



**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 women's economic empowerment

Summary

In 2014, the UN Women Independent Evaluation Office undertook a corporate thematic evaluation of the UN Women contribution to women's economic empowerment as mandated by the UN Women Corporate Evaluation Plan 2014-2017. The main purpose of the evaluation was to inform strategic policy and programmatic decision-making, organizational learning and accountability within UN Women, and contribute to wider knowledge on what works and what does not to advance women's economic empowerment.

The evaluation was forward-looking, focusing on organizational learning and improvement, while assessing progress towards results of the UN Women Strategic Plan Goal 2 on women's economic empowerment. The report provides five strategic recommendations that UN Women should consider in moving forward its work on women's economic empowerment.

The primary intended users of the evaluation findings and recommendations are UN Women's Executive Board, senior management and staff at headquarters, regional and country levels, as well as other global stakeholders working in the area of women's economic empowerment.

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT PORTFOLIO OF UN WOMEN

1. UN Women's specific mandate on Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) is derived from a range of international standards and normative frameworks including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), relevant outcomes of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), including the resolution on women's economic empowerment (resolution 54/4, in 2010); and General Assembly resolutions related to women in development, the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas and violence against women migrant workers.

2. WEE is one of UN Women's core thematic priorities and has been included as a stand-alone goal area within its current and past strategic plans. In 2013, WEE was the third largest area of investment for UN Women, representing over 14% of total expenditure. According to UN Women's strategic plan, its work on WEE falls broadly into five areas: 1) supporting legislation, policies and strategies to strengthen WEE and access to resources; 2) supporting gender-responsive infrastructure and services (transport, utilities, water, energy, etc.) to enhance women's sustainable livelihoods; 3) working with gender equality advocates to influence economic and labour policies and strategies; 4) supporting intergovernmental mechanisms to ensure global policy and normative frameworks for WEE are reaffirmed and deepened; and 5) working with the UN System and key international partners (including multi-lateral development banks) to strengthen coordination. UN Women also administers the Fund for Gender Equality (FGE), the only global fund exclusively dedicated to women's economic and political empowerment.

3. UN Women's unique role is derived from its mandate. The various historical groundings of its work in the security, development and human rights pillars of the UN also provide an important context for UN Women's work in the area of WEE.

B. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

4. This thematic corporate evaluation of UN Women's contribution to WEE aimed to enhance UN Women's approach to WEE, including by informing the mid-term review of the 2014-2017 Strategic Plan. The objectives of the evaluation were to: 1) assess the relevance of UN Women's WEE approach at global, regional and national levels, as well as UN Women's comparative advantage/added value in the WEE thematic area as compared with key partners; 2) assess effectiveness and organizational efficiency in progressing towards the achievement of results, as defined in the 2011-2013 and 2014-2017 strategic plans, including the

organizational mechanisms to ensure efficient linkages / feedback loops between headquarters and the field; 3) analyse how a rights-based approach and gender equality principles are integrated in WEE areas of work; 4) identify and validate lessons learned, good practice examples and innovations of work supported by UN Women; and 5) provide recommendations with respect to UN Women's WEE strategies and approaches.

5. The evaluation covered all dimensions of UN Women's WEE work, namely its mandates to support normative, operational and coordination work at global, regional and country levels between 2011 and the first quarter of 2014. The evaluation was predominantly formative and forward-looking, focusing on organizational learning in order to better inform planning and programming in relation to WEE, as well as the Mid-term review of the Strategic Plan. A complementary summative approach was also used to ensure that UN Women accomplishments and challenges on WEE were well-documented and understood, enabling lessons learned to be distilled.

6. The evaluation was conducted by an external independent evaluation team between May and December 2014 and managed by the UN Women Independent Evaluation Office (IEO), with the active involvement of internal and external reference groups and an evaluation advisory group.

C. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

7. In line with the Evaluation Policy and the recent assessments of the evaluation function presented by the Global Evaluation Advisory Committee at the 2015 first regular session of the Executive Board, the design and conduct of this corporate evaluation were enhanced by strengthening quality assurance mechanisms while applying gender-responsive elements, including participatory and utilization-focused approaches.

8. Participatory approaches allowed the engagement of more than 500 stakeholders. In order to reach an extended number of stakeholders, online surveys were designed and administered. For the data collection phases at the country-level, evaluation stakeholders were actively involved through a participatory process which emphasized the voice of women and other community members in assessing change (or lack of change). Participatory videos by stakeholders were also produced to inform the evaluation.

9. During the desk phase, the evaluation team conducted a comprehensive desk review of more than 300 documents and a portfolio analysis of a representative sample of 27 UN Women country offices. Both exercises focused on UN Women work related to its normative, coordination and operational mandates. As part of a fieldwork phase, six case studies were completed, one at the global level and five at the country level (Bolivia, Jordan, Moldova, Nepal and Zimbabwe).

10. In the analysis, a mixed methods approach was applied, involving a blend of qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods, through triangulation.

D. KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on the 41 findings of the evaluation (see annex 1), the following 10 conclusions have been developed, organized by evaluation criteria.

D1. Relevance

Conclusion 1: In principle, UN Women is well placed to influence WEE at global, regional and country level. Recent efforts by the Entity to redefine its vision may now provide the strategic and conceptual framework needed to maximize this advantage.

11. UN Women has recognized that a lack of strategic focus in WEE has, until now, hampered it from being fully recognized as a central actor on women's economic empowerment at the global, regional and national levels. An implicit and evolving theory of change has insufficiently shaped the organization's programming and results frameworks. It has also hindered the production of clear corporate guidance regarding UN Women's normative position and operational approach to WEE.

12. The main implication of having no definitive theory of change for WEE has been limited strategic coherence across the organization and this has reduced the ability to expand and deepen partnerships. In overall terms, this has hindered UN Women in attempts to maximize its strengths and strategic position within the international arena.

13. Despite of the above, UN Women has been able to strategically position itself to influence WEE at a global and country level through its normative and coordination work. The Entity's recent efforts to revise its strategic focus, and clarify an overarching theory of change for WEE, are very positive. These are likely to contribute to greater re-alignment of the Entity's operational and regional work with its implicit theories of change.

14. In redefining its theory of change for WEE, there is considerable scope for the Entity to be more forward looking. While UN Women's increased focus on decent work and care work recognizes changes in labour markets and women's role in the economy, its strategic approach to WEE has largely been informed by analyses of the current situation, past trends, and known development pathways. Its work has also not focused on structural economic change, so much as helping women adapt to less than ideal economic conditions locally and globally.

15. There are some inspiring examples of forward-looking work, such as the support to the Information and Communication Technology sectors, but – in total – UN Women lacks a future-looking narrative. There is a convincing case for the forthcoming theory of change to position UN Women more strongly in relation to

global meta-trends, such as ubiquitous Internet connectivity, 500 million more women in the global middle class by 2020, climate change, rising global inequality, declining access to employment and the resulting competition over jobs, and global financial instability.

Conclusion 2: UN Women’s current comparative advantage in the area of WEE is its policy and normative work. It could potentially be a knowledge hub and thought-leader for rights based and gender-responsive work on macroeconomic policy.

16. UN Women has made a significant contribution to global discourse and normative frameworks on WEE. Combined with its global reports, the Entity’s normative function has added value through bringing a rights-based perspective and approach to intergovernmental dialogue. While UN Women’s normative resources are limited, its coordination mandate and growing country-level presence can also be leveraged to help complete the task of effectively integrating WEE across all relevant Post-2015 development goals and indicators.

17. At both the country and global level, the Entity’s triple mandate means it is well positioned to assist agencies within the UN System (particularly at the country level) to engender sustainable development goals in areas relevant to WEE. There is considerable scope to leverage UN Women’s normative mandate to advocate for inclusive macroeconomic policy, using a rights-based approach that addresses the structural barriers to WEE. UN Women’s work on regional trade policies in East Africa is an example of such work. Meso-level policy advocacy (such as to promote women’s access to agricultural credit and infrastructure investment in ways that reduce women’s care burden) would be an important corollary of this work.

18. To date, UN Women has put in place only very limited human resources capacity or guidance in relation to macroeconomic policy work, although macroeconomics is a stated intention of current Policy Division thinking, and fits within UN Women’s implicit theory of change to support the creation of the conditions required for sustainable inclusive growth. Expanding UN Women’s work in this domain would require new partnerships (including additional funds to enable UN Women to influence and enter partnerships through joint programmes) and significant capacity development (in particular training and guidance tools for regional and country-level staff working on WEE). It also represents a more promising comparative advantage for long-term sustainable impact than isolated micro-level interventions.

19. Even within its existing capacity, there is proven scope for UN Women to contribute to gender-responsive macroeconomic evidence. For example, UN Women is working in partnership with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to undertake national statistical strengthening, including professional communications products that have been used by policy makers to interpret and incorporate time-use data; and at the global level through the work

with UN Statistics Division on the Evidence and Data for Gender Equality (EDGE) indicator set.

Conclusion 3: With the right alliances, UN Women could reinvigorate the quest for future economic models, bringing gender-responsive empirical evidence and action research into mainstream economic debates.

20. UN Women's current strategic approach results in a close link between its effectiveness and the resource base it can mobilize. This limits the Entity's scope for scaling up impact and achieving critical mass behind policy positions. While the structural funding gap creates real challenges, a strong organizational focus on levels of funding is obscuring other options for leveraging impact and creating several negative narratives.

21. At the core of UN Women's future ability to effect change, regardless of the amount of resources that it can mobilize, is the set of partnerships and alliances that it can forge. Operationally, UN Women will, for the foreseeable future, have limited resources and capacity to lead large programmes. Its impact will depend on working in concert with other partners through joint programming and providing high quality technical inputs to engender economic models and economic empowerment programmes.

