



# Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

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### Evaluation

## Corporate evaluation of the contribution of UN-Women to United Nations system coordination on gender equality and the empowerment of women

### *Summary*

As mandated by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) Corporate Evaluation Plan 2014-2017, the UN-Women Independent Evaluation Office undertook a corporate thematic evaluation of the UN-Women contribution to United Nations (UN) system coordination on gender equality and the empowerment of women (GEEW). The main purpose of the evaluation was to inform strategic decision-making, organizational learning and accountability, as well as generating knowledge on what works and what doesn't in key aspects of UN coordination to advance GEEW at global, regional and country levels.

The evaluation assessed the relevance, effectiveness and organizational efficiency of UN-Women's UN coordination mandate on GEEW. The report provides seven main conclusions and eight recommendations.

The primary intended users of the evaluation are the UN-Women Executive Board, and UN-Women senior management and staff at the global, regional and country levels.

## **A. Introduction to UN-Women’s UN coordination mandate**

1. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) was established by General Assembly resolution 64/289 on system-wide coherence to assist Member States and the United Nations (UN) system in progressing more effectively and efficiently towards the goal of achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women (GEEW). The entity was designed “fit-for-purpose” in that its mandate cuts across the three pillars of the United Nations (development, peace and security, and human rights), and integrates normative support, coordination functions and operational activities.

2. As defined in its founding resolution and subsequent strategic documents, UN-Women’s UN coordination role includes three aspects: leadership and advocacy related to “agenda setting” in the UN; promoting accountability of the UN system in relation to its GEEW commitments; and coordinating by engaging in system-wide and interagency efforts that promote and advance GEEW at global, regional and national levels. Furthermore, UN-Women has the responsibility to follow up on gender parity commitments in the UN system.

3. UN-Women’s UN coordination role is its newest role, as it was not formally included in or adopted from the mandates of any of its predecessor entities, although some GEEW coordination existed prior to the establishment of UN-Women. The UN-Women coordination role is an “organizational” mandate that is not limited to any one division, unit or level of the organization, including decentralized level.

## **B. Context of UN coordination on gender equality and the empowerment of women**

4. The creation of UN-Women and the agency’s coordination mandate need to be understood against the backdrop of broader reform processes within the UN development system. Over the past two decades, UN Member States have reiterated calls for the United Nations to increase its efficiency and effectiveness and reduce duplication and fragmentation. Furthermore, the integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as articulated in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), requires the international community, including the UN development system, to expand their existing notions of collaboration and coordination.

5. Despite noteworthy successes, efforts to improve coordination and coherence continue to be limited by the current structure and governance of the UN development system. The continued fragmentation of the UN system, separate governing bodies, and agency-specific staff accountabilities weakens accountability among UN agencies (horizontal accountability). For these reasons, inter-agency coordination continues to be based on voluntary participation and lacks strong incentives.

6. UN funds and programmes are increasingly reliant on earmarked non-core funding. At the same time, contributions to “Delivering as One” related One Funds have been declining, and donors are increasingly earmarking resources within these funds. These factors foster competition rather than collaboration and coordination among UN agencies, and limit the ability of UNTERM (UNCTs) to focus on jointly identified priorities.

7. In addition to the above-mentioned challenges, UN-Women’s evolution since its creation in 2010 has taken place against the backdrop of chronic

underfunding. Although UN-Women has found creative ways to function within these financial limitations, the funding shortfall is an underlying issue in the ability of UN-Women to completely fulfil its mandate and meet the high expectations set for it.

8. Despite the above challenges, UN-Women is strategically positioned to advance GEEW within the UN system, making the entity's establishment a notable milestone in the UN reform process.

## **C. Background and objectives of the evaluation**

9. This evaluation aimed to assess the relevance, effectiveness and organizational efficiency of UN-Women's UN system coordination mandate on GEEW. It also considered how a human rights-based approach and gender equality principles are integrated in the implementation of this mandate. The evaluation covered the period 2011 to 2015 at country, regional and global levels, including its integration with operational work and intergovernmental normative support.

10. The evaluation was commissioned and managed by the Independent Evaluation Office of UN-Women and was conducted by an external independent evaluation team between February 2015 and February 2016, with the active involvement of internal and external reference groups and an external evaluation expert group.

11. This evaluation is expected to feed into UN-Women's efforts to promote the gender equality goal and gender mainstreaming in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the next Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review. In addition, findings from this evaluation informed the mid-term review of UN-Women's Strategic Plan 2014-2017. It is also expected to inform the development of the next Strategic Plan.

