

CASE STUDY

EVALUATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN THE AMERICAS AND CARIBBEAN

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This document was prepared as part of the UN Women Evaluation of Civil Society Engagement in the Americas and Caribbean by the UN Women Independent Evaluation Service. See the full evaluation report and other materials [here](#).



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1. BACKGROUND

1.1. UN Women Civil Society Advisory Groups

The creation of Civil Society Advisory Groups (CSAGs) followed a 2010 General Assembly Resolution encouraging the “meaningful contribution” of civil society organizations to UN Women’s work.¹ CSAGs were reflected in the organization’s Strategic Plan 2011-2013,² and later defined in the *Civil Society Advisory Group Strategy* (2015) as “an institutional mechanism for regular dialogue, between UN Women and leaders from the gender equality movement, on key gender equality issues and priorities at national, regional and global levels”³.

CSAGs have a double and complementary role. First, they serve an advisory role through which civil society’s prominent leaders and experts provide technical and political inputs to inform UN Women decision-making and strategic positioning. Second, CSAGs are meant to fulfil an advocacy role that could leverage the CSAG members advocacy capacity in promoting women’s rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women through their engagement on inter-governmental processes and platforms.

CSAGs may have a global, regional, and national footprint and represent a clear expression of UN Women’s convening power. Globally, UN Women have 42 CSAGs in operation under the guidance of UN Women headquarters Civil Society Unit. CSAGs are present on Arab States, Asia and the Pacific,

Europe and Central Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean⁴ including more than 500 members of a diverse group of gender equality advocates, such as: women’s rights leaders; male gender equality advocates⁵; youth leaders; indigenous groups; LGBTQI+ leaders; labour/trade union leaders; feminist media advocates; progressive and feminist faith-based organization leaders⁶.

1.2. Civil Society Advisory Groups in the Americas and Caribbean region

In the Americas and Caribbean region there are both regional and national CSAGs. Considering the period between 2018 and 2022, ACRO and eight offices had at least one CSAG term. CSAGs were discontinued in Brazil (2018) and Bolivia (2021), but, in 2023, a new mandate has been implemented in Bolivia. The Caribbean Multi-Country Office (MCO) made attempts to reactivate its CSAG in 2018, and although it remains inactive, the office created a Civil Society Reference Group within the Spotlight Initiative with an advisory role with relevant civil society representatives as well as set up a regular alternative consultative mechanism for engaging civil society. Finally, as of the writing of this report, groups are active in ACRO and other six country offices, namely: Argentina; Bolivia; Colombia; Ecuador; El Salvador; Guatemala; and Mexico. More detailed information on CSAGs in the region can be found on the table below.

¹ “Requests the head of the Entity to continue the existing practice of effective consultation with civil society organizations, and encourages their meaningful contribution to the work of the Entity”. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 2 July 2010, p.09, §55. See <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Executive%20Board/GA-Res-64-289-en-Adopted%20by%20the%20General%20Assembly%20on%202%20July%202010%20pdf.pdf>.

² “UN-Women will work to ensure more systematic consultations with civil society at all levels, including establishing a civil society advisory group at the global level and, where required,

at national and regional levels”. UNW/2011/9, p.20, §54. See <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Executive%20Board/EB-2011-AS-UNW-2011-09-StrategicPlan-en.pdf>.

³ Civil Society Advisory Group Strategy (2015), p.09.

⁴ See <https://unwomen.sharepoint.com/sites/extranet/csag/Pages/Home.aspx>.

⁵ The evaluation team identified on data collection that, throughout their terms, Bolivia CSAG had three men on its conformation and Colombia CSAG had two.

⁶ See <https://unwomen.sharepoint.com/Intergovernmental-Support/civilsociety/Pages/CSAGs.aspx>.

