



**IN BRIEF**

# CORPORATE FORMATIVE EVALUATION OF UN WOMEN'S WORK IN THE AREA OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Photo: *The Drought* ©Md Harun

## BACKGROUND

This formative evaluation focused on UN Women's work on climate change from 2011 to 2022, where climate change is linked to related environmental areas of UN Women's portfolio (e.g. biodiversity and land degradation) and disaster risk reduction (DRR).<sup>1</sup> It was conducted from October 2021 to August 2022 and addressed work across UN Women's three mandate areas, six geographic regions, four strategic priority areas and relevant institutional outcome areas. Given the formative nature of the exercise, the team focused on assessing the comparative advantage of UN Women and its potential role in this space, as well as the architecture, modalities and resourcing in place to play this role. The evaluation conclusions and practical recommendations draw on 12 key evidence-based findings and aim to support UN Women's learning and decision-making for implementation of its corporate commitment to mainstream climate change within its work.

## EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The evaluation used the *Inclusive Systemic Evaluation for Gender Equality, Environments and Marginalized Voices (ISE4GEMs)* methodology.<sup>2</sup> This approach draws upon systems thinking, with a focus on mainstreaming and prioritizing three dimensions: gender equality, environments and marginalized voices.

The evaluation sought to answer three overarching evaluation questions:

1. What is **UN Women's comparative advantage/value added** in the climate change and gender equality nexus?<sup>3</sup>
2. What **strategic approaches** could UN Women apply in advancing the climate change and gender equality nexus going forward?
3. What **opportunities** can UN Women leverage to mitigate its climate footprint and improve sustainability and habitability?<sup>4</sup> How?

## EVALUATION DATA COLLECTION



**Mixed-methods approach** using both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods.

**90**

**individuals** reached through **59 semi-structured key informant interviews**, **four focus group discussions** and four written responses.



**surveys conducted** internal and external surveys yielded responses from **218 personnel within UN Women and 54 external stakeholders**.



**Network mapping** undertaken to **understand existing partnerships** and identify opportunities for future partnership.



**Capacity assessment to analyse organizational strengths and gaps**, which contributed to the development of a Climate Change and Gender Equality Maturity Matrix (see Annex 12).

<sup>1</sup> The evaluation includes climate-related aspects of UN Women's DRR portfolio and recognizes that DRR also encompasses many hazard types which are not environmental.

<sup>2</sup> Stephens, A., Lewis, E.D. and Reddy, S.M. 2018. *Inclusive Systemic Evaluation (ISE4GEMs): A New Approach for the SDG Era*. New York: UN Women

<sup>3</sup> The gender equality and climate change nexus refers to the relationship between gender and climate change.

<sup>4</sup> The degree to which a particular habitat or environment, whether natural or human-made, rural or urban, is hospitable to living things.

Source: ISE4GEMs

## CONTEXT

The intersection between gender equality and climate change – the nexus space – stems from the recognition that climate change can magnify gender inequalities and poses different and disproportionate risks for women and girls. The gender equality and climate change nexus is multifaceted and complex. It requires that gender relations and gender equality targets be systemically integrated into climate change policies and action to achieve both gender equality and climate-related goals at global, regional, national and local levels. Women and girls are differentially and often disproportionately affected by climate change given inequitable and discriminatory social norms; their role in the household; their disproportionate care responsibilities relative to men and boys; and barriers that affect their voice, participation and agency.<sup>5</sup>

There is also growing recognition within the international community of the importance of gender equality and the empowerment of women in climate mitigation and adaptation, and the transition to green and blue economies – as part of the just transitions discourse.<sup>6</sup> This is reflected in internationally ratified conventions which recognize the critical role that women do and must play as agents of change, participants and leaders in climate change decision-making and planning.