22. As a consequence of its coordination mandate, UN Women is already strategically placed to focus on the partnerships that it has with UNDP, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, and United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs so that their programmes truly address structural bottlenecks to WEE. The Entity's operational relationships with academic institutions, Officer of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and civil society advisory groups are promising avenues for bringing increased levels and quality of rights-based economic analysis and evidence.

D2: Effectiveness

Conclusion 4: UN Women's normative mandate has enabled it to effectively influence international discourse and standards, as well as a range of national policies despite having limited resources.

23. By implementing lessons learnt from supporting the Commission on the Status of Women, UN Women has successfully intensified its involvement at the normative level, enabling it to effectively influence international discourse around issues such as unpaid care work, domestic workers, home-based workers, women migrant workers, and rural women. As a priority, this approach can continue to support inclusion of WEE in the Sustainable Development Goals.

24. Progress has also been made in supporting countries to embed normative standards into national laws. Scope now remains for translating more of the global normative results into positive changes at the country level and to ensure that knowledge, experiences and good practices from the field are used to inform global processes.

25. While examples of using evidence from the field in intergovernmental normative work do exist, these have been limited and ad hoc. Similarly, while many UN Women field staff are knowledgeable about normative standards for economic empowerment at the international level, they require more guidance and technical support to translate this into concrete policy action and implementation at the country level.

Conclusion 5: Coordination and joint programming have made a cautious but important contribution to advancing WEE within the UN System, especially at country level. There is both demand and opportunity for UN Women to leverage this into leadership of convening and facilitating the WEE community.

26. UN Women has rightly approached its coordination mandate at both the global and country level with a degree of caution, based on its appreciation of its own emerging capacity and acknowledgement of the roles that have previously been played by other UN entities.

27. At the global and country level, the UN System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP) is recognized by other UN entities as a major contribution to coordination. While no specific mechanism exists for coordinating WEE at the global level, there is also a strong case for avoiding additional layers of coordination mechanisms. A more promising approach looks to be a combination of existing forums, a WEE community of practice, and guidance on using the gender scorecards to promote accountability in relation to WEE.

28. UN Women's leadership and role in existing coordination forums (such as the Interagency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) at the headquarters level and the UN Resident coordinator system and UNDAF working groups at the country level) is already producing important results in terms of an increased number of joint programmes and initiatives and UNDAFs that are effectively gender-responsive. UN Women staff see the Entity's results in engendering UNDAFs, including in the area of WEE, as one of its organizational strengths.

29. The evaluation found that, at the country level, UN Women staff have to prioritize their coordination efforts between the UN country team and the wider national WEE space (normally through the ministries of gender). There tends to be few synergies between these forums. Thus, while UN Women's disciplined interpretation of its coordination mandate to focus on the UN System has contributed to its effectiveness in terms of UNDAF, the wider principle of coordination is not yet being fully realized.

30. Analysis of UN Women's comparative advantages finds that it has significant expertise in convening and facilitating multi-stakeholder groups. Combined with a strong demand for it to assume a leadership position in relation

to broader coordination of WEE efforts, there is a strong case for the Entity to take a more inclusive approach to its coordination role by creating platforms for participatory dialogue and collaboration.

Conclusion 6: The principal means by which UN Women can enhance its effectiveness is through its partnerships. Becoming more strategic and selective will be critical.

31. The effectiveness of UN Women's operational work is correlated with the level of resources that it has. In reality, however, there is very limited scope for planning based on raising large increases in financial resources, especially within the structurally underfunded gender equality sector. Doing so also places UN Women in competition with the organizations that it is seeking to build alliances with.

32. For these reasons, partnerships offer a more sustainable and more scalable route to extending UN Women's capacity. They can also help towards building the capacity of the sector overall. While it is promising to see increased instances of partnerships in support of WEE (particularly through the Knowledge Gateway and the Post-2015 process), UN Women also needs to be more strategic and selective in ensuring that the parameters, expectations and contributions of its partnerships are clearly defined.

33. The organization is already learning that different types of partnerships require different approaches, including when they relate to different thematic areas. For example, a private sector partnership in relation to economic empowerment carries with it different characteristics and considerations than when it relates to ending violence against women. Developing a model for strategically disaggregating and prioritizing partnerships in relation to WEE will be an important step for the organization to take.

Conclusion 7: UN Women's operational work makes the most effective contribution where it identifies and addresses structural barriers and bottlenecks to women's realization of their economic rights.

34. A great deal of UN Women's micro-level work is currently designed to solve economic problems faced by women – provide direct access to better skills, credit products, market opportunities, information and other services. This has provided some inspiring examples of women gaining confidence, assets and a sense of control over their lives. However, this approach is limited in terms of the scale it can reach, the dimensions of empowerment that can be effected, and the extent to which it differentiates UN Women (or not) from other actors.

35. Much has been learnt from this work, including through the FGE. But the limited scope for impact in comparison to work at the meso- and macro-levels suggest that the time has come to revise the approach: micro-level work needs to sit within a bigger picture and contribute evidence towards shifting structural bottlenecks to women's economic empowerment.