Table 1. Snapshot of CSAGs in Latin America and the Caribbean

Managing Office	CSAG 2018-22	Active in 2023?	# of CSAG groups	Periods	LNOB	Maturity level ⁷
ACRO	Yes	Yes	2	2018-2020 2020-2022	Yes	High
Argentina	Yes	Yes	1	2022-2025	Yes	Medium
Bolivia	Yes	Yes	2	2018-2021 2023-2024	TBC	Medium
Brazil	Yes	No	1	2016-2018	Yes	Low
Caribbean	No	No*	0	N/A	N/A	N/A
Chile	No	No	0	N/A	N/A	N/A
Colombia	Yes	Yes	4	2016-2018 2018-2019 2019-2021 2021-2023	Yes	High
Ecuador	Yes	Yes	3	2017-2019 2020-2022 2023-2025	Yes	High
El Salvador	Yes	Yes	2	2016-2020 2021-2023	Yes	Medium
Haiti	No	No	0	N/A	N/A	N/A
Honduras	No	No	0	N/A	N/A	N/A
Guatemala	Yes	Yes		2017-2018 2018-2022		High
Mexico	Yes	Yes	3	2018-2019 2020-2022 2023-2024	Yes	High
Uruguay	No	No	0	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total	64,3% 9/14	50% 7/14	N/A	57% 40/70	50% 7/14	N/A

Source: Evaluation team based on desk review;
N/A = not applicable

LNOB = satisfactory inclusion of populations who are at risk of being left behind and face greater vulnerability

*Caribbean MCO has a regular mechanism for civil society dialogue that is not a CSAG

2. OBJECTIVES AND APPROACH

2.1. Objective and scope

As part of the overall evaluation of UN Women’s engagement with civil society in the Americas and the Caribbean region, this case study is focused on engagement using CSAGs as

participatory spaces both to achieve advisory and advocacy results. In this sense, the case study assesses UN Women’s national and regional CSAGs characteristics, roles and operation in the Americas and Caribbean region and contributes to the following evaluation general primary objectives:

⁷ The maturity level was calculated based on a sum of the following variables: presence of a CSAG between 2018 and 2022 (binary: 0 or 1 point); presence of a CSAG in 2023 (binary: 0 or 1 point); presence of a CSAG group before 2016 (binary: 0 or 2 points); number of CSAG groups between 2018 and 2023 (0 to 3 points, counting 1 point for each group up to the maximum of 3 groups); and frequency of meetings (0= null; 1=low; 2=medium; 3=high). The maximum points available was 10, which was only achieved by two offices (Colombia and Mexico). The final maturity level was provided using the following scale: 0 point = N/A; 1-4 points = low; 5-7 = medium; and 8-10 = high

- Assess whether UN Women’s implementation modalities are well-suited to foster effective achievement of programmatic results with CSOs;
- Identify key bottlenecks, challenges, and solutions to engaging efficiently with CSOs through UN Women’s main modalities;
- Map major civil society initiatives in the region and identify lessons for UN Women senior management and programme staff based on what has or has not been achieved; and
- Recommend improvements for driving impact with CSO alliances in the region, including those representing LNOB constituencies, to inform implementation of the ACRO Strategic Note 2022- 2025 and UN Women Strategic Plan 2022-2025.

Additionally, the case study seeks the following additional and specific objectives:

- Collect, systematize and analyze data across the indicators listed on the CSAG Analytical Framework and other emerging areas of sample of CSAGs that are representative of evaluation selected managing offices typology and criteria;
- Identify overall trends in activity of CSAGs over time across the region in each managing office using secondary data (annual reports; evaluations);
- Systematize CSAG configuration approaches by UN Women managing offices across different country typologies based on office size, context, innovation, length of existence, etc.
- Identify from data most significant changes and generate insights into what types of CSAGs, managing offices, or other factors may be affecting performance; and
- Propose feasible action points to leverage national and regional CSAGs performance and roles in the Americas and Caribbean region in the context of the implementation of the

ACRO Strategic Note 2022-2025 and UN Women Strategic Plan 2022-2025.

The scope of this exercise will include national and regional CSAGs over the 2018-2022 period as well as relevant corporate policy and procedure.⁸ Thematic or programme civil society reference groups with similar structure and functions as CSAGs, such as the Spotlight Initiative Civil Society Reference Group, will also be object of analysis. This topic was selected as a case study given the high relevance of CSAGs for UN Women’s engagement with civil society in the Americas and the Caribbean region, operating as a space for civil society participation and for advisory/advocacy support to UN Women managing offices. Thus, this case study provides an opportunity for learning and enhanced utility through the identification of good practices, lessons and potential operational enhancements regarding CSAGs.