## **D. Evaluation methodology**

12. The design and conduct of this corporate evaluation were enhanced by applying a gender-responsive perspective and introducing a systems-thinking approach. The evaluation used mixed methods including field observation, interviews, document review, country portfolio review and surveys.

13. At the global level, emphasis was placed on four global areas that have been a critical part of UN coordination work at Headquarters: SDGs; Beijing+20; UN System-wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP); and the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review. The nature of UN coordination work, contributions, and challenges faced in thematic areas were also explored.

14. Field-level perspectives were gathered through country visits (to Fiji, Kyrgyzstan, Jordan, Malawi, Mali and Mexico), Skype and telephone consultations with stakeholders in six additional countries (Guinea-Bissau, Myanmar, Serbia, Tanzania, Tunisia and Uruguay), and in all six regions, including members of UN regional coordination bodies. This coverage ensured that evaluation findings were informed by qualitative information from a variety of country contexts and across UN-Women presence models.

15. A country portfolio review provided a broad overview of work in field offices in a purposeful sample of 26 countries, including 5 countries with no UN-Women presence at the time of collecting data (Argentina, Chad, Eritrea, Malaysia and Montenegro).

16. Overall, the evaluation team consulted 467 stakeholders (at Headquarters, regional and country levels), most of whom were representatives of peer organizations in the UN system. Representatives of Member States (programme countries and donors) and, to a lesser extent, academia and civil society representatives were also consulted, particularly at the country level.

## E. Main conclusions

Based on the findings of the evaluation (see Annex 1), the following seven main conclusions emerged.

**1) UN-Women has implemented its UN coordination role in a highly complex environment. The challenges in coordinating efforts in the UN system are well-known and widely acknowledged.**

17. At the macro level, these include *vertical accountability mechanisms* (i.e., entity accountability to its own Headquarters) and competition for resources, which limit the ability of UN entities to focus on jointly identified priorities, and *horizontal accountability mechanisms* (i.e., accountability among entities). At the micro level, UN staff members with common goals and values—including feminist values that are key for forging a shared identity and a transformative approach to gender equality work—face challenges in trying to foster a sense of community for GEEW work.

18. The integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights the need and provides the space to reassess the factors that are inhibiting coordination and collaboration in the United Nations. UN-Women has the opportunity to continue to influence these discussions in global mechanisms, such as the Chief Executives Board, and processes, such as the UN Economic and Social Council dialogue on the longer term positioning of the UN development system and the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review. Addressing systemic challenges is also the responsibility of Member States, given that they have encouraged UN agencies to think, plan and work together coherently to deliver better results.

**2) In five years, UN-Women has built a solid foundation for the ongoing relevance and effectiveness of its UN coordination role. It has made notable contributions to strengthening UN system coherence, capacity, mobilization and accountability for GEEW related work.**

19. UN-Women's implementation of its mandate on UN coordination has added value to the normative, intergovernmental and operational work of the UN system. At the global level, UN-Women has used its unique GEEW-focused mandate and technical expertise to coordinate or lead processes culminating in the development and adoption of guiding (normative) frameworks and related UN commitments, such as the SDGs or the monitoring of UN system performance on GEEW as outlined in the widely accepted UN-SWAP.

20. UN-Women has been the driving force behind establishing or revitalizing several GEEW-related collaboration mechanisms, including: the global UN-SWAP network, regional and country level gender theme groups, and UN Development Group global and regional mechanisms in which UN-Women is an active and acknowledged player. UN-Women regional offices have become critical advocates in both strategic and operational coordination mechanisms and also provide technical inputs to country-level processes.

21. At the country normative level, UN-Women has led or played a key role in UN system efforts to jointly advocate for GEEW—contributing to changes in

national policies facilitated by the fact that national-level actors perceived the UN as speaking with one voice. UN-Women has also worked with other UN entities to reduce duplication of efforts and strengthen joint reporting against normative frameworks (such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and Security Council Resolution 1325 reports) and encouraged them to commit to applying these frameworks in their own programmatic work.

22. UN-Women has also worked with other UN entities to strengthen the inclusion of GEEW in UNCT workplans, common country assessments and UN Development Assistance Frameworks. In this regard, UN-Women has encouraged links between global and regional normative frameworks for gender equality and human rights aligned with national priorities.