36. This suggests that UN Women should be highly selective in its micro-level work and focus strongly on how it will provide evidence and data about structural barriers to women's realization of their economic rights. For example, shifting away from using funds to support individual women's access to finance and focusing instead on supporting women at the collective level to address bottlenecks that deny women economic opportunities, independent decision-making or control of assets.

D3: Gender equality

Conclusion 8: Women's economic, social and cultural rights, stand in a disadvantaged position to the dominant political economic paradigm. In this context, UN Women needs to mobilize and give voice to all the allies it can – including men, civil society, and the private sector – from the position of legal authority that human rights frameworks provide.

37. To a certain degree, a dilemma exists within UN Women about whether or not to explicitly use rights-based approaches in trying to gain traction within the global economic system. The evaluation has found that UN Women's recent shift towards a rights-based approach for its work on WEE (which approaches WEE in terms of constraints and discrimination) positions the entity well to add value to other existing efforts in this area.

38. Evidence within lessons learnt from UN Women country offices indicate how important it is to articulate rights-based approaches as a contribution to economic by advocating change explicitly through the lens of women's economic rights, but accompanying this with data on the economic effects of such policies.

39. Given the commitment to rights-based approaches in the UN System, it may be useful for the Entity to reframe its work in terms of women's economic rights. Evidence from UN Women's operational work suggests that the realization of women's economic rights needs to include strengthening rights-holding groups to better organize, document and voice their positions in national processes (and by supporting the collection of data that can verify the effects of various policies on WEE). UN Women has also recognized that increased engagement with men and boys is needed at a country level in order to increase understanding and cultural support for women's economic rights.

D4. Organizational efficiency

Conclusion 9: During its transition phase, UN Women undertook intentional efforts to focus outwards and engage with and begin influencing its wider network and environment. To enhance its institutional ability to contribute to WEE, there is now a need to consolidate inwards and strengthen a consistent approach to WEE-related leadership at all levels within the organization.

40. It has taken UN Women close to four years to begin the process of inclusively mapping out a comprehensive theory of change for WEE. This is due

to several factors, including internal transition, constrained human resources (including time), and a challenging external context (including resistance to a rights-based approach and competing economic approaches). As a consequence, UN Women's capacity and experience in WEE is now distributed across the organization, but not yet joined up into a cohesive whole. Nevertheless, there is positive movement with recent processes, including the internal and external consultations to develop a strong theory of change.

41. The evaluation found that one of UN Women's comparative advantages is its motivated and passionate staff, who are technical experts in their area. There is now a need for the increased priority given to WEE to be matched by resources to build up capacity of UN Women staff in this area (at all levels of the organization); and to develop corporate guidance through inclusive and open internal processes. UN Women's work at the policy and normative level provides a good example of how strong technical staff can contribute effectively to WEE in a resource-constrained environment.

42. The new regional architecture, particularly the new WEE regional advisors (once in place in all regions), provides a valuable in-house resource for the organization to address capacity gaps (particularly in terms of providing substantive expertise on WEE, including to country offices that lack such expertise) and support efforts to achieve greater strategic coherence. They can also play an important role in supporting increased linkages between normative and operational work on WEE, in particular by channelling up to HQ areas where country offices need further guidance and support to implement norms and standards and in transmitting evidence/examples where country offices have supported the implementation of norms and standards.

43. To make the most of this human resource capacity, the organization requires a shared leadership culture at all levels of the organization in order to further advance its work on WEE: providing strong overall direction for work on WEE while enabling technical autonomy for experts. At the same time, mechanisms are required to allow multidisciplinary teams to form and work across the thematic areas as WEE programming works best when it is holistic and integrated with other areas of women's lives.

D5. Lessons learnt on knowledge management

Conclusion 10: UN Women has generated a wealth of evidence and multiple knowledge management initiatives. The time has come to integrate these efforts into a systemic approach that enables the organization to realize the promise of its three mandates.

44. UN Women has created some strong research and knowledge products for the external audience in relation to WEE. Furthermore, the Knowledge Gateway has played an important role in providing a global platform to facilitate experience-based knowledge exchange about WEE between international

organizations, civil society organizations, the private sector and women entrepreneurs seeking to enhance WEE. It has also enabled UN Women to expand and diversify its network of partners.

45. There is an acute awareness within the organization of the importance of internal knowledge management, and a real intention to deliver this function. However, current efforts are largely fragmented, partial, and ad hoc. For example, the developers of the Knowledge Gateway were unable to arrange for the UN Women Training Centre open module to be hosted on the Gateway.

46. While the Knowledge Gateway has provided an important forum for exchange of experience among external actors, more specific mechanisms and tools need to be developed to support internal organizational learning on WEE through the sharing of experiences, good practices and lessons learnt. In particular, there is scope to continue the integration of the FGE into UN Women's primary systems, and to begin drawing on the evidence generated by UN System WEE projects.

