



FINAL REPORT

EVALUATION OF UN WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO
WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT
IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA



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EVALUATION OF UN WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA



INDEPENDENT EVALUATION AND AUDIT SERVICES (IEAS)

Independent Evaluation Service (IES)

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ACRONYMS

AGRIFED	Agriculture Femmes et Développement Durable
CAR	Central Africa Republic
CIV	Côte d'Ivoire
CMR	Cameroon
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EVAW	Ending Violence Against Women
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GATE	UN Women Global Accountability and Tracking of Evaluation Use
IEAS	Independent Evaluation and Audit Services
IES	Independent Evaluation Service
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
LBR	Liberia
MLI	Mali
NER	Niger
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NGA	Nigeria
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PBF	Peace Building Fund
PSH	Peace, Security and Humanitarian Action
RRR (or 3R)	Recognize, Reduce, and Redistribute Unpaid Care Work in WEE Programming
SEN	Senegal
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SLE	Sierra Leone
SME	Small-to-Medium Enterprises
UEMOA	Union Économique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine
UMOA	Union Monétaire Ouest Africaine
UN	United Nations
UNCCD	UN Convention to Combat Desertification
UNECA	UN Economic Commission for Africa
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment
WCA	West and Central Africa
WCARO	West and Central Africa Regional Office
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
WFP	World Food Programme



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EVALUATION OF UN WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

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PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The evaluation of UN Women's contribution to Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) in West and Central Africa (WCA) seeks to assess the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of WEE programmes in the region, as well as human rights and gender equality considerations. The evaluation covers the exercise of UN Women's integrated mandate in the implementation of WEE interventions in the WCA region between 2018 and the third quarter of 2022.

The evaluation serves a dual purpose: it looks back to assess the overall successes and challenges of WEE programming since 2018, including experience in climate-resilient agriculture; it also looks forward to evaluate the thematic area's new direction towards policy and normative work and to formulate recommendations based on lessons drawn from UN Women's WEE programming between 2018 and 2022.

Users of this evaluation are primarily expected to be decision makers and UN Women personnel at country, regional and headquarters' levels. Additional users of this evaluation are actors directly working on, or with an interest in, WEE. Once approved by IEAS, this report will be disseminated among UN Women stakeholders, non-governmental organizations, UN agencies and development partners, and uploaded on the GATE system for global learning.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS



To what extent are WEE initiatives **relevant to the WCA region's context and priorities**? In particular, to what extent are recent initiatives (2020 onwards) relevant to the region's context and priorities?



To what extent is UN Women WCA Regional Office **strategically positioned** to enhance WEE?



Are WEE interventions at country level strategically **consistent and aligned with approaches recommended regionally and globally** by UN Women?



How has UN Women implemented its **operational, normative and coordination mandate** to advance WEE in the WCA region?



Are UN Women's **organizational structures and mechanisms** related to WEE conducive to the achievement of results in the region?



To what extent are **lessons from initiatives implemented in the field** feeding into the regional approach and vice versa?



What is the likelihood of **long-term results** or programme continuation after UN Women support has ended and, in particular, what innovative WEE approaches have potential for replication and scaling up?



To what extent have **gender and human rights** considerations been integrated into programme design and implementation?



Were the processes and activities implemented during interventions **free from discrimination for all stakeholders**, including those living with disability?

EVALUATION APPROACH

The evaluation was led by the Independent Evaluation Service (IES) under the leadership of the Regional Evaluation Specialist for WCA. The evaluation team used a gender-responsive and human rights-based approach, as prescribed by the UN Women Evaluation Policy which is aligned with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) guidance on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation.

A qualitative method was applied in this evaluation using oral and written information obtained from multiple sources to consider or triangulate different viewpoints, including by asking open-ended interview questions to a small but representative population of respondents.

The desk review at inception stage helped understand the context and narrow down the main sources for the evaluation.

The evaluation analysed results using a detailed evaluation framework, taking into account people's perceptions of over time. Reported changes were assessed against planned result pathways, as sketched in a reconstructed theory of change. Non-numerical information allows for a more nuanced assessment of both internal and external factors that influence performance.

The evaluation was conducted in compliance with UNEG Ethical Guidelines, UNEG Guidance on Integrating Disability Inclusion in Evaluation and the UNEG Code of Conduct for Evaluation.

DATA COLLECTED



The evaluation primarily used **qualitative methods**: the evaluation team analysed results using a detailed evaluation framework



Portfolio analysis and desk review: written information on program results was collected from several sources



A total of 67 participants responded to an **online survey** targeting UN Women personnel



Most interviews took place virtually, while face-to-face sessions for focus groups and interviews were held with participants at the Regional Office and three Country Offices (Liberia, Niger and Senegal).



Case study on the Climate Smart Agriculture flagship programme, which is prevalent in the WCA region

HIGHLIGHTS BY EVALUATION CRITERIA

RELEVANCE

WEE programming in the WCA region is well-suited to the region's needs. Specifically, UN Women's work supporting women's income-generating activities are predominantly focused on the agricultural sector, which is a significant contributor to both employment and GDP in the region. A considerable proportion of livelihood support interventions are integrated into broader programmes addressing thematic impact areas, such as Ending Violence against Women and Peace and Security. Interestingly, these thematic combinations arose from the volatile security and climate conditions prevalent in the Sahel region and its surroundings. UN Women demonstrated agility in responding to contextual challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

While there is a growing emphasis on normative and policy change in WEE programmes implemented in the WCA region, the majority of the WEE portfolio is linked to UN Women's operational mandate, primarily consisting of income-generation interventions in the agriculture sector.

A key aspect of economic interventions is that they are often integrated into programmes belonging to other impact areas such as *Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action*, *Elimination of Violence against Women* and *Governance*. These impact areas use WEE interventions to enhance women's protection and rehabilitation.

The second most frequent WEE initiatives in the region are *digital inclusion*, *climate-resilient agriculture*, *women cooperatives* and *policy-normative-institutional* approaches. The rights-based commitment to women's economic well-being (Beijing 1995) is explicitly reflected in normative priorities in the WCA Regional Office's strategy that are well represented in country office portfolios, namely: *gender affirmative procurement*, *gender-responsive social protection* and *gender and fiscal stimulus*. The *policy, normative and institutional approaches* area of work aligns with the Regional Office's new programmatic emphasis on norms, laws and policies. However, while the WCA region clearly intends to work on macro-policies, the monetary component of macroeconomic policies is not clearly articulated. Furthermore, the WEE portfolio currently lacks a specific intervention focused on influencing policies and laws that regulate decent work for women.

COHERENCE

Coherence within WEE programming in the WCA region is facilitated firstly by the pivotal role played by the WEE team at the Regional Office, which provides technical assistance on WEE interventions; produces innovative knowledge products; and cultivates partnerships at the regional level for policy action. Secondly, the Climate Resilient Agriculture Initiative has been a crucial factor in harmonizing practices, as every country in the region has opted for at least one component of the initiative.

Country Offices rely on the guidance received from the Regional Office WEE unit on programme management and new macroeconomic policy analysis. The UN Women Flagship Programming Initiative has significantly contributed to the internal coherence of WEE programming in the WCA region. Flagship programming by UN Women headquarters has not only reduced reliance on small-scale micro-programming but has also enhanced the overall coherence of WEE programming in the region. The five most frequent types of interventions chosen by Country Offices are also key components of the Climate Smart Agriculture Flagship Initiative: strengthened marketing strategies; improved agriculture productivity using improved technology and seeds; enhanced capacities of women farmers cooperatives; and access to land tenure and finance. Every Country Office in the region has opted for at least one of the components of the Climate Resilient Agriculture Initiative.

EFFECTIVENESS

Not all programmes were effective in securing women's access to land and the demand for increased access to income and finance remains much higher than programme budgets can afford. However, evaluative evidence shows that the capacity building targets for reaching women were achieved or exceeded. Regarding normative work, UN Women has made contributions to creating policy environments that remove structural barriers to women's economic empowerment at local, national and regional levels, albeit at a fairly modest level.

A major part of UN Women's direct support for WEE in the region has been with women in rural communities through a series of funded projects, large and small, in a context of growing concern about the impact of climate change on agricultural production and livelihoods. Stakeholders and beneficiaries reported positive advancements in their skills and livelihoods. However, they also highlighted the need for further progress in terms of access to land, income, finance and markets.

This could be attributed to UN Women's relatively recent focus on normative work in this area. In particular, the Gender Affirmative Procurement Initiative initiated in 2022 has used access to procurement opportunities to strengthen women-led small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) in Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Nigeria and Senegal. The project relies on political will to leverage government control over public procurement and reduce discriminatory practices to achieve the target of 400 women-led SMEs accessing new women-friendly procurement opportunities in these four countries within three years. Similarly, a project on Unpaid Care Work implemented in Senegal has contributed to the incorporation of equitable care and domestic work in the development of Community Development Plans in six municipalities. However, both the Affirmative Procurement and the Unpaid Care Work initiatives are still too new to show legal or regulatory change at national level.

EFFICIENCY

The planned transition towards macroeconomic interventions is hindered by existing capacities; and there has been a notable increase in demand for support from the regional WEE unit. A key challenge arises from employment arrangements: most WEE personnel are currently employed under the Service Contract modality. This raises concerns about the effective management of complex programmes, especially considering the Regional Office's new emphasis on normative change, which requires a multi-year strategy for successful implementation. This situation is further compounded by the potential loss of experienced personnel.

According to current practice, the Regional Office leads on oversight, policy advice, technical support and knowledge development, and Country Offices lead on programme implementation. According to feedback from several respondents to the evaluation, this arrangement works well for regular programme implementation. However, when it comes to long-term policy vision, there are limited human resources available in the region.

The evaluation noted that, as the majority of Country Office personnel were recruited based on their project management experience, UN Women's increased emphasis on creating a gender-responsive policy and legal environment did not align with Country Office capacities. This situation, coupled with the high proportion of personnel with short-term contract arrangements is likely to lead to a substantial strain on regional support and the knowledge management system, which, as highlighted by a previous regional evaluation, has room for improvement.

SUSTAINABILITY

UN Women's efforts in rural community mobilization, capacity building and policy advocacy have established a good foundation for creating a sustainable and enabling environment for women's economic empowerment.

The establishment and reinforcement of women's cooperatives has served as a stable foundation where project funding was not sustained. This, together with the establishment of local savings and loans associations and the acquisition of land for women's access and/or ownership and their formalization in national economies through a number of projects in the region, has provided a strong basis for sustainability. Regarding the normative component of WEE, the evaluation acknowledges that the practice of targeting government actors for training, consultation and advocacy can contribute to the sustainability of newly introduced policy interventions.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

UN Women and its partners have adopted a thoughtful approach to WEE in the WCA region, considering the specific context and characteristics of the women being targeted. Interventions designed for women farmers prioritize collective agency, while programmes such as the Affirmative Procurement Initiative and Second Chance Education focus on enhancing individual agency. However, the evaluation revealed a need to further address the diverse layers of identity that may hinder the enjoyment of economic rights among the targeted women. Specifically, disability inclusion was found to be insufficient in economic empowerment programmes; and the concerns of domestic workers have not been adequately accounted for in WEE programming in the region.

UN Women's WEE interventions in WCA are guided by principles of gender equality and women's empowerment, as outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. UN Women and its partners have adopted various approaches to addressing structural barriers to economic empowerment, taking into consideration the context and the profile of women being targeted by particular initiatives. While collective agency was successfully leveraged for the benefit of women farmers and entrepreneurs, there is scope to recognize the potential for action which benefits domestic workers, disabled women and, to a lesser extent, women survivors of violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS



The West and Central Africa Regional Office should continue to **focus on research and advocacy for policy change** to address structural obstacles to women's economic empowerment. This should also include women's rights to decent work and social protection, macroeconomic monetary and fiscal policies, gender-responsive budget mechanisms, and women's participation and leadership in climate change policies and implementation.



The West and Central Africa Regional Office should **elaborate an explicit typology of countries in the region**, based on their profile using different parameters such as their economic and security situations, the prevalence of displaced persons, and whether they are a destination or a country of origin for migration. By taking these factors into account, the Regional Office can facilitate more deliberate, customized and integrated WEE programming, particularly in countries with state fragility facing conflicts and a high prevalence of refugees.



The West and Central Africa Regional Office should progressively aim to **improve contractual arrangements for their economic empowerment personnel and strengthen their capacities** in the area of gender-responsive, macroeconomic policy. While the regional WEE team's contribution of knowledge products is unique and significant, the team could improve its role as a knowledge hub on WEE and provider of policy advice through good knowledge management practices.



The West and Central Africa Regional Office should **provide local organizations and institutions with the necessary skills and knowledge** to ensure long-term viability. It is essential to assess programmes that have experienced a decline, marked by a decrease in their scope and funding despite their continued relevance and need in the region. This review could facilitate the generation of innovative ideas to revive such programmes within the current context, either as stand-alone initiatives or integrated components of ongoing interventions.



The West and Central Africa Regional Office should go beyond being non-discriminatory by **ensuring its economic empowerment policy and programme proposals refer explicitly to disability and under-privileged groups** to facilitate inclusiveness at the implementation stage for the poorest and more marginalized communities. UN Women could leverage its convening power with other UN organizations to jointly advocate for the economic rights of domestic workers.



Photo: © UN Women/WCA Regional Office

1. BACKGROUND

The Regional Office of West and Central Africa (WCA) identified the theme of Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) as worthy of an evaluation mainly as a formative exercise due to the introduction of new programmes, including those focused on policy, laws and norms. The Regional Office also wished to take stock of achievements through more established initiatives. Given the strategic importance, the Independent Evaluation Services (IES) added this Regional Evaluation to the plan of IES-led evaluations in 2022. The WEE evaluation was initiated in October 2022 and will be used at Regional and Country Office levels.

In the UN Women's Global Strategy 2018–2021, the WEE impact area is high among the Entity's programmatic priorities. The WEE outcome states "Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy". Its corresponding outputs relate to (1) policies for decent work and social protection; (2) business ownership; and (3) access to agricultural means of production. For each of the above outputs, there is an associated flagship programme¹. The new Regional Office Strategic Note articulates the regional priorities in the WEE thematic area, including:

- climate change and climate smart agriculture,
- support to women-led SMEs,
- integration of gender in economic policy as part of post-COVID-19 recovery initiatives and
- social protection, including unpaid work.

A desk review of available documents identified initiatives related to the first three priorities, and two programmes explicitly dedicated to social protection: Transformative Approaches to Recognize, Reduce and Redistribute Unpaid Care Work, coordinated at the Regional Office level with programme focal points in the Rwanda, Senegal and South Africa Country Offices; and Engendering Fiscal Stimulus Packages in Africa, managed by headquarters but implemented by the Regional Office and six Country Offices. According to the Strategic Note, two major regional programmes will be implemented by Country Offices with oversight and support from the Regional Office: "*Women in Climate Resilience Agriculture Value Chains programme to contribute to socio-economic and climate resilience*" and "*Affirmative Procurement in partnership with the AfDB to enhance opportunities including access to public and private procurement, for women-led businesses in Nigeria, Mali, Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire*." A new regional programme entitled "Gender responsive transition to the green economy" (or in short, "Gender and green transition") is not mentioned in the Strategic Note but complements the Climate Resilient Agriculture programme at normative level.

1.1 Context, purpose and scope

The Regional Office's Strategic Note (2018–2021) recognizes the need for a gender-responsive approach to policy making and programming for WEE in the WCA region. To this end, UN Women has been quite active since 2019 in the development of policy briefs and knowledge products on topics such as women and trade, green jobs for women in Africa, gender-responsive social protection, time-use surveys, unpaid care work and childcare services.

Additionally, UN Women addressed the gendered impact of climate change through a flagship programme to improve women's access to land, finance and skills for climate-resilient agriculture. The UN Economic Commission for Africa² is among several UN agencies supporting national governments to ensure gender equality in National Determined Contributions under the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (2015). The commission's climate change resilience programme promotes women as drivers of change, rather than victims of climate change.

A study³ on WEE in West Africa notes that donors and regional actors are prioritizing women farmers' increased productivity and incorporation into profitable value chains; women entrepreneurs' access to finance, markets and broader support; and promoting enabling environments and reforming discriminatory laws. This is consistent with UN Women's move towards flagship programming (now called "Gender Equality Accelerators"), forming partnerships with key players in WEE, including the African Development Bank, national governments and establishing joint programmes with other UN agencies, including FAO, IFAD and WFP.

WEE programming in the WCA region had a significant focus on implementing the flagship initiative on women's participation in climate-resilient agriculture value chains from 2018 to 2020.

¹Enhancing income generation and security through decent work and social protection for women; Stimulating equal opportunities for women entrepreneurs and Promoting women's access to land and productive resources for climate-resilient agriculture, respectively.

² UN Economic Commission for Africa, Gender Equality in Climate Change. Analysis report on Gender in Climate Change Policies, Programmes and NDC Processes. Second draft, October 2020.

³Mayra Buvinic, Megan O'Donnell, and Shelby Bourgault, Women's Economic Empowerment in West Africa: Towards a Practical Research Agenda, Working Paper 557, October 2020, Center for Global Development, www.cgdev.org

Since then, the programme has consolidated its results under this initiative and introduced additional components on gender and green transition, social protection, and unpaid care to address regional priorities related to COVID-19 and the climate emergency.

The thematic evaluation of UN Women's contribution to WEE in the WCA region (2018–2022) serves a dual purpose: it looks back to assess the overall successes and challenges of WEE programming since 2018, including experience in climate-resilient agriculture; it also looks forward to evaluate the programme's new direction towards policy and normative work and formulate recommendations based on lessons drawn from UN Women's WEE programming between 2018 and 2022. Specifically, the evaluation seeks to respond to nine questions grouped into five evaluation criteria (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability), as well as human rights and gender equality considerations.

The evaluation covered the exercise of UN Women's integrated mandate in implementing WEE interventions in the WCA region between 2018 and the third quarter of 2022. UN Women adheres to the leave no one behind principle, and the evaluation integrated considerations of how efforts are affecting groups differently (e.g. disability status, the most disadvantaged women) and ensuring an inclusive approach.

The Regional Office's WEE efforts are captured under its Strategic Note (2019–2021) Outcome 2.1 and 2.2 (which was the focus of this evaluation) and are aligned with UN Women's Strategic Plan 2022–2025 (Impact area 2 and outcome 4) and UN Women Strategic Plan 2018–2021 (Outcome 3 and Output 8,9 and 10). As an important portion of the WEE portfolio in the WCA region is multi-thematic, the evaluation explored linkages between WEE programming and other impact areas. The WEE component of programmes belonging to Impact Area 3 Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) and Impact Area 4 Peace, Security, and Humanitarian Action (PSH) serves to improve the livelihoods and reduce the vulnerability of women affected by conflicts or disasters.

The geographic scope included West and Central Africa, with in-depth field work in Liberia and Niger and the Regional Office in Senegal. The geographic coverage of UN Women WEE programming in the WCA region covers seven Country Offices, and WEE efforts are being implemented in approximately 11 countries.

The evaluation also reviewed the regional and country programmes designed according to the WEE Flagship Programming Initiatives, in particular on climate-smart agriculture (which was the focus of the case study), as well as affirmative procurement for women entrepreneurs. The evaluation assessed UN Women's coordination work, including joint action with United Nations agencies, Regional and International Financial Institutions and key Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to identify UN Women's comparative advantage and added value to the empowerment of women in the region.

Users of this evaluation are expected to be primarily decision makers and UN Women personnel at country, regional and headquarters' levels. The evaluation is also intended to be used by UN Women stakeholders, non-governmental organizations, UN agencies, CSOs and development partners. The results of the evaluation will be publicly accessible through the GATE system for global learning.

1.2. Evaluation method

The evaluation primarily used qualitative methods: the evaluation team analysed results using a detailed evaluation framework,⁴ taking into account the perceptions of a representative population of respondents on results progression over time. Written information on program results was collected from several sources and assessed against planned result pathways, as sketched in a reconstructed theory of change.⁵ Policy and research papers developed by UN Women, FAO and IFAD (see bibliography) were key to appreciate the normative component of WEE practices in the region. The *Framework for Gender and Socially-Inclusive Climate Resilient Agriculture*⁶ was used to understand and interpret practices related to the Climate Smart Agriculture Initiative which is prevalent in the WCA region.