**3) Despite external challenges, internal limitations and the short time it has been in operation, UN-Women in its UN coordination role has been able to demonstrate good practices.**

23. UN-Women offices at Headquarters, regional and country levels have developed promising strategies to address complex coordination issues. UN-Women has been most successful when it has taken a participatory and consultative approach to engaging other UN entities. At Headquarters level, this has been best illustrated in the development and roll-out of the UN-SWAP, where more than 50 entities were involved in designing the framework. Existing inter-agency mechanisms have begun to take ownership of certain indicator areas and there is a considerable sense of ownership of the UN-SWAP beyond UN-Women. Similarly, UN-Women effectively facilitated consultations with UN entities and Member States as part of the 2013 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review, resulting in stronger language on GEEW.

24. Other good practices are those that help increase the evidence base on GEEW and identify the system's capacity and each entity's collaborative advantage. At the regional level, joint research and joint programming have provided an evidence base on issues of concern to regions, countries and UNCTs. For example, UN-Women regional offices in East and Southern Africa and Asia and the Pacific have engaged in joint research with other UN partners on topics such as ending violence against women and extractive industries. In the West and Central Africa region, UN-Women's regional office carried out a mapping of UN gender capacity at the regional level for presentation to the UN Development Group with the aim to inform a more coherent regional-level approach to GEEW based on a clear understanding of each entity's areas of strength and weakness.

25. At the country level, UN-Women country offices have worked to facilitate the sharing of technical and knowledge resources among UNCT members. UN-Women has also helped to clarify the purpose of the gender theme groups, encourage the development of realistic workplans, and focus the gender theme groups' work on issues that matter to the UNCT and the national context. Having clearer, more realistic and relevant Terms of Reference and workplans has helped gender theme groups to achieve greater results.

26. UN-Women has also demonstrated how substantive and issue orientation of coordinated efforts enhances links to programming and GEEW results, often with regard to the enabling environment for GEEW in a particular context. In several countries reviewed, joint advocacy contributed to new or revised national legislation or to national action plans and other frameworks to ensure greater gender mainstreaming in national policy. For example, Colombia showed good practice in collaboration among UN-Women, UN Development Programme, UN

Children's Fund and Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to ensure that women were able to participate in peace process talks in Havana, Cuba.

**4) More needs to be done to ensure concrete demonstration of GEEW results of UN system coordination and shared accountability for GEEW across the UN system.**

27. As stated in the UN-Women's Coordination Strategy, coordination must advance concrete development results for GEEW. Overall, the evaluation has shown that, with the right people, resources and positioning, UN-Women can support UN coordination that leads to progress on GEEW at the country level. Nonetheless, clear linkages between the work carried out through UN-Women's UN coordination role and results on GEEW are currently difficult to discern.

28. Across the United Nations, there is also limited evidence that improved UN system capacity for GEEW (to which UN-Women has contributed through tools, frameworks, knowledge and skills) has been systematically translated into more or stronger GEEW results (including performance in the UN system's internal changes, such as gender parity). Despite noted progress in strengthening UNCT capacity for gender mainstreaming, UN-Women is still (and in some cases increasingly) regarded as the main player expected to not only drive and monitor UNCT commitments to GEEW but also to implement them—rather than the UNCT taking responsibility. Support by the leadership of the UNCT and the country's own gender equality dynamics also affect the extent to which UN-Women is able to promote and facilitate stronger links between UN coordinated efforts and GEEW results.

29. Within UN-Women, factors that limit demonstration of GEEW results include insufficient resources, variability of skills, expertise and staffing across UN-Women offices, and limitations in how the UN coordination role is conceived and thus reported (as focusing on processes rather than results). The link between better UN coordination and changes for GEEW has not yet been clearly articulated, demonstrated or operationalized. UN-Women's Coordination Strategy provides a step in the right direction, but does not yet sufficiently clarify why and how contributions to the internal workings of the UN system will lead to results in the lives of women and men. Neither UN-Women nor other UN entities systematically monitor or are able to clearly demonstrate such links. Although in early stages of development, the Flagship Programming Initiatives are expected to provide opportunities to demonstrate how coordination among entities, mobilized around a theory of change, strengthens the ability to deliver results for GEEW.

**5) UN-Women's strategic positioning for UN coordination is shaped not only by its existing assets, but also by the extent to which UN partners recognize its added value and demand its coordination efforts.**

30. Given the vertical structure of the UN system, coordination relies on the voluntary cooperation of UN entities. The evaluation found that reputation based on expertise and authority (e.g., moral, financial or mandate-related) often became key levers to facilitate coordination. In addition, dimensions of reciprocity and trust constitute core relationships to ensure successful coordination. Whether and how other UN actors perceive, interpret and make use of UN-Women's assets is also strongly influenced by their own needs, stakes and interests. The implementation of UN-Women's UN coordination mandate is therefore subject to the multiple perspectives and competing interests of individual agencies.

