COUNTRY OFFICE AUDIT

INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT UN WOMEN COUNTRY OFFICE IN ZIMBABWE

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INDEPENDENT EVALUATION AND AUDIT SERVICES (IEAS)
Internal Audit Service (IAS)
UN WOMEN

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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 Zimbabwe from February to July 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 internal 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 internal 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 from 1 January 2022 to 31 January 2024 (on 1 January 2022 the Country Office did not have an approved Strategic Note: it was approved in April 2022). For operations controls, the sample covered transactions from 1 January 2023 to 31 January 2024. Recorded expenditure for the Country Office totalled US$ 1.7 million in 2022, (from Atlas), US$ 7 million in 2023 and US$ 65,320 in 2024 (from Quantum).

Scope limitation: IAS did not review all relevant Quantum ERP-related reports from January 2023 to December 2023 and related controls as some tools and processes were still under development at the time of the audit.

As part of its regular audit procedures, IAS conducted an anonymous survey of Country Office personnel with a 71 per cent response rate. The results of the survey have been incorporated throughout the report.

The audit was conducted in conformance with the *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing* of The Institute of Internal Auditors.

Audit opinion and overall audit rating

IAS acknowledges several achievements and good practices. For example, through the Spotlight Initiative, the Country Office assisted the government in drafting and launching the Zimbabwe national strategy to prevent and address gender-based violence 2023–2030; the National Gender Policy 2024–2028; and the launch of the High-level Political Compact to end gender-based violence and harmful practices. Key frameworks such as the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and Common Country Assessment included gender equality elements. UN Women contributed towards gender parity through coordinating the UNCT-SWAP indicators, which include gender parity. The Country Office and the government worked closely on implementation and reporting on the normative instruments adopted by the country. The Strategic Note was developed through extensive consultations with stakeholders and was designed to address key gender inequality issues in Zimbabwe. Some state-owned entities implemented gender-based violence victim referral systems that continued to operate after the end of UN Women projects.

IAS assessed the overall state of governance, risk management and internal controls in the Country Office as **Some Improvement Needed** meaning that **"***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.*"

The overall rating is based on the overall state of governance, risk and internal controls from January 2022 to January 2024. The following areas were rated either ***satisfactory or some improvements needed***: communications and knowledge management; UN system coordination; resource mobilization; HR management; procurement; assets; ICT; travel; security and safety; and financial management. However, IAS assessed the following areas as **Major Improvement Needed** due to the severity of the potential risks, which if not addressed adequately, could significantly affect achievement of Country Office objectives: (a) inadequate programme management regarding the project portfolio, construction-related projects, verification of targeted population and working with programme partners; and (b) ineffective risk management practices and follow-up of oversight recommendations.

The Country Office informed IAS that the office's internal control framework was not working properly when the new Country Representative and Deputy Country Representative joined in April and May 2022 respectively. Moreover, the Country Office has not had an Operations Manager since 2018 and while responsibilities were shared among various staff, though it was unclear whether staff were trained to successfully discharge their duties. At the time of the audit, the Office had an ongoing recruitment process for an Operations Manager post after approval of post reestablishment. The office structure was imbalanced between Operations and Programme due to several vacancies and departures from the Programme team and the Deputy Country Representative. The Internal Control Frameworks for 2020, 2021 and 2022 and operations functional analysis conducted in 2021 by the Regional Office partly reflected these issues. Over this period, the Country Office was entrusted with significant funding and, due to the lack of an Operations Manager, the office's exposure to risks was significant and should have been addressed. **IAS acknowledges that the current Country Representative started making notable improvements upon assuming office from April 2022 and it is anticipated that these improvements will continue to enhance the control environment going forward**.

IAS made 11 recommendations to address the areas for improvement, 4 of which are ranked as high priority, 7 as medium priority.

A high (Critical) priority recommendation means that *"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."* The four high-priority recommendations include:

Recommendation 3: The Country Office to ensure that there is a process in place to proactively manage project-related risks during the project life cycle, monitoring and tracking project progress against agreed targets and milestones, and to continuously validate with the targeted population that project results are addressing their needs. Moreover, the Country Office needs to manage its construction interventions according to established corporate processes.

Recommendation 4: The Country Office to enhance programme partner management by monitoring progress through the timely submission of narrative and financial progress reports; continuously remediating outstanding PGAMS actions; and reassigning focal points for partner agreements. The capacity assessments of partners should be risk-focused, with capacity development plans established and monitored; aligned to payment modalities and size of advances; and performance evaluations of partners systematically conducted to ensure the satisfactory execution of all deliverables.

Recommendation 6: The Country Office to continue to explore different mitigation measures to effectively align residual risks to the UN Women risk appetite statement; include construction-related risks in the Country Office's main risk register, with effective mitigation actions to ensure the quality of work; and reduce potential fraud risks, poor performance and misuse of funds related to construction and other high residual risks to the Country Office environment.

Recommendation 7: The Country Office to strengthen implementation and reporting on partner audit and Country Portfolio Evaluation recommendations. Responsibility for follow-up of partner audit recommendations should also be redistributed from the Operations to Programme teams; and ensure formal tracking of all partner audit findings/recommendations through the audit portal.

The seven 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 strengthening the capacity/skills of the Monitoring and Reporting function to independently validate the reliability of results; the monitoring of performance of the Resource Mobilization Strategy and plans; extending the scope of the Country Office's previous functional analysis beyond the Operations/Admin functions; improving HR processes for consultants, handover and performance evaluations; and harmonizing procurement, asset and financial management processes.

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

CoA	Chart of Accounts
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DRF	Development Results Framework
DSA	Daily Subsistence Allowance
IAS	Internal Audit Service
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IEAS	Independent Evaluation and Audit Services
LTA	Long-Term Agreement
OEEF	Organizational Efficiency and Effectiveness Framework
PSMU	**Programme Support Management Unit**
RMS	Results Management System
SSA	Special Service Agreement
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

I. BACKGROUND

UN Women has worked in Zimbabwe since the 1980s (first as UNIFEM) and had a project office in Harare, which became a country programme and later a regional programme under the Southern Africa Multi-Country Office before being established as a Country Office in 1996. The Country Office reports to the East and Southern Africa Regional Office. The Country Office is located in Harare; there are no sub-offices. The current Country Representative assumed the role on 19 April 2022.

The Country Office mainly focused on three thematic areas: Ending Violence Against Women; Governance and Participation in Public Life; and Economic Empowerment. The current Country Office Strategic Note covers the period 2022–2026. The 2023 Annual Work Plan included *51 Development Results Framework (DRF) indicators of which 31 are global strategic plan indicators and 20 are country office indicators; and 30 Organizational Efficiency and Effectiveness Framework (OEEF) indicators of which 14 are global strategic plan indicators and 16 are country office indicators.*

As of 2 February 2024, according to the OneApp HR dashboard, the Country Office employed 6 personnel with fixed-term appointments; 1 personnel on temporary appointment; engaged 10 individuals on service contracts; 1 consultant on Special Service Agreement (SSA); and 3 United Nations Volunteers.

The Country Office's budget and expenditure are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Office target and actual budget, total expenditure (in US$)

	2022	2023	22 July2024	Total
Budget target	4,733,626	3,561,857	6,986,674	15,282,157
Actual budget	4,008,761	3,877,423	2,743,365	10,629,548
Resource mobilization rate	85%	109%	39%	70%
Expenditure	3,385,100	3,199,209	1,099,626	7,683,935
Financial delivery rate	84%	83%	40%	72%

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".

For the period under review (2022–2023), the country field programme comprised 16 non-core funded projects with a total budget of US$ 2.7 million from 2022 Atlas, funded by a range of donors, including:

- Multi-Donor and Multi-Partner Trust Funds for three projects amounting to US$ 1.5 million;
- UN agency bilateral agreements, including five projects amounting to US$ 150,000 funded by UNAIDS and the Peacebuilding Fund; and
- other funding for eight projects amounting to US$ 1.1 million.

As of 2 February 2024, of 13 non-core-funded projects with a total budget of US$ 2.5 million, 10 projects were migrated from Atlas to Quantum, while 3 were newly created projects in Quantum.

As of 2 February 2024, the Country Office had 18 partner agreements with a start date from January 2022 valued at approximately US$ 1.5 million. The highest value partner agreement was US$ 496,279, while the lowest was US$ 5,000.

Recorded expenditure for the Country Office totalled US$ 1.7 million in 2022 (from Atlas), US$ 7 million in 2023 and US$ 65,320 in 2024 (from Quantum). Overall, this consisted of: staff costs (25 per cent); other personnel costs (22 per cent); procurement of goods and services (10 per cent); maintenance, utilities and common services (22 per cent); personnel travel (8 per cent); training and hospitality costs, including external participant travel (8 per cent); support cost charges (1 per cent); and grants (4 per cent). This includes 17 per cent of the total expenditure incurred through liquidation of advances or reimbursements to programme partners.

II. AUDIT RESULTS

A. Strategic priorities, programme planning and implementation

See Background section for key information on strategic priorities, country programmes, project portfolio, and resource mobilization and utilization. IAS reviewed the Country Office's strategic positioning, priorities setting and implementation, coordination of gender mainstreaming, advocacy and resource mobilization, programme and project management, and management of programme partners. The Country Office's work was aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 5, Gender Equality.

The Country Office understood its role and responsibilities in the country. Feedback from the stakeholders interviewed by IAS was generally positive with few suggestions for improvement. The structure and resources dedicated for communications appeared sufficient. Several good quality advocacy campaigns and knowledge products were produced; however, not all knowledge products had clear dissemination plans. After the IAS audit mission, the Country Office acted on this observation and developed a knowledge dissemination plan for 2024–2026. The political will to advance the gender agenda is a comparative advantage for the Country Office as evidenced by the inclusion of gender equality in the government's Budget Statement since 2022 and the drafting and subsequent implementation of a National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

The Country Office adequately led the coordination mandate for gender mainstreaming in Zimbabwe. All pillars of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework demonstrated incorporation of a gender lens due to the active involvement of UN Women, the UN Country Team (UNCT) and UN Resident Coordinator's Office during the drafting process. The Country Office provided guidance to the UNCT and gender focal points on allocation of gender markers for joint programmes and individual projects. The collaboration between the Country Office and the UN Resident Coordinator's Office was solid and well appreciated by stakeholders.