## FINDINGS

The evaluation found that despite common use of the term “climate change,” **UN Women’s climate change work is interlinked with a broader range of environmental issues, including biodiversity and land degradation, and DRR (Finding 1)**. It is difficult to adopt a siloed approach for categorizing climate change work as it is often inextricably linked to other environmental and social issues. As UN Women moves forward with climate and environmental work, the Entity should clarify key terminology and consider whether the “climate change” label is the most appropriate or whether broader terminology should be adopted that reflects the many interconnected dimensions of climate and gender work and represents the breadth of work being undertaken.

The evaluation examined UN Women’s climate change work within the Entity’s normative, coordination and operational mandate areas. At the normative level, **UN Women has contributed to tangible results to enhance gender equality and women’s empowerment in some key climate change and environment frameworks.**

**This has created the foundation to develop a more strategic, coherent and comprehensive approach to normative support going forward (Finding 2)**. In particular, UN Women has supported the integration of gender equality within Rio Convention frameworks and their gender-responsive implementation. The Entity has had strong engagement with normative processes related to DRR, including support to gender-responsive implementation of the Sendai Framework.

UN Women has participated in several stand-alone global and regional UN system coordination forums. At the regional and country level, UN Women has engaged in climate change-related thematic coordination groups. However, although there are some areas of strength (e.g. DRR mechanisms), engagement has been more limited. The evaluation noted the potential for UN Women to deepen its coordination work but **UN Women has not yet fully engaged its widely recognized UN system coordination and stakeholder convening capacity to address the gender equality and climate change nexus (Finding 3)**.

At the operational level, UN Women’s operational climate change and environmental work has not yet been fully mainstreamed across thematic areas as set out in the Strategic Plan 2022–2025. **Climate change work has mainly been concentrated in work related to women’s economic empowerment and DRR, but there are opportunities to further incorporate climate change and environmental programming across the organization’s work programme (Finding 4)**. Analysis of a portfolio of 82 climate change-related programmes that UN Women was engaged in found that the work was concentrated within Women’s Economic Empowerment (48 per cent), and Peace and Security, Humanitarian Action and DRR (33 per cent). Governance and Participation in Public Life made up 12 per cent of the programmes and 4 per cent Ending Violence Against Women. UN Women’s operational work was often more expansive than stakeholders realized, spanning all regions (even if coverage was uneven). UN Women’s contributions to data and research were also noted, including efforts to collect national-level data on gender and climate indicators. This existing work, when evaluated and assessed, provides a foundation for operational opportunities within each of UN Women’s thematic areas.

<sup>5</sup> UNEP Global Gender and Environment Outlook (2016), 30. <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/global-gender-and-environment-outlook-ggeo>

<sup>6</sup> Just transitions refers to a principle, process and practice of transitioning to a green, regenerative economy in a fair and inclusive manner “that redresses past harms and creates new relationships of power for the future.” The goal of a just transition is to create social and economic opportunities for all groups. “Just transition strategies were first developed by labor union and environmental justice groups rooted in low-income communities of color, who saw the need to phase out the industries that were harming workers, community health and the planet; and at the same time provide just pathways for workers to transition to other jobs” (Climate Justice Alliance).

There is a clear desire by UN Women personnel to draw deeper and establish more intentional links between the gender equality and climate change nexus with the intersectionality of marginalized voices. There were also many examples of UN Women engaging in the nexus with marginalized populations. However, stakeholders also felt that the efforts made and results achieved are not yet sufficient. The evaluation found that UN Women personnel are committed to integrating the leave no one behind principle within the Entity's climate change and environmental work. **The limited data on this topic in some regions and countries is a key barrier to better understanding and designing policy and praxis around gender, marginalization, environment and climate change but there are opportunities to strengthen engagement with marginalized groups (Finding 5).**

The evaluation examined the strategic approaches that UN Women could apply to advance its climate change work. **Both internal and external stakeholders overwhelmingly want to see the organization take a greater leadership role and an integrated and strategic approach to climate change (Finding 6).** Partnership has been a key approach for UN Women and will be a key aspect of a more strategic and intentional approach to its climate change work. UN Women is considered a valuable partner for mainstreaming gender equality into climate change and environmental work by a wide range of stakeholder types. **UN Women now needs to establish partnerships that will support the mainstreaming of climate change within its gender equality work (Finding 7).** Through partnership mapping, the evaluation found many potential partnership opportunities at global, regional and national levels.

