources, assets and security management were satisfactory, while procurement and travel management needed some improvement.

## KEY OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

### Observation 9: Procurement planning and processes

The Country Office had developed a Procurement Strategy for the current Strategic Note to help to reduce its operational costs. IAS takes positive note of this longer-term vision and investment in a more sustainable Procurement function. The Country Office also intends to support the monitoring of gender-responsive procurement by the UN.

Following the Procurement Strategy, the Procurement function is reasonably well established; operating to procure needed goods and services for the Country Office; and has sufficient capacity. The Procurement Associates had all completed CIPS training.

Generally, and based on the audit sample, procurement processes were transparent and competitive. The Country Office is also taking advantage of LTAs of other UN agencies in Bangladesh and piggybacking of their agreements.

From the sampled transactions reviewed, IAS assessed that, in general, controls and documentation for the procurement of goods and services were working efficiently and documentation was in place to provide assurance that value for money was achieved.

IAS also identified areas for enhancement to contribute to better risk management and controls in the Procurement function:

#### Procurement planning

The Country Office prepared procurement plans for 2022 and 2023. IAS noted that the 2023 Procurement Plan, which amounted to US\$ 702,996, was significantly lower than the actual procurement related to expenditure for goods and services. As calculated by IAS, Quantum purchase order data excluding non-staff related purchase orders and travel amounted to US\$ 1,599,772. Based on the data, in 2023, the Country Office undertook a considerable amount of ad hoc procurement (46 per cent) which was not directly linked to the Country Office's 2023 Procurement Plan. The Country Office maintained that the amount of ad hoc procurement might not be totally accurate as Requisitioners often erroneously selected "Ad hoc" instead of "Procurement Plan" when creating requisitions.



In Atlas, and prior to the roll-out of Quantum, the Country Office maintained that the offline procurement plan was developed before the Country Office's Biennial Work Plan was prepared and approved. Procurement planning may be potentially incomplete in the project planning phase, and implementation by the programme management team which does not allow the procurement team to have a complete the procurement plan. Subsequent to the roll-out of Quantum, the Country Office stated that procurement planning will improve going forward. Procurement plans must now be incorporated within projects in Quantum and no procurement should be initiated unless there was a plan for the procurement within the project along with available budget.

While project managers are responsible for preparing and updating procurement plans within projects, IAS considers there is a need for enhanced coordination of Programme and Procurement functions as a key success factor for effective procurement planning, which would allow the Procurement team to consolidate individual requests into integrated plans, and approach procurement exercises in time and ensuring value for money. This could be achieved by including accountability for proactive procurement planning in project managers' Terms of Reference, and coordination authority and responsibility in the Procurement function's Terms of Reference.

On a positive note, the volume of ad hoc procurement had significantly reduced in the first quarter of 2024 compared to 2023. Ad hoc procurement currently only accounts for 12 per cent of procurement and IAS encourages the Country Office to ensure that this positive trend continues.

Long term agreements: IAS noted that 17 per cent of the Country Office's procurement of goods and services related to micro-purchasing. Based on discussions, where possible, the Country Office tries to establish LTAs. Linked to micro-purchasing, IAS reviewed the top 10 suppliers and was pleased to note that 7 (totalling US\$ 106,001) of the 10 suppliers (totalling US\$ 146,516) viewed had LTAs/service contracts with the Country Office. Currently, the Country Office has 29 LTAs in place and 4 service contracts. However, there may still be opportunities to implement further LTAs in order to reduce too frequent micro-purchasing with the same vendor.

IAS summarized key findings from its sample of 32 purchase orders:

Images included in Terms of Reference/specifications documents: For three purchase orders, the Terms of Reference/specifications shared with potential vendors included pictures of items which were not labelled as "Sample Design". While no brands or models were mentioned/visible, images should clearly state that they are samples or examples for illustrative purposes. The Country Office maintained that pictures were given as a reference for potential suppliers so that they had a better understanding of the goods required and that the pictures were based on market research. ***IAS advises the Country Office Representative to ensure that Procurement terms of reference/specifications which include pictures are clearly labelled as "samples" by the Procurement Unit.***