31. Broadly speaking, UN-Women's positioning for UN coordination is more consistently acknowledged by others at the global level than in the field. This is partly due to the variety of national contexts and relationships between UN entities at the field level, as well as a variety of implementation and presence modalities by UN-Women in the field.

32. UN-Women's positioning in UN coordination is stronger within the normative mandate versus the operational one. It is also strong with regard to promoting accountability frameworks for GEEW commitments at Headquarters level, as it is seen as having the legitimacy to do this. It is clearly positioned to lead on UN coordination on cross-sectoral issues (for example, in the SDGs), and advocacy and implementation of normative frameworks on GEEW (such as Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women).

33. UN-Women's positioning in thematic areas has been more varied and contested at Headquarters, regional and country levels as there is a perception that it may infringe on the status, positioning and influence of other actors in these areas. In particular, in the area of humanitarian action there appears to be a considerable gap between UN-Women's potential to add value and other UN actors' acknowledgement and demand for UN-Women's engagement.

34. Key assets that UN-Women can draw upon in relation to its UN coordination mandate are its unique GEEW-focused mandate, which requires a cross-sectoral perspective or a more holistic vision for GEEW; its reputation for expertise, especially in relation to GEEW in general; and its access to extensive networks, especially grassroots women's organizations and specific government ministries (such as national gender machineries) that other UN entities do not normally reach. This constitutes an important asset in terms of UN-Women's ability to facilitate inclusive consultation processes.

35. Issues that, until now, have tended to limit UN-Women's strategic positioning in relation to UN coordination include the following:

- a) Field presence and representation in global inter-agency mechanisms. What counts as a relevant organizational asset can vary slightly by issue and thematic area. For example, the fact that UN-Women is not a member of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee has been linked to the argument that it is not sufficiently operational to be a relevant player in the context of humanitarian action, even though there are examples of UN-Women playing effective coordination roles in humanitarian settings.
- b) Financial incentives. UN-Women does not offer the financial incentives that other coordinating entities in the UN system may be able to provide.
- c) Overlapping mandates. The existence of other entities with overlapping mandates for coordination in a particular thematic area creates greater imperatives for dialogue on complementarities.
- d) Operational capacity. Actual or perceived gaps in UN-Women's operational capacity in the field also negatively influence its ability to contribute to or lead inter-agency discussions. For example, some consulted stakeholders felt that UN-Women is less able to lead global discussions on different thematic areas than other agencies with larger budgets because it lacks evidence based on its programming in the field. At the field level, the perception of lack of operational capacity also affects UN-Women's credibility in terms of its UN coordination role. This is particularly the case in countries where UN-Women does not have a country office but only programme presence.

- e) Coordination architecture. Formal inter-agency coordination mechanisms can provide a structure and legitimacy to coordination efforts. For example, in the area of *women, peace and security*, UN-Women's positioning has been facilitated by the strong UN architecture for gender, peace and security that is accountable to the UN Security Council. In contrast, in the context of *humanitarian action*, there is more limited institutional coordination on GEEW. The absence of a gender architecture and accountability framework in the humanitarian system, and the fact that UN-Women has not been granted membership in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, have meant that its positioning in different country contexts has varied according to factors such as the strength and perspective of humanitarian coordinators and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and the capacity of UN-Women offices.
- 6) The United Nations is not leading by example with regard to gender equality. While UN-Women has set some positive practices as examples for other UN entities, it does not yet consistently model principles of GEEW.**

36. To date, the UN system is not yet consistently modelling the principles of GEEW that it promotes—as shown in the modest progress made so far in reaching a 50:50 gender balance. Data indicate that only limited progress was made towards achieving the goal of gender parity within the UN system during the period under review (2011-2015). From 2011 to 2013, the representation of women in professional and higher categories increased marginally, from 40.9 per cent to 41.8 per cent overall. Parity was reached at P1-P2 levels, but otherwise, an inverse relationship between professional level and representation of women remains<sup>1</sup>. The percentage of women who are Resident Coordinators increased from 37.1 per cent in 2011 to 39.5 per cent in 2013, and National Professional Officers in the UN system are within 10 percentage points of achieving gender parity<sup>2</sup>. In the UN-SWAP (2014 reporting period), 77 per cent of entities reported that they had not achieved equal representation of women at the P-4 level and above, and this is one of the indicators with the poorest performance across the UN system<sup>3</sup>.