Based on the audit work performed, IAS assessed the following areas as satisfactory: advocacy, communications and coordination. Areas for improvement included Strategic Note design and implementation, resource mobilization, management of the project portfolio and programme partners.

KEY OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Observation 1: Communications and knowledge management

The Country Office understood its role and responsibilities in the country. The Communications Strategy and annual communications plan were developed but did not include the required targets. Several good quality advocacy campaigns and knowledge products were produced. The Country Office also promoted work with both traditional and non-traditional partners. These efforts should continue. One of the key challenges in Zimbabwe was the perception of the shrinking operating space for women's civil society organizations (CSOs) due to some recent and work-in-progress laws and regulations that are likely to limit the nature of the work undertaken by CSOs in the country. Respondents to the personnel survey undertaken by IAS encouraged the Country Office to develop a strategy to work effectively with CSO partners and continue to maintain effective partnerships with the government and other stakeholders.

Almost all respondents to the personnel survey agreed that the Country Office worked to build partner capacity to develop and implement gender-responsive policies, strategies, frameworks and programmes. Feedback from the external stakeholders interviewed by IAS was generally positive on the leading role played by UN Women on gender mainstreaming in Zimbabwe. They highlighted the discussions about an action plan for gender equality considerations related to climate change but there is not yet solid funding for implementation.

Since joining the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, UN Women has been present in the Humanitarian Country Team and has supported gender analysis and training. Stakeholders suggested the Country Office work closely with UN entities that are already in the humanitarian space and help them to articulate gender mainstreaming in their programmes, while also recognizing that UN Women is not predominantly a humanitarian organization.

Communications Strategy, plan and activities: The Country Office developed a Communications Strategy for 2022–2026; costed annual communication plans, directly linked to the aspirations and duration of the Strategic Note 2022–2026; and developed a log frame which clearly identifies the overall objective, expected outcome, priority audience, activities, indicators and medium to be used to deliver. IAS noted that the strategy commits to the regular update of data on key performance indicators. However, the indicators contained in the strategy and plans did not have targets, which could result in difficulties measuring performance. Establishing targets would help the Country Office to objectively monitor performance and take timely/appropriate actions. ***As an advisory note, the Country Office to enhance the Communications Strategy and annual communications plans with clear targets and measure performance on an annual basis***.

Communication and visibility of projects: The level of communication with donors, programme partners and the targeted population was generally adequate; however, it sometimes needed to be more proactive. Some donors stated that they felt their contributions were not adequately recognized or acknowledged publicly, which could lead to some dissatisfaction. Considering the country context, the Country Office should continue to prioritize donor visibility by continually highlighting donors' contributions, achievements and impact through various communication channels. The Country Office informed IAS that it had discussed expectations regarding visibility with one donor and the Country Office has accommodated its requests.

All respondents to the personnel survey agreed that the Country Office shared knowledge across Thematic and Operations teams. As good practices for sharing knowledge and experiences, the Country Office participated in communities of practice; dedicated 1–2 hours every week to sharing of knowledge and learning for all personnel; and conducted monthly programmes and operations staff meetings to identify synergies.

Observation 2: Coordination Strategy, structure and resources

The Country Office developed a costed workplan for its coordination work. Reviews of annual workplans were undertaken during midterm, quarterly reports and annual reflections. The annual workplan was also guided by the Country Office's Strategic Note. As chair of the Zimbabwe UN Gender Theme Group, the Country Office led the formulation of gender mainstreaming, which was endorsed by the UNCT. UN Women also played a crucial role in the development and roll-out of the UNCT gender mainstreaming strategy. The Country Office is also a member of the drafting team for the Regional Office's coordination strategy.

The Coordination unit was composed of one gender mainstreaming and coordination specialist on a Service Contract, funded by extrabudgetary resources. Other than staff time, the operational budget for the coordination mandate was 76 per cent funded by non-core funds from one donor and 24 per cent funded by core resources. As part of resource mobilization efforts, the Country Office needs to diversify its donor base to ensure the sustainability of the coordination mandate and function.

At the time of the audit, the Country Office did not have a dedicated coordination strategy but relied on the UNCT gender mainstreaming strategy, which might not include all the critical UN Women specific coordination priorities cascaded from headquarters and the Regional Office. After the IAS audit mission, the Country Office developed a Coordination Strategy, which is now under implementation. The Country Office noted that the UN Women global Coordination Strategy was adopted in 2024, especially Strategic Plan outcome 7 and the regional coordination strategy has not yet been completed. Under Resolution 64/289,[1] UN Women's mandate is coordination within the UN and the Country Office had ensured there was a strategy for mainstreaming gender within the UNCT. For external coordination, the Country Office supported formulation of a national gender machinery strategy to improve coordination on gender nationwide.

[1] Link, https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/64/289

UNCT-SWAP scorecard: The Zimbabwe UNCT produced at least three UNCT-SWAP gender equality scorecard annual progress reports and action plans from 2021 to 2023 and action plans for the SWAP. Focusing on the 2023 report, the UNCT assessed five performance indicators based on the 2023 workplan to determine the effectiveness of the UNCT in achieving the performance indicators and to develop an action plan to help improve performance in 2024. Overall performance of the 15 indicators was generally satisfactory: 9 indicators exceeded requirements, 4 were meeting requirements; and 2 were approaching requirements.[2] The two underperforming indicators were: 4.1 Leadership for Gender Equality, and indicator PI 7.1 GEWE Results. The action plans for these two indicators were already under way, which included having gender on Programme Management Team meeting agendas, tracking gender results using UNInfo and incorporating/contributing to gender equality and the empowerment of women inputs in UNCT annual reports.[3] ***As an advisory note, the Country Office to continue its proactive engagement with the gender focal points and Heads of UN entities to improve performance of the two UNCT-SWAP indicators facing challenges, and consider reassessing them for the purposes of the 2024 UNCT SWAP annual report.***

Observation 3: Strategic Note design and implementation

The Strategic Note was well defined, reviewed and addressed the key gender inequality issues in Zimbabwe, and had clear priorities. The Country Office was progressing with implementation of the Strategic Note; however, some outcome and output indicators required further attention to expedite their full implementation. The Country Office noted it is less than halfway through implementing the strategy and has a midterm review of the Strategic Note planned for September 2024 (it was initially planned for June 2024). Therefore, further improvements are expected in the future.

Monitoring, reporting and evaluation: The Country Office had a monitoring and reporting analyst who was also responsible for decentralized evaluations. The Strategic Note was supported by a Monitoring, Evaluation and Research Plan 2022–2026, which was included in the annual workplans to follow implementation of the Strategic Note and was used as another tool for fundraising. However, the research components did not adequately translate into the annual workplans, i.e. the Monitoring, Evaluation and Research Plan identified six main research activities but the annual workplans only incorporated research for one major project, while other planned research activities in the plan were not implemented. ***As an advisory note, the Country Office could endeavour to incorporate more research into annual workplans and knowledge management to have more visibility, if research is still considered important.***

With regards to monitoring, the monitoring and reporting analyst followed up on results at country level to consolidate thematic results, while programme specialists/managers followed up results at project and thematic level. Several missions were undertaken by programme specialists to project sites, and there were a few instances where the monitoring and reporting analyst conducted **independent monitoring visits for projects; however, they were not sufficient relative to the number of projects. Personnel carrying out monitoring and evaluation at the country level need to be more involved in the independent validation of data reported by programme teams and partners**. For example, by meeting or calling people directly benefitting from UN Women's programmes especially where construction, major training/workshops, etc. are planned; during or post-implementation of projects; and validating their satisfaction with interventions or the completeness and quantity of inputs or services received. This would ensure the Country Office's annual reports include valid and authentic data for wider dissemination to internal and external stakeholders.

Strategic Note output and outcome indicators: The Country Office highlighted that the outcomes for the duration of the Strategic Note do not change but the outputs sometimes change year-on-year if they are completed, or no longer applicable. As of 2 March 2024, according to the 2023 results monitoring and reporting dashboards, the Country Office had a total of 81 indicators (*excluding desk 12 desk review and 12 delated indicators*); 54 per cent of indicators were "target reached or surpassed"; 19 per cent were "significant progress"; 6 per cent were "some progress"; and 21 per cent were "no change". The number of indicators with "some progress" and "no change" was 27 per cent of all indicators, which were mostly in outcomes and outputs. To improve its overall performance, the Country Office needs to pay attention to the number of indicators classified as "no change" and "no progress", which could form part of the agenda for the

[2] Zimbabwe-2023-SWAP SCORECARD ANNUAL REPORT page 6

[3] Zimbabwe-2023-SWAP SCORECARD ANNUAL REPORT pages 23 and 27

2024 midterm review to take feedback from different teams on the reasons for the lack of positive performance. It is anticipated that this will increase the probability of reaching the targets and making significant progress in achieving the indicators. **Annual report results validation**: The Country Office undertook a results-based reporting training course and orientation of the 2024 annual reporting guidance on 27 November 2023. Although the 2023 annual report was submitted on time to the Regional Office and headquarters, it reported results by different teams that were, at times, inaccurate or unsubstantiated. For example, there were inconsistencies in the measurement of targets versus actual results; some reported numbers could not be traced back to the supporting documents; and there was underreporting of the challenges faced during implementation of projects feeding into the Country Office's annual report. IAS also raised concerns about the results from project narrative reports, which are then consolidated into annual reports without independent validation. This occurred because the Monitoring and Reporting team relied on the data reported by the Programme teams without cross-checking with results from the monitoring visits to project sites. Therefore, some sections of the annual report could be unreliable as the source data was not validated by the Monitoring team.

One of the challenges across UN Women is the low investment in post-implementation management reviews for completed programmes/projects which could help determine outcomes and impact in the long term. Despite final evaluations for programmes/projects, measurement of long-term results is not yet fully institutionalized because outcome and impact indicators still generally focus on quantitative measures, which are more linked to outputs/activities. Sometimes there are also difficulties in reporting impact and outcomes because they usually require a long time to materialize and become concrete. Some of the donors interviewed by IAS highlighted that they would like to see more reporting on outcomes, and they raised a concern that current annual and donor reports focused more on outputs or activities. They urged the Country Office to go above and beyond to demonstrate what has been achieved by the work carried out in previous years, which is currently benefitting women and girls in Zimbabwe.

