

## IN BRIEF

# CORPORATE EVALUATION OF UN WOMEN'S UN SYSTEM COORDINATION AND BROADER CONVENING ROLE IN ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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*This brief presents the findings of the corporate evaluation of UN Women's UN system coordination and broader convening role with civil society, governments and other partners in ending violence against women (EVAW). This evaluation was conducted by UN Women's Independent Evaluation Service (IES) of the Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS) as part of the revised UN Women Corporate Evaluation Plan (2018–2021). The evaluation covered the period from 2018–2020. It was initiated in December 2020 and completed in April 2021.*

## WHAT WAS EVALUATED

The evaluation focused on UN Women's UN coordination and convening role in EVAW primarily during the period of the current Strategic Plan (2018–2021) and allowed for the inclusion of relevant historical results and mechanisms. While not a focus of this evaluation, the emerging lessons learned for coordination and convening from the Spotlight Initiative to EVAW were also considered.

Drawing on insights collected during the evaluation inception stage, the evaluation focused on five key questions:

- What is the **strategic significance** of UN Women's UN coordination and broader convening role in advancing globally agreed goals on EVAW?
- How has UN Women **operationalized** its UN system coordination and broader convening power on EVAW issues?
- What are the **results** of UN Women's UN system coordination and broader convening role on EVAW issues?
- How has UN Women's coordination and convening role contributed to EVAW during the **COVID-19 global pandemic**?
- What **lessons** emerge from programmes where UN Women's UN coordination and broader convening work has led to demonstrated impact in EVAW?

The findings from this evaluation are expected to contribute to strategic decision-making; organizational learning and accountability; and to strengthening UN Women's

UN system coordination and its broader convening role in EVAW, including through the development of UN Women's Strategic Plan 2022–2025. The primary intended users of the evaluation are the UN Women Executive Board, and senior management and programme staff directly working on, or with an interest in EVAW. The evaluation is also intended to be useful for other actors working on EVAW, including civil society, UN agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector, and development partners.

## HOW IT WAS EVALUATED

The key emphasis of the evaluation was on mapping and validation of UN Women's coordination work on EVAW outcomes – those reflected in the Integrated Resource and Results Framework of UN Women's Strategic Plan 2018–2021, and the targets enshrined in international commitments including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The evaluation team employed a combination of primary and secondary data sources to provide and validate evidence against the evaluation questions.

In total, over 400 stakeholders were engaged through interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), surveys and questionnaires. The evaluation team also carried out five in-depth case studies which were considered of an appropriate scale and maturation to offer useful lessons.

## DATA COLLECTION



### Desk review

and synthesis, portfolio analysis and review of UN Women management systems, reports and internal assessments



### Key informant interviews and focus group discussions:

6 focus group discussions with country level EAW specialists in 6 regions (AC, AP, AS, ECA, ESA, WCA)



### Online surveys of

UN Women staff and partners. 32.5% total response rate for 2 surveys (UN Women EAW staff 34.5%, GTG members 30.6%)



### Five case studies:

Inter-agency mechanisms and coordination bodies, regional dialogues and conferences, Knowledge products, Joint Programmes and Advocacy, Covid-19 response

# 200+

documents reviewed

# 6

focus group discussions

# 100

stakeholders engaged

# 306

survey respondents

# 2

online surveys

# 5

case studies

## LESSONS LEARNED AND PROMISING PRACTICES

The evaluation brought to light a few key factors that influence success in any coordination and convening role. While they are potentially applicable across thematic areas, their specific importance to EAW is due to the large and overlapping footprints of EAW programming in the UN system.