2.2. Methodological approach

This case study focuses in one of the three overarching evaluation questions of this thematic exercise, namely:

3. To what extent has UN Women effectively enabled the inclusion of CSOs in its work to influence gender priorities and policies, including those representing LNOB constituencies?

3.1 To what extent have civil society advisory groups provided a meaningful and useful participatory mechanism for promoting CSO engagement in UN Women’s work?

In line with the evaluation report, this case study addresses these questions based on the key criteria of coherence, sustainability, efficiency, and effectiveness using standard definitions of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development’s Development Assistance Committee

⁸ This analysis does not include the Spotlight Civil Society National Reference Group mechanisms.

with the integration of human rights and gender in a cross-cutting manner⁹.

As proposed in the Evaluation Matrix of the Inception Report of this exercise, sub-question 3.1 should be answered through several performance indicators. Additionally, during the field phase of the evaluation, CSAGs were further identified as a main topic both for their relevance during the period under analysis and for the strategic role as a participatory space for UN Women ACRO in the next years. Having this in mind, a CSAG case study analytical framework was integrated into the evaluation’s methodological approach (see below table) to support UN Women decision-making in a formative manner, including additional indicators. The case study will allow for a deeper analysis of CSAGs functioning and

potential role in the region, as detailed in the table below.

Data for this case study was collected and analyzed through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with UN Women personnel and CSAG former and current members; a survey of civil society partners in the region; and desk review of documents listed in the annex. In terms of limitations, the main challenge was the absence of documents for some managing offices, notably meeting minutes, that were not done or provided for all registered CSAGs meetings. This limitation was overcome by the collection of additional data through interviews with UN Women personnel and CSAGs former and current members.

Table 2. CSAG case study analytical framework

<p>Objective of desk review: Map and assess CSAGs as a priority modality for UN Women’s consultation with CSOs at national/regional level with dual purpose of (a) answering key evaluation questions on CSAG and dialogue; and (b) informing ACRO’s planned establishment of new regional CSAG, as well as in COs such as Haiti and Bolivia</p>
<p>Related evaluation questions: 2.2. To what extent has coherence between different thematic/programmatic areas of UN Women offices in their engagement with CSOs affected results and partnerships? 3.1. To what extent have civil society advisory groups provided a meaningful and useful participatory mechanism for promoting CSO engagement in UN Women’s work? 3.2. To what extent have strategic dialogue and coordination effectively facilitated the integration of CSO perspectives into relevant national and regional platforms, policy spaces, and agendas?</p>
<p>Approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect, systematize, and analyze data across below indicators and other emerging areas of sample of CSAGs that are representative of evaluation selected managing offices typology and criteria • Identify overall trends in activity of CSAGs over time across the region in each managing office using secondary data (annual reports, evaluations) • Systematize CSAG configuration approaches by UN Women managing offices across different country typologies based on office size, context, innovation, length of existence, etc. • Identify from data most significant changes and generate insights into what types of CSAGs, managing offices, or other factors may be affecting performance • Propose feasible action points to leverage national and regional CSAG performance and roles in the Americas and Caribbean region in the context of the implementation of the ACRO Strategic Note 2022-2025 and UN Women Strategic Plan 2022-2025

⁹ OECD, ‘Better Criteria for Better Evaluation: Revised Evaluation Criteria Definitions and Principles for Use’, OECD/DAC Net- work on Development Evaluation, Dec 2019.

Analytical framework		
<u>Evaluation Criterion</u>	<u>Indicator</u>	<u>Data source</u>
<i>Relevance and coherence</i>	Number of UN Women's offices with operational CSAGs	Annual reports
	LNOB representation of CSAG members	Data request (CSAG member profiles)
	Descriptive characteristics of CSAGs (size, composition of members, approach to meetings, objectives, management, etc.)	Annual reports; interviews / focus groups
<i>Sustainability</i>	Degree to which CSAG members have programmatic, coordination, and/or other linkages to UN Women's work	Interviews / focus groups
	Retention/length of CSAG members active	Interviews / focus groups
	Level of CSAG activity over Strategic Note period per office	Data request (CSAG meeting notes)
<i>Efficiency</i>	Number of communications and advocacy outputs	Data request (CSAG documentation)
	Number of CSAG activities organized (formally and informally or 'organically')	Data request (CSAG meeting notes)
<i>Effectiveness</i>	Perception of CSAG members about degree to which discussions are considered for advocacy, intergovernmental, and other spaces in line with CSAG mandates	Interviews / focus groups
	Evidence that CSAG inputs have been taken into account in UN Women office planning or decision-making	Data request; interview / focus groups
	Most significant changes reported by CSAG members and UN Women personnel	Interviews / focus groups; data request (CSAG results reports); annual reports; evaluation reports

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Relevance and coherence

Finding 1

The structure and roles of CSAGs in the Americas and Caribbean region were coherent with the 2015 UN Women CSAG Strategy and this alignment was reflected within Country Office Strategic Notes.