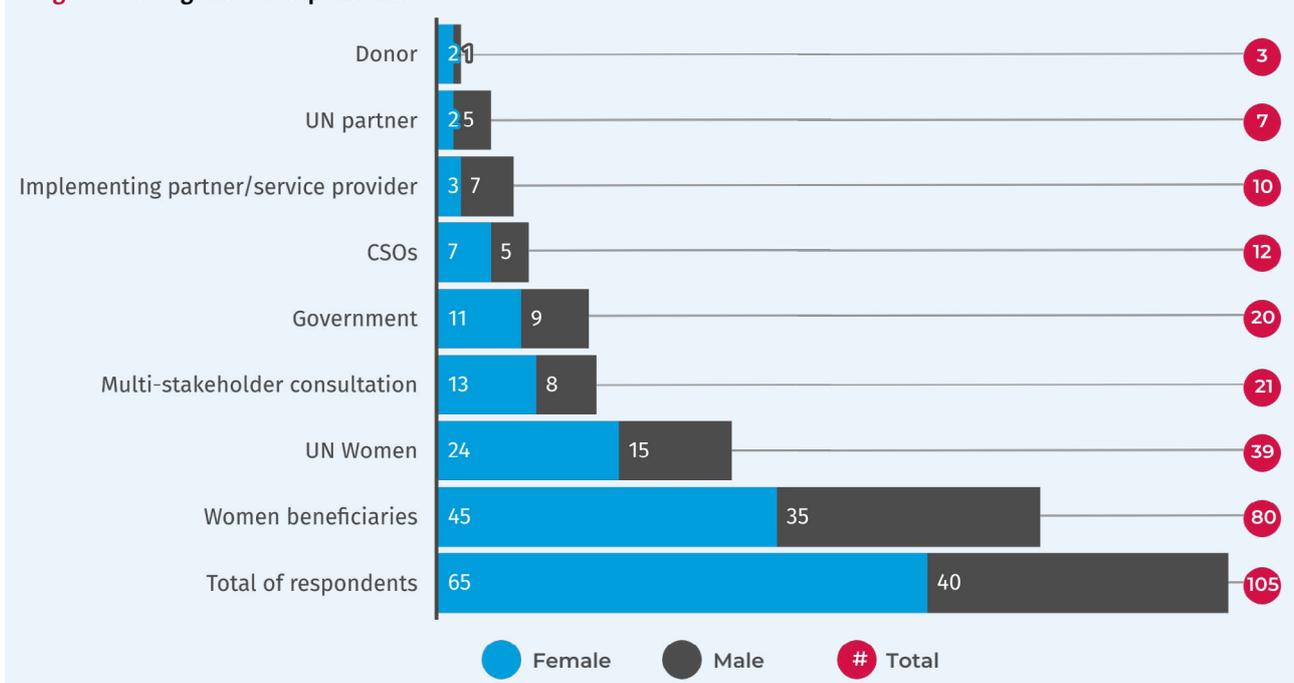
Most of the interviews took place virtually, while face-to-face sessions for focus groups and interviews were held with participants at the Regional Office and three⁷ Country Offices (Liberia, Niger and Senegal). This brought an additional dimension to the evidence alongside field visits and document reviews. During the initial phase, the evaluation team strategically identified key informants for the evaluation through purposeful sampling. The selection of informants for both online and in-person semi-structured interviews was guided by the criteria outlined in Annex 5, such as their category, perceived level of involvement with UN Women, or their contributions to the design, implementation or advancement of WEE programmes.

⁴Annex 3 This matrix displays how each evaluation criteria and corresponding questions were addressed.

⁵Annex 4 Diagram of the Theory of Change

⁶Huyer S, Simelton E, Chanana N, Mulema AA and Marty E (2021) - *Expanding Opportunities: A Framework for Gender and Socially-Inclusive Climate Resilient Agriculture*, Frontiers in Climate, 3, December 2021.

⁷At inception stage, six countries were eligible for face-to-face interviews: Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, DRC and Senegal. Liberia was retained as it has programmes that aim to give land tenure to women in addition to a varied combination of WEE, EVAW and PSH programmes. Nigeria was already covered by the Corporate Evaluation on WEE. Mali was not safe for travel. Due to the high diversity of normative WEE programming in Senegal, Senegal was chosen over DRC.

Figure 1 - Categories of respondents

A total of 67 participants responded to an online survey targeting UN Women personnel. This added an additional facet of evidence to the evaluation, enhancing the process of cross-referencing with other sources from UN Women.

The decision to focus a case study⁸ on the Climate Smart Agriculture flagship programme was driven by a portfolio analysis that highlighted its implementation in every country of the region⁹. Its importance is further underscored by its extensive scope and comparatively lengthy duration, averaging three years.

1.3 Ethics and inclusiveness of the evaluation

The main ethical and methodological framework of this evaluation is constituted by existing UN guidance documents.¹⁰ The evaluation followed strict guidelines to ensure respect for the dignity of all participants, including those who are disabled and/or marginalized. At the start of each interview, participants were provided with a clear understanding of the evaluation's purpose and how the information they shared would be used by the evaluation team. The evaluators emphasized their independence, and participants were informed about their rights, including the option to decline participation and were assured that their responses would be treated confidentially.

To maintain confidentiality, online survey information was kept completely anonymous and transcripts from interviews did not refer to individual identities. Information gathered was stored in line with IES Data Management

Guidance. To assess how the leave no one behind principle and gender equality were taken into account in the design and implementation of WEE initiatives, the evaluation drew upon Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality framework.

1.4 Limitations

Due to security and budgetary considerations, the evaluation was only able to visit three of the originally selected five countries for in-person interviews. As a result, the contribution of observational methods to the body of evidence supporting the evaluation's findings was limited.

The size of the evaluation scope required an overarching perspective, which allowed for the identification of broad trends in UN Women's economic empowerment practices within the region. However, it did not afford the opportunity to closely verify the claims and figures presented in periodic reports regarding the extent of the population impacted by specific initiatives aimed at enhancing women's economic power. That being said, the rich body of evaluations conducted in the region¹¹ on WEE programmes provided reliable insights on achievements and challenges.

Furthermore, because of time or budget constraints the evaluation did not have the capacity to investigate interventions implemented by other UN agencies or key actors involved in WEE. This could have provided valuable insights into coordination, consistency and potential overlaps among their activities.

⁸ Appendix to this report: Case Study on Climate Resilient Agriculture

⁹ Beyond the formal five: Central Africa Republic, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal

¹⁰ UNEG documents (Code of Conduct for Evaluation, Ethical Guidelines, Guidance on Integrating Disability Inclusion in Evaluation and on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation) and UN Women Evaluation Policy.

¹¹ Annex 2: UN Women project evaluations



Photo: © UN Women/WCA Regional Office

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE WEE PORTFOLIO

2.1 Overview of WEE programming in the WCA region

The Regional Office considers the WEE impact area as its most important priority: “The first regional priority area is women economic empowerment, focusing on income security, decent work and economic autonomy”¹². It sets out to implement three flagship programmes (see Table 2) “in the following sectors¹³: “agriculture, energy, extractive industries and infrastructure for the purposes of anchoring its country offices work.” (id.) The three flagship programmes do not necessarily bear the same name as shown in Table 1 below.

The Regional Office’s “development results framework” for 2022–2025 has an outcome related to economic empowerment, along with two corresponding outputs. The intended outcome sought by UN Women is to ensure that

global gender equality norms are effectively translated into gender-responsive laws, policies and institutions.

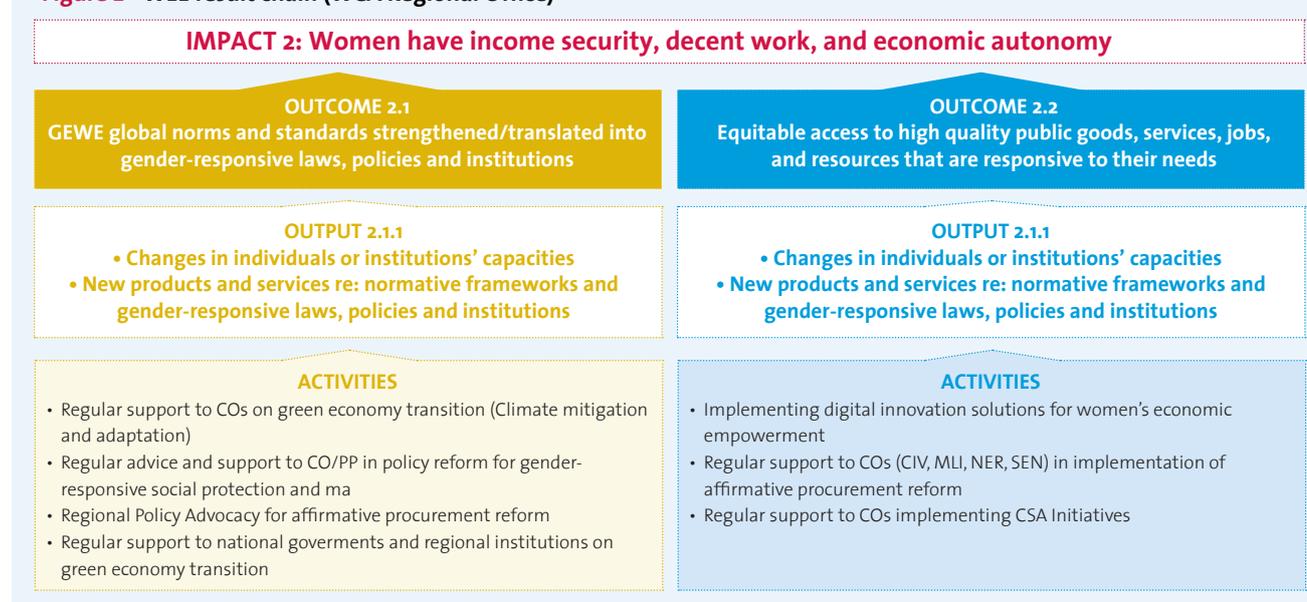
A combined search on OneApp and ATLAS reveals¹⁴ a total of 42 programmes focused on economic empowerment. Twenty per cent of these programmes fall under a different impact area, namely Violence Against Women or Peace, Security, and Humanitarian Action. These initiatives primarily address women’s protection and rehabilitation. Notably, there are a few instances¹⁵ where programmes categorized under non-economic empowerment impact areas address key issues related to economic empowerment. Initiatives for women’s economic rehabilitation are considered integral components of UN Women’s response to peace, security and humanitarian concerns in the region.

Table 1 – Alignment with the global strategy

#	WEE OUTPUT (GLOBAL STRATEGY)	RELATED FLAGSHIP PROGRAMME INITIATIVE (HEADQUARTERS)	RELATED FLAGSHIP PROGRAMME INITIATIVE (WCA)
1	More policies promote decent work for women	Enhancing income generation and security through decent work and social protection for women	Unpaid Care-Work and Domestic Work
2	More women own, launch and/or better manage SME and large enterprises	Stimulating equal opportunities for women entrepreneurs	Women Entrepreneurs through Affirmative Procurement
3	More rural women secure access to productive resources and engage in sustainable agriculture for women.	Promoting women’s access to land and productive resources for climate-resilient agriculture	WEE through Climate-Resilient Agriculture

Source: Data compiled by the evaluation team (Q4 2022)

Figure 2 - WEE result chain (WCA Regional Office)



Source: Data compiled by the evaluation team (Q4 2022)

¹² WCA Regional Office Strategic Note (2018-2021), p.12

¹³ From the review of the region’s economic empowerment programmes, agriculture is the main sector of WEE implementation. Exceptionally, Cameroon’s “Gender and Road” programme is part of an infrastructure programme but its outputs are not related to infrastructure construction.

¹⁴ The 3R and Engendering Fiscal Stimulus programmes are implemented in the region but mapped at headquarters level.

¹⁵ For example, in Liberia, there is a dedicated US\$ 2 million programme focused on a crucial aspect of economic empowerment: access to land. However, this programme is classified under UN Women Liberia’s Women, Peace, and Security impact area. Similarly, a US\$1,500,000 programme targeting gender-responsive budgeting, innovative financing, and accountability frameworks is also recorded under the Women, Peace, and Security impact area. Lastly, the funding for climate smart agriculture in the Central African Republic comes from the Peace Building Fund.

2.2 WEE theory of change in the WCA region

The evaluation team carefully considered multiple factors while reconstructing a region-specific theory of change¹⁶ for the WEE impact area in the WCA region during 2018–2021, including:

1. The global theory of change constructed for WEE under UN Women's Strategic Plan 2018–2021¹⁷ (thematic areas 4 and 5), a new forward looking global WEE-theory of change developed for the Strategic Plan 2022-25 and UN Women's integrated triple mandate (normative, operational and coordination).
2. Emerging interventions such as women's access to land, financial tools and new technologies for agricultural productivity; addressing unpaid work and time poverty; gender affirmative procurement; and gender-responsive climate change adaptation and resilience.
3. Commonalities and diversity of country contexts across the WCA region, including that several major interventions recorded under the impact areas of Violence Against Women and Peace, Security and Humanitarian Action address key economic empowerment issues, including land tenure. The thinking behind these thematically hybrid interventions is related to contexts where safety and the protection of the psychological and physical integrity of women are a prerequisite for their economic empowerment. Cross-thematic programming is required in contexts where state fragility, political upheavals, massive population displacements and terrorism prevail.

The diagram depicted in Figure 3 includes an outcome block focusing on protection and human rights, along with three outcomes supported by flagship programmes active in WCA. The evaluation suggests that its most plausible statement of change theory is as follows:

“By ensuring the protection of women, girls and individuals with special needs from violence, their safety is guaranteed as the three gender risk differences, particularly women's vulnerability, capacity and exposure, have been effectively addressed.”

*“If women, girls and people with special needs are **protected from violence and improve their psychological and nutritional status** and access renewable or sustainable energy, including in areas affected by conflicts and disasters, then their safety, physical and mental health and security are assured and their human rights respected because the three gender risk differences, particularly in terms of women's vulnerability, capacity and exposure, have been taken into account.”*

The other outcomes already reflected in the regional Strategic Note can be formulated as follows:

*“If **women's land tenure security** is increased, smallholder productivity increased and opportunities to move up the value chain promoted, then more rural women increase their income security and improve their working conditions and resilience to climate change by using productive resources and engaging in sustainable agriculture because discrimination against women to access productive assets and key financing barriers are removed.”*

*“If **public procurement** is gender responsive and women entrepreneurs' capacity to benefit from procurement is strengthened then more women own, launch and/or manage enterprises because a supportive institutional and policy framework is in place.”*

*“If **unpaid care and domestic work** is recognized as a key barrier to women's access to decent work and women's organizations are empowered to participate in debates and decision-making processes about public investments in the care economy, then more policies promote decent work and social protection for women because political, social and economic barriers have been addressed.”*

An implicit outcome on human rights, physical and mental integrity is reflected as a key contributor to the overall WEE GOAL

If (1) macroeconomic policies are designed to expand employment opportunities for women and create space for gender-sensitive public investments in services and social protection;

if (2) unpaid care and domestic work is reduced and redistributed through gender sensitive investments in public infrastructure and services;

if (3) women's access to social protection is enhanced; and

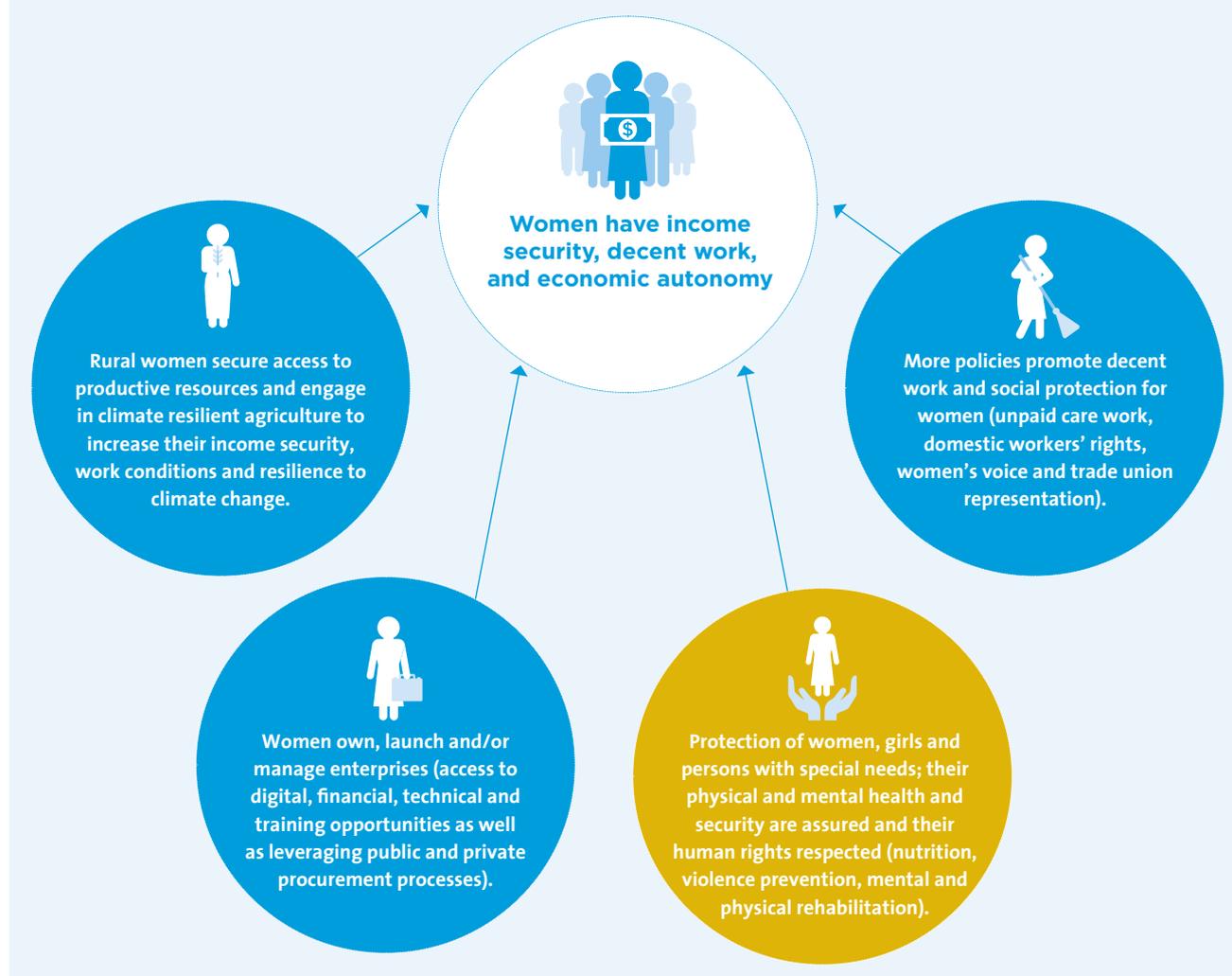
if (4) women's human rights, physical and psychological integrity are protected,

then (5) income generation and income security for women will improve;

because (6) the key structural barriers have been addressed.

¹⁶ The graphic version can be found in Annex 4

¹⁷ Theories of change for UN Women's Thematic Priorities: Achieving Transformative Results for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, 2017 - UN Women's Strategic Plan 2018-2021, See theories of change under Thematic-Priority-5: *More policies promote decent work and social protection for women* and Thematic priority 6 *More women own, launch and/or better manage small and medium and large enterprises*.