The Country Office highlighted that this challenge is exacerbated by annual reports and donor report templates that only focus on output and outcome results during the reporting period. Therefore, sometimes it is not clear how the Country Office can demonstrate outcomes and impact over the long term. ***The Country Office suggested corporate guidance could be strengthened in this area for effective reporting on impact and it is anticipated that the new Planning, Monitoring and Reporting Policy will address some of these challenges***.

Women's Economic Empowerment thematic area: Currently, the Country Office does not have a Women's Economic Empowerment portfolio or strategy. As a result, there is an absence of comprehensive plans, policies and programmes aimed at addressing the barriers and challenges faced by women in accessing economic opportunities and achieving financial independence. Developing a robust strategy to address these issues requires a multifaceted approach that targets various dimensions of women's economic empowerment.

The Country Office informed IAS that the Regional Office provided the Country Office with US$ 800,000 as leverage to build the Women's Economic Empowerment portfolio over a period of three years (2023–2025). IAS' review of the 2023 annual report in the Results Management System (RMS) and Delivery Report as of 10 October 2023 indicated a one-time allocation from the Executive Director's Office of US$ 154,737. At the time of the audit, the Women's Economic Empowerment unit was still under establishment. IAS encourages the Country Office to use the Women's Empowerment Principles as an entry point with stakeholders, especially the private sector, to increase the uptake of gender-responsive procurement principles and to operationalize gender-responsive budgeting, which are some of the key drivers in the economic landscape. The Country Office informed IAS that it had never had a dedicated Women's Economic Empowerment strategy due to lack of donor interest. This meant that the office took a piecemeal approach to addressing female poverty, including through promoting safe markets as a response to gender-based violence, under one major project or through a joint programme on renewable energy. The Country Office was leveraging both the one-time Executive Director's core allocation and additional funding from the Regional Office to implement a seed programme on Women's Economic Empowerment, which was developed internally with inputs from the relevant government ministry and other external stakeholders. The programme focuses on research; mapping of economic empowerment opportunities for women across the country; and business clinics/capacity-building for women entrepreneurs to enhance their businesses and leverage affirmative procurement opportunities. The Country Office informed IAS that one donor has shown great interest in the research aspects and, during a donor meeting, another donor indicated it could contribute US$ 200,000 to support this work in most remote areas.

Recommendation 1 (Medium):

The Country Office to ensure a consistent and coherent approach to monitoring and reporting and strengthen processes to continuously ensure reliability of results, including maintaining evidence for knowledge management and business continuity purposes, which could include: (a) building the capacity and coaching the Thematic and Operations teams to achieve high performance for the Strategic Note and Annual Workplan indicators; (b) establishing clear roles and accountability for producing accurate and validated results for data collection, monitoring and reporting; and (c) strengthening the capacity/skills of the Monitoring and Reporting function to independently validate the reliability of the results indicator information reported by Thematic and Operations teams, including results reported in project narrative reports by Programme teams and programme partners.

Observation 4: Resource mobilization

The Country Office has a Resource Mobilization Strategy which could be enhanced by clear targets to enable the objective monitoring of performance and to improve clarity about new ways to raise resources.

Resource Mobilization Strategy: The Country Office developed a Resource Mobilization Strategy 2023–2026 in April 2023. The strategy included a results framework; however, it did not have expected outcomes and targets for the proposed strategic actions and indicators. Without targets, senior management would not be able to gauge whether resource mobilization had been successful or required more efforts. This could result in reduced accountability/commitment for raising resources and performance monitoring that is not objective. The Resource Mobilization Strategy proposed a clear monitoring and evaluation plan; however, at the time of the IAS audit, the plan had not yet been established. The lack of a monitoring and evaluation plan for the strategy could result in an uncoordinated approach to measuring the success of fundraising efforts.

Resource mobilization projections: For the duration of the Strategic Note 2022–2026, the Country Office projected a total of US$ 28 million for five years, of which 63 per cent, i.e. US$ 17.9 million was to be mobilized. During the six years of the previous Strategic Note 2016–2021, the Country Office was able to achieve 69 per cent or US$ 22 million of the US$ 31 million budget. The US$ 28 million projection for the current Strategic Note therefore seems quite ambitious, considering the challenging donor landscape.

LEADS and proposals: The Country Office used the LEADs portal to track and monitor the status of proposals, concept notes and resource pipeline. IAS observed that most “won” or “approved” proposals had not yet translated into actual confirmed funding, projects and transfers from donors. The status of ongoing negotiations had not been updated, and some proposals had expired but were not removed from the LEADs system. Therefore, management might have incomplete data to monitor resource mobilization efforts and take risk-informed decisions.

DAMS portal: As of 2 February 2024, the Country Office had 10 donor agreements for US$ 11.5 million with end dates during the audit period, i.e. from 2022 onwards. At the time of the audit, IAS noted that most of the projects with substantial funding ended in 2023, and the pipeline for new projects beginning in 2024 had not yet been confirmed or guaranteed by donors.

Country Office structure relative to available resources: The Country Office is classified as a small-sized office in the Enterprise Data Management system as of February 2024. The Presence Governance Guidance classifies a small-sized office as having US$ 1.5–3.5 million of DRF delivery per year (excluding core); a resource mobilization target of US$ 1.8–4.2 million per year; and up to 11 personnel (staff, service contractors and UN Volunteers). The guidance states that small-sized offices should focus on one Strategic Plan outcome, with possible smaller programmes in other areas. The Country Office informed IAS that it will use the comprehensive midterm review to determine if any Strategic Plan outcomes should be removed, bearing in mind that it was in advanced negotiations with two donors for new projects regarding Governance, and Violence Against Women and it had already secured core funds for Women’s Economic Empowerment. The Country Office was also conducting ongoing discussions with a potential donor about how Economic Empowerment could be turned into a small seed programme for more future projects.

In 2022, as per the Q4 2022 quarterly business review report, the Country Office exceeded the minimum criteria in the presence governance framework for a small-sized office for revenue and financial delivery: revenue was 116 per cent or US$ 2.1 million versus the required US$ 1.8 million per year; financial delivery was 146 per cent or US$ 2.2 million (excluding core) versus the required at least US$ 1.5 million DRF (excluding core).

As per the personnel dashboard as of 2 February 2024, the Country Office had 7 staff, 10 service contractors and 3 UN Volunteers: a total of 20 personnel which, as per the Presence Governance Guidance, is more aligned with a "medium" sized office. This presents potential sustainability and cost-effectiveness risks. If the Country Office is unable to consistently mobilize resources, it may have to reduce the number of personnel or create a business case for maintaining a higher number of personnel compared to its funding structure. The Country Office suggested that provisions should be made for transitional periods when new donor agreements are being negotiated.

Recommendation 2 (Medium):

The Country Office to monitor performance of the Resource Mobilization Strategy and related plans against targets; and if needed, revisit the targets to ensure business continuity and sufficient funding to deliver the Strategic Note. If resource mobilization is less successful than expected despite these efforts, the Country Office needs to consider scaling down some Strategic Note priorities and the office's structure/staffing level.

Observation 5: Project design

Programmes and projects were aligned with the Country Office's Strategic Note and the National Development Strategy. Project outcomes directly addressed the main priorities for ending violence against women, women's leadership and political participation, and women's economic empowerment in the country. ProDocs were well designed, with well-defined results frameworks to adequately measure performance and project sustainability.

Project design and governance: In general, projects were well designed. IAS observed that three of the six sampled projects did not stipulate a requirement for either a project steering committee or a technical advisory committee. Without a project steering committee, there may be a lack of strategic guidance and oversight, leading to ambiguity regarding project objectives, priorities and alignment with donor requirements. The absence of a technical coordination committee may result in a lack of technical expertise or oversight in project design and implementation. These committees help to ensure that projects remain relevant and are aligned with donor and country priorities, that they stay on track and address emerging needs of the target population. Given the headquarters Programme Support Management Unit (PSMU) was still in the process of revising the ProDoc template and will clarify the requirements for steering committees and governance arrangements for projects in June/July 2024, ***as an advisory note, the Country Office could form steering and technical committees during the project design phase to provide oversight, guidance and decision-making authority throughout the project life cycle***.

Although comprehensive needs assessments were well documented, the design of programmes/projects should increase areas of intervention that reach more girls and women who directly benefit from UN Women's projects to address their needs and challenges and ask for feedback on the quality and sustainability of UN Women's programmes after implementation.

Project sustainability, project and programme exit strategies: Despite the Strategic Note 2022–2026 being clear on its sustainability and exit approach, IAS observed that the key principles were not tested, especially for completed/closed programmes. Sustainability strategies were not always well implemented and exit strategies were not clearly documented, i.e. no sampled projects had exit/transition strategies. Therefore, the Country Office cannot be assured that its sustainability and exit approaches were feasible or needed improvement. IAS also observed that the design of programmes was mostly centred around workshops and stakeholder capacity-building. The Country Office noted that as the bulk of its projects related to governance and gender-based violence, implementation approaches usually contain significant components on capacity-building and awareness-raising activities. Now that the Country Office is developing its Women's Economic Empowerment portfolio, it plans interventions related to manufacturing and equipment for women entrepreneurs, etc). Some of the stakeholders IAS interviewed raised concerns that some results were not fully sustainable, i.e., after UN Women's funding ends there are insufficient financial and other resources to continue the programmes. Stakeholders also highlighted that some local stakeholders do not see value in the programmes and sometimes prioritize the short-term daily subsistence allowance (DSA) for training and workshops. IAS conducted site visits during the audit and some stakeholders who were reached with UN Women programming also raised concerns that project results were not sustainable. All projects should ideally be implemented to empower local stakeholders and institutions to take ownership of project activities, build their skills and capacities, and continue interventions independently after the end of UN Women's funding. Without adequate emphasis on sustainability and exit strategies, projects may fail to build upon initial successes or capitalize on momentum, leading to missed opportunities for long-term impact.

Some programme partners that IAS interviewed stated they were not engaged throughout the project life cycle and therefore were not aware of some critical components of the project, such as the results framework. For ownership and long-term sustainability, stakeholders need to be engaged at all stages of the project life cycle, including confirmation of the result framework at the inception of partner agreements. Partners and stakeholders need to be identified and engaged at the beginning of projects. ***As an advisory note, the Country Office should prioritize effective adaptability, sustainability strategies and exit/phase-out considerations during the design of projects and throughout the project's life cycle. PSMU stated that sustainability will be incorporated into the ProDoc templates and explanatory note, along with guidance for stakeholder management and a mapping tool.***

Observation 6: Project portfolio management

Only one interim report of 17 donor reports sampled was reported to donors with delay. Nevertheless, there were outstanding outputs upon closure of some projects and validation of project results with people directly benefitting from the projects should be systematic.