Another key component to advancing UN Women's climate change work is the Entity's internal architecture. **UN Women personnel expressed the need for a corporate focal point at a minimum to coordinate and bring coherence across all UN Women's climate change and environmental work, as well as a formalized network that connects personnel working on climate change and the environment across the organization (Finding 8).** Appropriate human and financial resources are critical for UN Women's work. The evaluation found that **the scale of UN Women's work in the area of climate change is affected by uneven competencies and variations in human and financial resources (Finding 9).** In addition to identifying and filling key positions, most UN Women stakeholders considered one of the best ways for the Entity to increase its overall capacity was to strengthen the technical knowledge of existing personnel in the climate change area. Partnerships have also been leveraged to complement UN Women's existing capacity.

With no specific climate-related indicators, the 2018–2021 Strategic Plan's monitoring and reporting framework was not conducive to making UN Women's work within the climate change and gender equality nexus visible. UN Women's 2022–2025 Strategic Plan includes the first indicator related to environmental sustainability under Organizational Effectiveness And Efficiency Output 1; however, **corporate results-based management (RBM) and knowledge management systems provide limited means to make the breadth of the organization's climate change and environmental work visible (Finding 10).**

There is an immediacy and urgency to developing a concerted response to the gender equality and climate change nexus as the just transition agenda gains ground globally. While UN Women has recently started to have greater involvement in movement building, the absence of clear narratives, supported by robust data and evidence, that effectively communicate the importance of gender equality for addressing the climate change crisis is a key obstacle. Through its communications and advocacy, **UN Women has a critical role to play in changing the narrative to make intersectionality and gender central to the mainstream discourse on climate change and the environment (Finding 11).**

The evaluation explored opportunities for UN Women to mitigate its own climate footprint and improve sustainability. **Overall, UN Women has taken initial steps towards becoming a climate neutral and environmentally sustainable organization, but there is opportunity to improve UN Women's policies and procedures to enhance environmental sustainability and reduce the Entity's carbon footprint (Finding 12).** UN Women has made some progress towards climate neutrality and environmental sustainability since 2011, mainly through the UN-wide Greening the Blue initiative. UN Women actively identifies climate risks to its operations as part of its Enterprise Risk Management System; and a system-wide indicator to measure and report on efforts towards climate and environmental mitigation was introduced in the Entity's Strategic Plan 2022–2025. However, despite the efforts outlined above, there remains scope to improve UN Women's methods and strategies to move closer to full climate neutrality and environmental sustainability.

## CONCLUSIONS

1

**Although awareness among UN Women personnel of the totality of UN Women’s climate change and environmental work is limited, the organization has engaged in a significant amount of work in this area. While some of this work has tended to be ad hoc, it represents a foundation for more strategic engagement in the longer term on the gender equality and climate change nexus.**

Operationally, UN Women can build on lessons from its successful projects and programmes; showcase existing results; and utilize lessons learned to improve programming. There are opportunities to both mainstream gender equality within the existing climate work led by more traditional environmental partners and to develop programming with higher-level outcomes focused on the gender equality and climate nexus. UN Women has demonstrated success with joint programming, which serve as models for future programme development. At the normative level, UN Women’s contributions prepare the organization for more consistent and strategic involvement with international frameworks, such as UNFCCC, UNCBD, UNCCD, the Sendai Framework and New Urban Agenda. If and as UN Women builds capacity in different spheres within its climate change and environmental work, the organization will be well placed to identify and engage new coordination mechanisms. In the meantime, the evaluation identified more immediate opportunities, such as engagement in UN Country Team (UNCT) thematic groups; United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) processes; and by using its broader coordination/convening capabilities to support the nexus.