Manual purchase requisitions and systems-generated purchase requisitions: IAS noted there were instances where requestors were completing both manual purchase requisition forms and system purchase requisitions in Quantum (2023), and Atlas (2022). These mainly related to related to micro-purchasing. IAS noted that manual requisition forms were not pre-numbered and/or sequenced which may lead to missing or unauthorized requisitions. In addition, some of the manual requisition dates pre-dated the E-requisition Quantum dates. It was not always clear if the project manager (first authority) had approved the manual request prior to submitting it to the Procurement function. For example, in one purchase order, the manual requisition was dated 8 June 2023, whereas the Quantum requisition was dated 20 June 2023, and was not signed by the project manager. The Country Office maintained that both manual and system requisitions were prepared by requestors in the Country Office as Quantum (2023), and Atlas (2022) did always allow for sufficient details or specifications to be included. Over the years, the Country Office has maintained offline purchase requisitions for better monitoring and record keeping. In Quantum, a requisition is required to be submitted online; however, Quantum has had glitches, therefore, the Country Office continued preparing manual purchase requisitions. With the gradual stabilization of Quantum and colleagues' capacity, the Country Office is encouraged to reassess these duplications and discontinue the use of offline/manual purchase requisitions.

### Recommendation 6 (Medium):

The Country Representative to:

- (a) Ensure managers are accountable for updating procurement plans in a timely manner.
- (b) Review and decide whether to (i) discontinue the use of offline/manual purchase requisitions; or (ii) improve processes linked to offline/manual purchase requisitions.

### Observation 10: Travel management

The Country Office did not always adhere to the Travel Policy and there were redundancies in travel management workflows through the continual use of legacy systems despite related processes already being integrated in Quantum.

IAS' review of a sample of travel transactions noted the following:

- Four missions did not have travel claims submitted after travel was completed.
- Three missions did not include travel authorizations/travel requests. Although no travel authorization was on file, there was evidence that the trips were authorized, but not by the Travel Authorization form or Travel Plan.
- Two travel purchase orders were created and approved post facto.

The Country Office is participating in three LTAs for travel services. Although the Country Office established a very good practice in always comparing tickets prices among LTA suppliers prior to booking duty travel, there are no Participating Level Agreements between the Country Office and the LTA vendors. Incorporating a Participation Level Agreement into an LTA ensures that all participating parties piggybacking onto the LTA have clearly defined roles and responsibilities, which helps prevent misunderstandings and ensures that each participating party understands their contributions to the LTA. IAS was unable to establish how these travel LTAs are being monitored and tracked.

When Quantum went live, the new online travel process had an online travel planning approval step which replaced the need for the manual mission and leave plan document previously completed for every travel process undertaken in UN Women. The Country Office is still using the mission and leave plan document (as noted in Observation 8

above), as well as completing the online travel planning steps in UNAll, which is redundant. The Regional Office stated it had encouraged this practice across the region; however, IAS notes (as communicated by the headquarters Procurement Unit) that the mission and leave plan is no longer required as Quantum provides for travel and leave recording and reporting.

### Recommendation 7 (Medium):

The Country Representative to:

- (a) Invest in training sessions and process improvement initiatives to maximize the benefits of Quantum, the newly integrated system.
- (b) Ensure compliance with travel policies and monitor related risks.
- (c) Establish separate Participation Level Agreements for each LTA the Country Office enters into.

### Observation 11: Security management

Based on IAS' review, Country Office management appears to implement adequate and effective measures to manage the safety and security of its staff, premises and assets. The Country Office has two main locations including one main office in Dhaka and a sub-office in Cox's Bazar. UN Women manages its own office in Dhaka, while the Cox's Bazar sub-office is hosted by IOM and is collocated with other UN entities.

The Country Office is in the process of establishing business continuity protocols in the BCCMA (Business Continuity and Crisis Management Application). The crisis management portion of the BCCMA is fully set up and approved. The business continuity portion has two protocols that are pending completion. It is important to ensure that these protocols are finalized and communicated internally should there be a need to activate a protocol in the future.

### Recommendation 8 (Medium):

The Country Representative to ensure completion of the outstanding business continuity protocols in the BCCMA.