Project risk management: Risk assessments were conducted for all six projects that IAS reviewed; however, the assessments were not sufficient to manage the risks that transpired during implementation of the projects. Some project risk assessments were completed as mandatory requirements during project design but were not updated as projects progressed. Contingency plans were required to mitigate the impact of potential delays, which may have involved identifying alternative approaches or adjusting project priorities as needed. Inadequate monitoring and control mechanisms can result in risks escalating beyond acceptable levels, leading to project delays, cost overruns, or failure to achieve objectives.

Projects with construction components: High inherent risks related to projects with construction outputs were not well managed. The Country Office did not submit the ProDocs and other mandatory documents to the Headquarters Infrastructure Review Committee for review and approval prior to the start of implementation. The projects started during the time of the previous leadership but with end dates during the current leadership.

Some project implementation sites experienced delays during project inception phases in terms of consultations with stakeholders to ensure buy-in. **IAS undertook field visits to verify the construction results and observed that some of the deliverables were of sub-standard quality; some deliverables reported as completed in project narrative reports were not physically completed; and some of the equipment reported as handed over to the targeted population could not be observed during IAS' visits.** This occurred due to a lack of expertise within the Programme team; the Country Office's lack of experience in infrastructure/construction projects; and the Programme team's lack of effective monitoring and control mechanisms to track project progress and identify deviations from the plan. This resulted in outstanding outputs which hindered the successful execution of project tasks and deliverables. The failure to deliver all expected outputs on time or to the expected quality affects results for women and girls and/or may damage UN Women's reputation as stakeholders may perceive that the project is poorly managed or unreliable, which could have long-term consequences for future projects and partnerships.

As per UN Women guidance on programme versus procurement activities,[4] construction services are not considered a programmatic partnership but rather a procurement activity. IAS observed that the Country Office engaged programme partners to implement infrastructure/construction activities and that some of the programme partners selected to manage the construction of safe markets, although the markets were built, did not hire or possess sufficient construction experience. As the programme partners did not specialize in construction, they hired construction companies to carry out the actual construction and UN Women signed partner agreements knowing that those partners would not be undertaking the construction directly. Without the necessary expertise, there was a heightened risk of delays, errors and subpar deliverables, which ultimately compromised the integrity and functionality of the safe markets project. The programme partners were legally registered as CSOs, not construction companies; therefore, their programme agreements with UN Women to undertake construction could lead to the partners not complying with laws and regulations for CSOs. The lack of experience in construction building among programme partners and Country Office Programme staff resulted in significant issues regarding the low quality and high cost of the construction process.

Processes around working with project target populations: During IAS' site visits, IAS interviewed people who benefitted from projects, who were generally satisfied with the projects supported by UN Women in Zimbabwe. At the same time, Monitoring and Evaluation staff at the Country Office should conduct continuous independent validation of project results with the targeted population. Some of the problems that arose could have been identified earlier if there had been regular site or field visits. Lack of consistent validation of the quality of project outcomes for the targeted population may compromise the effectiveness and impact of project interventions, as resources may not be targeted to address genuine needs or priorities. Validation is a critical step in ensuring accountability, transparency, target populations' data accuracy and effectiveness in project implementation.

As a general advisory note, the Country Office is encouraged to undertake frequent refresher training for Programme teams and to mandate project management training for new personnel as part of their induction process. This will complement the Quantum and results-based management training undertaken in 2023 and 2024.

Recommendation 3 (High):

The Country Office to ensure that there is a process in place to proactively manage project-related risks during the project life cycle, monitoring and tracking project progress against agreed targets and milestones, and to continuously validate with the targeted population that project results are addressing their needs. Moreover, the Country Office needs to manage its construction interventions according to established corporate processes.

Observation 7: Programme partner management

The Country Office did not always use suitable implementation modalities to manage its programme partners. Potential partners should be assessed based on their proven expertise, capacity, credibility and alignment with UN Women's mission and values. The programme partners IAS interviewed highlighted their good experience in working with the Country Office and the level of communication was felt to be generally satisfactory. Programme teams still face some challenges with liquidation of advances to programme partners.

Programme partners' operational capacity: Eight of the ten sampled programme partners were selected on a competitive basis and reviewed by the Local Project Appraisal Committee, which was compliant with the Selection of Programme Partners' Policy. Two of ten programme partners were selected on a non-competitive basis. In one of the two cases, due to the urgent onset of the programme, implementation time frame of only 12 months and a non-negotiable no-cost extension with the funding partner, the Country Office decided to undertake sole-sourcing and engaged an organization that had worked in the target province and districts for a long time and had experience of working with UN agencies.

[4] Guidance Note on Key Considerations and Principles regarding Programme versus Procurement Actions

Capacity assessments were conducted for all the programme partners sampled. However, the risk ratings and payment modalities did not always correlate with the partners' actual performance in terms of quality, costs and timeliness of delivered results. Therefore, capacity assessments need to be more realistic about the programme partners' ability to implement project activities. Some programme partners informed IAS that they were not adequately appraised of UN Women's expectations for narrative and financial reporting (among other things); therefore, the Country Office needs to continue to organize training on UN Women templates, as required, for partners implementing common projects to deliver consistent messaging, preferably at the start of projects or when most programme partners have been onboarded. Due to resource constraints, these training exercises could take place virtually. At the same time, there is an expectation that the selected partners should already possess the technical expertise required for delivery of the substantive work required by the Country Office.

Clearance of advances and submission of reports by programme partners: IAS reviewed 20 FACE forms and narrative reports submitted by programme partners, of which only one was uploaded to PGAMS as the Country Office relied on offline filing rather than PGAMS. Eleven of the 20 FACE forms were submitted on time; however, it was difficult to assess the timeliness of submission for nine of the 20 FACE forms which were missing submission dates, expenditure periods and approval dates.

IAS observed that the Country Office did not effectively manage the liquidation of advances to programme partners to ensure transparency, accuracy and accountability in the utilization of funds disbursed for project activities. There were also unresolved issues around reconciling and settling outstanding funds by programme partners for project activities, despite projects being closed. IAS observed that, in the majority of cases, the approving officers did not complete the letters of certification of expenditure on the FACE forms to document the samples used to verify the expenditure before liquidating the advances. This could result in inaccurate and insufficient evidence or supporting documents; and difficulty in verifying the accuracy and legitimacy of expenditure.

IAS noted that some programme partners advanced small grants to other organizations for research and to community-based organizations as part of their capacity-building. Other programme partners advanced funds to subcontractors for the construction of safe markets. However, these small grants and advances to subcontractors were immediately liquidated in FACE forms rather than waiting for the reporting of actual expenditure related to the activities for which the advances/funds were granted. Therefore, the FACE forms were not fully based on actual expenditure and incorrectly included outstanding advances as part of expenditure, which was not followed up. The Small Grants Policy and Procedure, section 5.9.1, requires submission of combined financial and progress reports and supporting documents by grantees after completion of allowed activities. There were no detailed receipts, invoices, etc. as supporting documents from the recipients of the small grants to account for use of these advances.

Some reports did not demonstrate outcomes and the impact achieved from the programme partner agreements because partners were not expected to measure results.

Review of programme partner performance: Programme partner performance ratings provide a mechanism for holding partners accountable for their contributions. IAS observed that Programme teams only evaluated the performance of 3 of 11 sampled partner agreements, while 8 completed agreements had not been evaluated. Without these evaluations, partners may not feel accountable for their performance, leading to potential underperformance or complacency and may result in the continuous engagement of weak/underperforming partners.

PGAMS pending actions: As of 5 March 2024, several actions were pending in PGAMS, including:

- Two partner agreement submissions and another two agreement amendments had yet to be finalized.
- Nine partner agreement closures had yet to be approved: three related to two focal points who no longer worked at the Country Office, but the new focal points had not been updated in PGAMs. The agreements had end dates between 28 June 2021 and 30 January 2023. This had reduced to seven as of 1 February 2024.
- Fourteen agreements had to be closed: four of which related to three focal points who no longer worked at the Country Office, but the new focal points had not been updated in PGAMs. The agreements had end dates between 2 July 2021 and 30 September 2023.

This occurred due to the lack of a strong follow-up mechanism within the Country Office to rectify some control gaps highlighted by headquarters in monthly or quarterly reports for programme and operational monitoring. In addition, because PGAMS had not been updated, the former focal points still receive notifications about partner agreements they no longer manage and the new focal points do not receive notifications to act, leading to delays.

Recommendation 4 (High):

The Country Office to enhance programme partner management by monitoring progress through the timely submission of narrative and financial progress reports; continuously remediating outstanding PGAMS actions; and reassigning focal points for partner agreements. The capacity assessments of partners should be risk-focused, with capacity development plans established and monitored; aligned to payment modalities and size of advances; and performance evaluations of partners systematically conducted to ensure the satisfactory execution of all deliverables.

B. Governance, risk management and internal controls

See Background section on structure and personnel. IAS reviewed the Country Office's structure and delegations of authority, control environment, risk management and implementation of recommendations from prior oversight reports. Based on the audit work performed, IAS assessed that delegation of authority, the internal control framework and control environment were satisfactory. Areas for improvement included office structure, risk management and implementation of recommendations from prior oversight reports.

The structure of the Country Office was relatively stable at the time of the audit; however, the number of personnel exceeded the maximum recommended by the Presence Governance Guidelines for a small office. Some positions could be better aligned to the Country Office's current strategic direction, and some of the findings from the October 2021 functional review of the Operations function were still applicable at the time of the audit in 2024. The control environment was well established and working, supported by policies and procedures. However, there were a few bottlenecks and attendance at UNCT Operations Management Team meetings was not regular.

Controls for follow-up of oversight recommendations were established; however, several partner audit and Country Portfolio Evaluation recommendations were still outstanding and overdue, and there was a need to streamline responsibilities for follow-up of the recommendations.