37. Furthermore, the UN system and its individual entities are not yet consistently assessing underlying cause of inequality to inform programming. In the area of joint programming, the UN experience has not always provided evidence of more intersectoral, multidimensional work that can address some of the more structural causes of inequality. The ability of UN-Women to influence change in this regard has been negatively affected by many UN entities not yet sufficiently investing in (or decreasing investment in) their own gender architecture.

38. UN-Women's own organizational culture reflects the fact that it has incorporated staff from predecessor organizations, particularly United Nations Development Fund for Women, as well as from many other UN agencies. They have brought a rich set of skills and knowledge of the UN system into UN-Women, as well as the challenge of forging a coherent organizational approach and identity on the basis of the mandate specificities.

39. While UN-Women has exceeded representation of women at all staff levels in all locations, policies and practices on issues such as maternity and paternity

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<sup>1</sup> Secretary-General. 2014. "Improvement in the Status of Women in the United Nations System". Report of the Secretary-General No. A/69/346, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, pp. 14-15.

<sup>3</sup> Secretary-General. 2015. "Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective into all Policies and Programmes in the United Nations System". Report of the Secretary-General to UN Economic and Social Council, April 1.



leave and overall working conditions are not yet considered best practice. This is due in part to constraints to setting internal policy, as UN-Women must adhere to UN system policies and administrative rules for the international civil service.

**7) UN-Women’s rapid evolution has required ongoing adjustments in systems and practices that have not yet consistently translated into efficient and effective support for implementation of the UN coordination mandate.**

40. UN-Women started to implement its UN coordination function while establishing itself as an entity. As in any organization undergoing change, the transformations have been accompanied by uncertainties about processes, systems, roles and responsibilities, and have been compounded by chronic under resourcing.

41. The ongoing transition and under resourcing have negatively affected UN-Women’s ability to fully implement its coordination mandate. Some noted areas for improvement may sort themselves out once recent structural changes have been in place long enough to become fully effective. Some other issues, however, are likely to require targeted action, in particular the following:

- a) Alignment of UN Coordination Strategy with Strategic Plan. The UN-Women Coordination Strategy has four outcome areas that are not visibly aligned with the results of the Strategic Plan 2014-2017. The results of “coordination” are currently framed as part of the Organizational Effectiveness and Efficiency Framework, yet there is a growing call for linking UN coordination to development results. UN-Women’s Coordination Strategy describes the dimensions of UN-Women’s coordination mandate, but it does not help clarify the purpose and intent of UN-Women’s coordination role and its relationship to the other roles (normative, operational) in its composite mandate.
- b) Guidance in setting priorities. UN-Women’s Coordination Strategy has not been translated yet into guidance to help set priorities and clarify what is expected from UN-Women in different thematic and/or geographic contexts. It also does not provide guidance on how these expectations may be adjusted in contexts where UN-Women’s ability to cover all dimensions of the mandate is constrained (for example, in countries where UN-Women has programme presence). As a result, both UN-Women staff and UN partners have a range of understandings and expectations of UN-Women’s UN coordination mandate.
- c) Staffing. UN-Women has faced challenges in linking global initiatives to the field and vice versa. There are a limited number of staff members at Headquarters responsible for responding to needs in the field, and these responsibilities are distributed across divisions. UN-Women regional offices note insufficient staff to provide support and guidance at the country level, with key staff having to divide their attention between implementation of UN-coordination work at the regional level, support at country level, and planning responsibilities. Regional offices have not been able to consistently respond to demands from country offices for more specialized and tailored support—either in coordination more generally or in the thematic areas of expertise (e.g., through thematic advisors based in regional offices). Country offices have also stressed the issue of staffing constraints for effective UN coordination efforts.
- d) Ensuring internal coherence. UN-Women’s UN coordination mandate is an organization-wide mandate. Several key divisions have a strong role to play in shaping and ensuring the coherence and effectiveness of UN-Women’s overall approach to UN coordination. Shared responsibility for coordination between divisions is appropriate given the integrated approaches, networks and expertise required. At the same time, it can be a barrier to coherence (in terms of messaging

and guidance) and efficiency. This applies to the relationships between divisions at Headquarters and to the relationships between Headquarters and the field.