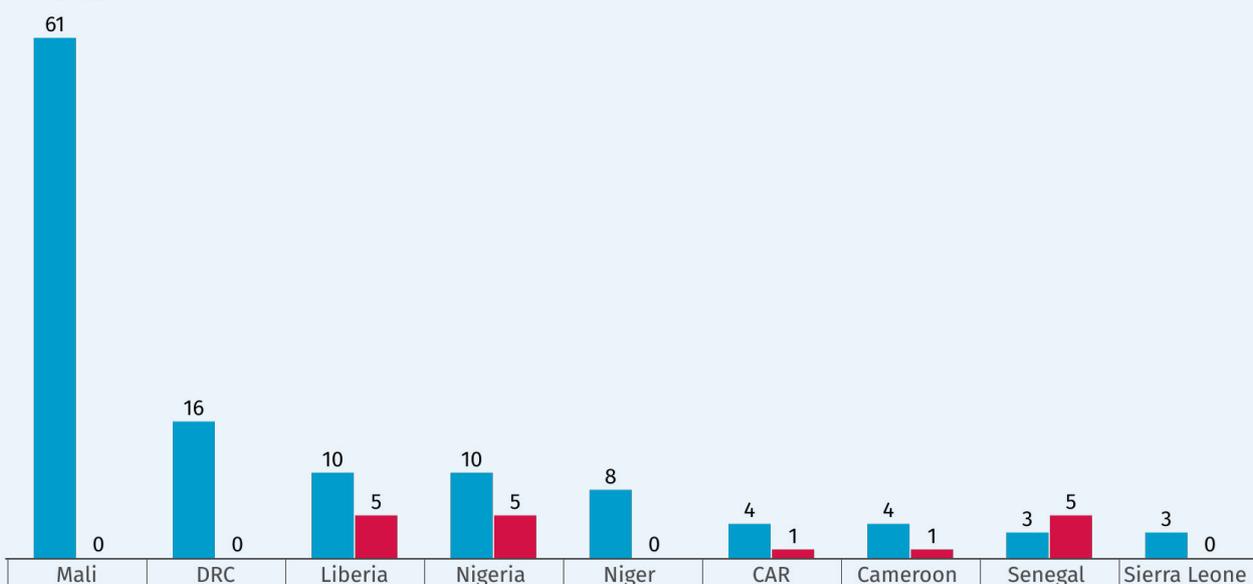
Figure 3 - Outcome block on protection and human rights, alongside three WEE outcomes

2.3. Stakeholder analysis

The usage of the terms “duty bearers” and “rights holders” serves to distinguish between two distinct groups. Duty bearers encompass various individuals and entities, including UN Women staff at country, regional and headquarters levels, senior managers, programme and policy development experts, technical personnel, as well as other UN agencies and partners such as UNDP, FAO, IFAD, WFP, ILO, African Development Bank and World Bank. Additionally, intergovernmental and multilateral bodies such as the African Union, ECOWAS, OECD; donors; ministries of gender and women, labour and employment, skills and entrepreneurship; local governments; public institutions; and academia also fall within the scope of duty bearers.

The category of rights holders encompasses a diverse range of individuals, including rural women and women entrepreneurs engaged in micro businesses and SMEs, regardless of whether they operate within the formal or informal sectors. This group also comprises vulnerable populations such as women migrants, refugees or internally displaced individuals, including those with or without disabilities, and individuals with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, as well as those with diverse sex characteristics. Lastly, women belonging to ethnic minority groups are also included within this category.

Figure 4 – Number of implementing partners (government and CSOs) who signed at least one agreement between 2018 and 2022



Source: Data on agreements with partners was collected from Country Offices during Q4 of 2022 and analysed by the evaluation team

CSOs play a pivotal role as they operate at the crossroads between duty bearers and rights holders. They constitute the majority of partner organizations engaged in implementation of UN Women programmes. Certain government ministries have also established agreements with UN Women to effectively execute diverse initiatives related to WEE.

Efforts focusing on affirmative procurement, unpaid care, and economic stimulus, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, heavily rely on government involvement. However, this is primarily applicable to countries with stable political and security conditions, such as Senegal. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

take the lead in forming the majority of partnerships established with UN Women to implement economic empowerment programmes, particularly within initiatives dedicated to addressing gender-based violence, peace, security and humanitarian action. See Table 3 for a list of donors involved in programmes that are clearly dedicated to WEE.¹⁸

Furthermore, programmes that address multiple impact areas, such as those at the intersection WEE and EAW, or between WEE and PSHA, are funded by key donors such as Japan, the Peacebuilding Fund, or the Multi-Partner Trust Fund Spotlight initiative.

¹⁸ For time period details, see Annex 19

Table 2 - Donors by WEE areas of work

AREA OF WEE WORK	DONOR	COUNTRY
Climate smart agriculture	African Development Bank	Guinea Bissau
	BNP Paribas	Senegal
	Luxembourg	Mali
	African Development Bank (loan to the Govt)	Côte d'Ivoire
		Cameroon
	Peace Building Fund	Central Africa Republic
	Multi-donor Trust Fund	Mali
Balear Islands	Senegal	
Rural WEE	UNDP	Mali
	Multi-donor Trust Fund	Liberia
		Niger
		Côte d'Ivoire
	Canada	Liberia
	Sweden	Liberia
		Mali
DRC		
MDTF	DRC	
African Development Bank	Cameroon	
Digital innovation for solutions in agriculture	Innovation Norway	Liberia, Mali, SEN
	Fund for Gender Equality	Nigeria
	African Development Bank	Côte d'Ivoire
COVID-19 support	UNDP	Nigeria, CMR
Laws & policy design/reform	World Bank (Loan to Govt)	DRC
	UNCCD	Senegal
Migration	Germany,	Niger
	Italy	Niger
	Balear Islands	Niger
Climate & energy	Multi-donor Trust Fund	Mali
		Liberia
Alternative livelihoods	Canada	Liberia
	BHP Billiton Foundation	Cameroon
Women entrepreneurs	Multi-Partner Trust Fund - Spotlight Initiative	Liberia
	Intl Bank for Recovery and Development	Senegal
	Standard Bank	Nigeria
	Diadie Amadou Sankare SAER-Mali	Mali
	South Korea	Sierra Leone
	AfDB	Côte d'Ivoire
IFAD		
Social Protection	Canada	Senegal
	South Korea	Niger, Senegal, Nigeria
	UN Trust Fund for Human Security	Côte d'Ivoire
COVID-19 Response	OHCHR	Niger
	UNDP	Cameroon
		Nigeria
	UNICEF	Senegal
Multi-donor Trust Fund	Central Africa Republic	

Source: Data on donor contributions was collected from Country Offices during Q4 of 2022 and analysed by the evaluation team

2.4 Budget

The total budget allocated to WEE programmes from 2018 to 2022 is estimated at US\$ 38.4 million.¹⁹ A noteworthy increase of US\$ 13 million was observed between 2021 and 2022 across various countries when compared to the budget for the WEE impact area from 2018 to 2021.

Looking at budgets per sub-areas of UN Women's work in the WEE impact area, the largest budget share is allocated to three initiatives²⁰ that primarily focus on laws, policies and target institutions or systemic mechanisms. This is consistent with the new programmatic emphasis on norms observed not only in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Niger but also across the entire region, driven by the Regional Office.

The Flagship Programme for Climate Smart Agriculture is the second most substantial type of initiative within the same impact area. This programme is implemented in four countries within the region: the Central African Republic, Mali, Nigeria and Senegal.

Equally significant are the ten notable WEE initiatives under the *Peace and Security* impact area. The budget of US\$ 2 million dedicated to land ownership and tenure, which is a crucial aspect of economic empowerment, is part of a larger peace and security initiative.

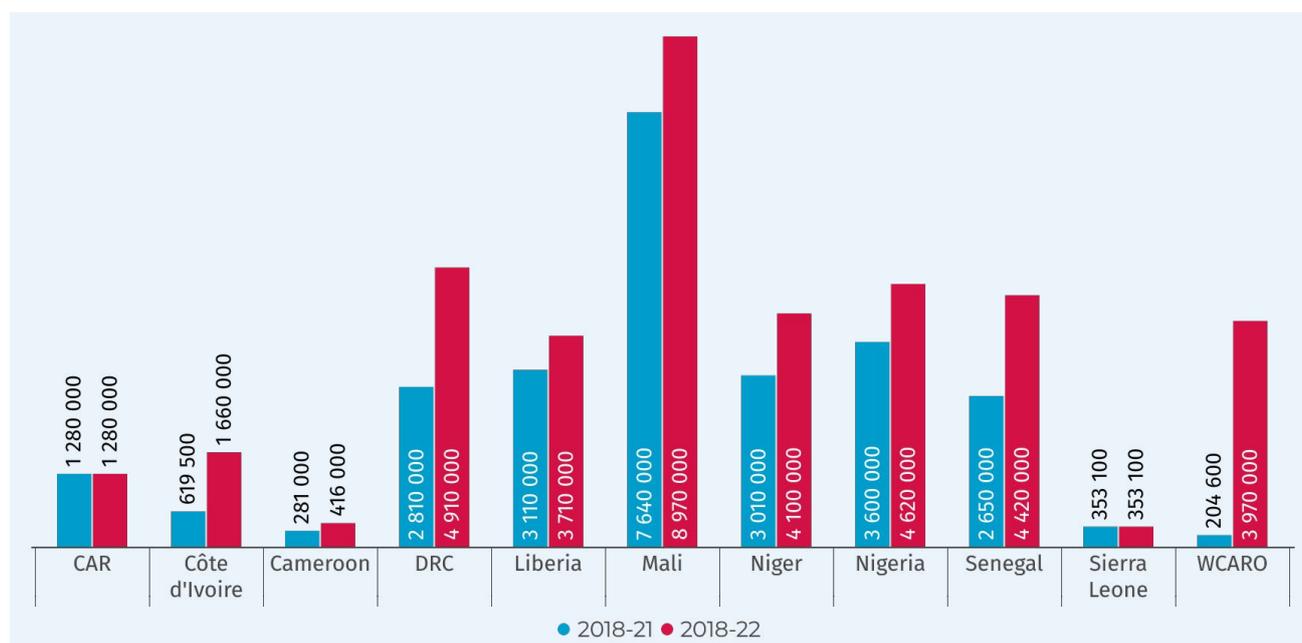


Table 3 – Budget per sub-areas of WEE

SUB-AREA	NUMBER OF PROGRAMMES	TOTAL BUDGET (US\$) REPORTED BETWEEN 2017 AND 2022	COUNTRIES
Norms, standards and laws	3	15385839	DRC, NER, RO
Climate smart agriculture	5	12061350	CAR, MLI, NGA, SEN
Women entrepreneurs	6	9625000	CIV, NGA, SEN, RO
Protection and rehabilitation in PSH	10	6656022	LBR, MLI, NER, NGA, SLE, DRC
Migration prevention	2	2683502	NER, NGA
Infrastructure (road)	1	2122000	CMR
Access to land	1	2000000	LBR
Digital inclusion	5	1948818	CIV, LBR, SEN
Gender-responsive mechanisms	1	1500000	LBR
Social protection	1	1333569	SEN
COVID-19 response	3	878719	CAR, NER, RO,
Climate sensitive energy	1	846342	MLI
Value chains	1	357220	CMR
Women cooperatives	1	11956	CMR

Source: ATLAS data compiled by the evaluation team (Q4 2022)

¹⁹ The budget allocations and expense estimates are based on Non-Core funds data. Core funds, on the other hand, are generally not allocated to specific programmes or impact areas, and are primarily used to cover administrative, logistical and personnel expenses. Additionally, Institutional Budget amounts are not factored into the estimates for WEE allocations and expenses, as these funds are typically reserved for personnel-related expenses.

²⁰ "Reform and dissemination of Laws favorable to Women-Owned Businesses" (DRC), "Making migration safe for women" (Niger) and "Gender & Green Transition in West and Central Africa" (Regional Office).



Photo: © UN Women/WCA Regional Office

3. EVALUATION FINDINGS

3.1 RELEVANCE

To what extent are WEE initiatives relevant to the WCA region's context and priorities? In particular, to what extent are recent initiatives (2020 onwards) relevant to the region's context and priorities?

FINDING 1

UN Women's growing emphasis on normative and policy change has the potential to bring about significant outcomes in WEE. However, the majority of the WEE portfolio in the region is operational programming, primarily consisting of income-generation interventions. Notably, economic interventions are often integrated into programmes addressing Peace and Security or Ending Violence Against Women. While the region aims to address macro-level policies, the specific details regarding the monetary aspect of these macroeconomic policies remain unclear.

The body of WEE initiatives that are active in the region can be represented (Table 4) in its great diversity. This diversity is achieved by fitting programs that are implemented in ten countries²¹ into 15 categories or areas of work, which are reflected in the table below.

WEE initiatives are also subsumed under various non-WEE impact areas, mainly Peace and Security and Humanitarian, Elimination of Violence Against Women and Governance areas. As reflected in Table 4, the use of WEE to serve the needs of protection/rehabilitation and the choice of joint programming modalities are in the top tier of practices chosen by Country Offices. The two most frequent practices are present in six and seven country offices, respectively. From this perspective, the second tier of WEE areas implemented in the region is constituted by digital inclusion, climate smart agriculture, women cooperatives²² and policy-normative-institutional approaches.

The next tier of WEE areas, present in five countries, is made of gender and fiscal stimulus, gender-responsive social protection and COVID-19 response mechanisms.

The last group is composed of WEE areas of work that are present in two countries (gender affirmative procurement, value chains) or only one.

All categories of WEE interventions listed above are consistent²³ with the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The rights-based commitment for women's economic well-being is reflected in the two normative priorities of the Regional Office strategy that are well represented in Country Office portfolios (see Table 1), namely: gender affirmative procurement, gender-responsive social protection and gender and fiscal stimulus.

The policy, normative and institutional approaches area of work (also listed in Table 1) is a priority identified by the 2015 edition of the Progress of the World's Women report, aiming to achieve equality by improving working conditions for female employees and implementing gender-responsive social and economic policies. This aligns with Regional Office's new programmatic emphasis on norms, laws, and policies.²⁴

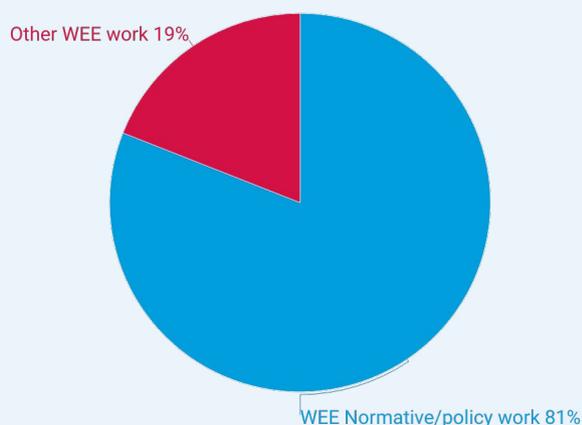
²¹As distinct from programmes that are at a conceptual stage.

²²The three areas (digital inclusion, climate smart agriculture, women cooperatives) are usually associated with the Climate Smart Agriculture flagship programme

²³Critical Area F of the Beijing Platform for Action is on "Women and the Economy". It articulates commitments related to "Inequality in economic structures and policies, in all forms of productive activities and in access to resources. F.1. Promote women's economic rights and independence, including access to employment, appropriate working conditions and control over economic resources; F.2. Facilitate women's equal access to resources, employment, markets and trade; F.3. Provide business services, training and access to markets, information and technology, particularly to low-income women; F.4. Strengthen women's economic capacity and commercial networks; F.5. Eliminate occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination; F.6. Promote harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men."

²⁴The UN Women – ILO Joint Policy Brief on "Decent Work and Women's Economic Empowerment: Good Policy and Practice" has recently been echoed by the IMF: "Offering publicly financed parental leave schemes can help parents reconcile work and family life and maintain their connections to the labor market through a guaranteed return to their job. (...) Establishing flexible work arrangements allows women to better balance their formal employment with other demands on their time". IMF, "Pursuing Women Economic Empowerment", 2016, p.16

Figure 5 - Budget share of WEE normative work between 2018 and 2022



Source: ATLAS data compiled by the evaluation team (Q4 2022)

Agriculture is still the most²⁶ important sector in WCA, contributing to employment and GDP of countries in the region. Therefore, it makes sense that WEE programmes are focused on agriculture. WEE efforts in this sector have been consolidated into a single flagship programme, the Climate Smart Agriculture Initiative. This flagship programme is the second largest type of WEE initiative in the region. It operates through strengthened *women cooperatives* and has a component dedicated to *digital inclusion* and *value chains*. Climate smart agriculture programmes are implemented in four countries in the region: Central African Republic, Mali, Nigeria and Senegal.

In the 2018–2021 regional Strategic Note, there was no mention of “macroeconomic policy”. The phrase only finds its place in the subsequent strategic planning document

where the first reference to “macroeconomic policy” appears to allude to the utilization of fiscal and monetary tools to achieve specific policy objectives. However, as the reader delves deeper into the document, the term “macroeconomic policy” takes on a broader connotation, encompassing far-reaching macro-level policies with large economic implications.

Whether the intention of the Regional Office is to influence the narrower interpretation of macroeconomics – focused on the deployment of fiscal and monetary instruments – or the broader sphere of macro-level policies, the implications of the strategic note WEE policy ripple across employment, well-being and overall security of income.

However, the monetary component²⁷ of macroeconomic policy stands out but is yet to be clearly acknowledged in the WEE strategy. The unique predicament faced by the majority of Country Offices in the region is that the French speaking countries of WCA do not have national central banks: the Franc CFA serves as the currency for French-speaking countries in West Africa, overseen internationally by the BCEAO and the BCEAC, in consultation with France’s Directorate General of the Treasury wherein its reserves are held.

Addressing the gender aspect of macroeconomic policies in WCA implies a thoughtful exploration of how to engage directly or indirectly with these pivotal banking institutions, as well as the UMOA/UEMOA. The forthcoming iteration of the regional WEE strategy must bridge this gap, affording due consideration to this intricate financial landscape.

²⁶ Agriculture provides 30-50 per cent of GDP in most countries in the region and is the main source of income and livelihood for 70-80 per cent of the population (<https://www.ifad.org/fr/web/operations/regions/wca>). See Annex 18 for further details.

²⁷ To achieve specific economic goals, governments can leverage their sovereign control over their currency through interest rates, exchange rates, inflation targets, etc. The other macroeconomic policy component is fiscal policy.

To what extent is UN Women WCA Regional Office strategically positioned to enhance WEE?

FINDING 2

The UN Women WCA Regional Office is strategically positioned to support and influence the work of responsible parties and implementing partners for major interventions²⁸ in the area of WEE, either in a joint modality or as a single responsible party. However, Country Offices could further improve advocacy with National Planning and Finance executives regarding key macroeconomic decisions. There is also a need to initiate engagements with organized labour on women's right to decent work and social protection.

From the perspective of key CSOs, donors and government institutions, UN Women is the right agency to engage with when it comes to women's equal access to decent employment, economic resources and agency in business. These stakeholders benefit from UN Women's expertise in gender analysis and its convening power both across sectors and internationally.

Whether considering programmes implemented in the past such as the *Women in Cross-Border Trade*²⁹ or more recent programmes such as *Climate Smart Agriculture* or the *Gender Affirmative Procurement* programme, these are undisputedly within UN Women's mandate as confirmed by evaluation interviewees, including those working at UN agencies. However, it is early to expect these programmes to clearly demonstrate achievements in terms of income generation among targeted participants. For instance, the *Cassava Initiative* implemented by the UN Women DRC Country Office, is an ongoing programme which supports associations of women farmers with fortified cassava cuttings to improve their income and fight against chronic malnutrition. As explained in the DRC Strategic Note Evaluation (pp.26-28), this initiative has not yet reached its full potential, raising questions about its immediate contribution to UN Women's claim for comparative advantage in WEE, as further elaborated under the Effectiveness and Sustainability sections of this report.

There are several instances of fruitful collaborations with other UN agencies: the Joint Programme on Rural Women's Economic Empowerment³⁰ has been jointly implemented for more than a decade in several countries in the region. The "*Advancing implementation of UNSCRs on Women Peace and Security (WPS) through strengthening accountability frameworks, innovative financing and Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB)*" is another example of an inter-agency collaborative initiative (OHCHR, UN Women, PBF) with a strong normative component for the economic empowerment of women. In this instance, UN Women's added value is manifested by efforts related to improving women's access to banking services, such as women opening their own individual bank accounts or advocating for guarantee funds to access credit.