KEY OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Observation 8: Functional review and technical support

Operations functional review: In October 2021, at the request of the Country Office, the Regional Office conducted an Operations unit functional review and support exercise as part of Regional Office oversight. The functional review highlighted some findings that were still relevant during the audit period: (a) the majority of consultants were funded by non-core funds from the one major project. It was recommended that the Country Office consider more secure contract modalities to foster business continuity; and (b) the absence of an Operations Manager since 2018 had resulted in a lack of consistent ownership for key operational tasks and responsibilities. Therefore, there was a need for close supervision, oversight and a clearer delineation of tasks to foster greater accountability within the Operations and Administration unit. It was recommended that the Country Office re-establish the Operations Manager role (at NOC level). At the time of the audit, IAS observed that the one major project had been the dominant project even though it had ended in September 2023; and while there were other sources of funding, it was not at the same level as the major project. . Regarding the Operations Manager post, the Country Office explained that the Regional Office received additional resources to allow the Country Office to recruit a national Operations Manager at the NOC level. The recruitment process and post establishment were ongoing concurrently given the utmost priority by management.

The functional review raised concerns about high staff turnover between March and September 2021 with the departure of three programme specialists and the Deputy Country Representative. Although recruitment was undertaken to replace the personnel in 2021, IAS observed that the replacements also then left with some posts still vacant. The Country Office informed IAS that several key members of the team left around the same time to assume promotions in other UN Women offices leaving a huge capacity gap in Zimbabwe, which had to start recruitment procedures again. Some positions were tied to a project so when the project ended the position was not replaced, while for other positions, no suitable candidates had yet been found.

Technical support requirements: Respondents to the personnel survey highlighted that more guidance was needed in the following areas: Quantum (this is a corporately recognized issue); monitoring and evaluation; development of ideas and proposals for resource mobilization; women's economic empowerment as a tool to women's leadership in the public sphere; the nexus of climate change and security; strategic and annual planning; and advocacy, communication and visibility. Management may prioritize these topics as part of personnel capacity development.

Most respondents to the survey were satisfied with the support they received from within the Country Office, Regional Office and headquarters. However, there was a need to streamline the flow of requests submitted by the Regional Office and headquarters to the Country Office to ensure clarity of expectations and timelines. Feedback also highlighted several areas where support from headquarters and the Regional Office could be improved: internal coordination; consolidated quarterly plans for more effective collaborations; use of the Global Service Tracker; different teams to improve the turnaround time for responding to requests; and speedy response to salary queries.

IAS analysed the budget, number of personnel per thematic area and number of Strategic Note indicators using the 2024 organization chart. Women's Political Participation and Governance had 20 indicators, the greatest number of non-core projects, most budget (US$ 1.6 million) and positions. Women's Economic Empowerment and Institutional Strengthening was the smallest area in terms of budget but had 14 Strategic Note indicators which could result in a lot of effort being dedicated to report on the indicators. Ending Violence Against Women had 23 indicators with a budget of US$ 1.5 million. The Country Office informed IAS that personnel implementing projects were also engaged on normative and coordination work.

Bottlenecks and workload: Sixty per cent of respondents to the personnel survey stated that they felt overloaded with work because they received ad hoc tasks and urgent requests at different levels with limited time for completion and learning. Programme teams were over-reliant on the Operations team or had frequent requests for support on repetitive processes which diverted time for growth and quality of service; and responsibilities were unevenly distributed by passing uncompleted tasks to other personnel. Respondents mostly faced significant bottlenecks in fund disbursement to partners, procurement, project implementation and project closure. The Country Office informed IAS it has sought to improve workflows and team dynamics through its annual retreats and reflection days but efforts were hindered by recent changes in Programme teams and lack of capacity following the introduction of Quantum. The Country Office anticipates that recurrent Regional Office training and the arrival of an Operations Manager will improve this matter.

The Country Office does not yet use the Global Service Tracker; therefore, IAS could not calculate the lead times of different processes. Notwithstanding this, IAS analysed the lead times for approval of requisitions and approval of purchase orders as of 31 March 2024 for 221 requisitions with requisition status "approved" and requisition process status "processed": 149 (67 per cent) requisitions were converted into approved purchase orders within 9 days; 46 (21 per cent) between 10 and 19 days; and the rest 26 (12 per cent) between 20 and 140 days. The Country Office did not perform negatively; however, lead times need to be continuously monitored to reduce bottlenecks and inefficiencies and increase staff morale.

Recommendation 5 (Medium):

To ensure that the office structure is fit-for-purpose to deliver on its strategic priorities and project portfolio, the Country Office to consider extending the scope of its functional analysis to other areas that were not covered by the 2021 Operations function review, i.e. strategic planning, programme management, coordination and communications. The Country Office also needs to further analyse the root causes of bottlenecks to streamline its processes.

Observation 9: Risk management

The Country Office had risk management practices, but they were not always effective. The risks related to construction, resource mobilization and business continuity needed more visibility and effective mitigation measures.

Risk assessment and risk register: The Country Office performed a risk assessment for 2024 and identified 22 risks. It rated 1 risk as "very high", 6 risks "high", 13 risks medium and 2 risks low. The very high risk related to the country's political and civil unrest. UN Women issued its first risk appetite statement in January 2024, and a new field "risk appetite" was added to the risk register template, with pre-population of appetite levels for each risk as per the risk appetite statement levels. Of the 22 risks assessed, IAS observed that seven risks with "low" risk appetite had a residual risk higher than the risk tolerance of UN Women: two had "high" residual risk, i.e. (i) Governance – internal to UN Women and (ii) HR retention, succession and/or recruitment; and five had "medium" residual risk, i.e. (i) Engagement and management of third parties; (ii) HR – personnel skills; (iii) liabilities, litigation, claims and disputes; (iv) safety and security; and (v) sexual harassment or sexual exploitation and abuse. The Country Office needs to maintain effective and sustainable efforts to reduce the residual risks for these seven risks to match UN Women's risk tolerance and risk appetite.

IAS observed that risks related to construction/infrastructure projects were not included in the risk register, despite construction being a key modality with significant budget allocations for implementation of projects in Zimbabwe. There were also some instances of significant financial findings from partner audits regarding construction. Therefore, these risks should have been elevated through incorporation into the risk register and prioritized as a stand-alone risk to ensure adequate identification, assessment and management of the risks.

Fraud risk assessment: The Country Office undertook a fraud risk assessment and register for 2023, which is conducted every two years. All risks had a "moderate" residual risk rating, and the fraud risk register was comprehensive. Although it highlighted "progress of construction works" as part of fraud risk scenarios for "misuse of advances and disbursements", the Country Office did not include existing controls for construction work and did not highlight any mitigating actions. As already highlighted in the project portfolio management observation above, construction risks were inadequately managed. Therefore, inclusion of construction work in both the risk register and fraud risk register would ensure visibility of the risks for management attention.

Most respondents to the personnel survey (80 per cent) indicated they were aware and knew how to report allegations of wrongdoing, while 20 per cent indicated they were aware of their obligation to report but did not know how to report or were not comfortable in reporting. The Country Office could organize a refresher training course for all personnel on fraud risk, piggybacking on the recent training of trainers conducted in early February 2024 for Regional Operations Managers and some Country Operations Managers. This would bring everyone to the same level and clarify expectations.

Post-facto approvals: As of 16 March 2024, the Country Office had three post-facto approval cases in 2023 and 2024: (i) US$ 12,794 for procurement of a conferencing service without a purchase order, which was submitted to the Headquarters Procurement Review Committee; (ii) US$ 9,305 for a no contract amendment to a common services supplier in January 2024; and (iii) a US$ 4,101 amendment of a partner agreement carried out after the end of the agreement. Although post-facto approvals are allowed by Policy, Procedure and Guidance as exceptions, the Country Office needs to strengthen its root cause analyses of post-facto cases and management should implement controls to prevent their reoccurrence. ***As an advisory note, the Country Office to strengthen the process to analyse the root causes of post-facto requests to limit their use as much as possible, while following the correct quality assurance and review process.*** The Country Office committed to implement controls to prevent/reduce reoccurrence of post-facto cases.

Recommendation 6 (High):

The Country Office to continue to:

- Explore different mitigation measures to effectively align residual risks to the UN Women risk appetite statement.
- Include construction-related risks in the Country Office's main risk register, with effective mitigation actions to ensure the quality of work.
- Reduce potential fraud risks, poor performance and misuse of funds related to construction and other high residual risks to the Country Office environment.

Observation 10: Follow-up of oversight recommendations

Programme partner audit findings: IAS reviewed the audited financial statements of six programme partners for the year ending 31 December 2022. One programme partner, which had an adverse audit opinion (three financial audit findings with a total of US$ 101,853 or 55 per cent of the US$ 184,550 total expenditure audited). *At the time of the audit, there were ongoing discussions to recover the funds from the partner, failing which, the amount was likely to be written off in the financial statements of UN Women*. The other five programme partner audits performed between January 2022 and December 2022 had an unmodified audit opinion, with a total of one financial audit finding, nine management control findings and two compliance findings. IAS observed that the Country Office only uploaded and tracked recommendations for financial audit findings on the partner audit portal. The programme partners that IAS interviewed highlighted that UN Women verified 100 per cent of the supporting documents for expenditure on the FACE Forms before liquidations. IAS observed that the method used to validate the supporting documents by Programme and Operations teams might be ineffective because financial findings and write-offs for unacceptable expenditure that were initially cleared by the Country Office were later rejected by the external auditors.

The Country Office maintained an excel file offline to capture management control, compliance and other findings. However, the completeness of the findings on the excel file and in the portal was not guaranteed. Incomplete tracking of audit findings may hinder efforts to improve programme partner performance and the ability to achieve strategic objectives. It is also inefficient to use two tools to monitor partner audit findings. The Country Office informed IAS that the excel file served as a tool for the team to collaborate on and input their agreed action plans with contributions from multiple teams. This document was used as a preliminary draft before being finalized and included online. This practice was adopted from the process used for Enterprise Risk Management, where risks are first captured offline, consolidated and then uploaded online. Going forward, the online modality will be used to capture all audit findings. IAS is of the view that all findings should be captured in the audit portal and the categories used to distinguish between different types of findings to ensure their visibility for management decision-making. The guidance from PSMU to Regional and Country Offices on 26 December 2023 also requested that Heads of Office ensure **all** types of findings are monitored and closed, which aligns with IAS' view.