Supporting evidence:

- Terms of Reference (TORs) and formal roles of the CSAGs are similar among the offices and coherent to the UN Women CSAG strategy (2015), demonstrating that national strategies on CSAGs followed corporate guidance and objectives, with CSAGs being understood as “an expert body, offering advisory and advocacy support to strengthen UN Women’s work on gender equality, women’s rights and women’s empowerment”¹⁰.
- All TORs revised were strongly aligned with the UN Women CSAG strategy (2015) and global TOR model,¹¹ especially in terms of providing clear rules for transparent and inclusive selection processes, criteria for group composition, profile of desired members and by defining clear roles for CSAGs mandate concerning their advisory and advocacy roles.
- CSAGs are mainly understood in the region as participatory spaces in which UN Women has a close dialogue with a diverse group of national and/or regional civil society representative activists.
- CSAGs are designed to be a two-way road in which UN Women provides to the organized civil society a deeper understanding of its mandate and normative references and civil society representatives provide their view of social-political context and perspectives regarding UN Women thematic areas.

- Survey results indicate that the majority of CSAG respondents (75%) somewhat agree or strongly agree that *the CSAG overall constitutes a relevant participation mechanism for civil society*.

Finding 2

As per corporate guidance, CSAGs have a dual and complementary role acting as (1) an advisory body to UN Women and (2) an advocacy platform to advance the gender equality agenda. While CSAGs in the Americas and the Caribbean region were designed for accomplishing this double mandate, their advisory role was much stronger than their advocacy role, especially in terms of providing UN Women with relevant feedback from representative civil society partners. This imbalance frustrated many CSAG members who had the expectation from their articulated formal roles of having a broader influence over UN Women initiatives.

Supporting evidence:

- TORs of CSAGs in the region are coherent with UN Women corporate and strategic vision regarding advisory and advocacy roles of civil society advisory groups. In general, in their advisory role, CSAGs are designed for being a dynamic resource to UN Women for innovative initiatives, ideas, strategies and policy perspectives. On the other hand, in its advocacy role, CSAGs should play a vital political role in the promotion of gender equality, advancing the shared goals between UN Women and CSOs on the promotion of gender equality.

¹⁰ UN Women CSAG Strategy, 2015, p. 16.

¹¹ https://unwomen.sharepoint.com/Intergovernmental-Support/civilsociety/Resources/ToR_Global_Civil_Society_Advisory_Group.pdf

- Despite the strong logic of CSAGs double role, results of advisory activities differ in nature and scope of those of advocacy activities. While advisory results were mainly at the output level, advocacy results are pitched at the outcome and even impact levels, which may partially explain why CSAG advisory results are easier to identify both in desk review and through stakeholder perceptions than advocacy results.
- The CSAG advisory role was well defined in TORs and clear for UN Women staff and CSAG members. Meeting minutes show that CSAG members provided very relevant and robust feedback about UN Women thematic areas and initiatives, also bringing to the organization a representative view of civil society perspectives and demands in terms of gender equality, women empowerment, and social and political context for advancing in UN Women mandate areas. Interviews with both UN Women personnel and CSAG members has shown that an area in which CSAG advisory role could be leveraged is the identification and technical approach to emerging issues (*e.g.* violence against trans women or digital justice).
- Survey results also indicated that around two-thirds of CSAG members (65%) found the groups had a clear role, indicating a notable proportion who do not have a clear understanding.
- Nevertheless, **the CSAG advocacy role had no clear definition in regional and national TORs and was also not well defined in terms of their regular work in the region.** Despite some interesting experiences, such as political advocacy activities implemented by the Ecuador¹² and Colombia CSAGs or communication and knowledge production initiatives implemented by El Salvador and Brazil CSAGs, there is no definition of what the mandate of CSAGs in terms of advocacy work should be, which is worsened by the limitations of resources available to do so.
- Interviews and focus group discussions with CSAG members and UN Women personnel have shown a general frustration with CSAG limitations in terms of influencing UN Women planning and implementation processes, which was exacerbated by high expectations when selected for the group.
- Primary data also shows that UN Women country offices have not given concrete responses for this frustration sentiment during or following CSAG mandates. In other words, there is no feedback mechanism. One common point of feedback was that CSAG spaces were more used to validate UN Women proposals than to take into consideration civil society perspectives on UN Women planning, risking that these mechanisms are perceived as a way to “rubber stamp” work with civil society.