47. It is the view of the evaluation that the knowledge management function sits at the centre of UN Women's ability to integrate and maximize the benefit of its three mandates: normative, coordination, and operational. In relation to WEE, it is the lack of a coherent strategy for knowledge management that is hindering the organization from realizing this comparative advantage. The knowledge function is also the most promising avenue for UN Women to engage with its universal mandate, as the guidance provided through the intergovernmental function has already demonstrated.

E. RECOMMENDATIONS

48. The evaluation has identified five recommendations that are critical for UN Women's future contribution to WEE. It is recognized that these recommendations require significant decisions, some of which transcend WEE and therefore require input and involvement across all levels of the organization.

49. In supporting the organization to reach and implement the five recommendations, the evaluation has articulated two levels of time-phased actions. **Short-term actions** are both immediate and based on helping the organization improve in regard to the path that it is already following. These actions target the global, regional and country levels. **Mid-term actions** are transformative ones that are necessary if the organization undertakes, at a corporate-level, to move decisively in the direction that the evidence in this evaluation is most supportive of. UN Women should consider these mid-term actions as part of the mid-term review of the 2014-2017 Strategic Plan.

Recommendation 1: UN Women's mission is best served by moving decisively into the macroeconomic space.

50. UN Women needs to determine the extent to which it plans to move into and equip itself to engage with debate, dialogue, advising, action and advocacy in

the macroeconomic space. The process of making this decision should be an inclusive one, involving all levels of the organization, as staff will need to get behind such a strategic direction to make it effective.

51. **Short-term actions:** At global, regional and country level, UN Women is advised to forge a closer working partnership with UN economic actors in order to address structural barriers to women's economic rights through meso- and macro-level policy interventions, including efforts to build on joint work in statistics and gender-responsive macroeconomic policy research. At the country level this should largely be meso-level work focused on engendering national development plans and poverty reduction strategies, including the statistical and budget monitoring systems that support them. This could continue the focus on the macroeconomic conditions and policies required to promote decent work, and include increased efforts by UN Women to align its work on WEE with emerging labour market trends and to promote institutional change, such as in the rules on land titling, and women's access to credit. Over time, UN Women country offices need to receive the necessary policy guidance and support from headquarters and the regional offices to enable micro-level work (including through the Fund for Gender Equality) to more directly link to meso-level interventions.

52. **Mid-term actions:** following a final decision as part of the mid-term review of the Strategic Plan, UN Women would be advised to address the structural barriers to women's economic rights through situating meso- and macro-level policy influence as the centrepiece of UN Women's future WEE strategy. At the heart of this could be a concerted attempt to engender mainstream economic models and policies. Working with academic and community partners around the world, the Bretton Woods institutions, and the women's movement, UN Women could advocate for and technically support medium and large-scale projects that generate decent employment in rural areas, and promote the growth of medium- and large-scale women's enterprises, helping to transform the lending practices of International Finance Institutions. In support of headquarters's work to influence macroeconomic and macro-level policies, UN Women country offices can identify relevant and appropriate areas to engage with governments through meso-level interventions aimed at promoting the conditions required for women to improve their economic condition – whether it is through access to productive and financial resources, social insurance, or work conditions.

Recommendation 2: UN Women should provide clarity on its commitment to taking up the mantle and responsibility of leading through partnership.

53. Increased efforts are needed to understand and maximize the value position of UN Women's partnerships, including through a well-articulated advocacy strategy for WEE that civil society can rally behind. Better leveraging of UN Women's convening role can further expand its influence in the WEE domain and solidly position the Entity as a representative, champion, and broker for other organizations that have comparative advantage in WEE.

54. **Short-term actions:** UN Women is advised to focus and deepen its UN System-wide coordination and partnerships with organizations that can have a catalytic role in support of its work on WEE. Working together, the Strategic Partnerships Division and the Economic Empowerment Section should lead a participatory internal process to develop a disaggregated framework of different types of partners, and a model decision-making process for selecting which partnerships to focus on with different objectives. Regional and country offices will need to be supported to apply this tool to their own contexts. A participatory organizational review of UN Women's private sector engagement can inform the development of a holistic strategy which clearly articulates UN Women's objectives, priorities and value proposition connected with such partnerships, including how the partnerships will be effectively leveraged to advance WEE. Instead of implementing programmes directly, UN Women should begin to focus on developing platforms and funding windows for donors where partners can come together in order to maximize their joint impact. IANWGE and UNDAF must increasingly be used to convene, coordinate and mobilize UN System-wide efforts in relation to WEE. UN Women at global, regional and country level can contribute expertise and knowledge to support the UN System (particularly economic agencies) to effectively engender their work on economic empowerment. At the country level, country teams need to be equipped with increased knowledge, resources and specific guidance to provide effective implementation of the system-wide coordination mandate, better positioning UN Women to exert greater influence in attracting and convening partners and actors working in the area of economic empowerment.