IAS observed that responsibilities for the follow-up of partner audit recommendations rested solely with the Operations team, while programme specialists/managers did not undertake any actions to ensure the audit findings for the partners they manage were implemented. The programme partners IAS interviewed also confirmed that Programme teams did not provide any support in this area and most of their engagements regarding audit findings were with the Operations team. The responsibility for follow-up of partner audit findings and recommendations was misallocated as the Country Office understood that, as audits seemed more of an operational matter, they were the responsibility of the Operations team. However, this was an incorrect assumption because the Operations team does not have a relationship with the programme partners, and Programme teams have to build the capacity of programme partners. This situation might result in Programme teams' lack of ownership of areas of improvement, which could also result in repeat audit findings.

Country Portfolio Evaluation: As of 12 February 2024, GATE highlighted that a Country Portfolio Evaluation covering January 2016 to December 2021 was completed in August 2022 with eight recommendations, all of which had been accepted by the Country Office. The eight recommendations had 31 key actions captured on GATE: 10 key actions were completed, while 21 were overdue with most due dates in 2023. The status of these actions was reflected as "on going"; however, as of February 2024, the key actions were overdue for implementation. Some of the recommendations highlighted challenges with resource mobilization and dependencies on external stakeholders, while some strategies and guidelines were still under development. The delays in implementing the recommendations could negatively affect the Country Office's performance.

Recommendation 7 (High):

The Country Office to strengthen implementation and reporting on partner audit and Country Portfolio Evaluation recommendations. Responsibility for follow-up of partner audit recommendations should also be redistributed from the Operations to Programme teams; and ensure formal tracking of all partner audit findings/recommendations through the audit portal.

C. Operations

See Background section on the number of personnel and the Country Office's main expenditure. IAS reviewed management of procurement, human resources (HR), finance and budget, information and communication technology (ICT), travel, assets, and safety and security. The Country Office's Procurement function processed 119 purchase orders amounting to US$ 617,053 from January 2023 to January 2024 using Quantum. The Operations Manager position was under recruitment. The Country Office had HR and staffing plans for existing posts, new positions, funded posts and those that do not yet have resource available. A Host Country Agreement had been endorsed by UN Women and the Government of Zimbabwe to cover UN Women premises, property, assets and personnel in the country.

Based on the audit work performed, IAS assessed that, in general, the following areas were satisfactory: ICT, travel, safety and security. Areas for enhancement included processes related to HR, procurement, finance and budgeting, and asset management.

KEY OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Observation 11: Human resources

IAS assessed that the processes for HR management were generally established. The overall completion rate of mandatory training was high, and the Country Office should sustain this good practice. The Country Office had an HR data and staffing plan for 2023, which was prepared and informed by approved and available funding. HR practices were generally good; however, there were some challenges. IAS noted high staff turnover, especially the frequent changes in programme specialist/manager positions. The handover process was not always clearly managed, and some key processes such as closure of projects and programme partner agreements were not completed or assigned new focal points in the systems. IAS also noted some issues regarding recruitment, especially for consultants, which could affect value for money.

Recruitment of fixed-term appointments, temporary appointments and service contractors: IAS sampled five recruitments of fixed-term appointments and service contractors, which were generally conducted in accordance with recruitment policies. However, IAS observed that hiring managers were inconsistent in their use of written tests and competency-based interviews. For lower-level positions, both written tests and interviews were used; however, for two higher-level positions only interviews were conducted. There was no explanation why hiring managers preferred more stringent recruitment processes for lower-level positions than for those at a higher level. IAS also observed that a desk review of resumes without any written test or competency-based interviews was used to recruit an international temporary appointment; and, while this is allowed by recruitment policies, a selection based solely on a review of resumes does not necessarily ensure or demonstrate an objective assessment of potential candidates. Therefore, it would be prudent to supplement desk reviews with either written tests or competency-based interviews to ensure the recruitment of suitable candidates to avoid the perception of lack of rigor or fairness in the recruitment process. The headquarters HR section highlighted that hiring managers are given the authority to decide which recruitment strategies to use and make the final decision on appointed candidates. Going forward, recruitment reports will be more comprehensive to explain the rationale behind recruitment decisions.

Recruitment of consultants (SSAs): IAS sampled 11 SSA recruitments which were generally conducted in accordance with recruitment policies. However, IAS also observed the following:

- Desk reviews were mostly used to recruit the consultants. While this is allowed by the policy, IAS highly encourages the Country Office to combine desk reviews with written tests and/or oral interviews to ensure more robust recruitment practices.
- IAS noted that the scope of four consultant contracts' terms of reference were too broad and of a continuous nature, not time-bound and included tasks that could be

expected to be performed by staff members rather than consultants. This led to most contracts being based on monthly payments and reports instead of specific deliverables, which might make it difficult to link monthly reports to specific results if specific deliverables are not defined upfront. The Country Office informed IAS that these consultants were not hired under the service contract modality due to limited funding, and were urgent recruitments to complete urgent tasks.

- Four contracts were extended at no cost due to the consultants' inability to complete contracts within the initial timelines. The Country Office stressed that extensions are at times warranted by objective circumstances.
- Sometimes the duration of the contracts was too short to ensure their successful completion.
- For three contracts, the consultancies were not advertised and there was no documented explanation about how the resumes were sourced. The Country Office informed IAS that the resumes were obtained from other UN entities, referrals and consultant lists/databases but this was not documented.
- For two contracts, no reference checks had been undertaken.
- The Country Office adopted a practice of conducting clearances for sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment for all personnel regardless of contract type. However, for two consultants, there were no clearances on file. Management explained that this was an oversight.

The headquarters HR section noted that some of the inconsistencies highlighted by IAS occurred due to changes in Human Resource Business Partners at the Regional Office, which might have affected the support and oversight to the Country Office. Some of the areas of improvement will be addressed by current work to refine HR policies and procedures. Some recent changes include updated policy and guidance on fees and terms of reference for consultants, training and tools.

Recommendation 8 (Medium):

The Country Office to:

- Ensure that complete and documented performance evaluations for all personnel are undertaken.
- Assign specific and timebound deliverables for all consultants.
- Improve quality assurance for handover processes when personnel leave the office and in the recruitment of consultants.

Observation 12: Procurement

The Country Office had procurement plans and used some long-term agreements (LTAs) managed by other UN entities. There was room to improve the segregation of duties in the procurement process to reduce potential procurement risks.

Procurement plan: The Country Office did not have a formally documented procurement strategy but relied on procurement plans and an informal procurement approach. Although a procurement plan was developed on an annual basis, it was not systematically and consistently updated throughout the year. The Country Office faced resource constraints and prioritized immediate procurement needs over long-term planning, resulting in a focus on short-term solutions rather than strategic procurement planning. Without adequate, timely and confirmed/certainty in funding, the Country Office struggled to develop and implement an effective procurement plan. The Country Office questioned the value addition of a procurement strategy versus the procurement plans currently being developed, particularly given the limited scope of the office's procurement budget. IAS believes that a strategy would provide the Country Office with direction on how to approach its programme needs in procurement; define its procurement profile (e.g., construction, maintenance of LTAs, creation of LTAs for repeated transactions, etc.); and structure and budget for the Procurement function to meet those needs.

The Country Office processed 119 purchase orders related to procurement, of which 82 per cent were for micro-purchasing, but only accounted for 38 per cent of the total procurement value of US$ 617,053. Low-value transactions would be better handled via LTAs for efficiency gains. The headquarters Procurement and Travel Services section advised the Country Office to coordinate with the regional procurement specialist to develop ***a longer procurement coordination plan*** for managing procurement activities, as a replacement for a procurement strategy. This plan should document available Country Office capacity relative to the volume of procurement. In consultation with the

Regional Office and headquarters Procurement and Travel Services, it should be determined whether the Country Office’s current capacity matches the volume of procurement. If not, procurement services should be sourced from the Regional Office or the headquarters Procurement and Travel Services corporate function to mitigate the risks associated with mismatched capacity and work volume. The "procurement coordination plan" should ensure that the Country Office efficiently manages its procurement activities without unnecessarily increasing investment in local capacity, and instead taps into more regional and corporate capacity.

Long-Term Agreements and Participation-Level Agreements: The Country Office participates in LTAs brokered through collaboration between UN entities in Zimbabwe. The Country Office developed Participation-Level Agreements between UN Women and 17 hotels and resorts but these agreements were never deployed or signed by either party (for UN Women it would be Director, Division of Management and Administration). IAS observed that the Procurement team did not always exercise the hotel LTAs already in place and is therefore in constant negotiations with vendors/suppliers for accommodation and conference facilities. For example, the Procurement team still procured hotels through requests for quotations, for which LTAs exist, as it preferred to engage in periodic competitive bidding. Projects with short time spans often require quick procurement to meet tight deadlines or urgent project requirements. However, foregoing LTAs may miss out on potential cost savings, efficiency gains, or value-added benefits that could be realized through volume commitments. Delays in procurement processes could result in delays in project implementation.

Lack of segregation of duties within the procurement process: The procurement case manager is the only procurement personnel in the office. For most purchases involving requests for quotations below US$ 50,000, they invited suppliers to submit bids; evaluated the bid/quotes/proposal submissions; and decided which suppliers should be awarded contracts. There was no evaluation of the quotations/bids by a technical evaluation team of at least two or three members. While the delegated authority reviews the procurement process before allocating contracts to suppliers, there is a risk that one person can have undue influence in the procurement process when they are the only ones evaluating bids/quotes/proposals. Without clear segregation of duties at the evaluation of bids/quotes/proposals stage, individuals have unchecked access to key procurement functions. This lack of managerial oversight can create opportunities for errors or wrongdoing. The Country Office informed IAS that the evaluation of bids was carried out by a technical evaluation/collaboration team appointed at the point of solicitation in Quantum. However, the Country Office did not share evidence of this assertion with IAS to support its claim. The Country Office accepted the need to ensure segregation of duties. It highlighted that it had two procurement officers up until August 2022, when one resigned. With limited funding and a rather small procurement budget, the Country Office committed to continuously seek elevated assistance from the Regional Office and headquarters Procurement Section when there is limited capacity to match procurement needs. The Country Office also highlighted that some challenges occurred due to changes in the Regional Office Procurement function, which reduced support and oversight to the Country Office.

Review of supplier/vendor performance: The evaluation of supplier performance was not consistently assessed at the end of contracts. The Country Office evaluated the performance of only 4 of the 9 closed and sampled purchase orders. Without such evaluations, suppliers may not be held accountable for their performance, creating current or future risks of potential underperformance or complacency. There was a lack of alignment between the Country Office's procurement priorities and the importance placed on supplier performance evaluation; added to this, the procurement case manager informed IAS that they were not aware of the requirement to evaluate vendor performance upon completion of a contract. The headquarters Procurement and Travel Services section highlighted that better communication and reinforcement of existing guidelines are necessary to ensure procurement personnel and Programme teams are aware of performance evaluation requirements.

