

evaluation), keeping the country as the primary unit of change – and set and uphold minimum standards for this.

- Develop and refine the results tracking system to support local level monitoring as well as systematic centralised results reporting.
- Given the complexity of social transformation required for gender equality and women’s empowerment, introduce complementary approaches to results tracking that take account of non-linear change and the possibility of unplanned consequences (positive and negative).

4) Increasing readiness of any future Strategic Plan to be evaluated

- Retain the requirement for an evaluation plan in the Strategic Plan, including country strategies, but base this on **strategic programme information needs**, rather than being dominated by project or donor requirements and require compliance.

This Assessment was conducted by independent evaluation consultants from IOD PARC, and managed by the UN Women Evaluation Office.

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UNIFEM Strategic Plan (2008-2010) Evaluability Assessment
Evaluation Office / 2011



UNIFEM Strategic Plan (2008-2010) Evaluability Assessment

Executive Summary

I. Study background and approach: This study, which was conducted from May 2010 to February 2011, is an analysis of the UNIFEM Strategic Plan (2008-2011), its associated results frameworks and institutional systems. It assesses UNIFEM’s experience of implementing the Strategic Plan, with a view to informing the new strategic planning process of UN Women. It is aimed at all members of UN Women and relevant partners, at headquarters, sub-regional and country levels, plus any interested external partners.

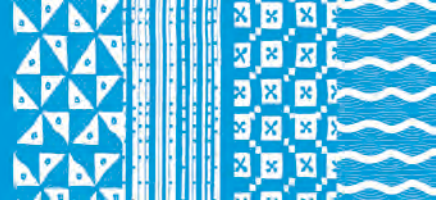
The implementation of Resolution A/RES/64/289 in July 2010, which mandated the formation of the UN’s new organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women (subsequently UN Women) led to a decision to modify the study. Rather than pursue a classic evaluability assessment (given that evaluation of UNIFEM’s Strategic Plan was now unlikely), the revised purpose of the study was:

monitoring and reporting systems...A formative and forward looking exercise aimed at capturing best practices, challenges and lessons learned from the UNIFEM Strategic Plan experience to date for reflection and learning.

The study comprised a range of methods: technical appraisal of corporate, thematic, regional, sub-regional and country Strategic Plan documents and results frameworks; review of a wide range of internal and external documentation, including work plans and annual reports; interviews with UNIFEM staff and external informants; workshops with and feedback from a Reference Group; programme and country sampling and selection leading to in-depth analysis of selected sub-regional (8) and country (8) offices and field visits to two sub-regional offices (Andean and Central & Eastern Europe) and two country offices (Colombia and Albania).

The study has identified some relevant and interesting lessons on the formulation of the UNIFEM Strategic Plan, its systems and

A qualitative analysis of the Strategic Plan’s basic parameters and its



the experience of its implementation. Consequently, it provides a useful body of evidence on how the learning from UNIFEM’s Strategic Plan experience could be used to support any future institutional planning processes of UN Women.

II. Key findings and conclusions

The key conclusions of the report are presented below in summary form, followed by lessons learned in section 3 and recommendations in section 4 of the full report. The full report also contains five findings sections, from which these conclusions have been derived.

Conclusion 1: The Strategic Plan and its technical robustness

The UNIFEM Strategic Plan and the understanding of change on which it is based provided a **relevant, appropriate and conceptually sound articulation** of UNIFEM’s core mandate on the achievement of gender equality and women’s empowerment. However, there are some **technical weaknesses**, which constrained its effective implementation. These include:

- There is **insufficient development of the understanding of change and results logic** within the **Strategic Plan**

and **inadequate recognition of potentially different pathways of change**.

- There is very **limited acknowledgment within the Strategic Plan of the assumptions and risks** that underlie the processes of change, such as the political factors that drive or hinder this.
- The **roles of key strategies** (e.g. knowledge management, capacity development) in linking outcomes and progressing change are **not sufficiently elaborated** within the Strategic Plan.
- Despite the considerable improvement from previous years, **specific results and neutral and measurable indicators/concrete targets** are not consistently applied within the Strategic Plan framework, nor does it have a **baseline** to set a starting point.
- While the Strategic Plan places emphasis on implementation at national level, the **primacy of country strategy planning** has been only a relatively recent departure within the strategic planning process.