Finding 3

Selection processes were generally transparent and in line with corporate procedures, but the lack of interest of relevant candidates was a challenge. Inclusion of diverse and representative groups was a relevant concern within selection processes, and this has resulted in a satisfactory level of representativeness on CSAG membership, even though specific criteria were not defined and implemented.

Supporting evidence:

- In some countries, reaching an adequate number and, above all, the desired profiles of candidates were a challenge (*e.g.* ACRO and El Salvador) or even a barrier (*e.g.* Caribbean).
- Interviews and focus group discussions with CSAG former and current members provided relevant critics to CSAGs selective processes, such as: call for proposals were concentrated on CVs, not on political relevance of candidates; requirements were not inclusive, (*e.g.* 3 recommendation letters); CSAG role and

¹² Webinar on "How to address stress during the pandemic" (2020), organized by UN Women with the support of UNDSS by recommendation of Ecuador CSAG."

regular work were not adequately described on TORs.

- In accordance with the UN Women CSAG strategy (2015), there is a tendency to combine the selection of experts in UN Women thematic areas with representatives of specific population groups.
- Inclusion from diverse groups was a constant concern in the competitive processes, but the selection rules do not normally establish specific criteria for representativeness. Even though, selection boards demonstrated concern about the representativity of candidates in terms of race, ethnicity, and region, evaluating candidates with diverse profiles and assuring that final selection lists were representative of the diversity of a given country or region. In this

sense, LNOB perspective was identified in the selection processes of all the nine managing offices that had at least one CSAG between 2018 and 2022.

- LNOB representativeness emphasized on Afro-American, indigenous and young women, with gaps in terms of women with disabilities rural, migrant and LGBTQI+ women. Colombia CO launched specific TORs to select one indigenous woman in 2020 and one woman with disability for its CSAG in 2023.
- Survey results indicate that the majority of CSAG respondents (73%) somewhat agree or strongly agree that *the composition of the CSAG is representative of the diversity of women in the country/region*.

3.2. Sustainability

Finding 4

CSAGs operational instability was a common challenge in the Americas and the Caribbean region and resulted in the suspension of certain CSAG activities altogether. At the institutional level, three factors seem to be crucial in this instability: the COVID-19 pandemic effects; challenging political contexts; and UN Women institutional risks.

Supporting evidence:

- The planned frequency of CSAG renewal has been maintained in some countries (*e.g.* Colombia), but in others it has not been achieved (*e.g.* El Salvador) or the CSAG has been suspended (*e.g.* Bolivia and Brazil).
- First, the onset of COVID-19 pandemic effects in 2020 created an environment in which shifting to regular online CSAG meetings represented a major change in operational approaches, particularly for offices where CSAGs entered a latent period such as Bolivia and Brazil.
- Second, the political context in certain countries created an environment in which the space for civil society dialogue significantly narrowed, and UN Women was not able to retain its mechanisms. On the one hand, several civil society leaderships have faced political persecution and exposure to risk in the region; on the other, expectations regarding UN Women capacity to respond to these scenarios sometimes were higher than institutional possibilities. This presents a political challenge for UN Women office leadership in divisive country contexts to meet CSAG demands sufficiently without alienating other key stakeholders.
- Third, UN Women institutional risks have also affected CSAGs operation and renovation processes, which normally depend from top-down leadership (*e.g.* Bolivia CSAG being inactive in 2021 and 2022).
- CSAG members, in general, have become reference figures for COs, which have implemented

activities and reported results of partnerships with CSAG members beyond the scope of the advisory group meetings and initiatives. For example, on the 2019 National Lesbian Pride Day, the UN Women Brazil CO published stories of lesbian activists on its website and social media, with the support of one CSAG member.