## **F. Recommendations**

42. The evaluation has identified eight recommendations that are critical for UN-Women's future contribution to UN coordination. Many factors that affect UN-Women's ability to implement its UN coordination mandate are inherent to the UN system and lie outside UN-Women's control and/or sphere of influence. Similarly, the effects of chronic underfunding for UN-Women cannot be underestimated.

**Recommendation 1: UN-Women should continue to actively engage in strategic dialogue with other UN entities and Member States, through existing mechanisms at all levels of the United Nations, to catalyse greater system coordination and coherence, particularly on GEEW.**

43. Systemic issues such as vertical accountability, weak incentives for coordination, the still-limited capacity of some UN entities to address GEEW, inconsistent support from the resident coordinator system, and varying stakeholder expectations of UN-Women's mandate are best addressed through existing system-wide mechanisms (such as the Chief Executives Board and its pillars, in particular the UN Development Group), Member State directives (such as the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review), and the demands that Member States place on UN entities.

44. This recommendation suggests that UN-Women should continue supporting the United Nations in overcoming systemic challenges for UN coordination. This would position UN-Women as forward looking and help resolve confusion about its UN coordination role and leadership on the ground.

**Recommendation 2: UN-Women should align the current Coordination Strategy with the Strategic Plan and current UN context, bringing greater focus on UN coordination as a means for development results and changes for GEEW.**

45. UN-Women has made laudable efforts to reinforce and clarify its UN coordination mandate both externally and internally, while implementing the mandate at the same time. Yet entities in the UN system, as well as UN-Women staff, note that the mandate requires greater clarification and better integration with other dimensions of UN-Women's mandate. This, together with the changes in the global context reflected in the SDGs and the UN Economic and Social Council dialogues on the longer-term positioning of the UN development system, provides a strong rationale for UN-Women to review and clarify its UN coordination mandate and fully align its Coordination Strategy with its Strategic Plan. This process includes making more explicit the link between UN coordination and GEEW development results.

**Recommendation 3: UN-Women should align the scope of its mandate with its resource base.**

46. UN-Women has faced constraints in funding its coordination role, establishing synergies, and setting priorities among the different dimensions of its composite mandate. Recognizing the limited funding base and that the institutional budget for UN-Women may not increase, resourcing the coordination role will require either: a) re-allocating or re-aligning existing core and institutional budget resources; b) better integrating financing for the UN coordination function in UN-Women's resource mobilization strategy; or c) reducing the scope of the mandate to align with current resource levels. This will

require clearly communicating to the Executive Board the implications of underfunding in UN-Women's ability to cover all dimensions of UN coordination. In light of current discussions on UN pooled financing mechanisms to bridge the SDGs financing gap, other complementary financial solutions could be taken into account.

47. If it is decided that the current scope of UN-Women's mandate will be maintained, then the resources to support that mandate in the field will need to be found or re-allocated. Further re-articulation of the three mandate dimensions may help streamline efforts to integrate UN coordination work in the context of the Flagship Programmes Initiatives.

**Recommendation 4: UN-Women should provide operational guidance for UN-Women staff on how to approach, plan, implement and report on its UN coordination role in different geographic and thematic contexts.**

48. Due to the rapid evolution of the organization and the challenges of priority setting, there are still gaps in strategic alignment and operational guidance provided to thematic areas and the field. The evaluation team heard repeated requests from UN-Women staff at the country and regional level, and from the different thematic areas, for guidance that could be adapted to their particular contexts. Often, the guidance requested was for tools, examples and documented experiences that could help them avoid duplication of effort.

49. UN Coordination Division and Policy and Programme Divisions should work together to identify the type of guidance to prioritize in the short and medium term. Such guidance should also emphasize UN-Women's role in ensuring that its support for UN system coordination adds significant transformative value—that is, that it nudges the UN system to do a better job in analysing and addressing underlying causes of gender inequality.

**Recommendation 5: UN-Women should enhance the role it plays in promoting UN system accountability for its commitments on GEEW.**

50. UN-Women has been effective in promoting the UN system's accountability for its commitments in GEEW, e.g., through the UN-SWAP, the role of the Focal Point for gender equality in the UN, and by serving as the Secretariat and/or contributing inputs for global studies commissioned by the Secretary-General or inter-governmental bodies.

51. UN-Women should continue to monitor and guide the UN system in strengthening implementation of its GEEW commitments and ensuring that the GEEW agenda retains its transformative potential and does not become a technocratic exercise. In doing so, it needs to ensure that greater attention is paid to related processes (consultation, feedback) and recognize that its role in promoting accountability—and challenging the system to do better—can lead to tensions with other entities, depending on how it is exercised.