### LESSON 1

**Having a coordination mandate is a necessary but insufficient condition for ensuring effective coordination to mainstream gender perspectives in development results. Implementing the mandate requires appropriate investment to strengthen the legitimacy vested in the coordinating entity to ‘lead, promote and coordinate’ the UN system.**

At a fundamental level, while UN Women’s mandate is to lead the UN system in coordination for gender equality and women’s empowerment, it is the collective responsibility of the UN system as a whole to work together to realize this goal. Coordination is the joint action of entities coming together based on the shared and agreed benefits of coordination. Therefore, drivers, incentives and enabling factors are required for peer entities to engage in coordination of EAW, based on clear and shared understanding of its contribution to system-wide results as much as to support agency-level objectives.

### LESSON 2

**Coordination in thematic areas is intertwined with the normative and operational roles of UN Women’s mandate. A large part of coordination in thematic areas takes place within the context of normative work and programming: joint planning; development and dissemination of knowledge products; programme implementation; and advocacy and communications. Coordination therefore needs to be viewed in terms of the value it adds to normative and operational results and outcomes.**

The averred importance of coordination’s contribution to results needs to be corroborated by due recognition in strategic plan thematic results through a theory of change; adoption of appropriate results indicators (beyond processes); elaboration of resource needs; allocations in programming budgets, and implementation of a framework of standards against which progress can be regularly aggregated, measured and reported on. A systematic documentation of coordination efforts would also enable recognition of the significant time spent in coordination for results, and the quality of the enabling environment in which coordination takes place.

**LESSON 3**

**Coordination is as much about people skills and building trust as it is institutional arrangements. Instances of strong leadership and individual efforts to build collaborative relationships were found to result in successes. Good examples were noted in the United Nations Joint Global Programme on Essential Services for Women and Girls Subject to Violence (the Essential Services Global Programme) and the Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls.**

At the country level, coordination responsibilities are attached to operational programme management responsibilities. However, skill sets for effective coordination can be quite different from those for effective operational programme management. Leadership, building trust, interpersonal skills and communication are important competencies for coordination, and are present to varying degrees in staff whose primary functions are in operational programme management rather than external coordination. In the absence of clearly specified and agreed coordination outputs, operational programme management often supersedes coordination as a priority, especially given the considerable amount of time involved in coordination.

**Coordination practices**

The evaluation team noted the following examples of promising practices in coordination that demonstrate the benefits of coordination, especially highlighting the costs of 'non-coordination'.

First, from a design perspective, some elements of the Spotlight Initiative's coordination structures could be further studied and potentially applied to joint programming in general.

As a flagship programme of the UN's SDG efforts and in line with the United Nations Development System (UNDS) reform, the Spotlight Initiative has positioned the Resident Coordinator's office as the location of UN system coordination for the programme. While this design is still to prove

its effectiveness and efficiency, UN Women is well positioned to play the technical coherence role by supporting the Resident Coordinator's office through in-country and regional office structures. UN Women's substantial human resources and expertise in EAW is a corporate asset not matched in the UN system, and could be leveraged more effectively to counterbalance non-uniform country presence and capacities.

Second, UN Women's recognition as the key counterpart UN agency on gender equality and women's empowerment, and the Entity's strong on-the-ground networks are UN Women's strategic assets in its coordination role, more than the size of its operational programmes. The evaluation team also noted several instances of UN Women's strong positioning with external actors at the country level as the 'go-to' agency for EAW matters. The strong constituencies built with national women's machinery, government-led coordination structures, CSOs and women's organizations has emanated from long-standing engagement in advocacy for a human rights-based, survivor-centred and multisectoral approach to EAW. This has enabled UN Women to play a lead role in external coordination even in countries with small programme portfolios.

Third, notwithstanding some challenges in developing an effective division of labour, both UN Women and UNFPA have made due efforts to evolve pragmatic inter-agency arrangements in joint programming, development of global knowledge products, and advocacy and communications. This was evident in the agreed division of territories in the Essential Services Global Programme and in the UNiTE Campaign in Asia and the Pacific, and also in managing joint programmes in countries where UN Women does not have a country presence. These successes are in no small measure due to the initiative shown by individuals to build a collaborative relationship within specific engagements towards common objectives. There is also mutual recognition and respect among the senior leadership in both entities of each other's technical expertise and continuing investment in EAW capacities. This has led to current dialogue on more effective corporate arrangements for collaborative action and minimized implementation frictions on the ground, though these nonetheless still remain.