55. **Mid-term actions:** following a final decision as part of the mid-term review of the Strategic Plan, UN Women would be advised at global and country level to identify major structural blockages within the economic system where competing interests of major constituents are a barrier to making common progress on women's economic rights. The Entity can develop an intensive process that brings these competing stakeholders into dialogue with each other for a concentrated period of time to build relationships and a mutual plan of action. To address longer-term relationships UN Women could maximize its convening role at global, regional and country levels by bringing together its civil society, private sector, and trade union partners into a single platform for dialogue. Outcomes from these dialogue processes can be used to inform the development of new economic models and tools that can be shared more widely. This would enable UN Women to consider fundraising specifically for its technical services, facilitation and monitoring follow-up of commitments: both achieving WEE objectives and (potentially) generating an additional source of income. Examples of changed behaviour and practices emerging from these dialogues could be subjected to impact evaluation, with the evidence collected being used to advocate for stronger responses to WEE among other Member States and private stakeholders.

Recommendation 3: UN Women's work on WEE should explicitly be based on, and guided by, a rights-based approach.

56. The evaluation recommends the establishment of a common approach that is institutionalized within UN Women, and forms the basis of all future knowledge generation. It is therefore recommended that a clear decision is made, and guidance provided, on what UN Women's core values are in relation to interpreting the world relating to WEE.

57. **Short-term action:** At global, regional and country levels, UN Women is advised to continue applying a rights-based approach to WEE internally (focused on economic rights), and openly in existing forums where it is the norm, such as intergovernmental work. At a country-level, UN Women staff members require increased knowledge and capacity to systematically apply a rights-based approach and ensure that operational work is designed to support implementation of normative commitments and recommendations emanating from relevant human rights treaty bodies, human rights experts and special rapporteurs. At the global and regional levels, there should be greater engagement with a wider range of human rights treaty and inter-governmental bodies beyond CEDAW and CSW in order to advance application of a rights-based approach to WEE. UN Women can continue to scale up its normative and coordination efforts, with a shift towards a greater focus on a rights-based approach where it can exert more influence as a thought leader, advocate, and knowledge hub in advancing WEE. As part of an approach to becoming a thought-leader, UN Women should re-target its WEE programming in terms of Participatory Action Research – pioneering new approaches to reach forgotten groups while generating evidence in innovative areas.

58. **Mid-term actions:** following a final decision as part of the mid-term review of the Strategic Plan, UN Women would be advised to reframe its work in terms of women's economic rights, and rename the thematic area accordingly. All the economic work of the organization could be framed and articulated in terms of rights first. In adopting this approach, information and knowledge collected about structural barriers to women's economic rights and participation in the productive workforce should be used to inform the design and implementation of programming at a broader policy level within each country.

Recommendation 4: UN Women needs to strengthen leadership across the organization in order to support work on WEE.

59. The evaluation found different leadership styles, approaches and skills being applied to WEE throughout the organization. This inconsistency in leadership culture and skill, combined with a complex external situation, makes the boundaries of personal autonomy and accountability unclear for many staff members engaged in WEE. The evaluation recommends that a clear position is taken with regard to developing leadership culture and capacity in UN Women.

60. **Short-term actions:** UN Women is advised that the values and standards of the Entity's leadership culture need to be communicated heavily within the organization, so that staff members come to reasonably expect that leaders at all levels are accountable to a consistent organizational approach to leadership. Intellectual and executive leadership of WEE should steadily be returned to the Economic Empowerment Section within the Policy Division. This can be manifested in terms of increased focus on responding to the needs of country and regional offices in relation to their economic empowerment programming (through a mechanism such as a helpdesk). The organization should provide the Economic Empowerment Section with sufficient time and resources to develop practical and needs-based corporate guidance and knowledge-sharing tools based on the active participation of staff members at all levels of the organization. The establishment of a clear vision, strategic focus, and theory of change for UN Women's work on WEE is needed to enable the Economic Empowerment Section to ensure that a common institutional direction is communicated throughout the organization.

61. **Mid-term actions:** following a final decision as part of the mid-term review of the Strategic Plan, UN Women would be advised to move away from seeking 'programme models' that can be applied across its portfolio, and instead adopt a highly participatory and gender-responsive approach to its work. This should focus on enabling self-organizing local networks, both internally and externally. Space needs to be made for multidisciplinary teams to form and collaborate on shared tasks.

Recommendation 5: UN Women needs to equip and organize itself in line with becoming a knowledge-led organization.

62. UN Women has recognized the potential value of knowledge management as a function, and has started several initiatives in an attempt to address this. How these different parts will be brought together into a unified system is a critical decision that needs to be made sooner rather than later.

63. **Short-term actions:** UN Women is advised to prioritize the knowledge actions that it has already identified, including rolling out a global roster of experts, the Knowledge Gateway, and the UN Women Training Centre WEE courses to UN country teams around the world. The WEE regional advisors should begin to play a greater role in the knowledge system. Planning and Programme and Guidance Unit and Research and Data section can support the development of a set of rights-based key performance indicators for UN Women contributions to WEE. These allow country office monitoring and decentralized evaluations to capture the full range of WEE impacts. At the country level, country offices need to begin designing projects and programmes so as to generate evidence for specific normative and policy work, ensuring that strategies (such as impact evaluations) to capture and communicate these findings are included in the design and budget. These communication products should be 'pushed up' to headquarters teams

(including FGE and the Knowledge Gateway) and ‘pushed out’ to other country teams through the WEE regional advisors.