- Several CSAG members were UN Women political or implementing partners before and have kept or even strengthened their connection with UN Women after becoming CSAG members. In some cases, CSAG former national members scaled up their partnership with UN Women becoming a member of the Regional CSAG (*e.g.* a former Colombia CSAG member) or taking part on global discussions and initiatives (*e.g.* a former Brazil CSAG member). For several CSAG members consulted for this evaluation, despite the limitations of CSAG format itself for fostering civil society participation on UN Women decision making, being a CSAG member has worked as a way to establish a solid and longstanding relationship with UN Women at the individual level.

Finding 5

CSAG instability was also a challenge at the individual level, which was impacted by varying commitment from members and exacerbated by the absence of tangible incentives, especially since membership in CSAGs represents unremunerated *ad honorem* and often time-consuming work.

Supporting evidence:

- Frequent turnover and/or the lack of commitment of CSAG members was mitigated through the partial maintenance of members during CSAGs renovation processes, which is in accordance with the UN Women CSAG Strategy (2015) and was a widespread practice throughout the region.

- CSAGs in the region had, in general, 2 to 3 meetings per year, which is feasible, considering that this is an *ad honorem* work. Some countries organized a higher number of meetings, especially virtual meetings during the Covid-19 pandemic (e.g. Mexico in 2020 held 5 meetings and Colombia held 4 in 2021), but this was not the rule. Nevertheless, intervals between meetings were generally quite long and resulted in the decrease of commitment of CSAG members, especially when there was no follow-up and activities to keep their engagement and to create synergies amongst the group.
- It has emerged on interviews and focus group discussions with UN Women personnel and CSAG former members that there is a main reputational risk posed for UN Women by CSAGs: the creation of an environment of extractive work comprehending CSAGs and other participatory spaces that demands unpaid knowledge-intensive services from women that are widely recognized experts and leaderships on their fields. This scenario is worsened by the fact that, during her/his permanence on the CSAG, a member cannot work as a consultant for UN Women or take part on projects implemented by her/him organization in partnership with UN Women.
- On the other hand, the opposite is also a reputational risk: primary data collection with CSAG members has shown that, despite the complexity of the work demanded, to take part of a CSAG meeting is time-consuming in itself, especially when it requires travelling, so this personal investment should be compensated with important duties and responsibilities.
- The Civil Society Reference Group of the Spotlight Initiative in the Caribbean region was reported as being a good practice of how to keep members engaged throughout the group's term. One distinctive feature was that the group's participation was *ad honorem* as most CSAGs, but the CSOs represented in the group were also grantees of Spotlight Initiative. Although this format of a group grounded on programming is not replicable for CSAGs, it shows the relevance of tangible incentives to foster sustainability of participatory spaces, including through in-person training, meetings, and in the framework of other key global events like CSW.
- As unremunerated work, CSAG representatives must balance demands on their time with professional, personal, economic, and other concerns. Interviews indicated that there was scope to reconsider other *honorarium* modalities that would provide greater incentives for members to remain engaged and active, such as providing capacity building or self-care activities to CSAG members, semi-regular regional meetings and conferences for reflection, strategic planning, or exchanging CSAG priorities.
- CSAGs main ideal profile are women with relevant background and experience, even in the case of young activists. However, these women have, in general, very busy agendas and it's very likely that they will not have enough time to dedicate to CSAG meetings and activities.

3.3. Efficiency

Finding 6

CSAG performance and activity levels varied significantly. These mechanisms were very productive in some countries, while in others they were unstable or inoperative. Nevertheless, CSAG meetings faced considerable limitations in terms of efficiency, especially

considering that organization of meetings were very resource intensive for UN Women. In this respect, UN Women's convening power was often not fully leveraged.

Supporting evidence:

- Although the roles of CSAGs were similar across the region, their functioning varied significantly

with diverse models of debates and advocacy strategies. Between 2018 and 2022, three managing offices suspended their CSAGs activities: Bolivia, Brazil and Caribbean.