Conclusion 2: Accompanying systems and their role in supporting Strategic Plan delivery

The systems developed for Strategic Plan implementation represent a **major**

corporate level outcomes and targets, but which allows countries and sections to flexibly identify their contributions to this. Countries and sections should then develop context specific results frameworks with clear starting points (baseline); outcome and output targets (results); and the pathway (process and milestones) towards achieving this.

Supporting recommendations

To help implement this, the report makes the following supporting recommendations:

1) Towards a robust Strategic Plan

- **Build on, make more explicit and validate the results logic of any future Strategic Plan** through developing further the understanding of change, to take account of movement over time and to clarify relationships between corporate and country level results logic (including any in- between levels).
- **Further strengthen the goal, outcome and output statements in line with the results logic**, including a long-term goal that addresses the vision of gender equality and women’s empowerment (to embed the longer-term goal of gender equality and women’s empowerment into the Strategic Plan results planning and logic).

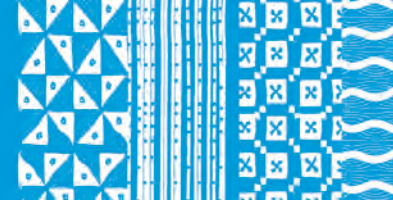
- Require the development of baselines within one year of Strategic Plan development. Development results baseline should be established principally at country level while a management results baseline needs to be developed corporately and at country level.

2) The strategic planning process

- **Recognise that the primacy of change is at the country level** – merge bottom-up with top-down planning processes. Timing and sequencing of planning will need to take account of institutional demands for a UN Women Strategic Plan within a short time frame (a draft in April 2011 for June submission to the Executive Board).
- **Develop a communications strategy** to inform stakeholders at all levels of the UN Women mandate, strategic planning process and Strategic Plan including further clarification of the normative and operational linkages and role as a ‘driver’ of gender mainstreaming in UN country teams.

3) Systems to support implementation of the Strategic Plan

- **Develop and strengthen the systems needed to support results management through the full programme / strategy cycle** (including



planning and management. This requires significant investment of time and resources. Elements include: clear feedback loops; investment in support / guidance, monitoring and evaluation systems (including at the country level); the recruitment and capacity development of dedicated staff and / or external expertise to support these systems; and to allow for reporting on gains beyond indicators, recognising the process-based nature of change, the fluidity of context specificity, and the need to aggregate up over time.

- **A strategic plan can provide staff with a valuable tool to promote the organisation’s remit to strengthen normative-operational connections and to be ‘a driver of gender equality’ within the UN.** However, space and performance are dependent on a number of factors including: coordination mechanisms; strategies for engaging with these, and guidance provided; and the status and capacities of staff and of offices within the UN system.
- **Building an evidence base to support results-based management and future evaluation is demanding and, realistically, needs to happen incrementally rather than all at once.** Key building blocks include the setting in place of an evaluation policy and strategy, a monitoring and reporting policy, lessons from experience to

guide refinement of performance measurement, and the necessary feedback loops to support results management. For baselines, clear institutional demand and clarity of purpose and pragmatism are needed.

IV. Recommendations

Based on these conclusions, the report makes a number of **recommendations** to UN Women with the aim of helping to (i) improve any new plan as a results-based management tool and (ii) support any new strategic planning process in order to strengthen both the plan and institutional buy-in.

The study also provides specific **proposals for how the recommendations might be operationalised**, with due regard for the current internal context, i.e. the process of confirming the institutional arrangements of UN Women. These are contained in section 5 of the full report.

Summary recommendation

Based on the body of evidence, the study proposes the following headline recommendation to UN Women:

Develop a corporate strategic plan based around a central framework, including

transformation in the way UNIFEM sought to introduce a results based culture and to collect and analyse data for performance monitoring. However, implementation did **not deliver the results oriented culture** envisaged. Specifically:

- Guidance material to support sections and offices to develop linked strategies is **good practice but can be improved on** in terms of timeliness and comprehensiveness.
- The results tracking system enabled **comprehensive results reporting** at global level but its main gearing towards (centralised) annual reporting **constrained its potential utility** for more locally-relevant performance management and trend analysis.
- There was **limited analysis of trends/progress and downward feedback loops**, which constrained the flow and use of valuable information.
- There was a need **to enable reporting beyond fixed and sometimes narrow global indicators** so that offices and sections could report on significant, wider **changes**.
- Considerable progress was made on results measurement but **systems had not yet been geared to support comprehensive results management** (throughout the full programme cycle). In particular **monitoring was not well developed**, though significant progress

has been made to move towards results-focused evaluation.