### III. RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

Observation	Recommendation	Process	Responsible Unit	Priority	Agree – Yes/no	Action Plan	Implementation date
Observation 3: Resource mobilization in Cox’s Bazar	Recommendation 1: The Country Representative to continue to monitor the effectiveness of the Country Office’s resource mobilization efforts for the Cox’s Bazar sub-office. The existing strategy could detail the funding environment in Cox’s Bazar, and link to the Strategic Note, addressing the Country Office’s future goals with respect to the changing nature of the Rohingya refugee crisis.	Resource mobilization	Bangladesh Country Office	Medium	Yes	<p><b>Action Taken:</b></p> <p>In the ongoing BCO SN 2022-2026, Outcome 5 is dedicated to the Rohingya Response. The BCO RM and partnership strategy covers the entire SN. The plan to update the strategy with a specific focus on CXB has been initiated.</p> <p><b>Action planned:</b></p> <p>The Cox’s Bazar (CXB) specific annex of the Resource Mobilisation and Partnership Strategy will be developed by Q4 of 2024. The CXB-specific annex is not a stand-alone RM and Partnership Strategy, in keeping with the one-BCO approach, rather it will complement the existing strategy with contextualized actions and priorities for CXB, tailored to the needs of the context, in alignment with the JRP, the RM plan developed by the Strategic Executive Group (SEG), and the medium-term vision document for the Rohingya response.</p>	December 2024
Observation 4: Project design and management	<p>Recommendation 2: The Country Representative to strengthen project monitoring. This could be achieved through better linking programmatic and financial monitoring, and monitoring plans which track planned results and agreed targets.</p> <p>The Country Representative to ensure that new projects and extensions to new phases of projects include defined exit/handover strategies to facilitate the sustainability of outcomes.</p>	Project management	Bangladesh Country Office	Medium	Yes	<p><b>Action taken:</b></p> <p>The Bangladesh Country Office (BCO) has been using the Responsible Partners’ Quarterly progress report template introduced by the Headquarters for monitoring and reporting purposes.</p> <p>The BCO has already shared guidance with all Programme Managers (PMs) and Programme Officers (POs) on exit strategy, project MERPS and PMFs in line with updated UN Women corporate Planning, Monitoring and Reporting Guidance. Two orientations on the PMR policy have been conducted.</p> <p><b>Actions Planned:</b></p> <p>BCO will continue to invest in capacity strengthening of programme colleagues and RPs to ensure better alignment between programmatic and financial monitoring.</p> <p>A refresher will be planned for Committing officers to ensure their review covers this aspect prior to approval.</p>	September 2024
Observation 5: Programme partner management	<p>Recommendation 3: The Country Representative to:</p> <p>(a) Review and streamline the process linked to the selection and contracting of programme partners.</p> <p>(b) Assess the training provided to programme partners on completing FACE forms and how it can be further improved, e.g., include recorded training and standard induction packages.</p> <p>(c) Ensure that partner audit findings are considered during the review of quarterly reports from programme partners and quarterly monitoring.</p>	Programme partner management	Bangladesh Country Office	Medium	Yes	<p><b>Action taken:</b></p> <p>All Managers have been reminded to review partner audit findings during the quarterly review.</p> <p><b>Action Planned:</b></p> <p>The BCO will revisit the workflows for partner selection to streamline the review process.</p> <p>The BCO has been providing continuous technical support and strengthening the capacity of partners on results-based management and financial rules and regulations including on Face Forms as part of partner induction and by organizing specific training. These efforts have enabled the BCO to provide quality donor reports and avoid serious audit findings.</p>	September 2024
Observation 6: Organizational structure and authority	<p>Recommendation 4: The Country Representative to:</p> <p>(a) Address or assess the feasibility of the recommendations and action plans contained in the 2022 Functional Review and 2023 Business Transformation Review due to rapidly changing contexts and risks.</p> <p>(b) Monitor the Country Office typology and, in case of potential inability to reach the required targets, prepare business continuity plans for potential scaling down and office restructuring, if needed.</p> <p>(c) Clarify the authority and accountability for different DRF outcomes in the Country Office.</p>	Organizational structure and authority	Bangladesh Country Office	Medium	Yes	<p><b>Action taken:</b></p> <p>The BCO strategic Note 2022-2026 narrative clearly mentions that the BCO will transition to a medium country typology by the end of the current SN period in 2026 as Bangladesh will be graduating from LDC status on 24 November 2026.</p> <p>The ICF was revised to give further delegation to Programme Managers in Cox Bazar Sub Office in line with the functional analysis in 2023.</p> <p>The Deputy Representative and Head of Sub Office are committing level 2 officers with clear division of labour. Due to competing priorities and filling vacancies in Cox’s Bazar most face forms have been reviewed and approved by the Representative and Deputy Representative in 2023 and 2024.</p> <p>The CXB organogram was discussed with the former Regional Director (RD) in May and will be reviewed with the new RD.</p> <p><b>Action planned:</b></p> <p>Once the CXB NOC is on board the division of labour in line with ICF will be revisited.</p> <p>In line with the recent SN direct funding guidance an RACI matrix will be developed.</p> <p>The Cox’s Bazar functional review recommendations are subject to availability of predictable funding. The CXB organogram will be regularly reviewed in light of funding and the ongoing localisation of the humanitarian response.</p> <p>The Executive Director has requested the Senior Management Team (SMT) to operationalize the corporate Humanitarian Strategy, two documents highlighting “Principles and Core Commitments” and an “Operational Workplan” be finalized to define the operational principles of UN Women’s humanitarian action, and minimum coordination and programmatic offers in all humanitarian contexts where UN Women has a presence.</p>	December 2024