- CSAGs have been used very productively in the region to provide UN Women with analysis of local political and social contexts, as well as suggestions on the state of the art in UN Women's mandate areas. There is a relevant difference between the intensity of discussions among CSAGs in the region: in some there have been very substantial discussions (*e.g.* Colombia and Mexico), while in others discussions have been less intense (*e.g.* Guatemala).
- Although the possibility of generating knowledge products from CSAGs has been discussed on some occasions, there is no consistent strategy in this regard.
- Former and current CSAG members consulted through interviews and focus group discussions generally found CSAG meetings were relevant for UN Women to present its portfolio to CSAG members and even for hearing the opinion of civil society representatives. However, members also considered that meetings were not efficient to foster collective action or joint initiatives. Additionally, the format, goals and expected takeaways of meetings were not clear for CSAG members and hindered the fulfillment of CSAG advocacy role.

Finding 7

The frequency of CSAGs meetings and renovation processes in the region were unstable and considerably affected by contextual and institutional challenges.

Supporting evidence:

- Survey results found that only 64% of respondents found that regular meetings were organized to fulfill the CSAG's mandate, indicating that over one-third of members either disagreed or were not sure about the regularity of this core CSAG activity. Indeed, a significant factor identified on interviews and focus group discussions as a barrier for efficiency was the lack of predictability in the frequency and

timeframe of meetings, which was worsened by a very short anticipation in convening meetings in some cases. Together, these elements resulted in the absence and consequent lack of engagement of members during CSAG terms and hindered the possibility of establishing a continuous and committed work dynamic.

- Interviews showed that CSAGs are more efficient and stable when UN Women indicates a focal point with a clear role of taking care of selection processes and meetings organization (*e.g.* ACRO and Argentina), although this possibility is limited by the fact that some UN Women offices are understaffed. Frequency of CSAGs meetings and renovation processes were also highly dependent on the leadership of office senior management, especially in the absence of a clear and objective regional strategy for CSAGs operation. Lack of incentives for individual engagement makes CSAGs more vulnerable to contextual challenges, since CSAG members tend to not see such participatory spaces as high priority (*e.g.* Brazil and Caribbean). Moreover, outreach to potential candidates, especially those with desired profiles, was also a challenge that was only partially overcome by an active engagement of UN Women personnel in contacting civil society leaders encouraging them to send an application (*e.g.* Argentina in 2022 and Brazil in 2016).
- Some calls for candidatures were unsuccessful. The Brazil CO was not able to finish a call for applications in 2018 and Brazil CSAG was discontinued. Caribbean MCO published a call for candidatures in 2018, but responses were not sufficient, and a new TOR was designed in 2019, but not disseminated. After this the Caribbean CSAG was officially discontinued.

3.4. Effectiveness

Finding 8

An effective operationalization of the advisory role of CSAGs contributed to concrete dialogue and a more sustainable relationship between UN Women and civil society organizations in certain cases. CSAGs members

provided relevant contextual analysis and technical inputs for UN Women offices, assessing UN Women initiatives and providing relevant information to inform decision-making. However, CSAGs demonstrated limited capacity to foster civil society participation on UN Women daily operation

Supporting evidence:

- The expertise of CSAG members has been used to receive substantial technical inputs in UN Women thematic areas or even in specific initiatives by some managing offices (*e.g.* Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico).
- Survey results indicated that most CSAG respondents (67%) agreed that CSAG meetings helped to make useful decisions.
- UN Women staff and civil society partners generally agreed that CSAG member voices were heard and considered in the revision of UN Women initiatives and, sometimes, strategic notes. In Brazil, CSAG members were engaged in the Mid-Term Review of the Strategic Note 2017-2021. In Argentina and Ecuador, CSAG members had an active participation in the discussions of Strategic Note design.
- Despite UN Women openness to hear civil society representatives opinions regarding its own initiatives, primary data collection has shown that this was not a two-way process, since some CSAG members related their frustration of speaking about their own priorities without seeing practical results or even genuine interest from UN Women¹³.
- Some interviews suggested the risk of CSAGs becoming a sort of tokenistic group, in which diverse voices of civil society are used to validate UN Women instruments, but with no significant results, especially in the case of specific groups, such as youth.