Key areas that have the most³¹ potential for leveraging UN Women's comparative advantage are climate smart agriculture, gender-responsive procurement and the recognition, reduction and redistribution of women's unpaid care work (the 3 Rs).³² However, as evidenced by the composition of Country Offices' workforce and portfolio of interventions, and as attested during consultations with stakeholders, Country Offices are not yet fully able to engage with national planning and finance executives on key macroeconomic decisions that might favourably influence the employment of women, or allow for public spending allocations in key sectors of development that benefit women and girls.

²⁸ Evidence on the effectiveness of the "signature interventions" is elaborated at pp.31-34

²⁹ The WICBT program was implemented before 2018 in several countries of Africa (Rwanda, DRC, Liberia, Nigeria, Cameroon, etc.) to tackle issues faced by women traders. Women face harassment as they cross borders to sell their produce. Through advocacy with government institutions and awareness raising activities, the program was aimed at tackling the disempowering effects of border harassments, the complexity of rules and procedures and the multiplicity of checkpoints, and the have a disempowering effect on their There is access to essential services (e.g., finance, healthcare, basic business-related resources and services), constraints & coping mechanisms of WICBT; awareness on border crossing procedures; women's empowerment as it relates to business decision-making, and women's awareness of national policy issues.

³⁰ The Joint Programme on Rural Women Economic Empowerment is a multi-agency programme (IFAD, FAO, WFP, UN Women) implemented in several countries, including in Liberia and Niger. In Liberia, the programme is dedicated to establishing partnerships with the Private Sector for Women's Financial Inclusion while in Niger, the focus is on Improving Nutrition through Community Engagement.

³¹ The merits of these interventions are described in Annex 19, Box 3

³² Interventions on digital solutions continue to attract great interest from partners and stakeholders but have encountered several feasibility issues on the ground.

The review of programme documents and strategic frameworks rarely shows any activity or output related to decent working conditions and social protection for female employees³³. Women's right to decent work appears at output level in only one business unit's WEE planning framework³⁴ in the WCA region: UN Women

Liberia incorporated the term "women organized in labour" as one of the factors to be evaluated in its strategy documents to gauge the degree to which reforms in macroeconomic, monetary and trade policies contribute to the economic empowerment of women.

FINDING 3

The contextual agility of WEE programming was mostly visible in UN Women's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and contributed to reinforcing the Entity's public perception as a key advocate for the economic autonomy of women.

As women-led businesses across Africa were significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, UN Women was active in carrying out assessments, advocating policy solutions and implementing practical interventions. Evaluation participants in Senegal mentioned that the advocacy work performed by the WEE unit was largely perceived as relevant. They cited an instance where the government partnered with UN Women to reach out to 10,000 vulnerable households and provide them with a basic food package. This package included rice procured from women actively participating in the Climate Resilient Agriculture initiative.³⁵ These food baskets were delivered directly to families' homes to improve both food security and curb the transmission of COVID-19. This initiative also helped safeguard the livelihoods of women producers in rural areas. However, reservations were expressed in an evaluation³⁶ about the comparative advantage of food distribution for UN Women.

UN Women's agility was evidenced by the timing of the assessment of Nigeria's economic fiscal stimulus and recovery response to the COVID-19 pandemic: its report was published in November 2021, while the pandemic continued to have negative impacts on the livelihoods of women and girls. The study³⁷ revealed that despite

using a gender-responsive budgeting approach for the 2022 Federal budget, the fiscal and monetary measures remained gender neutral. This means that the Federal Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Planning did not effectively consider the specific needs of women, especially those from vulnerable groups, when distributing the economic stimulus package. As a result, the government lacked the necessary tools to gauge how these measures impacted the living standards of women. Implementation of UN Women's recommendations by the government remained uncertain at the time of the evaluation. However, raising issues at the right moment can be a significant catalyst for bringing about positive changes.

A survey conducted by UN Women with 165 women entrepreneurs in Mali, revealed that as much as 96 per cent of the women had seen their economic activity reduced in the first two months of the crisis. Women-led businesses were also impacted at a faster rate than SMEs led by men. A similar survey by UN Women Côte d'Ivoire and the SME agency of Côte d'Ivoire showed that a significantly higher number of women-led businesses had been forced to cease operations because of the crisis (64 per cent for women-led businesses compared to 52 per cent for men-led businesses).

³³In the four-year Strategic Note issued in 2018, the WCA Regional Office considered the impact area of "Women's economic empowerment" as its most important priority, focusing on income security, decent work and economic autonomy. This triple focus was also confirmed in the Strategic Note 2022-2025 and is aligned with the formulation of WEE programming at corporate outcome level: "Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy". If it is acknowledged by business units of the WCA region, through consultations with women organizations, that implementing decent work programs is a priority, there is scope for establishing fruitful collaboration with ILO and OHCHR for improved working conditions of women workers, including equal pay for work of equal value.

³⁴Several Country Offices mention "decent work" at outcome level in their Development Result Frameworks, but no activity or output under the said outcome articulates anything related to women's rights to work or at work. This is clearly a programming gap observed throughout the region in the area of WEE, except for Liberia which specifies work on unpaid care work, decent work opportunities, and women's access to social protection services.

³⁵UN Women in Senegal contributed to the COVID-19 response through the 'Household Food Basket' initiative. According to personnel interviewed, the office collected 100 270 000 Fcfa from BNP Paribas and the Ministry of Women, the Family and the Protection of Children to purchase 231 metric tonnes of rice and 23 tonnes of cereals from 285 women's supplier organizations (AgriFeD beneficiaries) and distributed it to vulnerable families. This initiative was reported to have directly affected 1,495 women entrepreneurs who mobilized 8,550 women. The income generated by these women-led businesses has apparently improved the livelihoods of 7,767 vulnerable families.

³⁶"During the COVID-19 pandemic, UN Women adapted its work by modifying its annual plan to support vulnerable women in the informal economy in Niamey. This included awareness campaigns, training, and the distribution of food and cash transfer. While there were questions about the comparative advantage of food and cash aid, UN Women's commission of two studies assessing the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls, as well as their protection needs was vital, as it did inform Niger's response to the pandemic and recovery plan. The studies fit more closely within UN Women's comparative advantage and expertise in gender statistics" [Country Portfolio Evaluation of UN Women Niger (2018-2022), p. 6]

³⁷[Report on a gender responsive assessment of economic fiscal stimulus and recovery response to covid – 19 in Nigeria: using the UN Women – ILO tool kit](#)

UN Women noted that a large percentage of women-led businesses in Africa operate in some of the sectors hardest hit by COVID-19 such as agriculture, hospitality and tourism, food, education, trade and other services. The Senegalese Association of Women Led Businesses estimated that economic activity in agriculture transformation was reduced by 60 per cent in the first three

months of the crisis, and that tourism and hospitality activities had come to a complete stop. UN Women advocated for gender-smart stimulus packages, gender-responsive procurement practices, gender lens credit literacy programmes to demystify loan application procedures, tax incentives for investing in women-led SMEs and bridging the gender technology gap for women-led SMEs.

3.2 COHERENCE

Are WEE interventions at country level strategically consistent and aligned with approaches recommended regionally and globally by UN Women?

FINDING 4

The emphasis on flagship programming by UN Women headquarters has not only reduced small-scale micro-programming but has also enhanced the overall coherence of WEE programming in the region.

Country Offices rely on the guidance received from the Regional Office WEE unit on programme management and new macroeconomic policy analysis. However, the evaluation team did not find any theory of change articulated in general terms for WEE. The lack of a clear, global vision for the WEE thematic area was identified in the 2014³⁸ corporate evaluation of WEE. In the 2022 corporate evaluation on WEE, no clear documents were found to provide guidance to WEE personnel (across headquarters, Regional Offices and Country Offices) “regarding the approach and conceptual underpinnings for WEE work.”³⁹

In the absence of a general WEE strategy, this evaluation did identify elements of coherence. The UN Women Flagship Programming Initiative was a factor in the internal coherence of WEE programming in the WCA region. The five most frequent types of interventions chosen by Country Offices were also key components of the Climate Smart Agriculture Flagship Programme (listed from the highest frequency): *strengthened marketing strategies; improved agriculture productivity using improved technology and seeds; enhanced capacities of women farmers cooperatives; access to land tenure; and finance*. Therefore, the Climate Resilient Agriculture Initiative drove harmonized practices across the region, and every country in the region opted for at least one of the components of the Climate Resilient Agriculture Initiative. As an illustration, Sierra Leone and Central Africa Republic, the two

countries with the lowest score in terms of WEE programming diversity, chose to implement *marketing strategies* and *access to finance* initiatives.

Women cooperatives in every country of the region (except Central Africa Republic) were trained by an agro-business expert to strengthen marketing techniques and acquire food transformation equipment as part of their climate smart agriculture programmes. Considering the use of the training of trainers approach and its multiplying factor, the reach of these training programmes can be significant. As reported by a recent final evaluation⁴⁰ of Mali’s climate resilient agriculture programme, 95 per cent of its 26,543 cooperative members “used learned notions to improve the quality of their products”. However, in Senegal where the same training programme was implemented, only 699 of the 16,000 women farmers reached by the climate resilient agriculture programme in three regions of Senegal (Saint Louis, Matam et Tambacounda) were reported,⁴¹ at mid-term stage, to “observe good climate resilient agriculture practices”. While a final evaluation of the said initiative did not take place, it can be assumed that more women farmers were reached but not the target 16,000 trainees.

³⁸ “Whilst the work of the Entity has been aligned with the development results framework, these frameworks do not sufficiently capture the conceptual underpinnings of UN Women’s work on WEE. The challenges associated with establishing a clear and consensual vision and approach to WEE – both within the organization and with external stakeholders – have made it difficult to prioritize a consistent focus for work on WEE. This has resulted in a wide array of approaches to WEE, at both global and country levels, and has created challenges in aligning regional and country-level work with UN Women’s emerging global priorities”. Corporate Evaluation on WEE, 2022, Finding 1, p.20

³⁹ Corporate Evaluation on WEE, 2022, Finding 8, p.36

⁴⁰ Final Evaluation of programme « Accès des femmes aux moyens de production pour une agriculture résiliente aux changements climatiques », p.35, Table 11

⁴¹ Mid-Term Evaluation of «Projet d’Appui aux Femmes dans l’Agriculture et le Développement Durable (PAF/AgriFeD)», p.65, Table 9

The Regional Office's decision to deploy the same agro-business expert in multiple countries was driven by efficiency. This approach not only reduced paperwork in recruitment processes but also established the consultant as a vital channel of communication between various locations where the Climate Resilient Agriculture Initiative was being implemented. The consultant's role involved travelling to several countries in the region to provide step-by-step guidance on product transformation, packaging, labelling and branding.

Her primary responsibility was to facilitate exchanges between UN Women-supported cooperatives in different countries, ensuring consistency in marketing and value addition practices. Her role consisted of improving the compliance of women cooperatives with international practices in the areas of product transformation, packaging and marketing. This was a contributing factor to the coherence of WEE initiatives in the region because the "Access to Market" component represents the most frequently addressed area within WEE interventions in the WCA region. As illustrated by Table 5, "Access to Markets" is the only WEE intervention area which is present in every country in the region.

BOX 1:**AGRO-INDUSTRIAL VALUE CHAIN SUPPORT IN SEVEN COUNTRIES IN THE REGION**

A good practice that contributed to the harmonization of WEE capacity programmes across the region was the delivery of training by an agro-business expert in several countries to diverse groups of women. The consultant also provided assistance remotely on value addition and marketing. The similarity of production techniques and marketing practices in the region is based on the following content shared by the consultant:

- technical training on the transformation of local raw materials such as shea butter into soap, deodorant, shampoo;
- capacity building in processing of shea butter into cosmetics;
- technical assistance provided to women's cooperatives about how to prepare innovative cassava based products;
- training in international quality standards in processing, food traceability and food safety, as well as control of food preservation techniques and international packaging standards; and
- training on how to visually improve products (including brands, logos and labels) and therefore improve market penetration.

Table 5 - WEE areas of work by frequency of implementation and Country Office

WEE SUB-AREAS OF WORK	CAR	CIV	CMR	DRC	LBR	MLI	NER	NGA	SEN	SLE
Access to markets										
Cross thematic (other than PSH)										
Access to land										
Protection/rehabilitation in PSH										
Climate smart agriculture										
Digital inclusion										
Gender-Responsive planning/budgeting										
Access to financial services										
Gender affirmative procurement										
Policy, normative and institutional approaches										
COVID-19 response mechanisms										
Women cooperatives										
Women entrepreneurs										
Climate sensitive energy										
Value chains										
Gender-responsive social protection										
Unpaid care work										
LEGEND	1 year programming		2 year programming		3 year programming		4 year programming		5 year programming	

Source: Evaluation team's analysis based on desk review and interviews

The deployment of the same expert to streamline packaging and marketing practices in the region was a factor of regional coherence: as evident from the above table, every country in the WCA region incorporates “Access to markets” in its WEE portfolio, highlighting the significance of this aspect of value addition. “Access to land” is another prevalent WEE theme in the region, probably because it is a common component of the Climate Resilient Agriculture flagship initiative. Conversely, due to their relative novelty, “Gender-Responsive Social Protection” and “Unpaid care work” are understandably the least frequently implemented initiatives in the region. Moreover, the region is characterized by cross-thematic initiatives, wherein WEE is considered as a means to enhance various other

outcomes. These include women’s protection, the rehabilitation of survivors of EVAW, the improvement of livelihoods for displaced people, and the provision of second chance education to vulnerable individuals.

Analysing country profiles: Mali, Nigeria, Cameroon and Senegal stand out with the highest levels of WEE portfolio diversity and the duration of WEE programming. In contrast, Sierra Leone, Central Africa Republic and Côte d’Ivoire have fewer and more recent WEE interventions, placing them on the other extreme in terms of maturation and diversity.

FINDING 5

The evaluation found that Country Offices’ decision to adopt cross-thematic programming between WPS and WEE, or EVAW and WEE is strongly predicated on the prevailing local security situation. However, the introduction of gender-responsive budgeting programming in a given country shows a weaker connection to the political stability of governments, and instead, relies more on the availability of resources and the decisions made by Country Office management.

The choice made by seven⁴² Country Offices to incorporate economic empowerment components in their protection and rehabilitation programmes is aligned with the dominant practice in the region.⁴³ Populations living in regions affected by a combination of climate-induced disasters, economic instability and conflict are often forced to flee and depend on humanitarian aid. In these contexts, income-generation support for women appears as a viable supplement to the direct delivery of aid to refugee settlements. This is the context in which UN Women uses joint programming modalities to leverage other UN agencies’ (UNHCR, WFP, FAO, UNICEF) comparative advantages.

Economic empowerment is also a key ingredient of preventive mechanisms used by UN Women and government authorities to reduce the number of migrant women that cross dangerous deserts and borders, mostly⁴⁴ within the continent, in search of a better life. Programming that focuses on migration is present in Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal which are countries with large displaced populations.

Cross-thematic programming between WEE and WPS occurs where the pressing concern is to respond to the needs of women in situations of vulnerability. In such contexts, UN Women is expected to contribute to solutions for displaced women’s urgent needs. Rehabilitation

efforts usually consist of providing a basic income or training to help women quickly acquire necessary skills to adapt and recover their livelihoods.

Between 2018 and 2022, programming for economic rehabilitation, as a key component of the WPS portfolio, occurred most frequently in countries such as Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Liberia, DRC and Cameroon which have faced terrorism and rebel uprisings for more than a decade. Refugees and internally displaced persons have no other choice but to depend on humanitarian aid. In this context, several UN agencies include an income-generation component in their humanitarian support. This is based on the presumed link between conflict and poverty. Projects are assumed to facilitate better cohesion at the community level and, ultimately, make way for the “humanitarian–development transition”.

Incorporating WEE activities in interventions dedicated to WPS is also justified on the grounds that access to an economic asset is a means to a collective end, namely the elimination of conflict in a given community. A good illustration of this is provided by the project on land tenure security⁴⁵ implemented by UN Women Liberia. Land and property disputes are the predominant drivers of conflict in Liberia. In this case, gender equitable access to land tenure is part of peace and security mechanisms.

⁴² The countries are Central Africa Republic, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria

⁴³ Cfr. the introductory chapter on regional context.

⁴⁴ “Most African migration occurs within the continent as migrants seek employment opportunities in neighboring regional economic hubs”, [Africa Center for Strategic Studies](#), 9 January 2023.

⁴⁵ Its full title is “Sustaining Peace and Reconciliation through strengthening Land Governance and Dispute Resolution” (2021-2022, Liberia).

Increasing access to land for women is a tool used by the Country Office and its partners as part of broader mechanisms for dispute resolution and prevention of violence against women.

The Regional Office has initiated conversations between the WEE and the EAW teams as part of a Community of Practice: the same rationale of rehabilitation and collective cohesion underpins the incorporation of economic components into programmes dedicated to the fight against gender-based violence, in a conflict or post-conflict context. This combination of WEE and EAW programming occurred in Liberia, Niger and Nigeria where UN Women leads or co-leads an important flagship programme, the Spotlight Initiative. Where the country context of UN Women's work is safer, these thematic combinations are rare. Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal do not have such cross-thematic programming for example, probably because they are the most politically stable countries in the region.

Lastly, UN Women's efforts to contribute to gender mainstreaming within public expenditure constitute another instance of cross-thematic programming. Gender-responsive planning and budgeting is not classified under the WEE impact area in global and decentralized strategy documents; it is placed under Governance probably because⁴⁶ it involves engagement with national decision makers to prioritize gender equality in policy and financial decisions in line with commitments set out in national constitutions and international conventions such as the Beijing Platform for Action on Women.

Over the period 2018–2022, gender programming in the area of public finance and budgeting was consistent in three countries⁴⁷ in the region and was rare⁴⁸ or non-existent in others. In countries with no gender-responsive planning and budgeting activity during this five-year period, such programming had existed prior to 2018. For instance, Cameroon had a vibrant programme before the last strategic planning period but has since completely abandoned it.

The UN Women Country Offices in DRC and Central Africa Republic operate in the highest state fragility context and do not currently have programmes related to gender-responsive budgeting. However, the presence of gender-responsive budgeting programming in a given country does not seem to be correlated with the stability of its government. Liberia, Mali, Niger have implemented such programmes more regularly in the WCA region, yet they are among the top 20 countries in the world that experience the highest state fragility.⁴⁹ Therefore, the choice of gender-responsive budgeting programming is less predicated upon contextual factors than a combination of Country Office characteristics such as availability of resources, awareness and willingness of management to use this important lever of WEE.

⁴⁶ At the same time, gender-responsive budgeting belongs with the WEE domain, not only for being instrumental to the policy goal of economic empowerment (alongside other valuable development goals), but also for its technical characteristic. Advocacy and dialogue on gender-responsive budgeting requires expertise in public finance.

⁴⁷ UN Women Mali, Liberia and Niger by order of frequency.

⁴⁸ UN Women Côte d'Ivoire and UN Women Senegal had a gender-responsive budgeting output in 2022 and 2018, respectively.

⁴⁹ "Fragile States Index", 2022

3.3 EFFECTIVENESS

How has UN Women implemented its operational, normative and coordination mandate to advance WEE in the WCA region?

FINDING 6: SUPPORT TO RURAL WOMEN

Stakeholders and beneficiaries have reported positive advancements in their skills and livelihoods. However, targets for increased access to resources such as land, income, finance and markets are not always clearly measured. This makes it difficult to report on the number women who were able to benefit as a result of training for example.

A major part of UN Women's direct support for WEE in the region has been with women in rural communities through a series of funded projects, large and small, in response to growing concern about the impact of climate

change on agricultural production and livelihoods. The programme on Women's Empowerment in Climate-Resilient Agriculture Value Chains is part of UN Women's global Flagship Programme Initiative.