64. **Mid-term actions:** following a final decision as part of the mid-term review of the Strategic Plan, UN Women would be advised to elevate the *Knowledge Gateway* into a *Global Gateway* – increasing the ‘felt presence’ of the Knowledge Gateway activities, Fund for Gender Equality activities and selected UN Women Training Centre courses by making them available through a single website. This could include the addition of opportunity brokerage: helping to match donors such as private foundations with NGOs who can meet their needs and, at the same time, advance UN Women’s mission. Future rounds of the Fund for Gender Equality could also be channelled through this global gateway. As the centrepiece of UN Women’s knowledge strategy, Knowledge Gateway should work with the UN Women Training Centre to make its free knowledge products available on the site. This will create an incentive for more WEE activists and organizations to regularly visit the site. As a whole, UN Women is advised to embrace a more open approach to data and knowledge, encouraging and incentivizing its staff to participate in Gateway discussions. UN Women could use the proposed internal helpdesk/intranet site to embrace and openly acknowledge and discuss failure (as well as success) within the organization in relation to innovative approaches. Staff members need to be encouraged to post examples of things that have not worked, with their explanations for what unforeseen factors caused these problems so that they can be learnt from.

Annex A: List of evaluation findings

Relevance

Finding 1: UN Women's portfolio of WEE interventions at global, regional and country levels are aligned with the goals and intended results of the Strategic Plans; this is a good basis for further strengthening links between activities and achieving outcomes based on the organization's evolving theory of change for WEE.

Finding 2: UN Women has recognized that, despite the increased importance given to WEE within the Entity, it remains the least developed and conceptualized thematic area, and has begun to take action to address this.

Finding 3: In responding to current debates around WEE, thought leadership within UN Women has dissipated across the normative, operational, coordination and executive branches of headquarters. Multiple visions and voices create challenges in aligning regional and country-level work with emerging global priorities.

Finding 4: UN Women's strong use of high quality expertise and evidence to revitalize its WEE approach and focus is well aligned to current understanding, but may risk diluting its key advantage of having the willingness to be flexible, dynamic and innovative.

Finding 5: The strategic prioritization of WEE on development (and the Millennium Development Goals) has led UN Women to focus on one part of its universal mandate, with implications for its operational choices as well as its natural allies.

Finding 6: UN Women is approaching a tipping point, beyond which the goodwill towards its brand and power of its mandate will need to be matched by the Entity meeting expectations for global leadership on WEE.

Finding 7: Operationally, UN Women has had to be creative to overcome size, capacity, and resource constraints. Its most promising approach has been to develop a strong role in convening and facilitating dialogue between mixed groups of stakeholders.

Finding 8: Current attempts at micro economic support to entrepreneurs face four overwhelming challenges: i) they do not seem to be reaching the most vulnerable, ii) they do not differentiate UN Women in a meaningful way from other organizations working in this area, iii) there is very limited evidence to suggest that women entrepreneurs have improved their economic outcomes or business survival, and iv) there are limited options to scale up outreach.

Finding 9: UN Women is uniquely positioned to complement the work of others and address structural challenges to women's access to finance.

Finding 10: UN Women has gained important credibility and authority through the normative gains it helped to lead in advancing a rights-based approach to WEE. Establishing similar capacity and authority in influencing macroeconomic policy is proving to be a major challenge.

Finding 11: There is strong demand for UN Women to transform itself into a knowledge hub for WEE. The triple mandate, Knowledge Gateway, Training Centre, and country-level presence make this a real, and exciting, possibility.

Finding 12: Women's access to educational opportunities (particularly vocational education and training in sectors linked to labour market demands and employment opportunities) and health are promising areas for UN Women to shape a new role as a partner to thematic sectors where it does not have a comparative advantage.

Finding 13: Beijing+20 presents the first opportunity to follow-up on UN Women's achievements in the Post-2015 dialogue. This provides an important opening to help complete the mainstreaming of gender equality and women's empowerment in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Effectiveness

Finding 14: UN Women has contributed significantly to shaping and influencing intergovernmental policy and norms to advance WEE, and at the country-level has supported the development of laws and policies to advance WEE. Important work in the area of shaping the macroeconomic policy established by multilateral and regional bodies is just starting with the African Development Bank.

Finding 15: Coordination of UN System and wider work on WEE has been strategically focused and has established a foundation for broader (more inclusive) and deeper (more specific to WEE) coordination in the future. Achieving this will require systems-strengthening of the coordination function with UN Women, and building on the prior work of others.

Finding 16: An increased number of joint programmes at the global level are supporting system-wide coordination. At the country-level, UN Women is playing a greater leadership role within UN System, in particular through UNDAF frameworks (the majority of which encompass WEE). Country offices require a minimum critical mass of capacity and resources in order to exert and grow effective influence.