Observation	Recommendation	Process	Responsible Unit	Priority	Agree – Yes/no	Action Plan	Implementation date
						BCO will reassess and realign as the guidance from HQ is issued as the office seeks to streamline both its programming and presence in Cox's Bazar in a context of depleting resources for the protracted Rohingya Response.	
Observation 7: Risk management	Recommendation 5: The Country Representative to enhance the existing end-to-end risk management process starting with robust risk identification at project and partner management levels; feeding key recurrent risks to the Country Office risk register; and periodically discussing key risks in all personnel and senior management team meetings.	Risk management	Bangladesh Country Office	Medium	Yes	<b>Action taken:</b> Review of risks are a standing agenda item for BCO priority meetings (equivalent to BCO SMT) as of 2024. The risk register was reviewed in July as part of the mid-year process. <b>Action planned:</b> Review and discussion on risks will be a regular feature in programme meetings and the operations clinic.	June 2024
Observation 9: Procurement planning and processes	Recommendation 6: The Country Representative to ensure:  (a) Ensure managers are accountable for updating procurement plans in a timely manner.  (b) Review and decide whether to (i) discontinue the use of offline/manual purchase requisitions; or (ii) improve processes linked to offline/manual purchase requisitions.	Procurement	Bangladesh Country Office	Medium	Yes	<b>Action taken:</b> The BCO has already shared guidance with all PMs and POs on updating unit procurement plans. These have been reported as part of Q2 reporting. <b>Action planned:</b> The BCO will continue to update and report on procurement plans in the quarterly reporting.	June 2024
Observation 10: Travel management	Recommendation 7: The Country Representative to:  (a) Invest in training sessions and process improvement initiatives to maximize the benefits of Quantum, the newly integrated system.  (b) Ensure compliance with travel policies and monitor related risks.  (c) Establish separate Participation Level Agreements for each LTA the Country Office enters into.	Travel management	Bangladesh Country Office	Medium	Yes	<b>Action taken:</b> The BCO will continue training to maximise the benefits of Quantum. In addition to training organised by the Regional Office, the BCO organised a three day in person training with the HQ Manager for Programme in May to support with capacity development of colleagues. Colleagues also attended the in-person training organised by UNDP earlier in the year. <b>Action planned:</b> A dedicated session on travel policies will be conducted in Q3. BCO has signed PLA for all the ongoing LTAs except for travel agencies. These were signed through inter agency agreement under the BOS platform. However, as recommended, BCO will sign PLA for the travel agent LTAs as well.	July 2024
Observation 11: Security management	Recommendation 8: The Country Representative to ensure completion of the outstanding business continuity protocols in the BCCMA.	Security management	Bangladesh Country Office	Medium	Yes	<b>Action taken:</b> BCO had achieved full compliance in BCCMA in terms of crisis management and protocols in June. BCO will continue to update protocols as relevant.	June 2024

# Annex 1: DEFINITIONS OF AUDIT TERMS, RATINGS AND PRIORITIES

## A. AUDIT RATINGS

<b>Satisfactory</b>	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.
<b>Some Improvement Needed</b>	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.
<b>Major Improvement Needed</b>	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.
<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	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

<b>High (Critical)</b>	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.
<b>Medium (Important)</b>	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.
<b>Low</b>	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 the management of the audited entity/area, either during the exit meeting or through a separate memo 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 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.



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