Table 6 - Reported achievements on rural women mobilization and access to assets and markets (full details are available in Annexes 10-11)

MOBILISATION AND ORGANISATION OF WOMEN FARMERS AND ENTREPRENEURS

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Through the Agrifed programme a not-for-profit national network of rural women (RENAFER) was established in 2020 in collaboration with FAO. It is estimated that there are 2,500 member associations across 19 provinces, (...).

NIGER

UN Women strengthened the organizational capacities of 11,725 women members of 469 farmers' organizations to promote the involvement and active participation of rural women in facilities' management and local decision-making (.)

NIGERIA

Thirty rural women farmers cooperatives were supported to register on agribusiness platforms. There were 37 women farmers cooperatives/groups organized and supported by the UN Women Climate Smart Agriculture project and 21 women entrepreneurs were facilitated to register on agribusiness platforms (...)

ACCESS TO LAND OWNERSHIP AND UTILISATION

CAMEROON

In 2018, a UN Women project reached out to 77 women living along the highway, helping them to obtain land titles (52) and land permits (25) with the aim of increasing women's access to land ownership and securing agricultural production to increase income

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

1,250 rural women secured access to productive resources and engaged in sustainable agriculture through a local land tenure charter that gave over 500 hectares to women's organizations.

MALI

UN Women increased access to land for 12,000 rural women through the acquisition of nearly 350 ha agricultural land. With the support of UN Women Mali's AgriFeD programme, more than 66 hectares were secured for 2,049 beneficiaries.

NIGERIA

1,200 female smallholder farmers were given 2 tracts of land to improve rice production through smart agronomic practices.

SENEGAL

With the support of UN Women Mali's AgriFeD program, more than 66 hectares were secured on behalf of 2,049 programme beneficiaries.

REGIONAL

WCARO reports that 100,000 women in the region in 2021 were made more aware of their land rights and 620 hectares were given to women for climate-smart agriculture.

ACCESS TO INCOME, FINANCE AND MARKETS

CAMEROON

A gender-sensitive market was reconstructed in Kerawa, during which 30 women SGBV survivors who has lost their income were trained and employed under a cash-for-work programme. They were given mobile phones as well as SIM cards containing an Orange Money account with an amount of 147\$ to start businesses.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

In 2021, 1,250 women had improved access to financial services through the opening of a local microfinance agency.

LIBERIA

344 women gained employment through Orange Liberia Mobile money services and 13 per cent increase in production for women farmers. As a result of UN Women's support to rural communities, over 40 Village and Loan Associations (VSLAs) are providing sustainable rural credit to over 1000 women smallholder farmers for investing in climate smart agriculture. A project funded by Canada in 2019-2021 upgraded Gender Friendly Facilities in Gbah Market for the Economic Empowerment of Rural Communities in Senjeh District, Bomi County. Benefitting 700 market women.

MALI

In 2021, 1,830 women entrepreneurs were able to access financing from FAFE, BNDA etc.. 4,505 female farmers made over \$900,000 in profits 2,400 women organized into 25 cooperatives to improve their potential access to targeted markets. In addition, 30 companies from Mali were strengthened for the export of agri-foods and crafts (...) These new practices have increased their production by an average of 35%. The data shows that women have developed marketing channels. Sales are based on trust for onions (72%), shallots (74%) and potatoes (68%). There was a low level of contracts with customers, with only 5% of sales for shallots and onions and 4% for potatoes.

NIGER

4,650 rural women in Niger could access to revolving funds. A further 100 women were supported in 2021 through the village loan and saving association approach, which helped strengthen income-generating activities. There was a reported 20 per cent increase in sales of agricultural products.

NIGERIA

In 2021, 37 women cooperatives and enterprise were supported to access the BfW digital platform. 200 women in cooperatives were supported to have a bank account for their business. 10,000 women benefited from the Flagship programme on climate resilient agriculture.

SENEGAL

UN Women provided technical support to the 16,000 members of the Network of Women Farmers of the North (REFAN) to improve their financing opportunities. And a partnership with the International Bank for Trade and Industry of Senegal (BICIS led to the establishment of a revolving credit line adapted and accessible to women farmers and in 2021, 1,588 female farmers benefited from a BNP Paribas credit line.

Source: Information from Country Office management as compiled by the evaluation team⁵⁰

Also known as AgriFeD, in some countries, the programme is implemented spanning seven countries – Central African Republic, Côte D'Ivoire, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal.⁵¹ It has contributed to women having access to land, increased incomes and applying climate resilient measures in agricultural production. The programme has also helped women farmers to upgrade their agricultural produce into added value processed products for markets and to participate in agribusiness value chains such as shea butter in Côte D'Ivoire and Nigeria, cassava in DRC and Liberia, rice in Nigeria and Senegal, and rice and corn in Mali.

Most evaluations of WEE projects and country portfolio evaluations found that targets in terms of women reached for capacity building were reached or surpassed.⁵²

However, targets for women increasing their access to resources such as land,⁵³ incomes and finance were not always attained or clearly measured. Reporting on these targets usually cites fewer numbers of women than those trained being able to reap the benefits as a result. For the flagship programmes on climate smart agriculture, targets for the total number of women applying new agricultural techniques appear to have been reached increasing crop yields for sale and incomes, as well as producing processed agri-products for sale at markets. For example, according to a decentralized evaluation,⁵⁴ the Agrifed project in Mali surpassed the targeted number of beneficiaries of 25,000 rural women and reached 26,543. Of these 22,702 rural women increased their knowledge of farming practices and 13,910 women acquired and strengthened their knowledge to improve their products.

⁵⁰ Including eight programme evaluations on WEE, five country portfolio evaluations and annual reports.

⁵¹ The case study on Climate Smart Agriculture (Cfr. Appendix to this report) provides detailed results of the flagship programmes.

⁵² Not always: in Senegal, it was found that only 699 rural women were trained of the original 4,000 targeted. "Mid-Term Evaluation of the Agrifed initiative", 2021, p. 29

⁵³ "No progress has yet been made in the area of land ownership, even though the programme included lobbying traditional authorities and political administrators in the provinces of Kinshasa (Plateau de Bateke) and Kwilu (Idiofa, Gungu, Blungu) for sustainable access to land for women." explanations under Finding 6 of UN Women DRC Portfolio Evaluation, p.41, 2022.

⁵⁴ The team did not validate the figures cited in: UN Women Mali, Évaluation finale du programme AgriFeD: Accès des femmes aux moyens de production pour une agriculture résiliente aux changements climatiques (2016-2021), Rapport provisoire, Mars 2023

At least 4,005 rural women acquired new knowledge on the process of setting up land management charters and their content; 6,714 rural women benefitted from a programme for increased access to financing; and 7,571 beneficiaries from 91 groups generated increased income through the marketing of market gardening and other products. There were 137 groups of 12,146 women who gained access to around 350 hectares of land, of which 264 were fully secured for 125 groups of 10,742 women through the support of partner NGOs with customary chiefs and administrative services.

It is clear from these figures that UN Women has been able to achieve a great deal in tight time frames and with limited budgets once distributed at community level. To what extent the numbers of women farmers and entrepreneurs reached are significant and the potential for their expansion and further development is a question that will require careful consideration.

STRENGTHENING WOMEN COOPERATIVES

As explained in Table 6 above, UN Women's community interventions were said to have been successful in mobilizing women into collective groups and cooperatives, imparting a range of skills (agricultural knowledge, markets, adding value to agricultural products, literacy, financial literacy [savings and accounting], addressing gender-based violence and awareness on land rights. In a number of countries, this has contributed to building

women's confidence and leadership as well as acquiring land both as individuals and as groups. Men and local governments have also been mobilized to support these initiatives.

While there is clear reporting by Country Offices' management on the participation of women in village loan and savings initiatives (e.g. nearly 5,000 women in Niger have accessed rotating funds), the exact number of women who successfully formalized their businesses, established personal bank accounts, and pursued bank loans and procurement contracts remains unknown.

SUPPORT FOR FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

In DRC, UN Women implements a private sector development strategy financed by the World Bank: Support Project for the Development of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (PADMPME). The project is geared to "improving the business environment" through advocacy for "Laws favourable to fair entrepreneurship" and capacity building by helping women exercise their economic rights and benefit from equal opportunities in entrepreneurship and employment. The project contributed to the adoption of the law on the Promotion of Entrepreneurship in DRC which is favourable to women entrepreneurs and was promulgated on 8 September 2022. A legal and a sociological study was commissioned to better understand the business climate and women's entrepreneurship in DRC.

Table 7 - Contribution to capacity building (full details are available in Annex 9)

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Under the PADMPME 129 executives 81 of whom were women were trained on skills to integrate gender into their programmes. An online zoom session with 47 women entrepreneurs, a consultation with stakeholders was held in the four cities on the legal frameworks to be reformed in the field of entrepreneurship in the DRC. Under the grifed project, several hundred women were trained (2018-21) on the processing and transformation of cassava. However, it was reported that only a few women were able to actually put into practice the teachings.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Training of women entrepreneurs on procurement procedures and opportunities during the national seminar on women's entrepreneurship in November 2022.

LIBERIA

Improvement of financial literacy skills for 693 rural women and 500 rural women received leadership training and self-confidence building. training on gender analysis of the national budget for the 2021 financial year, was provided by UN Women to 18 lawmakers from the budget committee of the gender and women legislative caucus.

NIGERIA

Women farmers were trained on business management and financial literacy skills (140), on branding, packaging and marketing skills (320), on standards and certification (120), and a training of trainers (TOT) as extension officers on gender and value chain development (65), on use of climate resilient technologies (6,442). 1,200 women smallholder rice farmers were trained along the Shea butter value. 120 rural women were trained to address climate risks in the targeted Local Government Areas, and 120 members of the women cooperative were mentored on access to the land network. Forty Nine (49) beneficiaries from seven cooperatives groups across the four pilot LGAs were trained in soap making techniques.

SENEGAL

In March 2021, UN Women launched a training programme to empower 500 women entrepreneurs on public procurement procedures. It was also planned for 70 civil servants to be trained on gender-responsive procurement. To date, out of a target of 500, 287 women entrepreneurs have benefited from capacity-building sessions. In addition, UN Women strengthened 30 women entrepreneurs' skills on "Gender and public procurement".

REGIONAL

Prior to the AfCFTA Conference on Women and Youth in Tanzania in September 2022, the WCARO WEE Unit, leveraged capacity building using its policy brief "Improving Women's and Young Women's Access to the Opportunities". The WEE section of the WCARO organized in 2020 the first regional capacity-building event on gender and macroeconomics for about 30 UN Women and IMF staff from seven regional Country Offices. UN Women also promoted gender-responsive procurement in both public and private sectors in Mali, Nigeria and Senegal, by training 341 women business owners and 70 government officials on procurement methods on gender-responsive procurement in 2021.

The *Affirmative Procurement Initiative* is active primarily in Senegal, Mali, Nigeria and CIV and works to provide opportunities for women-led businesses to tender for and gain access to public and private procurement contracts as a means to grow their enterprises and augment their incomes. The ongoing approach is to provide training and support to women entrepreneurs on procurement laws and processes, as well as awareness raising for public procurement officials and chambers of commerce on gender and supply chain issues. In addition, there is policy advocacy for more gender-sensitive procurement procedures, including the introduction of targets and quotas for awarding contracts to women-led businesses.

The *Buy from Women* initiative was introduced in several countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Mali and Nigeria) to improve women's access to markets and learning opportunities, renewable energy, and risk transfer and finance. The initiative was intended to provide a platform for women farmers or market entrepreneurs to sell and buy directly without relying on market intermediaries that reduce the profit for sellers and make products more expensive for buyers. The digital platform was developed by UN Women globally both as a web portal and a mobile phone application, which is intended to facilitate women's

access to markets, key information and learning material, digital technologies and digital financial services. It has been launched in a number of countries⁵⁵ in WCA as an attempt to augment access to markets for women farmers. Another digital solution is UN Women's global pilot project "Digital solutions to enhance Rural Women's Resilience to Disasters."⁵⁶

However, *Buy from Women* has its limitations,⁵⁷ in DRC for example, there is little evidence that the online platform "Agromwinda", was used by targeted rural farmers as a transaction channel for cassava products. In Mali, while 1,335 women farmers from 24 women's cooperatives were reported to have been registered on the platform, it was not clear how many of them recorded transactions online.

In Liberia, Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, the platform is still under development. In Central African Republic, *Buy from Women* started in 2019 with potential but the structure is absent in rural areas. In Liberia, some stakeholders indicated challenges in attracting buyers to the platform. The transfer of management responsibilities to the Orange Foundation (a private sector entity) is intended to strengthen the platform's sustainability.

FINDING 7: NORMATIVE WORK

UN Women has made contributions to creating policy environments that remove structural barriers to women's economic empowerment at local, national and regional levels, albeit at a fairly modest level. This could be attributed to the fact that UN Women's focus on normative work in this area is relatively recent. There is potential for UN Women to increase its policy influence by accelerating the implementation of legal reforms and advocating for law reforms that are conducive to WEE and identifying new policy issues related to climate change.

In line with the stronger emphasis on policy orientation globally for 2022–25, the Regional Office WEE unit has been spearheading efforts focused more on policy change through partnerships to implement programmes at country level in newer areas such as gender-affirmative procurement, green economy transition, unpaid care work, etc. and through the development of knowledge products for awareness raising and advocacy. As illustrated in various examples of work conducted at country office level (see Table 8 below), efforts to advance partnerships with regional and national institutions are key for policy change.

The stakeholders consulted expressed the need to strengthen policy work at the Country Office level. To gain more traction in the region, fiscal and macroeconomic reform, legal and practical measures for green economy transition and gender-friendly business environments require increased attention. In the agricultural sector, women and communities remain unaware of the normative dimensions of land ownership. Resuming and revisiting gender-responsive budgeting in collaboration with the Governance Section at UN Women headquarters could provide an entry point in this regard.

⁵⁵ Collaboration between UN Women and Orange was under way to improve the Buy from Women platforms in Liberia and Mali. In 2021, collaboration with Orange in the Central African Republic, in which 100 women in CAR were reportedly trained in digital entrepreneurship (through online sales) and 487 women farmers, market women and traders reportedly used Orange Money for mobile money transactions.

⁵⁶ The Regional Office took over the overall coordination and knowledge management of the latter, which supports the development of digital micro-insurance solutions adapted to the needs of female farmers.

⁵⁷ To quote the Corporate Evaluation of UN Women's Approach to Innovation (May 2021), "A number of Country Offices implementing BFW reported that there was insufficient technical expertise in the Country Office or headquarters to support the design process and identify potential challenges, yet they still felt expectation from leadership to implement the platform. As a result, the programme failed to adequately address several foreseeable issues." p.30

Table 8 - Normative work for WEE (full details are available in Annex 13)**UN WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO WEE-FRIENDLY POLICIES AND LAWS****DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO**

The signing of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in 2022 whereby the parliamentary officials undertook to integrate gender into parliamentary practices and engage UN Women to support them. UN Women's engagement contributed to the adoption of the Law on the promotion of entrepreneurship in DCR (8 September 2022).

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Launch in 2022 of the Gender Responsive Audit of Procurement Laws, Policies, Regulations, and Institutions at both national and sub-national tiers of governance in 2021 as (Affirmative Procurement Reform)

LIBERIA

In 2018 the Land Rights Act favourable to women was signed into law in Liberia. UN Women provided technical and financial support in 2021 for developing a framework that would guide the Ministry of Gender Promotion

MALI

UN Women provided technical support to integrate gender in the Methodology for Assessing Procurement Systems (MAPS) which aims to assess and improve public procurement systems (+ 2022 government circular letter on GRB).

NIGER

A gender-responsive National Economic and Social Development Plan (PDES 2022-2026) was adopted.

NIGERIA

UN Women organised 6 policy dialogues on the adoption of the Agriculture Promotion Policy between 2019-2021. 2 regulations/policies promoting women's rights to secure land and supported the implementation of the 2016 Procurement Act.

SENEGAL

Under the affirmative procurement We-Fi project UN Women support resulted in procurement-related quotas being set for suppliers which meet key criteria in relation to gender equality. A preferential clause of two per cent of contracts was reserved for women entrepreneurs. Provisions for recognizing, reducing and redistributing women's unpaid care work (3Rs) were considered while developing new Local Development Plans in 6 municipalities in the north of Senegal. As pointed out by a recent evaluation of the 3 R programme while this represents an innovative and transformative approach aligned to local gender and development priorities, changes are yet to be achieved at institutional level: despite positive impressions recorded during capacity strengthening sessions, significant knowledge gaps remained amongst male representatives of targeted municipalities.

SIERRA LEONE

The National Machinery for the advancement of Women with support from UN Women and UNDP completed the drafting of the Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Policy. In January 2023 the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act was passed guaranteeing women at least 30% of positions in government and the private sector, with equal pay.

REGIONAL

WCARO has developed partnerships and worked with global and regional bodies such as the African Public Procurement Network, the Open and Contracting Partnership (procurement), the Regional Conference on Women in Trade (12-14 September 2022) for the Women in Trade Protocol for the AfCFTA. Together with the IDRC, and the Economic and Social Research Consortium the First Symposium on Women's Economic Empowerment in West Africa was organised in October 2022. Intense advocacy and policy dialogue on women's participation in the green economy contributed to the Ministers of Gender of ECOWAS, adopting a Roadmap for the Implementation of CSW 66th action plan on climate change. In 2022 the AU, UN Women, UNDP, ITU, UNECA organised a Pre- CSW67 Consultation in Africa on the theme "Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

Source: Information from Country Office management as compiled by the evaluation team

Apart from normative work with government institutions, UN Women targeted private companies to raise awareness of gender-responsive economic practices, building on the work already accomplished with several private companies. Banks⁵⁸ and communications⁵⁹ companies were active in the production and marketing components of agricultural interventions in support of WEE.

Other private companies were attracted by financial inclusion initiatives⁶⁰ and economic support to women affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶¹

Leveraging the Women's Empowerment Principles, UN Women identified pillars to measure the private sector's impact on inclusive economic growth: workplace practices, procurement practices, investment and financing practices, and advocacy and community practices.

⁵⁸ For example, BNP Paribas in Senegal and Stanbic Bank in Nigeria are key partners in climate-resilient agriculture. Ecobank signed an Memorandum of Understanding with the Regional Office but the agreement is still too broad to be operational.

⁵⁹ Orange is a key partner of UN Women Liberia (for more information, cfr. Annex 18-Box 2)

⁶⁰ Procter and Gamble and Mastercard in Nigeria

⁶¹ Tobene Power, Senegal

As of February 2023, 134 companies in the WCA region have signed up to the Women's Empowerment Principles,⁶² most of which are in Nigeria (see Table 9). This is probably a result of the training workshop organized by UN Women Nigeria in March 2020 on Women's Empowerment Principles for signatories and non-signatories. In September 2019, consultative dialogues were held with private-sector institutions and organizations to promote and implement gender-responsive procurement policies which led to the formation of a private-sector working group on gender-responsive procurement. Elsewhere in the region, the Women's Empowerment Principles are yet to attract a significant number of signatories.

Table 9 - Women's Empowerment Principles signatories

COUNTRY	SIGNATORIES	WOMEN-OWNED
Nigeria	106	48
Democratic Republic of Congo	7	1
Côte d'Ivoire	5	0
Senegal	5	0
Mali	4	1
Cameroon	3	0
Liberia	3	1
Total WCA	134	51
Total Africa	366	86

Source: UN website for Women's Empowerment Principles

Table 10 - Contributing factors to change as per the reconstructed theory of change

1. Women's land tenure security and smallholder productivity are increased, and opportunities to move up the value chain promoted.

Access to land has been identified as a key contributing factor to the improvement of women farmers' autonomy (Finding 6). It has implied either directly engaging with governing authorities to obtain dedicated land for exploitation by women cooperatives (Cameroon) or taking advantage of existing quotas of land allocation for women farmers (Senegal).

Training initiatives and financial inputs were key factors allowing women to expand their productivity in agriculture and organize along the value chain nodes, such as shea butter cosmetics, food conservation, etc...