Recommendation 9 (Medium):

The Country Office, with the support of the Regional Office and headquarters Procurement and Travel Services section, to ensure a harmonized approach to procurement to ensure the efficiency of the procurement process. In consultation with the Regional Office, this may include: developing and updating procurement coordination plans to document the available Country Office capacity relative to the volume of procurement; systematically conducting and documenting performance evaluations of suppliers at the end of contracts/purchase orders; and implementing robust segregation of duty controls to mitigate fraud, errors and non-compliance.

Observation 13: Financial management

The processes for budgeting and financial management were adequate, and operational monitoring of projects and budgets was carried out. However, **major improvement** was needed in use of the right Chart of Accounts for expenditure; and some non-core project expenses were charged to core resources and had to be reversed. It could not be confirmed whether all such expenses were duly reversed.

Rephasals/revision of budgets: The process for core budget revisions was clear. IAS observed that the Country Office no longer used the project budget revision forms for non-core projects that are supposed to be cleared by programme managers, the finance associate, Operations Manager and Country Representative or Deputy Representative. In May and November 2023, PSMU circulated checklists for approval and revisions of project award budgets to all Country Offices. However, the Zimbabwe Country Office did not use the checklists for the budget revisions conducted in late 2023, especially for non-core projects. The Country Office informed IAS that the budget revisions were discussed during meetings, but it was not aware that the forms/checklists still needed to be used for Quantum. With Quantum now allowing Programme teams to revise budgets, some revisions might not be visible for management to provide oversight as Quantum shows the revised budgets but is not able to show the dates and personnel who revised the budgets.

Chart of Accounts (CoA) for transactions: IAS observed that in seven transactions sampled for testing, the CoA on payment requisitions did not match the CoA on payment vouchers/purchase orders in Atlas. The Country Office explained that sometimes Programme teams made mistakes with the CoA on payment requisitions, then the Operations team amended the CoA with the correct details. However, there was no audit trail to determine the right CoA; discussions between Operations and Programme teams; or annotations on the payment requests with reasons for amending the CoA. This occurred due to weak budget monitoring. There is a risk that the Country Office might allocate expenditure to incorrect/inappropriate projects, donors and activity codes resulting in potential financial misstatement. Incorrect allocation of CoA could continue because there was no clear feedback loop from Operations to Programme teams to provide guidance on the use of CoA.

Over-charging core resources with non-core projects expenses: Expenses should be charged to the core or non-core projects funding the expenses per funding type. However, IAS observed that, from the time of Quantum implementation to October 2023, the Country Office charged core funding CoA with expenses from non-core projects. This resulted in overspending of core funds. As of 10 October 2023, approximately 95 per cent or US$ 502,465 of US$ 531,678 core resources had been utilized, leaving 5 per cent of funds available. The Country Office has been working on adjustments to remove some costs to be charged to non-core projects. IAS also observed that the Country Office carried out numerous reversals on the Quantum Account Analysis report in late 2023 to early 2024 to clean-up the over-charging of core CoA. Therefore, IAS conducted an analysis of the Quantum Account Analysis as of 25 February 2024 using key words "**reversal**" and "**rsvl**", which highlighted 365 transactions amounting to US$ 465,499 with reversals of expenses from core project IDs to various non-core project IDs.

The Country Office explained that personnel found it easier to charge almost everything to core resources because the budgets for non-core projects had yet to be uploaded/captured on Quantum; therefore, it was not possible to charge expenses to zero budgets. However, charging core resources was not the best solution. Another reason was that personnel were still learning how to use Quantum during 2023. As a result, the monitoring of budgets might be unreliable because some reversals might not be processed and not all non-core transactions charged to core resources might be reversed. Furthermore, some costs might be misallocated between non-core projects and some expenses for closed projects might be incorrectly charged to other non-core projects. There is also a risk that core resources might 'subsidize' some non-core projects for failure to reverse all such transactions.

Staff operational advances: IAS reviewed eight staff operational advances used for operational purposes and noted delays in liquidating all advances. Ordinarily, seven days would be considered a reasonable time to clear the advance; however, the average time was 54 days. A liquidation and cash deposit of one advance was not captured in Atlas. The delays occurred because personnel did not prioritize the liquidation of advances despite several reminders. This could distort project financial reports and the closure of projects.

Daily Subsistence Allowance (DSA): The Country Office used personnel or a bank to pay advances to workshops/meeting participants in instances where the participants did not have bank accounts, or it was cost-effective to incur less banking charges to withdraw cash once and distribute the individual amounts. The Country Office's practice was to have participants sign attendance registers for the receipt of DSA. In 7 of 11 advances that IAS sampled, no documents were available to demonstrate that participants acknowledged receipt of the funds. The Country Office liquidated the DSA advances using only the attendance registers, which are not confirmation of actual money received. Without such documentation, there is no guarantee that the right people received the DSA, for the right reasons and for the duration of their attendance. The Country Office informed IAS that included in the DSA payments are an attached schedule for DSA with the names of participants, computation and amount of DSA. Participants are required to sign against this schedule, and their identification is checked against their ID. Additionally, the participant registers are signed and attached to confirm attendance and the number of days of attendance. Both forms have been utilized as acknowledgements. However, IAS observed that this practice was not consistent.

Recommendation 10 (Medium):

The Country Office to strengthen financial management controls by acting upon the reports issued by headquarters as part of programme and operational monitoring. This may include ensuring Programme and Operations teams use and validate the correct Chart of Accounts; undertaking a quality assurance exercise to confirm that all non-core expenses charged to core Chart of Accounts are duly reversed; use of checklists for approval and revisions of project award budgets for non-core projects; timely liquidation of staff operational advances; and consistently obtaining confirmation of receipt of DSA by workshop/meeting participants.

Observation 14: Asset management

The Country Office managed its assets adequately; however, there were opportunities to improve the controls over the assets purchased on behalf of programme partners.

Assets purchased on behalf of programme partners: Partner agreements and monitoring of programme partner procedures require that programme and operations managers ensure programme partners submit inventory reports detailing the assets bought using UN Women funds within 30 calendar days after each calendar year. IAS observed that the Country Office allocated 510 items comprising laptops (129), lock sets, chairs, solar panels and rails, Logitech cameras, batteries, inverters and bicycles to 10 programme partners. Two programme partners did not formally acknowledge receipt of the assets from UN Women. The Country Office has an inventory list of assets purchased for programme partners, which is updated with information from FACE forms, liquidations and scattered verification missions. However, there is no visibility of all the assets bought by programme partners if FACE forms are not clear or there has not been a finance mission to verify supporting documents. IAS also noted that some descriptions of expenses on FACE forms did not match the actual receipts, invoices, etc. maintained by programme partners; therefore, the list of assets might be incomplete. Responsibility for managing the assets with programme partners was assigned to the Operations team; however, Programme teams should take over this responsibility as they issue the assets to the programme partners. The Operations team could provide continuous monitoring support to ensure complete and appropriate use of assets.

Recommendation 11 (Medium):

The Country Office to ensure programme partners formally acknowledge receipt of assets from UN Women and their purposeful utilization after project completion. Primary responsibility for management of the assets with programme partners should be redistributed from the Operations team to Programme teams, while the Operations team could support with monitoring the assets. Programme and Operations teams should consistently perform an annual reconciliation of the inventory reports from partners versus the inventory records maintained by UN Women. Such reconciliations should be completed within 60 calendar days at the end of each calendar year as per the monitoring of programme partner procedure.

Observation 15: ICT management

ICT was outsourced to the Zimbabwe Common Services and was generally managed adequately. As a result, the Country Office did not require an in-house ICT focal point.

Cybersecurity compliance: As per the 2023 Q4 East and Southern Africa regional quarterly business review report, as of 8 February 2024, the Country Office was overall compliant with InfoSec after conducting the certification process. Nine sub-areas were fully compliant, while the following three sub-areas were not fully compliant: (i) IT devices; (ii) no name; and (iii) privileges. ***As an advisory note, the Country Office to clarify with the headquarters Information Systems and Telecommunications division what requirements in the information security dashboard are missing for full compliance.***

Observation 16: Travel management

The Country Office had established controls and a standard operating procedure for travel management; however, it did not always adhere to the Travel Policy.

Compliance with Travel Policy: IAS inspected travel files for nine missions and observed that:

- Four missions of external travellers did not have travel authorizations. The external travellers had requested financial support from UN Women to attend events such as the Commission on Status of Women: there were response letters from UN Women confirming that financial support would be provided, but no travel authorizations.
- Seven missions did not have travel claims.
- In seven missions there were no boarding passes for evidence of travel by the travellers.