52. In playing this role, UN-Women can draw more systematically on the important external “check” on the UN system that civil society can provide. UN-Women has a global and articulate constituency, which is one of its primary sources of strength and influence. The alliance between UN-Women and civil society can contribute to helping the United Nations explore approaches that are more transformative with regard to gender power relations. Since it is often difficult to be a critic from within, leveraging relationships with civil society networks outside the UN system could be strategic in terms of eliciting honest critiques of the UN system.

53. In addition, UN-Women's UN Coordination Division should continue to enhance accountability of the UN system through the UN-SWAP and harmonize existing accountability mechanisms.

**Recommendation 6: UN-Women should strengthen its efforts to ensure that GEEW principles are consistently taken into account by the UN system in the areas of UN-Women's thematic expertise.**

54. This recommendation suggests actions to strengthen UN-Women's strategic positioning as a coordinating entity on GEEW in its thematic areas of work (outlined in its Strategic Plan 2014-2017). UN-Women should strengthen its thought leadership capacity in its thematic areas. Expertise is one of the key factors in strengthening its reputation and credibility as a coordinating entity. The development of organizational expertise (as opposed to periodically contracted expertise) does have resource implications. However, it may also be possible to leverage strategic partnerships with civil society and academia to engage in research that can inform the UN system's work in certain thematic areas.

55. UN-Women should enhance its analytical capacity by convening actors and sponsoring system-wide assessments of collective experiences and undertakings in key thematic areas. This could be a powerful way to enhance UN-Women's credibility as an agency that catalyses greater learning among entities.

56. As noted in Recommendation 1, UN-Women should engage in discussions with principals and/or the Senior Management of other UN entities to ensure that there is clarity with respect to each entity's role and collaborative advantage in the thematic areas. This will ensure that work in the field is smoother and better coordinated.

57. UN-Women has come a long way in the two years since its humanitarian strategy was adopted (2014) and it began its engagement in this area. Although it is still having difficulties gaining acknowledgement for its value added in humanitarian settings, the evaluation noted several good practices UN-Women has developed in different humanitarian contexts. In order to ensure that UN-Women can continue to play an effective role in this area of work, it should:

- a) Continue to move towards more systematic and consistent engagement in coordinating GEEW for humanitarian action, drawing on its partnership with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Its humanitarian strategy emphasizes upstream advocacy, guidance and standard setting, accountability and capacity building. These are aligned with UN-Women's UN coordination mandate, and appear to be contributions that are welcomed by partners such as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
- b) Propose a review of the "gender architecture" and accountability framework for GEEW in the humanitarian area, which would include identifying the strengths and weaknesses of current coordinating structures on GEEW. The lack of gender architecture can be interpreted as one of the challenges for coordination and positioning of UN-Women within the larger humanitarian system.
- c) Continue its advocacy to become a member of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, which would give it a stronger voice in the humanitarian system.
- d) Create a repository of "results" that shed light on the unique role UN-Women can fulfil and that no other entity is undertaking. Estimate the cost of inaction on gender equality in terms of lives, women's and girls' plights, and other consequences (short and long term).

**Recommendation 7: UN-Women should modify policies and practices in order to model a gender-responsive organization for the United Nations.**

58. UN-Women is part and parcel of UN policies and administrative rules and thus may be constrained in the extent to which it can modify policies for the international civil service. Thus, this recommendation must be discussed by Senior Management in terms of what can be done to push the boundaries of those externally-driven policies and procedures and what is possible to change internally within the remit of UN-Women.

59. In the effort to lead by example, UN-Women should strive to demonstrate best practices in its own organizational policies and practices, culture and approaches to programming. Examples include reviewing maternity and paternity leave and flexible work policies, promoting an egalitarian organizational culture that capitalizes on staff members' passion for the mandate, and promoting transformative programming models. UN-Women's ability to lead by example in these areas will enhance its credibility in guiding the system. Senior Management should identify key gaps and prioritize areas that it will strengthen to move towards UN-Women becoming a model entity.