2. Public procurement is gender responsive and women entrepreneurs' capacity to benefit from procurement is strengthened

A project funded by the World Bank in Senegal, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire and Mali sought to increase women capacities and government awareness on using access to procurement opportunities as a contributing factor for strengthening women led SMEs. The role of the government in gender responsive public procurement is key: the government is positioned as policymaker and regulator and secondly, as a client with full control over procurement.

The 2022 project is still too new for the project to show legal or regulatory reforms it has contributed to. However, political will and improvement of social norms are the main contributing factors which will reduce discriminatory practices to make possible the target of 400 women led SMEs accessing new women-friendly procurement opportunities in the 4 countries within 3 years.

3. Women, girls and special-needs-people are protected from violence and improve their psychological and nutritional status and access renewable or sustainable energy, including in areas affected by conflicts and disasters.

Several cross-thematic initiatives (mainly on peace, security and humanitarian action) utilize a WEE component as a strategy to achieve gender equality. By acknowledging this fact, the reconstructed TOC also incorporates women's physical and mental security as a pre-requisite for their economic empowerment. As demonstrated (Finding 5) in Liberia, securing land tenure through community dialogue is a means to a collective end, namely the reduction of conflicts in a given community. Promoting women economic independence can create lasting positive effects in the community. The achievement of lasting peace is required for the use of land as a valuable asset helping individual women to break free from exploitative conditions, thus leading to a more secure and protected future. Land ownership becomes a safeguard against gender-based violence, empowering women to live a life that is free from hunger, insecurity and sexual abuse.

4. Unpaid care and domestic work is recognized as a key barrier to women's access to decent work and women's organizations are empowered to participate in debates and decision-making processes about public investments in the care economy.

While the 3R57 programme was limited in time (2021-2023) and was only implemented in Senegal, it has shown key contributing factors to the public recognition of unpaid care work as a social impediment.

A key contributing factor to influencing policy on unpaid care work has consisted for UN Women to position its support at their earliest stage of Community Development Plan design process in six municipalities. This ensured an early incorporation of unremunerated care work concerns in the community needs assessments and priority decisions. Preliminary participative discussions helped fill the knowledge gap and strengthen capacities and dialogue around the unequal burden of domestic work. Another positive factor was the use of recent research carried out by the CRES58 which helped advocate with valuable insights into existing gaps and possible entry points for strengthening child-care services in Senegal.

A key barrier to building momentum from local levels to the national level was partly due to political turnover and to the resulting political instability and emerging priorities. In addition, the Programme lifespan proved too short to see the translation of efforts into concrete results at the national policy level.

Source: Information from Country Office management as compiled by the evaluation team

⁶² According to the official UN website for [Women's Empowerment Principles](#)

3.4 EFFICIENCY

Organizational efficiency-1

Are UN Women's organizational structures and mechanisms related to WEE conducive to the achievement of results in the region?

FINDING 8

The intended transition towards macroeconomic interventions is hindered by the current level of expertise at Country Office level, leading to a notable increase in demand for support from the regional WEE unit. A key challenge arises from employment arrangements: the majority of WEE personnel are currently employed under the Service Contract modality. This raises concerns about the effective management of complex programmes, especially considering the Regional Office's new emphasis on normative change, which requires a multi-year strategy for successful implementation, further compounded by the potential loss of experienced personnel

The regional architecture guiding collaboration between UN Women offices at regional and country levels was clearly outlined in the four-year Regional Office Strategic Note released in 2018. In this organizational structure, the Regional Office primarily assumes the roles of oversight, policy advice, technical support and knowledge development, while leaving programme implementation⁶³ to Country Offices. According to feedback from several respondents to the evaluation, this arrangement works well for regular programme implementation. However, when it comes to long-term policy vision, there are limited human resources available in the region.

As already mentioned under the *coherence* evaluation criterion, the 2022 corporate evaluation on WEE highlighted that there were no clear documents which could offer direction to WEE personnel across headquarters, Regional and Country Offices regarding the approach and conceptual foundations for their WEE-related tasks. However, a shift of emphasis towards normative interventions has been signalled from the Regional Office through the design of interventions on "Unpaid Care Work", "Gender-Responsive Social Protection", "Gender Fiscal Stimulus", etc. However, competences are limited in this area as the majority of Country Office personnel were recruited on the basis of their project management experience. As Niger and Nigeria are the only Country Offices with a newly hired Chief Economist, the recent emphasis on macro-level policy development has resulted in increased demand for assistance from the regional WEE unit, including face-to-face or virtual training sessions. This training could potentially be lost due to limited contractual stability as detailed below.

As of February 2023, a total of 42 UN Women personnel are working on WEE in the WCA region⁶⁴. However, they make up only 13 per cent of the entire workforce, and their contracts are predominantly short-term. The Service Contract modality accounts for 87 per cent of WEE personnel in the region.

Service Contracts are the employment arrangement for all WEE employees, with the exception of those in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Sierra Leone, and the Regional Office. This situation creates a significant challenge for UN Women in retaining personnel in the WCA region. With the limited number of experienced professionals in fixed-term positions, implementation and management of complex multi-year programmes may suffer. Changes in personnel can lead to delays and disruptions in project implementation and potentially hinder the achievement of results, affecting the quality of programme outcomes.

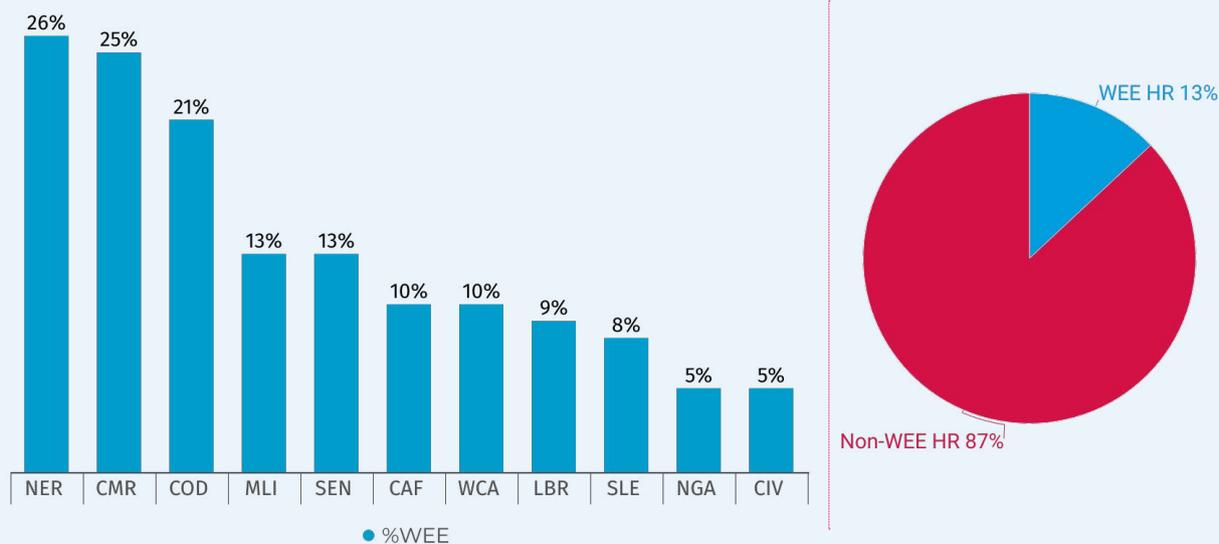
Turnover of personnel may lead to a loss of valuable institutional knowledge gained through experience and previous projects. This loss of knowledge could hinder Country Offices' ability to learn from past successes and failures, affecting the overall effectiveness of future initiatives. There are also cost implications for new recruitments and related capacity building.

The DRC Country Office has the highest number of personnel dedicated to the WEE impact area. DRC has an US\$ 11 million programme on women-friendly legal reform, known as PADMPME. Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone rely solely on one individual, respectively a UN Volunteer and a National Professional, for a portion of her time.

⁶³The principle is not 100 per cent applied as the Regional Office coordinates the new US\$ 4 million We-Fi Programme on Affirmative Procurement involving Nigeria, Mali, Senegal and Cote d'Ivoire. The gender-responsive transition to the green economy in WCA initiative is also managed by the Regional Office.

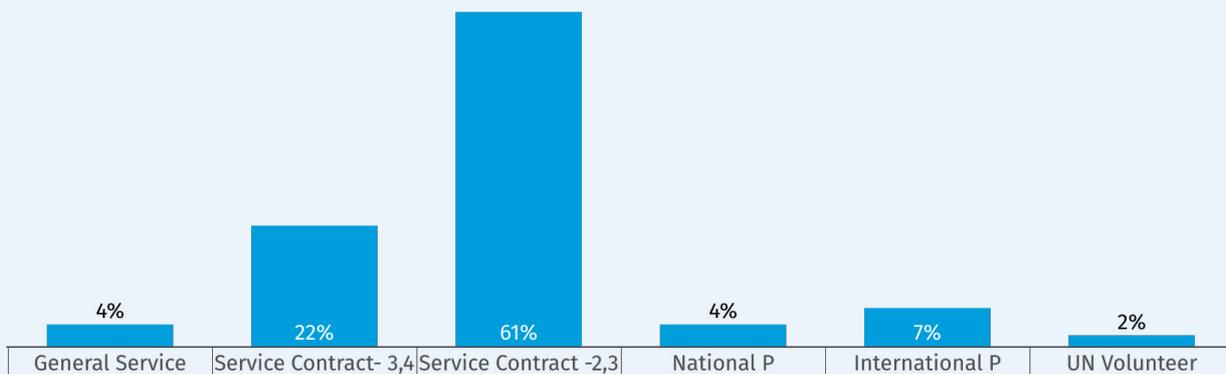
⁶⁴The total number of WEE personnel would be 47 if gender statistics officers were included. In the table entitled "WEE Economic Empowerment Workforce", statistics personnel are considered to be part of WEE personnel. In reality, Senegal and Cameroon have two and five WEE personnel, respectively.

Figure 6 – Proportion of workforce dedicated to WEE (%) as of February 2023



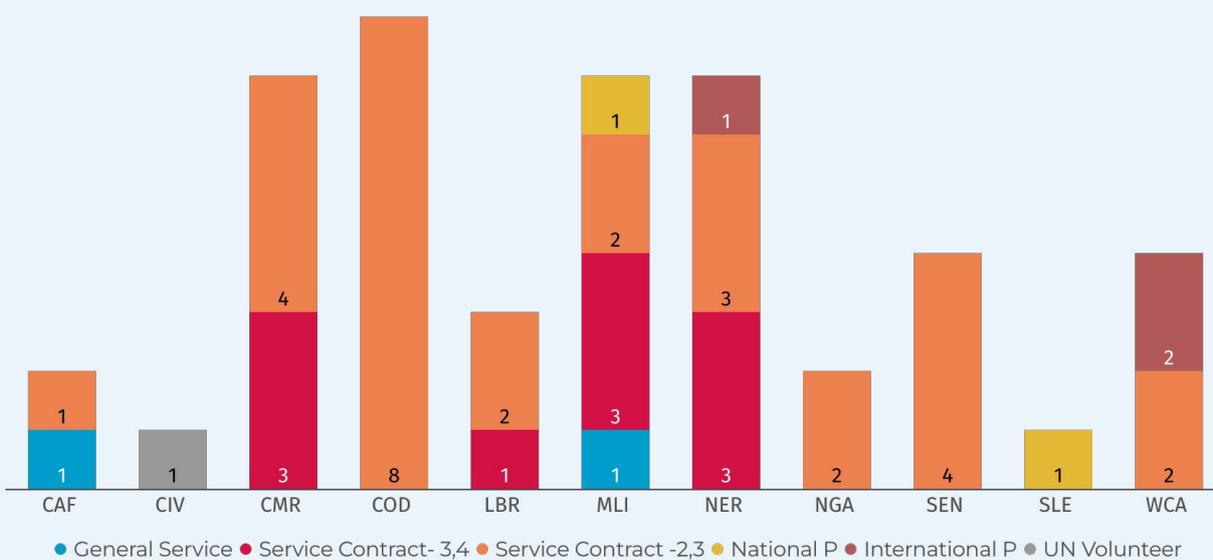
Source: Data from HR unit as compiled by the evaluation team

Figure 7 – UN Women personnel positions as of February 2023



Source: Data from HR unit as compiled by the evaluation team

Figure 8 – Human resources as of February 2023



Source: Data from HR unit as compiled by the evaluation team

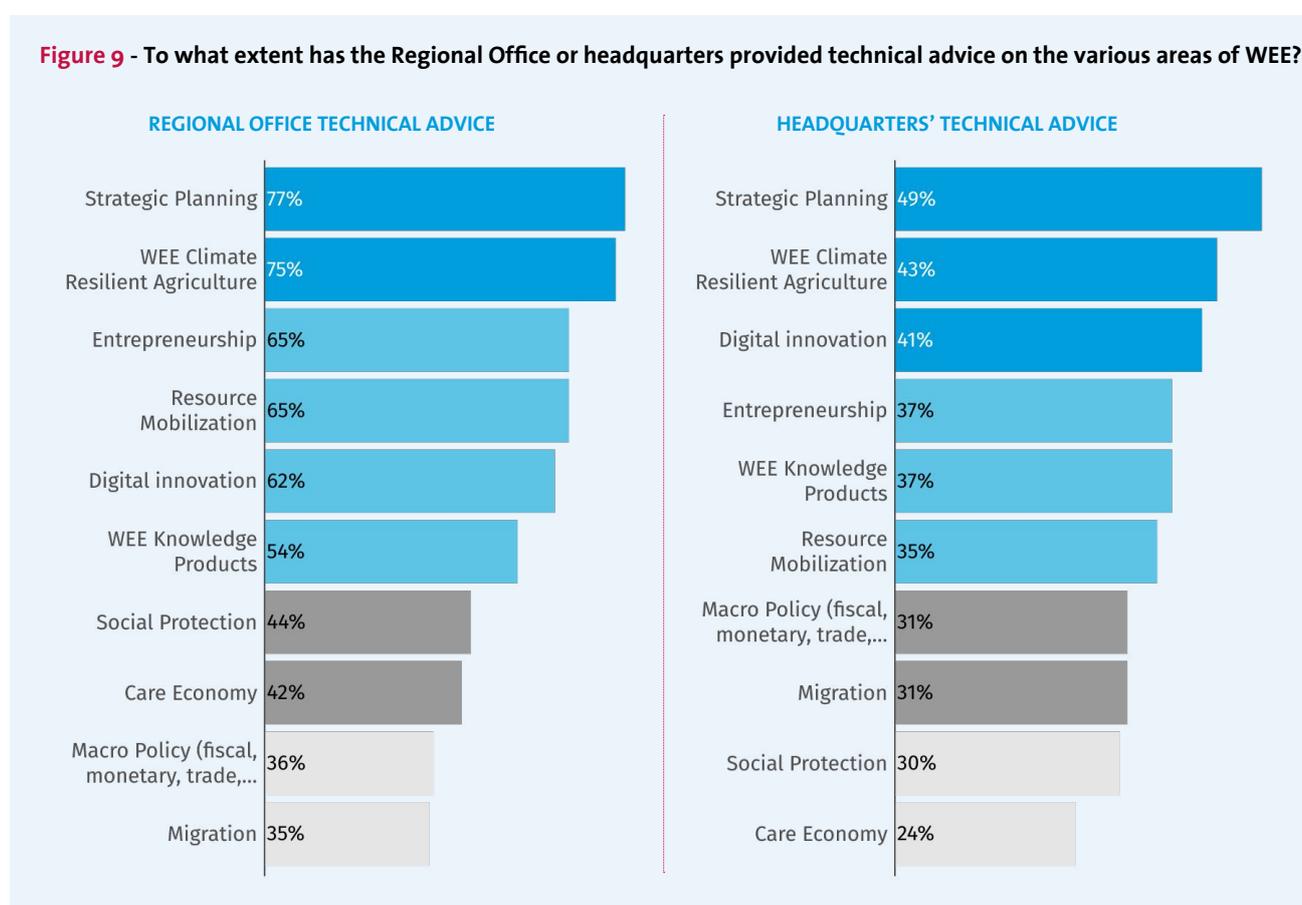
Organizational efficiency-2

To what extent are lessons from initiatives implemented in the field feeding into the regional approach and vice versa?

FINDING 9

Knowledge sharing in WEE programming occurs more frequently among colleagues within a specific Country Office, followed by interactions with the regional WEE unit, and lastly, it extends to sharing between different Country Offices. Unfortunately, the lessons derived from some WEE evaluations are seldom applied in subsequent planning cycles. Similarly, while regional knowledge production efforts are valuable, their effectiveness could be enhanced through implementation of robust knowledge management practices, such as ensuring adequate storage capacities and easy accessibility to knowledge products.

Figure 9 - To what extent has the Regional Office or headquarters provided technical advice on the various areas of WEE?



Source: Survey compiled by the evaluation team

According to the personnel survey conducted in November 2022 and summarized in Figure 9 above, 57 per cent of respondents (N = 50) received support from the regional WEE unit in various areas of interest, as compared to 38 per cent who stated having received support from headquarters.⁶⁵ According to survey respondents, the highest ranking areas of support received from headquarters and the Regional Office include: strategic planning, the WEE flagship programme, entrepreneurship, resource mobilization, and digital innovation. Technical advice in the areas of social protection, the care economy and macro policy is more frequently provided by the Regional Office than by headquarters.

Survey participants mentioned that they tended to share knowledge drawn from WEE programming with their Country Office colleagues first, then with the relevant Regional Office thematic unit and lastly with other Country Offices. It is interesting that support from the Regional Office scored higher than Country Office-to-Country Office learning interactions, probably because the regional WEE unit is regularly in touch with Country Offices either physically or virtually. However, it also points to the potential for increasing inter-office collaboration and learning, particularly between countries with a similar economic profile or those belonging to the same geopolitical space, such as the Sahel.

⁶⁵ Question.8: To what extent has the Regional Office provided support in the following areas? Question 9: To what extent has headquarters provided support in the following areas?

Figure 10 – Knowledge sharing within Country Offices, with Regional Office and with other Country Offices

Source: Survey compiled by the evaluation team targeting UN Women personnel in the WCA region

The fact that 63 per cent of respondents shared knowledge “(very) frequently” with other Country Offices is probably facilitated by flagship programming: the Climate Resilient Agriculture Programme has helped Country Offices move away from fragmented programming and has provided them with an opportunity to learn from each other, either directly or through the expert mediation of the Regional Office.

The Regional Office WEE team, in a positive move to support learning and innovation, has incorporated an innovation specialist position. This is providing impetus for innovation in the region (including on digital solutions, energy savings and alternatives, and reforestation) to support country flagship projects on climate resilient agriculture; document and share information and lessons on innovation; and reach out to donors for resource mobilization. In addition, the regional WEE team is reaching out to banks, financial technology companies and mobile operators to explore collaboration on the Buy from Women platform.⁶⁶ The Regional Office’s Buy from Women knowledge sharing webinar series is an initiative for internal capacity building, sharing of lessons learned and best practices on innovative projects and approaches.

Annual reports and various narratives are published on UN Women’s website, which serve as valuable tools for learning and record keeping. While, in theory, online or face-to-face opportunities for mutual learning are reinforced by programme evaluations, only five Country Offices have commissioned evaluations of WEE-related initiatives since the inception of UN Women. Furthermore, new proposal documents are not mandated⁶⁷ to be informed by evaluative evidence. Certain planning tools, including the Annual

Work Plans attached to Strategic Notes, are at times, not regarded as living documents that can be continuously updated over the course of a programme’s lifecycle. This issue came to light during the visit conducted by the team in Niger. Another notable instance is the Development Result Framework of UN Women in Cameroon. It was not updated to reflect the decision made in 2020 to urgently divert funding to the COVID-19 programme⁶⁸. Similarly, UN Women Côte d’Ivoire did not update its Development Result Framework to reflect an output associated with the African Development Bank-funded initiative on affirmative procurement. These oversights can have adverse implications for results monitoring and, consequently, may affect how Country Offices draw upon overall lessons learned from ongoing programmes.