2

**There is an expectation that UN Women play a more proactive role (and demonstrate leadership) to ensure that gender equality and leave no one behind perspectives are central to climate change and environmental work.**

UN Women is well positioned to play a unique and important role to establish the parameters of just transitions and climate justice on behalf of marginalized populations and those who are systematically excluded from national climate policies and climate-related resources. There are two key prerequisites for UN Women to play an effective role within this space. First, UN Women needs to define what constitutes climate change work and adopt appropriate terminology to clearly describe the work. Second, UN Women should articulate its strategic direction, objectives and interventions/strategies for its climate change work.

3

**Partnerships, although often ad hoc, have been central to UN Women’s climate change and environmental work to date. Going forward, forming longer-term, strategic partnerships will be critical for UN Women to magnify its impact in the climate change and environment space.**

UN Women has engaged with a wide variety of partners within the complex climate change and gender equality nexus. UN Women is well regarded as a partner (particularly for its technical expertise in gender equality, as a convenor, and for augmenting the visibility of women and girls); however, partnerships for climate change were often opportunistic and ad hoc. While this often served the immediate purpose, there is opportunity for UN Women to form partnerships more strategically and leverage these partnerships to magnify its influence and impact.

To maximize the benefit of its partnerships, partners need to be identified and targeted based on a clear strategic direction. There are opportunities for UN Women to partner with organizations that are well established within the climate and environmental sphere to better mainstream and integrate gender equality and women’s empowerment into their work. Partnerships strengthened UN Women’s engagement at the normative level. Engagements with organizations such as UNFCCC, UNEP, UNDP, IUCN and ASEAN serve as models for how such partnerships can enhance gender equality integration in international and regional frameworks.

4

**The absence of a corporate coordinating structure for climate change and environmental work has negatively affected the coherence and visibility of UN Women’s work in this area among both internal and external stakeholders.**

To support the coordination of relevant personnel, greater understanding and cohesiveness of UN Women’s climate change work and the development and implementation of a strategy for gender equality and climate change (if one is to be developed), an overall corporate level coordinator/coordination function is needed. This lead/coordinator role should be connected to a broader inter-divisional task force or network representing climate change and environmental work across UN Women’s thematic areas.

5

**UN Women requires some additional capacity to successfully mainstream its work on climate change and the environment, but also needs to build organizational competencies by strengthening the knowledge of all personnel.**

Existing capacity and competency levels across the organization to effectively address the climate change, environment and gender equality nexus are not sufficient to meet the needs expressed by partners. UN Women needs to have a better understanding of its existing capacity (across all personnel) and clarity on the minimum requirements (competencies) for various office types. While additional capacity is needed, building the competencies of UN Women personnel to mainstream climate change is also a priority, with particular emphasis on greater technical expertise to identify and mainstream climate change issues into programming.

6

**UN Women's reputation and credibility may be affected if it does not demonstrate and amplify its own institutional climate mitigation efforts.**

UN Women has a nascent environmental management system in place in terms of facilities management; monitoring and offsetting carbon emissions; and identifying and adapting to climate-related risks. However, UN Women may fall short of meeting the commitments of the System-Wide Strategy for Sustainability Management in the United Nations System 2020–2030. A first step to address this would be the development of an environmental sustainability policy that would address management functions (e.g. ICT, procurement, facilities management, etc.) and environmental and social safeguards for programming.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, the evaluation developed four recommendations for UN Women's gender equality, climate change and environmental work. To support implementation of the recommendations, the evaluation team developed a Climate Change and Gender Equality Maturity Matrix (Annex 12) which provides a road map for UN Women to strengthen its work on climate change in the short, medium and long-term.



### RECOMMENDATION 1

UN Women should develop a strategy to guide the mainstreaming of its climate change and environmental work across thematic areas and ensure resources are available to implement it.



### RECOMMENDATION 2

UN Women should develop an environmental sustainability policy.



### RECOMMENDATION 3

UN Women should develop and strengthen the organizational architecture for its gender equality, climate change and environmental work.



### RECOMMENDATION 4

UN Women should formalize further partnerships at the corporate level with key stakeholders for a more coordinated and comprehensive approach.