Finding 17: UN Women's relationships with governments and women's organizations are attractive for many organizations that have resources and

programming on WEE but lack connections (including the Bretton Woods institutions and the private sector). There is scope for UN Women to better understand and articulate this value proposition.

Finding 18: Where data are available, many indicators in UN Women's Global Development Results Framework reveal positive trends but are unclear on causation. These need to be interpreted carefully.

Finding 19: Micro-level enterprise activities may be helping to lift the households involved above the economic poverty line and increase women's sense of confidence. However, evidence of more holistic empowerment, including control of assets, decision-making, or climbing the value chain is very limited.

Finding 20: The organization has recognized the contribution of FGE to achieving important results at the country level, and is working towards greater integration. There is scope to deepen and accelerate this.

Finding 21: At the global, regional and country level, UN Women can firmly establish its position of global leadership on WEE through its work on strengthening and making usable WEE statistics, evaluation evidence and performance monitoring.

Finding 22: There are real opportunities for UN Women to enhance its position on risk and resilience-based programming.

Finding 23: UN Women has been effective in communicating normative developments to the field and sharing relevant information. Further support is needed to enable country offices to translate the significant normative advances made in the area of WEE into legislative and policy change at the national level.

Finding 24: UN Women has recognized the need to aggregate and share knowledge gained from operational experience with its normative function. So far, attempts to achieve this have been ad hoc. There is a need for UN Women to systematically gather evidence on WEE (including from sister entities), analyse this, and 'push' relevant information to its other business functions (including intergovernmental).

Finding 25: The global and national economic context has a significant effect on UN Women's work in WEE, and the extent to which it can contribute to achieve higher-level results.

Finding 26: UN Women's resourcing narrative is creating an incentive for it to 'do' (and to fundraise by 'doing'). This has several negative effects, including

unnecessarily positioning the organization in competition with the wider gender equality sector.

Finding 27: In light of resource constraints, UN Women's work at the policy and normative level has enabled UN Women to achieve significant results with limited resources. This approach offers potential for scaling.

Finding 28: WEE is a broad and cross-cutting area which has contributed to an increased number of partnerships and collaboration between UN Women and other UN entities and external partners.

Finding 29: UN Women's attempts to engage the private sector are necessary, timely and have the potential to be pioneering for the UN in advancing WEE. Ensuring their strategic and operational effectiveness demands greater shared ownership of objectives, conceptual clarity on modalities of engagement, and sensitive positioning regarding resource-mobilization.

Finding 30: UN Women's civil society links and roots in the women's movement are significant assets in establishing legitimacy of representation of excluded groups in global and national normative processes and economic policy discussions.

Gender equality

Finding 31: At the global level, there has been increased attention to understanding and unpacking the underlying causes of disempowerment, inequalities and discrimination and to understand how UN Women can contribute to redress them. Greater efforts are now needed to address the major structural causes of inequality through the Entity's operational work at a country level.

Finding 32: UN development and economic bodies provide an important opportunity for catalytic partnerships with UN Women in regard to the rights-based approach.

Finding 33: At the global level, there has been a more explicit adoption of a rights-based framework arguing for gender equality and for a more transformative agenda. There is also a stronger identified linkage between poverty and disempowerment and a clearer recognition that women and men in extreme poverty face a host of similar constraints, as well as gender-specific constraints.

Finding 34: While programme documents frequently reference international norms and standards in general terms, the design of UN Women's global, regional and country-level programmes has greater scope to adopt a systematic approach that links planned interventions with country-specific recommendations and

conclusions of relevant treaty bodies, human rights experts and special rapporteurs.

Finding 35: UN Women is challenged in addressing gender equality considerations in its WEE work by resistance to the rights-based approach for WEE and under-developed relationships with treaty and inter-governmental bodies beyond CEDAW and CSW.

Organizational efficiency

Finding 36: Thematic effectiveness in WEE is fundamentally intertwined with organizational characteristics: WEE has to be seen in context of both UN Women and the wider environment.

Finding 37: A foundation has been established for Results Based Management. This can be built on and more closely linked to the theory of change for WEE.

Finding 38: WEE is a foundation for (and consequence of) enabling wider participation of women in social and political life. Thematically, it provides an important entry point for addressing all areas of UN Women's work, including recovery, leadership, governance, and HIV/AIDS. Most especially, however, WEE and gender-based violence are intricately connected at household level, and integrated programming is essential.

Finding 39: UN Women staff members across the organization have a wide variance in capacity and knowledge in the area of WEE. Efforts to address this have scope for greater integration.

Finding 40: While knowledge sharing at the regional level is being increasingly supported with the establishment of the Regional WEE Advisor positions, country offices lack information about WEE work taking place outside their regions and require significantly more policy support and technical guidance from HQ in order to strengthen their efforts to advance WEE.

Finding 41: UN Women, especially in its coordinating role in the UN System, is well positioned to have voice through social media and to use communications to advance its work on WEE.