**CONCLUSIONS**

**CONCLUSION 1.** UN Women's mandate to 'lead, promote and coordinate' mainstreaming of gender equality and women's empowerment across the UN system is a strong, strategic asset. However, current system-wide accountability and reporting frameworks are inadequate to enable effective coordination for system-wide results in thematic areas. An accountability framework for thematic areas, including EAW, that incorporates system-wide results therefore needs to be developed.

**CONCLUSION 2.** The lack of articulation of a concrete value proposition of UN system coordination, which clearly defines action areas, roles and responsibilities, and metrics to track contributions to development results, has constrained the operationalization of the Entity's coordination role in thematic areas. It is within UN Women's mandate to articulate this value proposition through consultations.

**CONCLUSION 3.** Despite the challenges, UN Women has achieved successful results with significant linkages to its UN system coordination and collaborative actions. Although there is evidence that UN Women's coordination and convening roles have helped advance EAW across regions, the results management framework needs to be strengthened to systematically capture these results.

**CONCLUSION 4.** The COVID-19 response is a strong example of the power of a coordinated UN system response. Not only did the response elicit the best efforts of the entire UN system, but it also established UN Women's credentials in a system-wide coordination role, emphasizing its capacities in thought leadership, swift mobilization of evidence, and strong and cohesive advocacy for action to respond to and prevent VAWG in public and private spaces.

**CONCLUSION 5.** Not systematically capturing and reflecting coordination-related plans, actions, costs and contributions to EAW thematic area results does not support the acknowledged importance of coordination of UN Women and the UN system as a whole. As a result, the value and contribution of coordination to outcomes remains undetermined and underrecognized.

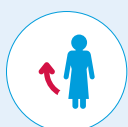
**CONCLUSION 6.** In the absence of clear institutional arrangements, enabling structures and processes for coordination in thematic areas, successes are achieved more through individual leadership, motivation, charisma and other interpersonal skills.

## RECOMMENDATIONS



### RECOMMENDATION 1.

UN Women should reaffirm its UN system coordination mandate for results in key thematic areas (i.e. beyond its promotion of gender mainstreaming in UN organizations).



### RECOMMENDATION 2.

UN Women should clearly articulate the value proposition of coordination to accelerate EAW outcomes and the risks and costs of non-coordination. It should also present the Entity's credentials to lead, promote and coordinate UN system accountability for thematic area results and should propose a 'coordination for EAW results' framework with clear results and indicators.



### RECOMMENDATION 3.

UN Women should appropriately recognize and reflect coordination and convening functions in the thematic areas of its Strategic Plan for 2022–2025 with specific results indicators and resource requirements at the global, regional and country levels to present a full picture of actions and funding gaps.



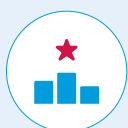
### RECOMMENDATION 4.

UN Women should lead and strengthen inter-agency mechanisms for coordinated actions in the thematic area of EAW towards accountability for development results as envisioned in UN-SWAP and internationally agreed goals on EAW, especially SDG 5.2.



### RECOMMENDATION 5.

UN Women should strengthen in-house coordination mechanisms to better represent thematic area highlights and coordination challenges in inter-agency mechanisms and reporting.



### RECOMMENDATION 6.

UN Women should systematically document and compellingly communicate the impact of coordination to the UN system, donors and national stakeholders through high-level messaging of the value proposition of its coordination work, using metrics and case studies suitable for external audiences.

The recommendations are based on the evaluation framework, findings and conclusions. The recommendations were developed in consultation with key evaluation stakeholders, including the Evaluation Reference Group, PPID, UNSCD, SPRED and the EAW section.