The Regional Office is currently developing a communication strategy to effectively mobilize and influence stakeholders, both rights holders and duty bearers. This will change the way innovations and strategies are shared across the region and how they are analysed. It will boost the content of messages shared by Country Offices for advocacy purposes through social media platforms. These communications are ideally informed with knowledge generated at regional and headquarters levels, accessible through effective knowledge management systems.

The evaluation team encountered difficulties in collecting desk review documentation at the inception stage. This is probably related to the fragmented system of knowledge management in the region (the management, storage, organization, retrievability and accessibility of knowledge products) including products produced by the WEE team at Regional and Country Offices.

⁶⁶ Some limitations in the effectiveness of the Buy From Women initiative were observed two years ago in the Corporate Evaluation of UN Women’s Approach to Innovation

⁶⁷ UN Women’s guidelines and [checklist for submitting](#) new proposals to an Appraisal Committee primarily focus on ensuring that the evaluation process is properly planned and budgeted. They do not mandate the inclusion of evaluative evidence in new programme proposals, making it optional to demonstrate how a newly designed proposal is informed with lessons drawn from previous evaluations.

⁶⁸ “Support to women’s socioeconomic activities around COVID-19 induced value chains in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon”

A regional evaluation from 2019⁶⁹ recommended that the Regional Office allocate resources for knowledge management and standardize its practices in this area (including data storage). In its response, the Regional Office committed to “recruit a KM Officer at WCARO with coordination responsibilities in the region by December 2021”. This individual would help “organize and implement centralized knowledge repositories/ databases/ servers for storage and archiving of knowledge products”. As this position is not reflected in the region’s recruitment plan, institutional memory gaps can be expected.

While the UN Women’s global website and the UN Women Africa platform contain interesting advocacy narratives, the lack of dedicated and structured country websites that reflect programmes, initiatives and research findings make it more challenging to advocate for national policymaking.

The Regional Office finalized its Knowledge Management Strategy in 2020, but its implementation is still pending. Ideally, knowledge produced at regional or headquarters levels should be used at the country level. Despite significant efforts to produce and disseminate policy reports and briefs, personnel workload is such that they often do not have the time required for learning.

3.5 SUSTAINABILITY

Evaluation Question: What is the likelihood of long-term results or programme continuation after UN Women support has ended and, in particular, what innovative WEE approaches have potential for replication and scaling up

FINDING 10

UN Women’s efforts in rural community mobilization, capacity building and policy advocacy have established a good foundation for creating a sustainable and enabling environment for WEE.

MOBILIZATION OF RURAL COMMUNITIES

Establishing organizations and institutions are a means of ensuring that initiatives and interventions can continue once a programme has come to an end. UN Women supported the formation of women’s collective organizations and cooperatives, particularly in rural communities and, with the collaboration of key partners, provided considerable capacity building to these organizations as well as individual women, across a range of skills and knowledge.⁷⁰ This together with the acquisition of land for women’s access and/or ownership and their formalization in national economies through a number of projects in the region, has provided a strong basis for sustainability. In some cases, such as the 3R⁷¹ Programme, this is being reinforced by national and local government policy changes and integration into their ongoing programmes and budgets.

Along with other development organizations, UN Women has contributed to organizing women⁷² into local savings and loan associations whereby the women borrow from each other. The challenge is how to further develop what has already been established through these associations. Stakeholders recognized the need to access credit on a more significant scale and extend these opportunities to more members of their communities. Convincing many rural women to overcome their mistrust of financial institutions requires time as they prefer to borrow from those they know in their families and communities. However, village metal savings boxes do not offer sufficient levels of security, investment and return. Efforts to fill this gap were provided in Senegal through an agreement between BNP Paribas and Agrifed and in Central Africa Republic with the opening of a local microfinance agency.⁷³

⁶⁹ “Finding Nr.3” of the [Knowledge Management Evaluation](#) conducted in 2019 by UN Women WCARO. According to the said finding, “UN Women-WCA region possesses various types of Knowledge Products (KPs). These were however reportedly stored in different locations and their storage was mostly not well organized.” The Knowledge Management Evaluation established “the current state of the KM function by Department or Country Office across the region” and identified “opportunities for and barriers to its successful role as a knowledge broker and provider”. Its recommendations were used to develop this [Knowledge Management Strategy](#).

⁷⁰ Cfr. Effectiveness Section (Finding 6)

⁷¹ Transformative Approaches to Recognize, Reduce, and Redistribute Unpaid Care Work in Women’s Economic Empowerment Programming
⁷² See Annex 12: “4,650 rural women in Niger could access to revolving funds” (...) “1,830 women entrepreneurs were able to access financing from the Fund for the Empowerment of Women and Children”, etc.

⁷³ The evaluation team did not confirm the information according to which “1588 female farmers benefitted from a BNP Paribas credit line in Senegal” (...) “1,250 women in CAR had access to financial services delivered by a local microfinance agency”. UN Women WCARO, Annual report, 2021, p.12.

The short duration of interventions may prevent programmes from improving women's income in the longer term. Those Country Offices without major projects to implement longer-term community interventions (Cameroon, DRC and Sierra Leone) could only offer one-off training sessions and workshops. They focused on other UN Women priority areas where more funding was available. Some countries with sustained WEE projects over the last five–six years are seeing these come to an end,⁷⁴ without new projects on the horizon, despite demand for deepening and replication in other communities.

To sustain the mobilization of rural women and meet their expectations, UN Women will need to work with government agencies that regulate the banking sector to identify ways financial institutions can fulfil the development needs of poor rural women and adapt financial products that are accessible, affordable and understood by rural communities. This could include facilitation that allows more women to open and manage bank accounts and loans.

Another strategy for the sustainability and representation of women's community groups and cooperatives in relation to policy reform is to consolidate them into national organizations or federations. The Sierra Leone Country Office is currently supporting the formation of a national cooperative federation. In Liberia, over the years the

Country Office has made efforts and continues to support the formation of a national organization of the village loans and savings associations.

POLICY INFLUENCE

Policy reforms and their implementation are key indicators for sustainability. UN Women has engaged in advocacy for policy change at country and regional levels in WCA and made efforts to contribute to reform or consideration for reform in areas such as land ownership for women, gender-responsive procurement, women's entrepreneurship, agricultural policies, cooperative development, women's unpaid care work and green jobs transition.

The stakeholders consulted suggested that UN Women could focus more actively on research and advocacy for policy change, especially gender equality transformative aspects. The aim would be to have a deeper impact on addressing the structural obstacles to WEE and the anticipated flow-on effect on the lives of a greater number of women working in agriculture, as entrepreneurs, market vendors and traders or as employees in firms.

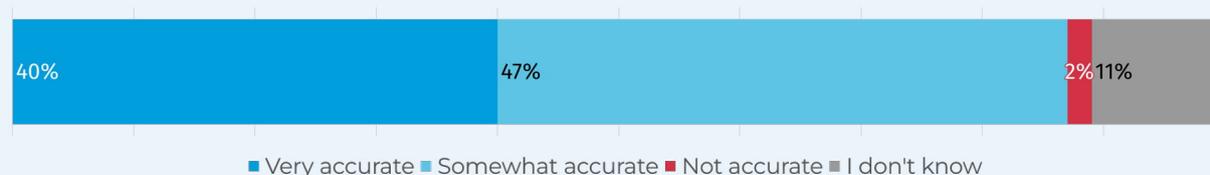
In this regard, increased focus on macroeconomic and fiscal policies and gender-responsive budget mechanisms as well as women's participation and leadership in climate change policies and implementation are required. Current efforts under way on the green economy transition speak to this concern.

BOX 2:

GOOD PRACTICES FOR INFRASTRUCTURE MAINTENANCE

A good practice that contributed to the harmonization of WEE capacity programmes across the region was the delivery of training by an agro-business expert UN Women projects in the region have included the provision of infrastructure equipment mainly to women farmers, such as seeds, machines for agricultural processing and milling; means of transport (tricycles and carts); support to construction of buildings for storage and processing; processing equipment; solar equipment; and purchase of agricultural inputs and grain for storage and resale. In some cases, facilities in markets have been upgraded. Beneficiaries are appreciative of this kind of assistance, but there is always the challenge of maintenance and replacement once a project is completed. Some good examples of anticipating maintenance needs were identified in Liberia, the women's farming collective asked each woman to contribute a small portion of the grain she milled at the community centre. These portions would be sold at market and the money obtained was put aside to pay for local expertise to repair and maintain the machinery. In Senegal, the programme included a component on training young people from the community on the maintenance and repair of equipment so they could intervene as needed, as well as earn income elsewhere based on their new skills.

Figure 11- Staff perceptions on sustainability



A good majority of respondents (87 per cent) perceived WEE programmes implemented by their Country Office as sustainable, with a measure of caution for half of the optimistic respondents.

Source: Evaluation survey conducted in November 2022 (number of participants: 55 personnel)

⁷⁴ The Accelerating Rural Women's Economic Empowerment is ending while the same Rural WEE initiative is ongoing from 2022 to 2027 in Niger.

FINDING 11

The evaluation found that some programmes with potential and relevance had lost momentum or been discontinued. However, programme managers have demonstrated creativity by incorporating elements of old programmes into new initiatives, indicating that the end of specific donor funding for a promising initiative does not necessarily mark the end of the programme.

GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUDGETING

Gender-responsive budgeting requires a long-term commitment to influence the budgeting decisions of national and local institutions. The Cameroon Government showed willingness to initiate reforms through the “Integrating Gender Responsive Budgeting in Aid Effectiveness” initiative,⁷⁵ which was funded by the European Union.⁷⁶ This programme allowed for the establishment of a foundation to implement gender-responsive budgeting processes in sectoral ministries and communes. While the programme successfully⁷⁷ integrated gender into national policy and budget frameworks and strengthened capacities, it regrettably met an untimely end due to the cessation of financial support, especially beyond the contributions received from the European Union. At present, the Cameroon Country Office’s 2022–2026 Strategic Note does not include gender-responsive budgeting activities, but there is a clear requirement for influential dialogue mechanisms, ongoing engagement and capacity building in this area. In addition, UN Women Nigeria, DRC and Sierra Leone abstained from including any outputs related to gender-responsive budgeting in their workplans of the period between 2018 and 2022. This regional trend signals a clear suspension of previous efforts in gender-responsive budgeting and underscores the necessity to assess the potential of prior gender-responsive budgeting impact and perceptions.

However, the evaluation did highlight two positive instances of continued programming through cross-thematic initiatives. One example is the OHCHR-PBF-UN Women Joint Programme in Liberia (2019–2021), which

focuses on [strengthening accountability frameworks, innovative financing, and gender-responsive budgeting to advance the implementation of UNSCRs on Women Peace and Security](#). This programme includes capacity strengthening for government actors and women’s organizations. Another collaboration is the Joint Programme on Rural Women’s Economic Empowerment involving FAO, WFP and UN Women, which works with the Liberian Government to establish a Gender-Responsive Planning and Budgeting Unit at the Ministry of Finance and gender desks in sectoral ministries to integrate gender mainstreaming into their work.⁷⁸ These examples demonstrate that even when some specific donor funding is discontinued, new programmes can carry forward some of the previous programme results in areas such as gender-responsive budgeting.

WOMEN IN INFORMAL CROSS-BORDER TRADE

The Women in Cross-Border Trade programme was implemented a decade ago in six African countries with the aim of improving the conditions of women cross-border traders and their contribution to poverty reduction, employment generation and regional integration. The programme provided assistance to form and expand cooperatives. It was distinctive in that it operated as a transborder initiative between Nigeria and Benin, between Rwanda and DRC, and between Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire. Its three expected outcomes⁷⁹ encouraged harmonization of practices across borders in the way women traders were handled. The programme is no longer operational in the WCA region.

⁷⁵ Two circular letters were signed by the Head of State giving clear instructions for gender to be mainstreamed in finance laws.

⁷⁶ Cfr. UN Women Cameroon, Country Portfolio Evaluation, 2020

⁷⁷ The Cameroon Government made efforts to implement gender-responsive budgeting by training technical staff at national and decentralized levels, and key civil society actors. The Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Planning jointly designed and implemented a capacity building action plan to integrate gender-responsive budgeting into national tools for planning, programming and budgeting. The Ministry of Finance committed to extending these efforts in the Public Financial Reform process, which was supposed to speed up the implementation of the gender-responsive budgeting action plan. Civil society was also engaged in this process. Dynamique Citoyenne was tasked with enhancing the capacities of CSO networks on gender-sensitive budget tracking for future national and local budget exercises. Furthermore, gender focal points were appointed in each ministry to oversee the gender mainstreaming development processes. Gender committees were also established in each ministry to support the focal points and increase staff exposure to gender issues. These committees have representatives from other ministries and provide important opportunities for alignment of plans and cross-learning. Research studies were conducted to track the budget of a sectoral ministry and monitor the government’s commitment to gender in the area of reproductive health.

⁷⁸ A Government respondent to the e-survey of the Global Evaluation Joint Programme Rural WEE in 2021, Liberia

⁷⁹ Outcome 1: Coalitions and networks of women cross-border traders effectively demand and obtain better services, women-friendly cross-border procedures and gender mainstreaming into African trade agreements and protocols of their governments and regional economic communities; Outcome 2: Regional economic communities and mainstream government institutions demonstrate leadership, commitment, and accountability to support women in informal cross-border trade and mainstream gender issues in trade agreement and processes; Outcome 3: Greater visibility of the contribution of women in informal cross-border trade to wealth creation, employment generation, poverty reduction and regional integration through knowledge sharing.

SECURING DONOR FUNDING

Areas that have consistently secured donor funding over the Strategic Note cycle and beyond are illustrated in Table 11 below.

Securing donor funding continuously over a period of six years and beyond, as seen in the case of Climate Smart Agriculture, Women Entrepreneurs, Rural Women's

Economic Empowerment and Alternative Livelihoods, is a strong indicator of sustainability in these areas. Consistent funding allows sufficient time to strengthen results in light of lessons learned, build trust with donors and community ownership for long-term impact.

Table 11 - Donor funding during 2018–2022

	BEFORE	2018				2019				2020				2021				2022				BEYOND
Climate smart agriculture																						
Women entrepreneurs																						
Rural WEE																						
Alternative livelihoods																						
Digital solutions in agriculture																						
Climate & Energy																						
Migration																						
COVID-19 Response																						
Laws and policy reform																						
Social Protection																						

Legend

Pre- and Post- Strategic Note	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
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Source: ATLAS data compiled and analysed by the evaluation team (Q4 2022)

3.6 GENDER EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

To what extent have gender and human rights considerations been integrated into programme design and implementation?

Were the processes and activities implemented during the intervention free from discrimination for all stakeholders, including those living with disability?

FINDING 12

UN Women's economic empowerment interventions in WCA prioritize a differentiated approach that considers the context and profile of targeted women. While collective agency was used with tangible benefit for women farmers, there is room for further action to support the economic empowerment of domestic workers and women living with disabilities.

The expert committee of the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has provided guidance on ensuring the rights of persons living with disabilities.⁸⁰ In addressing the evaluation question on gender equality and human rights, WEE interventions are examined through the lens of Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality.⁸¹ The broad notion of "women" in the phrase "women's economic empowerment" can be broken down using intersectionality to understand the specific categories or groups of women that may be overlooked.

The evaluation's task is to determine whether women in the region have been treated as a homogenous group or if differences among them based on physical conditions (disabled or not), income (rich or poor, business owners or unemployed), geographic location (urban or rural) and cultural or ethnic diversity have been taken into account.

This approach allows the evaluation to assess whether the leave no one behind principle has been adequately integrated into programme design and implementation. By exploring the intersecting dimensions of their identity-based exclusion,⁸² the evaluation hopes to uncover any programme coverage gaps and determine if the particular economic empowerment needs of women resulting from these intersections have been addressed.

UN Women and its partners in the WCA region have adopted various approaches to addressing structural barriers to economic empowerment, taking into consideration the context and the profile of women being targeted by a particular initiative implemented. While collective agency was leveraged with success for the benefit of women farmers and entrepreneurs, there is scope for recognizing the potential for action in favour of domestic workers, disabled women and, to a lesser extent,⁸³ women survivors of violence.

While not all programmes stress collective agency (e.g. UN Women's Affirmative Procurement Initiative), there is a nuanced approach when it comes to encouraging women's participation. The Second Chance Education programme, for instance, places a strong emphasis on individual agency for income generation. However, when the primary focus shifts towards women farmers, the importance of their collective agency becomes central to the programming strategy. This collective approach is particularly crucial in multi-country initiatives, such as those related to Climate Resilient Agriculture or the joint programme for Rural Women's Economic Empowerment. Without the involvement of female farmers in a robust collective comprising more than 10,000 individuals, securing financing from BNP Paribas for the rice agriculture initiative would have been a challenging endeavour.

⁸⁰ Going further than the general principles of the Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW, UN Women published in 2017 "Making the SDGs Count for Women with Disabilities". <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/6/issue-brief-making-the-sdgs-count-for-women-and-girls-with-disabilities>. And also Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016): General Comment No. 3 on Women and Girls with Disabilities. CRPD/C/GC/3. <https://undocs.org/en/CRPD/C/GC/3>.

⁸¹ The inclusion of women from underprivileged groups in a development programme can be understood through the lens of Kimberlé Crenshaw's analysis of the US anti-discrimination law. Crenshaw advocated for legal reform as she discovered, in a particular complaint about job discrimination, the frequency of discrimination appeared to be higher for black women, while black men and white women had no discrimination complaint. Crenshaw observed that there was no legal provision for people who were both black and women. Legal procedures against discrimination were therefore processed either on the basis of discrimination for being black or for being a women, not for being both.

⁸² It is not uncommon for individuals to bear multiple identities that are socially perceived as disadvantageous. For example, a woman may be born into the role of a 'wahaya' (a domestic worker treated as a slave) and also live with a disability.

⁸³ "To a lesser extent" because there is ongoing work for women survivors of violence, as cross-thematic programming is de facto established in the region (cfr. Coherence section of the Findings Chapter). Future strategic documents could reflect a more deliberate collaboration between the WEE and Violence Against Women units in view of improving ongoing efforts for the economic empowerment of violence against women survivors.

The increased leverage gained through organized cooperatives can also help negotiate land allocation with local and traditional authorities.

These programmes have helped reach some of the poorest women through collective organizations. In many instances, the starting point for community initiatives was with marginalized groups of illiterate rural women. Given their initial levels of empowerment, the interventions made a significant difference in their lives in terms of awareness, acquiring basic skills and spurring collective actions to improve their productivity and incomes. UN Women's support for village-level loans and savings associations was key for these women to save and access funds for investments and family needs (for example the village loan and savings associations in Liberia and Dimitra Clubs in Niger). Women in cooperatives with a large number of members have been able to negotiate and establish low-interest credit lines⁸⁴ with major banks.

While the principle of leave no one behind is being applied in many interventions in the region, focusing mainly on poor rural women,⁸⁵ it is not being applied systematically. In the selection of beneficiaries, interventions may reach women who already have a certain level of empowerment (skills, local status) and not the most vulnerable unless there is a more systematic and purposeful inclusion process. Currently, there are no ongoing WEE programmes in the WCA region that specifically target women involved in informal cross-border trade as a group of economic actors. However, some activities have been reported to include women who are disabled or survivors of violence.

DOMESTIC WORKERS

Certain groups of women require a collective voice to advocate for their economic rights, e.g. domestic workers. The workload of domestic workers⁸⁶ often includes serving women from various social groups⁸⁷ in sectors such as healthcare, education and manufacturing. By performing household tasks such as cleaning, cooking, laundry and childcare, domestic workers help alleviate the time burden⁸⁸ on women who are more privileged, allowing the latter to pursue more gratifying work, education and leisure activities. It is therefore vital to recognize domestic work as a legitimate and valuable form of labour by understanding that these efforts enable more privileged women to balance their professional and domestic responsibilities.