Conclusion 3: The experience of implementation: UNIFEM’s take-up and use of the Strategic Plan and its systems

The Strategic Plan, its results frameworks and associated systems provided a **clear organising frame** to make explicit UNIFEM’s work and strategic focus to staff and partners. They supported coherence and consistency across the Organisation. However, their potential value was **not being fully realised** (especially at sub-regional and country levels):

- The understanding of how change would be supported through the Strategic Plan was **not been sufficiently tested and validated at local levels**.
- The Strategic Plan was providing a conceptual **umbrella for thematic and strategic coherence, rather than acting as a strategic driver for operations**.
- The results tracking system was **not adequately supporting local reporting and decision-making**.
- UNIFEM’s **status in the UN, inadequate staffing and insufficient predictability of resources** constrained effective implementation, and were out of sync with the aims of the Strategic Plan.



- The process of development of the Strategic Plan and related strategies (such as country strategies) took place rapidly, and **without the time period required for full engagement and discussion** with staff and partners.

Conclusion 4: The role of the Strategic Plan in supporting the delivery of UNIFEM's remit around normative / operational activity plus UN coordination processes

Under the Strategic Plan a considerable volume of work took place to **address normative and operational linkages** and to support the **mainstreaming of gender equality and women's empowerment within UN coordination processes** centrally and at field level. However, this was not being conducted to its full potential:

- While UNIFEM's mandate was generally understood by partners, **the Strategic Plan document was not generally well known or communicated.**
- There is a need for **clearer definition of the role of 'driver' within UN country teams**, a focus on **impact as well as process** in coordination work, **corporate commitment** to agreed arrangements secured (e.g. providing human and financial resources to carry out an agreed co-ordination role) and **distillation and sharing of good /**

promising practice.

- While the Strategic Plan facilitated staff to make explicit the connections between normative and operational work, **further work is needed to strengthen these linkages**, including generation of an evidence base on what is working / not working.

Conclusion 5: The role of the Strategic Plan in delivering an information base to support any later evaluation

The measures taken to provide evidence of Strategic Plan impact has enabled the generation of a **more focused and coherent evidence base for future evaluation** than was the case previously. In particular there are now up-to-date and aligned performance data, which are aggregated from country to corporate levels. However:

- The lack of **clarity on starting position** (baseline), an **absence of clear targets** (in country strategies as well as corporate Strategic Plan) and **inadequate monitoring systems and capacity**, severely limits robust and comprehensive performance measurement.
- **The evaluation evidence base is gradually developing** but lacks (i) a systematic approach to generating evaluation information around areas of

strategic institutional interest, and (ii) feedback loops between evaluation reports and strategic planning and operations; and longitudinal studies.

III. Lessons learned

The study finds the following lessons learned which may have broader relevance beyond this process. More detail on each lesson is contained in the full report:

- An organisation-wide strategic plan results logic, which sets out the underlying belief in how change happens and the cause-effect rationale of the plan, needs to be **clear and articulated in appropriate detail.**
- However, it is important for a corporate strategic plan to provide a **strategic framework that gives direction to but does not constrain country level flexibility** to respond to context. This implies a broad framework at corporate level, including, e.g. clear outcome statements and targets, but which allows countries to demonstrate through their own results frameworks how they will contribute to these changes.
- **Development and validation of a strategic plan through consultation**

and a comprehensive planning process helps build technical quality, ownership and institutional buy-in. This implies a broad-based participatory process involving relevant staff across the organisation and, which takes account of bottom-up and top-down planning.

- **A strategic plan, which includes high-level ambitions, requires concomitant investment in resources – human and financial.** There need to be very clear and explicit links between a strategic plan and staffing, professional development, and elapsed time to conduct a participatory strategic planning process and to ensure assimilation across the institution.
- A key message is the **primacy of country-level for change.** Even with a strategic plan which is clear that the locus of change is at national level, successful implementation at country level requires a number of conditions related to structures, systems (planning, appraisal, monitoring & reporting, quality assurance and guidance and evaluation), capacities, the contextualisation of the strategic plan and theory of change, and human and financial resourcing.
- **The implementation of a strategic plan needs to be accompanied by an organisation-wide shift from results measurement / tracking to results**