As an advisory note, the Country Office to ensure consistent compliance with the Travel Policy and submission of complete supporting documents by both internal and external travellers for liquidation of travel advances.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

Observation	Recommendation	Responsible Unit	Priority	Agreed?	Action Plan	Implementation date
3: Strategic Note design and implementation	Recommendation 1: The Country Office to ensure a consistent and coherent approach to monitoring and reporting and strengthen processes to continuously ensure reliability of results, including maintaining evidence for knowledge management and business continuity purposes, which could include: (a) building the capacity and coaching the Thematic and Operations teams to achieve high performance for the Strategic Note and Annual Workplan indicators; (b) establishing clear roles and accountability for producing accurate and validated results for data collection, monitoring and reporting; and (c) strengthening the capacity/skills of the Monitoring and Reporting function to independently validate the reliability of the results indicator information reported by Thematic and Operations teams, including results reported in project narrative reports by Programme teams and programme partners.	Country Office	Medium	Yes	The upcoming midterm review of the SN implementation will be used to identify and address capacity gaps. The Regional Office Knowledge Management training planned since 2023 was finally held in May 2024 with support of the Regional Office Knowledge Management Specialist. As a result, the office knowledge strategy was refined, and a knowledge dissemination plan developed (attached). The Country Office M&E Analyst will conduct spot checks on the projects and provide an independent assessment through validation of beneficiaries and data. In addition, the M&E will engage with the program managers on joint field visits.	31 March 2025 Done Ongoing
4: Resource mobilization	Recommendation 2: The Country Office to monitor performance of the Resource Mobilization Strategy and related plans against targets; and if needed, revisit the targets to ensure business continuity and sufficient funding to deliver the Strategic Note. If resource mobilization is less successful than expected despite these efforts, the Country Office needs to consider scaling down some Strategic Note priorities and the office's structure/staffing level.	Country Office	Medium	Yes	The Country Office takes note of the recommendation. To date the office has registered 3 hard pipelines and two Concepts notes have been validated and awaiting final feedback.	Ongoing, 30 June 2025
6: Project portfolio management	Recommendation 3: The Country Office to ensure that there is a process in place to proactively manage project-related risks during the project life cycle, monitoring and tracking project progress against agreed targets and milestones, and to continuously validate with the targeted population that project results are addressing their needs. Moreover, the Country Office needs to manage its construction interventions according to established corporate processes.	Country Office	High	Yes	Country Office takes note of the recommendation with the following actions. a) Regular review, updating and monitoring of risk register. c.1) Country Office engages Headquarters Infrastructure Review Committee on construction related projects C.3) An Internal Technical Committee to manage the feasibility, scope, schedule, costs, risks on a regular basis and defining the escalation strategy in case of lags and challenges.	Ongoing 30 June 2025
7: Programme partner management	Recommendation 4: The Country Office to enhance programme partner management by monitoring progress through the timely submission of narrative and financial progress reports; continuously remediating outstanding PGAMS actions; and reassigning focal points for partner agreements. The capacity assessments of partners should be risk-focused, with capacity development plans established and monitored; aligned to payment modalities and size of advances; and performance evaluations of partners systematically conducted to ensure the satisfactory execution of all deliverables.	Country Office	High	Yes	The Country Office actions are as follows. The Office has significantly reduced the outstanding PGAMS actions and the few remaining have technical challenges which Headquarter has been engaged. Continuous monitoring will be conducted to ensure timely clearance, reporting and closure. Continuous trainings are provided to partners by the programme, finance, and monitoring teams on joint missions on reporting, FACE forms. Capacity based assessments – Before engaging the partner, a comprehensive risk assessment is conducted by the programme and operations team. The partners assessed as 'low' risk will be engaged. The Office continues to work on continuously improving the capacity of the programme partners through trainings, verifications and monitoring throughout the lifespan of the projects.	31 December 2024 30 June 2025 Ongoing Ongoing
8: Functional review and technical support	Recommendation 5: To ensure that the office structure is fit-for-purpose to deliver on its strategic priorities and project portfolio, the Country Office to consider extending the scope of its functional analysis to other areas that were not covered by the 2021 Operations function review, i.e. strategic planning, programme management, coordination and communications. The Country Office also needs to further analyse the root causes of bottlenecks to streamline its processes.	Country Office	Medium	Yes	A functional analysis will be commissioned with support from ESARO to restructure the office. In the meantime, the Country Office regularly reviews the organizational structure to ensure that staffing is aligned with available funding, projects, and SN priorities. Currently the office is in the process of recruiting an Admin and Procurement Associate and Operations Manager and expected to join in Q3 2024. Both programmes and operations staff are provided with training through ESARO and Headquarters.	30 June 2025 31 October 2024 On-going

Observation	Recommendation	Responsible Unit	Priority	Agreed?	Action Plan	Implementation date
9: Risk management	Recommendation 6: The Country Office to continue to: • Explore different mitigation measures to effectively align residual risks to the UN Women risk appetite statement. • Include construction-related risks in the Country Office's main risk register, with effective mitigation actions to ensure the quality of work. • Reduce potential fraud risks, poor performance and misuse of funds related to construction and other high residual risks to the Country Office environment.	Country Office	High	Yes	1. Country Office will review the ERM risk register and include construction related risks including mitigation actions and review the entire risk register in line with the audit recommendations. 2. CO to engage expertise in the HQ Infrastructure unit and consultant engineers to guide the contractor engagement and supervision and other processes like scope definition and harmonizing Bill of quantities and the project cost estimates and timelines. 3. Country Office currently conducts thorough evaluation of contractors on their experience, process control expertise, reputation, team selection, and applied ability. By conducting pre-project activities such as interviews and reference checks, and fostering a collaborative environment, we are ensuring that we select partners who are capable and committed to achieving our project objectives. We are also closely collaborating with Headquarters quality control sections in all the processes. 4. Quarterly programmatic and operations meetings to review risks and mitigations through programme monitoring.	31 March 2025 Ongoing Ongoing Ongoing Quarterly
10: Follow-up of oversight recommendations	Recommendation 7: The Country Office to strengthen implementation and reporting on partner audit and Country Portfolio Evaluation recommendations. Responsibility for follow-up of partner audit recommendations should also be redistributed from the Operations to Programme teams; and ensure formal tracking of all partner audit findings/recommendations through the audit portal.	Country Office	High	Yes	On the CPE, *17 out of the 31 key actions were marked as ongoing to account for the fact they were medium to long term. The Country Office learned about the requirement to mark actions as complete during the auditor'' visit. As of now, 25 out of 31 key actions are marked as 'completed'.* On audit, the office managed to clear the financial findings except for one partner who initially had no financial finding. Going forward the responsibility will be reassigned to the programme team with the following actions. • Audit follow up committee to be set up, comprising Programme Specialists with support from the Deputy Country Representative and Operations Manager. • Close monitoring, follow up and review. A standing agenda item in the programme meetings and summary update in staff meetings. • Raise awareness to stakeholders on compliance, management of funds and the consequences of non- compliance (refunds). • Internal review of partner selections, validation of documentation during monitoring and verification. • Country Office has reviewed and strengthened the checklist used for disbursements, verification requirements and liquidations. • Country Office updates the partner audit portal on SharePoint, and this includes outstanding management findings, action plans and monitors implementation deadlines.	30 June 2025
11: Human resources	Recommendation 8: The Country Office to: • Ensure that complete and documented performance evaluations for all personnel are undertaken. • Assign specific and timebound deliverables for all consultants. • Improve quality assurance for handover processes when personnel leave the office and in the recruitment of consultants.	Country Office	Medium	Yes	• The Country Office continues to improve and strengthen its handover processes and continues to ensure smooth business continuity (use of digital tools, Teams, One drive) and involvement of the supervisor and staff. • For the two Senior Positions they were handled from ESARO and the lower positions were handled at Country Office level and the standard for the Country office is for both written and oral interviews. ESARO also considers the time factor when recruiting for key level positions. • The Country Office pays consultants based on specific deliverables that is the standard practise for the Country Office. Country Office will ensure all consultants contracts are time bound and have terms of payment based on specific deliverables instead of monthly reports.	31 March 2025

Observation	Recommendation	Responsible Unit	Priority	Agreed?	Action Plan	Implementation date
12: Procurement	Recommendation 9: The Country Office, with the support of the Regional Office and headquarters Procurement and Travel Services section, to ensure a harmonized approach to procurement to ensure the efficiency of the procurement process. In consultation with the Regional Office, this may include: developing and updating procurement coordination plans to document the available Country Office capacity relative to the volume of procurement; systematically conducting and documenting performance evaluations of suppliers at the end of contracts/purchase orders; and implementing robust segregation of duty controls to mitigate fraud, errors and non-compliance.	Country Office	Medium	Yes	Regarding Procurement planning, the Country Office has a practice of drafting procurement plans at annual planning meetings which are then uploaded onto online platforms. The plans are reviewed quarterly, and any adjustments made accordingly. It is not clear to the CO what would be the value addition of a procurement strategy vs the procurement plans currently being developed and given the limited scope of the office procurement budget. The lack of predictable multi-year funding limits the CO's ability to have a detailed and comprehensive procurement plan from the beginning of the year. The CO will ensure that performance evaluations of suppliers are done at the end of the contracts/purchase orders and uploaded on OneDrive/Teams	30 June 2025
13: Financial management	Recommendation 10: The Country Office to strengthen financial management controls by acting upon the reports issued by headquarters as part of programme and operational monitoring. This may include ensuring Programme and Operations teams use and validate the correct Chart of Accounts; undertaking a quality assurance exercise to confirm that all non-core expenses charged to core Chart of Accounts are duly reversed; use of checklists for approval and revisions of project award budgets for non-core projects; timely liquidation of staff operational advances; and consistently obtaining confirmation of receipt of DSA by workshop/meeting participants.	Country Office	Medium	Yes	• All budget revisions will include approved checklists as provided by Headquarters PSMU • As part of the handover process, the office includes a checklist for programme staff to reassign roles in PGAMS, PPM awards & budgets, DAMS and any other tasks and responsibilities, are signed off by supervisor/focal person prior to their exist. • PGAMS pending actions are a standing agenda item in programme meetings as monitoring with follow up actions to ensure that these do not remain as long outstanding items. • The programme team to submit a consolidated list of focal points for update to PSMU. Once updated, the remaining pending actions will be addressed. CO timeline for completion is Q4 2024. • Chart of Accounts (CoA) checklist to be shared by the operations team and refresher trainings to be carried out each quarter. • Programme and Operations management meetings are being held monthly to discuss bottle necks and budgets and spending plan. • CO uses the month end closure process to monitor and review budgets for clean-up and revision.	Ongoing Ongoing Monthly Done 31 March 2025 Monthly Monthly
14: Asset management	Recommendation 11: The Country Office to ensure programme partners formally acknowledge receipt of assets from UN Women and their purposeful utilization after project completion. Primary responsibility for management of the assets with programme partners should be redistributed from the Operations team to Programme teams, while the Operations team could support with monitoring the assets. Programme and Operations teams should consistently perform an annual reconciliation of the inventory reports from partners versus the inventory records maintained by UN Women. Such reconciliations should be completed within 60 calendar days at the end of each calendar year as per the monitoring of programme partner procedure.	Country Office	Medium	Yes	• Country Office to dispose obsolete and damaged assets. • CO to engage ESARO on the disposal process. • Focus on improving asset documentation and maintaining inventory registers	30 March 2025 Ongoing

Annex 1: DEFINITIONS OF AUDIT TERMS, RATINGS AND PRIORITIES

A. AUDIT RATINGS

Satisfactory	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.
Some Improvement Needed	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.
Major Improvement Needed	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.
Unsatisfactory	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

High (Critical)	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.
Medium (Important)	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.
Low	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 implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.

GENERATION EQUALITY

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