It is equally essential to acknowledge that the conditions under which domestic workers operate significantly impact their human rights and empowerment. Factors such as the number of hours worked, working conditions, salary and the nature of their tasks are all critical considerations. However, existing terminology, such as “unpaid care and domestic work” or “care-giving and domestic work” used by the 3R programme, fails to specifically address the workers whose occupation⁸⁹ is domestic work. Regional and Country Offices' planning documents, while containing strategic language⁹⁰ on women's rights in relation to (and at) work, lack specific interventions dedicated to advocating for fair and decent working conditions for domestic workers. This includes adequate pay, legal protections and access to education and training opportunities.

UN Women could support organizations that empower domestic workers by providing knowledge of their legal rights, working conditions and avenues for redress in cases of exploitation or abuse. Additionally, advocacy efforts could be directed towards policymakers and employers to push for better working conditions, fair wages and legal protections for domestic workers.

⁸⁴ In 2021, the 16,000 member strong REFAN (Network of Women Farmers of the North) obtained a customized credit line from BICIS (International Bank for Trade and Industry of Senegal). Another bank, BNP Paribas, approved a credit line for 1,588 women farmers.

⁸⁵ Cfr. Finding 5 under “Effectiveness” section: In many instances, the starting point for community initiatives was with marginalized groups of illiterate rural women for which the interventions made a significant difference in their lives through village level loans and savings associations (for instance, the village loan and savings associations in Liberia and Dimitra Clubs in Niger).

⁸⁶ A domestic worker is understood as an individual who performs various tasks and responsibilities within a household setting. This includes individuals engaged in providing direct services such as cleaning, cooking, childcare, eldercare and other household chores for financial compensation. Domestic slaves may also undertake similar responsibilities as those performed by domestic workers but they are forced into unpaid labour and subjected to exploitative conditions. Domestic workers deserve fair compensation and protection of their rights, while efforts should be made to eliminate domestic slavery and ensure the dignity and well-being of all individuals engaged in domestic work.

⁸⁷ Destremau B. Laljtier B. [2002]. « Introduction. Femmes en domesticité. Les domestiques du Sud, au Nord et au Sud, *Revue Tiers-Monde*, vol. 43, No 170, p. 249-264

⁸⁸ According to a study conducted in Benin and Togo, women living in urban settings spend four times as much time as men on unpaid domestic and care work. [Cfr. ADJAMAGBO Agnès, et al. 2016 « Mise en couple et devenir des unions : comparaison de deux capitales ouest-africaines, Cotonou et Lomé », in *Trajectoires et âges de la vie*. Sophie Penneec et Jean-Paul Sanderson (dir.), Association internationale des démographes de langue française, Paris.]

⁸⁹ Domestic slaves still exist in some parts of Mauritania, Niger (the “wahaya”), Mali and Northern Nigeria. Paid domestic work occurs more frequently than unpaid domestic work.

⁹⁰ Decent work and social protection.

PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES

In theory, all UN Women's WEE programmes should be fully inclusive and based on human rights principles, including people living with disabilities. However, previous evaluations⁹¹ indicate that disability inclusion is insufficient. This evaluation confirms that disability inclusion is rarely explicit⁹² at the design stage. Concept documents fail to analyse the situation of people living with disabilities and the multiple intersecting factors of exclusion they often encounter. Moreover, the results and activities do not explicitly target this vulnerable group, nor are indicators disaggregated by disability.

Disability inclusion during the programme implementation stage remains inadequate. Leaders of cooperatives interviewed during the evaluation of the "*Women, Agriculture and Climate Change*" programme in the Central African Republic last year clearly acknowledged their obligations, stating that the programme did not exclude anyone. However, during a field visit the evaluation team later noted a lack of visible representation of persons living with disabilities, suggesting the absence of deliberate inclusion strategies. It is therefore imperative to move beyond mere avoidance of exclusion and genuinely promote the inclusion of people with disabilities: they should be specifically targeted at the programme design stage and sensitized to their rights as active participants.

WOMEN VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE

There are instances within programmes where women affected by gender-based violence and violence from conflicts have been included in activities. For example, the Agrifed Centre (Agriculture, Women and Sustainable Development) in Kinshasa, DRC trains rural women on sustainable methods of cassava production and transformation and includes survivors of violence or vulnerable women on how to start a sustained, income-generating activity for their families. In Liberia as part of the Spotlight programme, poor women traditional practitioners of female genital mutilation are trained on alternative livelihoods. Training programmes for women farmers and communities include awareness raising on gender-based violence.

To some extent these instances are a result of developing integrated and inclusive approaches at the community level, addressing the multi-dimensional gender barriers and contexts, even if such holistic modalities are not overtly programmed at country or regional levels.

⁹¹ Cfr. the Country Portfolio Evaluation reports of UN Women in Nigeria, Cameroon and DRC.

⁹² For instance, UN Women DRC's 2018-2019 Strategic Note had no reference to disability. In contrast, the subsequent Strategic Note includes disability while elaborating on how Output 2.2.2 (related to WEE) would leave no one behind.



Photo: © UN Women/WCA Regional Office

4. CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSION 1 :**Relevance**

UN Women's WEE programming in the WCA region is well-suited to its operating context. Specifically, UN Women's work supporting women's income-generating activities are predominantly focused on the agricultural sector (see Tables 5 and 6), which is a significant contributor to both employment and GDP in the region. Additionally, a considerable proportion of livelihood-support interventions are integrated into broader programmes addressing thematic impact areas, such as EAW and PSH. Interestingly, these thematic combinations were not explicitly outlined in the relevant Strategic Notes; instead, they were introduced in the field arising from the challenges posed by the volatile security and climate conditions prevalent in the Sahel region and its surroundings. Moreover, UN Women has demonstrated agility in responding to context-specific challenges, as evidenced by the customization of WEE programmes to respond to the urgent needs imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, while the region aims to address macro-level policies, the specific details regarding the monetary aspect of these macroeconomic policies remain unclear.

CONCLUSION 2:**COHERENCE**

Coherence within WEE programming in the WCA region is facilitated by two essential factors. The first being the pivotal role played by the WEE team at the Regional Office, which provides technical assistance on WEE interventions; produces innovative knowledge products; and cultivates partnerships at the regional level for policy action. The team consistently advocates for transformative approaches to eliminate structural obstacles to WEE and encourages engagement with government bodies for policy change and implementation, with a particular focus on macroeconomic and fiscal policy.

The second factor is the streamlining role UN Women's corporate Flagship Programming Initiative has played in WEE programming in the region by focusing on the five most frequent types of interventions, which also happen to be key components of the Climate Smart Agriculture Flagship Initiative. These interventions include strengthening marketing strategies, aiming to improve agriculture productivity using technology and seeds; enhancing the capacities of women farmers' cooperatives; and providing access to land tenure and finance. The Climate Resilient Agriculture Initiative has therefore emerged as a crucial factor in harmonizing practices across the region. Every country in the region has opted for at least one component of the Climate Resilient Agriculture Initiative, further contributing to the coherence of WEE programming in the region.

CONCLUSION 3:**EFFECTIVENESS**

Several evaluations of WEE projects and country portfolios in the region have shown that the attainment of capacity-building targets for women was generally satisfactory (see Table 7), although at times it fell short of the initial goal in terms of the number of women trained. However, as shown in DRC, not all programmes were successful in securing women's access to land. In addition, the demand for increased access to income and finance remains much higher than programme budgets can afford. At best, these interventions can serve as pilots or models to be adopted by local and national governments and scaled up.

It is notable that in numerous initiatives within the WCA region (Women, Peace and Security, Conflict and Crisis), UN Women has adopted integrated approaches, particularly at the community level, even if not explicitly planned. These approaches were aimed at achieving more comprehensive achievements in gender equality while simultaneously bolstering women's agency, knowledge acquisition and leadership, thereby serving as crucial elements for long-term sustainability. To achieve these outcomes, the approaches entailed expanding the scope of WEE projects to encompass additional dimensions such as addressing gender-based violence, providing leadership training, promoting governance around rights, access to land and influencing local government policies. Similar approaches were observed in other UN Women projects addressing gender-based violence, conflict situations, and internal and cross-border migration, where livelihood and WEE components were incorporated into the implementation process.

CONCLUSION 4:**Efficiency**

UN Women has placed greater emphasis on creating policy and legal environments that support WEE. This has led to an increase in the organization's knowledge-related interventions, with the WEE team in the region increasingly relying on expert knowledge and specialized economists to conduct macro-level policy work. However, only a few Country Offices have been successful in recruiting personnel with the necessary expertise. As a result, the Regional Office has seen a surge in demand for the development of a new conceptual framework for normative and policy-based advocacy. This trend, added to the high proportion of personnel with short-term contract arrangements, will place a significant strain on the region's knowledge management system, which as noted elsewhere⁹³ has room for improvement.

⁹³The region's ability to maintain institutional memory was assessed as weak. [Knowledge Management Evaluation](#), 2019, WCARO

CONCLUSION 5:**Sustainability**

The evaluation noted an important challenge facing many interventions: the loss of momentum or discontinuation once funding ends. In agriculture, this challenge was addressed in part by supporting the formation of women's collective organizations and cooperatives in rural communities and providing them with the skills and knowledge necessary to sustain and scale up initiatives. These efforts have laid a foundation for sustainability, which can serve as a model for other programmes.

While it is too early to assess the sustainability of newly introduced policy interventions, the right choice has been made in targeting government actors for advocacy, training and consultations. To succeed in the normative and policy area, it is crucial to build a solid base of knowledgeable economics personnel through training and recruitment. In doing so, a programme can improve its chances of achieving sustained impact and effectiveness beyond the life cycle of donor funding.

CONCLUSION 6:**Gender Equality and Human Rights**

UN Women and its partners have adopted a thoughtful approach to WEE in the WCA region, considering the specific context and characteristics of the women being targeted. Interventions designed for women farmers prioritize collective agency, while programmes such as the *Affirmative Procurement Initiative* and *Second Chance Education* focus on enhancing individual agency.

However, the evaluation revealed the need to further address the diverse layers of identity that may hinder the enjoyment of economic rights among the targeted women. Specifically, disability inclusion was found to be insufficient in WEE programmes. Additionally, the concerns of domestic workers have not been adequately accounted for in the WEE programming in the region.

5. LESSONS LEARNED

While the gender-responsive budgeting programme in Cameroon was affected by a lack of funding, regional experiences demonstrate that the discontinuation of donor funding for a promising initiative does not necessarily imply the end of the programme. The Liberia Country Office has successfully incorporated programme outcomes from an initiative where funding came to an end into their existing programmes, such as the Joint Programme on Rural Women's Economic Empowerment and the WPS programmes, by including a gender-responsive budgeting component in their workplan. Therefore, a new programme, regardless of its primary focus, can continue to build upon previous programme results that were unable to be sustained due to discontinued donor funding.

The evaluation has highlighted that the establishment and reinforcement of women's cooperatives have served as a stable foundation where project funding was not sustained. Capacity building of rural women and women entrepreneurs has shown existing institutional gaps, particularly in terms of access to affordable credit and adapted market facilities. For greater gender responsiveness and reform of finance and market institutions, UN Women can play a key role in linking the cohorts of women it has already provided with capacity development with relevant programmes from international finance institutions and national agencies.



Photo: © UN Women/WCA Regional Office

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following evaluation recommendations stem from extensive consultations with dedicated WEE programme managers across multiple business units within the WCA region. They also draw from ideas and feedback gathered during focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. As a result, they are poised to guide the way forward in enhancing and optimizing the WEE programs.

RECOMMENDATION 1.

Based on findings

1,2,3,6,7

Urgency



Complexity



RELEVANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS

The UN Women West and Central Africa Regional Office should continue to focus on research and advocacy for policy change to address structural obstacles to women's economic empowerment. This should also include women's rights to decent work and social protection, macroeconomic and fiscal policies, gender-responsive budget mechanisms and women's participation and leadership in climate change policies and implementation.

Upgrading women's skills and agency to access high-quality, green jobs will require the development of agribusiness and industrial sectors for job creation, with women receiving a fair share through technical skills training. Millions of poor, rural women with little education also need support to survive and improve their livelihoods in the face of climate change disasters, including those in conflict zones. Decent and green jobs may not be available to them in the short term, so the community interventions implemented by UN Women or other actors are still necessary, ideally as part of government-funded programmes.

A strategic transition plan could be developed incorporating one or several of the four optional pathways proposed below. For example:

4. Continue to deliver rural community interventions in partnership with other agencies while attempting to achieve higher results.
5. Continue to deliver community projects, but evolve strategies to co-design and implement them, with the goal of handing over to local, district and national governments, CSOs and other entities.
6. Phase out these types of projects and instead focus on policy and the enabling environment through research, data analysis and strategic lessons learned, with a broader impact and influence on macroeconomic and fiscal policies.
7. A combination of the above options:
 - a. The UN Women WCA Regional and Country Offices could choose to continue delivering rural community interventions in partnership with other agencies, with a focus on achieving higher results leveraging the digital innovation component as emphasized by Pillar-1 of the African Union GEWE Strategy (2018-2028).⁹⁴ To this end, knowledge-sharing between UN agencies is key to solving issues encountered by the Buy from Women initiative and strengthening the production component of agriculture interventions as demonstrated elsewhere⁹⁵ on the continent.
 - b. The UN Women WCA Regional and Country Offices could continue delivering community projects with an emphasis on co-designing and implementing these projects in partnership with local, district and national governments, CSOs and other entities. The ultimate goal would be to hand over these projects to partners. This requires a preliminary mapping of existing initiatives by various actors, including governments and CSOs. In post-humanitarian contexts, where communities are in the process of recovering from the aftermath of conflicts or natural disasters, income-generation projects will persist. Therefore, given that implementation of cross-thematic projects (EVAW-WPS-WEE) will remain a defining feature of UN Women's interventions in the WCA region, it is imperative for personnel at the Regional and Country Offices to formally recognize and embrace multi-thematic approaches. This entails active collaboration in the design and execution of relevant interventions.
 - c. The UN Women WCA Regional and Country Offices could phase out community projects and instead concentrate on policy and the enabling environment. This would involve conducting research, data analysis and strategic lessons learned to influence macroeconomic and fiscal policies, resulting in a broader impact.
 - d. The UN Women WCA Regional and Country Offices could combine a number of the above three options, leveraging the strengths of each to maximize impact and sustainability.

By selecting and implementing one or several of these pathways and continuing to strengthen staff capacity on WEE at the country level, UN Women can optimize its resources and efforts to achieve its goals in the WCA region, while ensuring a smooth and effective transition.

Responsible units: All business units in WCA region

⁹⁴ Pillar 1 focuses on maximizing opportunities, outcomes and e-tech dividends for women

⁹⁵ Clemence Uwamutarambirwa designed the Smart Potato Greenhouse Technology app, story by Pearl Amina Karung in Africa Renewal, 28 April 2023.

RECOMMENDATION 2.*Based on findings*

1,4,5

Urgency*Complexity***COHERENCE**

The Regional Office should elaborate an explicit WEE typology of countries of the region, based on their profile using different parameters such as their economic situation; whether they have faced terrorism and rebel uprisings; and the prevalence of refugees and internally displaced persons.

Other factors to consider in this typology of countries include their climate, geopolitical and governance contexts, and whether they are a destination for migration or a country of origin for migration. By taking these factors into account, the Regional Office can facilitate more deliberate, customized and integrated⁹⁶ WEE programming, particularly in countries with state fragility, facing conflicts and a high prevalence of refugees and internally displaced persons. Prominent among these parameters is the monetary architecture that prevails in the region.

Developing gender-responsive macroeconomic policies in the region calls for a well-defined strategy of engagement with the regional bodies regulating monetary policy.

Additionally, future strategic documents should reflect a more deliberate collaboration between the WEE and Violence Against Women units to improve ongoing efforts for the economic empowerment of violence against women survivors.

Responsible units: *WEE team at the Regional Office*

RECOMMENDATION 3**EFFICIENCY***Based on findings*

8, 9

Urgency*Complexity*

The Regional and Country Offices should progressively aim to improve contractual arrangements for their WEE personnel and strengthen their capacities in the area of gender-responsive, macroeconomic policy. While the regional WEE team's contribution of knowledge products is unique and significant, it could improve its role as a knowledge hub on WEE and policy-advice provider through the following knowledge management practices:

- collaborating with academic institutions to generate high-quality knowledge;
- conducting an in-house inventory of knowledge products, including evaluation reports on WEE;
- collaborating with other knowledge-based UN agencies to improve expertise and knowledge-sharing practices;
- conducting a knowledge needs assessment by surveying internal and external users to address gaps between available knowledge and needs;
- articulating and implementing standardized knowledge creation, storage and dissemination procedures;
- expanding existing platforms and emulating good practices already in place, such as Gender Cafe, Peace Huts, Gender Resource Centers, Gender Knowledge Center, Gender Corners and Brown Bag discussions;
- adapting dissemination products and reducing language and literacy barriers, such as creating videos rather than printed materials and using language that is appropriate for the targeted audience; and
- building capacity and agency of grassroots membership-based women's organizations for programme implementation and not only relying on CSOs for delivery.

Responsible units: *WEE team at the Regional Office, Country Offices in dialogue with relevant units at headquarters*

⁹⁶ Programming that takes advantage of potential synergies with other ongoing programmes in a different impact area: Governance, Women, Peace and Security; EVAW, etc.

RECOMMENDATION 4.*Based on findings*

10 and 11

Urgency*Complexity***SUSTAINABILITY**

In general terms, for sustainability, it is crucial to focus on building the capacity of local organizations and institutions, especially in rural areas, providing them with the necessary skills and knowledge to sustain and scale up programmes. To ensure long-term viability, the Regional Office should assess programmes such as gender-responsive budgeting and Women in Cross-Border Trade that have experienced a decline, marked by a decrease in their scope and funding despite their continued relevance and necessity in the region. This review could help to generate innovative ideas aimed at reigniting gender-responsive budgeting initiatives within the current context, potentially as stand-alone initiatives or as integrated components of ongoing interventions in multiple countries.

Another EU-funded programme that was discontinued is the Women in Cross Border Trade initiative. After a similar review of its ongoing relevance and necessity, the initiative could either be revived as a separate programme, or integrated as a sub-section within existing major WEE programmes. For example, the policy aspect of the Women in Cross Border Trade could be integrated into other WEE policy programmes, as could other components. To regain momentum in the WCA region for the Gender Responsive Budgeting and Planning programme, the Regional Adviser on WEE should advocate for the establishment of closer

collaboration between the WEE and Governance units at corporate level. This collaboration has the potential to establish synergies between the new economic policy projects and intended outcomes of gender-responsive budgeting, particularly in terms of advocacy work and capacity building. Another option, as noted from the Liberia Country Office, involves incorporating programme outcomes from a discontinued project into the workplan of a project with available funding resources.

Responsible units: *All business units in WCA region*

RECOMMENDATION 5.*Based on finding*

12

Urgency*Complexity***GENDER EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

The WCA Regional and Country Offices should go beyond being non-discriminatory by ensuring their economic empowerment policy and programme proposals refer explicitly to disability and under-privileged groups to facilitate inclusiveness at the implementation stage for the poorest and most marginalized.

The Entity should leverage its convening power with other UN organizations to jointly advocate for the economic rights of domestic workers by (a) revising ongoing interventions on unpaid care work or designing future programmes with dispositions that provide for the rights and welfare of (un)paid domestic workers;⁹⁷ (b) actively participating in policy dialogues at regional and national levels and collaborating with governments, employers' associations and labour rights organizations to advocate for the abolition of domestic slavery and the regulation of paid domestic work through the amendment of the Labour Code and legal frameworks, formulation and implementation of policies that protect and promote

the rights of domestic workers; (c) gathering data on the population of domestic workers and domestically enslaved persons⁹⁸ and adding this topic to its research, data collection and knowledge sharing plans; and (d) by partnering in particular with the International Labour Organization to support the efforts of civil society groups and domestic workers' associations to acknowledge the importance of fair compensation, the eradication of domestic slavery and the need to combat exploitation and protect the rights and well-being of domestically enslaved persons and domestic workers.

Responsible units: *All business units in WCA region*

⁹⁷Domestic workers as all individuals involved in (un-)paid household chores for their livelihood

⁹⁸This phrase serves to recognize that slavery is a social construct. There is no "natural" slaves as such.

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UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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