**Recommendation 8: UN-Women should strengthen gender-focused coordination mechanisms at Headquarters and in the field that have been key to its approach to implementing its UN coordination mandate.**

60. As part of its efforts to strengthen coherence, tap into synergies, and reduce duplication on GEEW in the UN system, UN-Women has contributed to and taken steps to strengthen inter-agency groups such as Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality and the UN Development Group Gender Equality Task Team at the global level, and gender theme groups at the regional and national level. These groups have contributed to GEEW capacity and results, but there is a need to further improve their relevance and effectiveness. There may be a need, for example, to streamline groups at Headquarters (such as Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality and UN Development Group's Gender Equality Task Team), to increase shared ownership of these groups and to ensure ongoing relevance to the United Nations and national and regional contexts. These mechanisms are particularly critical for UN-Women's role as a backbone organization for collective efforts on GEEW in the United Nations.

**Annex A: List of evaluation findings****Findings on relevance**

Finding 1: In response to the complex and multifaceted nature of its coordination mandate, UN-Women's context-specific approaches to implementation have been generally relevant and appropriate.

Finding 2: Despite efforts to communicate both within UN-Women and in the UN system, there is still a lack of clarity and a range of interpretations of UN-Women's UN system coordination mandate.

Finding 3: UN-Women's Coordination Strategy and related Theory of Change illustrate its (evolving) interpretation of its coordination mandate, but do not yet provide a clear articulation of the transformative change for GEEW results that drive the Coordination Strategy and a clear foundation for operationalizing this mandate.

Finding 4: UN-Women's strategic positioning is strongest in relation to coordinating issues that are (perceived as) addressing GEEW or gender mainstreaming in general. Its strategic positioning is more varied in relation to specific thematic and policy areas in which other UN actors have a declared stake.

**Findings on effectiveness**

Finding 5: At the global level, UN-Women has made notable contributions to strengthening system-wide coherence and mobilization for GEEW through inter-governmental processes and policy areas.

Finding 6: UN-Women has contributed to enhancing coherence, fostering synergies and reducing duplication among UN entities in the field. Related efforts have faced ongoing challenges largely deriving from the vertical structure of the UN system.

Finding 7: UN-Women has significantly contributed to progress towards stronger UN system accountability for GEEW, in particular through the UN-SWAP.

Finding 8: UN accountability for GEEW commitments at the country level is a much greater challenge. Despite UN-Women's efforts as an advocate, there is still limited uptake of horizontal accountability tools.

Finding 9: At the global level, UN-Women has contributed to strengthening UN system capacity for gender mainstreaming. However, the extent to which individual UN entities use this capacity still varies.

Finding 10: UN-Women has strengthened UN system capacities for gender mainstreaming in programming initiatives at the field level. Over the period under review, there has been notable progress in integrating GEEW in preparation of UN Development Assistance Frameworks. Greater attention needs to be paid to implementation, resource allocation and monitoring of GEEW-related commitments.

Finding 11: While there has been modest progress towards the goal of achieving a 50:50 gender balance at all levels of the UN system, there continues to be an inverse relationship between seniority and the representation of women. The effectiveness of UN-Women's contributions in this area is negatively affected by insufficient leadership and support for gender parity within many UN entities.

Finding 12: There are some examples of UN-Women's coordination efforts having contributed to progress towards GEEW at the country level. Overall, however, there is insufficient data to make a consistent link between UN-Women's coordination work and substantial changes on the ground.

**Findings on gender equality and human rights based approach**

Finding 13: The UN system is framing its work within a human rights framework, which includes the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. UN-Women has used its UN system coordination role on GEEW to support this effort and strengthen linkages between global and regional normative frameworks and national priorities and initiatives.

Finding 14: UN-Women often mobilizes rights holders to participate in and influence GEEW-related processes. Nevertheless, there is room for UN-Women to further strengthen its engagement with civil society and better promote the UN system's broad and regular engagement with civil society as one way of promoting greater accountability.

Finding 15: The UN system does not yet consistently identify and address the underlying causes of inequality and discrimination in its external work on GEEW or within the UN system itself.

Finding 16: UN-Women has set some positive examples but faces internal challenges in creating an enabling culture for gender equality. It has not yet become a model gender-responsive organization for other UN entities.

**Findings on organizational efficiency**

Finding 17: The complexity and scope of existing demand for GEEW-related coordination in the United Nations is considerably more than what UN-Women can provide given its current resources and priorities.

Finding 18: UN-Women's evolving organizational structure and processes do not yet consistently ensure efficiency and related synergies in UN system coordination work across UN-Women.

Finding 19: UN-Women has been addressing some key constraints that it faced in delivering on its UN system GEEW coordination mandate. As it overcomes these constraints, efficiency will improve.