On primary data collection, several CSAG members related how CSAG were relevant for them at the individual level for many reasons: to be closer to UN Women; to better known UN Women functioning; to enter in a diverse and relevant civil society network; to improve their professional trajectory; and to have a honorable position to add to their CV. Nevertheless, this relevance at the individual level did not find correspondence at the group level, in which frustration with the restricted capacity of CSAG to promote civil society participation was the rule.

Finding 9

CSAGs also have operated as a relevant participatory space for civil society representatives and, in some cases, worked as a bridge between UN Women and a broader universe of CSOs. In this sense, the effectiveness of CSAG main activity, that is its regular and extraordinary meetings, varied significantly among offices and between periods of time for the same office. Concerning their strengths, meetings were able to produce a rich dialogue between UN Women and civil society and allowed the exchange of experiences and best practices. Considering their weaknesses, meetings suffered from a lack of focus and the absence of strategic objectives, missing the opportunity to take full advantage of the convening of relevant civil society leaderships and experts.

Supporting evidence:

- In some countries, CSAGs have served as a bridge between UN Women and the broader universe of CSOs (*e.g.* Guatemala and Mexico), but, in other cases, the CSAG has not been able

¹³ In this sense, it's interesting to quote a finding from the *Final evaluation of the Mexico Strategic Note 2014-2019*, p.43: "Por otro lado, se valora el proceso de institucionalización de la participación de las organizaciones a través del Grupo Asesor de la Sociedad Civil, que funciona con una diversidad de territorios y temáticas representadas y con un proceso de selección

transparente. De todas formas, algunas de las personas entrevistadas consideran que esta instancia podría potenciar su contribución al fortalecimiento de la sociedad civil como sector y no sólo para consultar sobre diversos aspectos del desarrollo institucional". Available at: <https://gate.unwomen.org/EvaluationDocument/Download?evaluationDocumentID=9402>.

to create these bridges (e.g. Brazil and the Caribbean).

- CSAGs also served as a bridge between CSOs and governmental representatives (e.g. Colombia and Mexico). Nevertheless, the emergency and institutionalization of an anti-rights agenda and the increasing distance between CSOs and governments in many countries of the region have limited UN Women capacity to build dialogue spaces and bridges between civil society and governmental institutions.
- CSAGs meetings have worked as safe spaces for the discussion between UN Women and civil society, especially in the context of a rising conservative political environment in which hard-earned gains for women are under attack. Despite this positive perspective, interviews and focus group discussions with CSAG members have shown that they have the expectation of also having CSAG as a platform to influence public debate on relevant issues for women: although they understand the limitations of UN Women to the boundaries of its mandate and normative documents, CSAG members expect a more proactive positioning of the institution on defending a minimum floor for the observance of human rights in the region.
- CSAGs have created a regular and relevant space of dialogue between UN Women and civil society organizations. CSAG meetings have amplified UN Women outreach since their members were, in general, widely recognized, and respected civil society leaderships and experts. Meetings often were opened to other invitees (e.g. Colombia and Mexico), which contributed to a more sustainable relationship between UN Women and civil society representatives.
- UN Women offices supported the participation of CSAG members in other dialogue spaces, such as the case of: Colombia office in 2019, when CSAG members participated in consultancy meetings with other civil society representatives; and Mexico CO, that supported the

participation of CSAG members at CSW61, with the organization of two parallel events, and CSW63, and also facilitated the participation of its CSAG in the Generation Equality Forum.

- Other UN Women participatory spaces and meetings were inspired by the CSAG model and resulted in opening spaces for dialogue with civil society organizations. For example, the Caribbean MCO organized quarterly meetings with CSOs; and ACRO has been organizing open meetings with regional civil society representatives¹⁴, creating a space for direct dialogue with CSOs both for giving updates about UN Women initiatives and for receiving civil society feedback.

Finding 10

In terms of their advocacy role, CSAGs have reached some relevant short to medium-term outputs such as communication products and strategies, contextual analysis, *ad hoc* technical inputs, and actionable takeaways regarding UN Women programmatic and normative initiatives. However, despite some relevant activities, CSAG mechanisms to influence UN Women planning and decision-making processes were limited and not systematized.

Supporting evidence:

- In some countries (e.g. Argentina¹⁵ and Mexico) CSAGs fostered a productive communication strategy (press releases and interviews with CSAG members), amplifying the voices of their members. CSAGs communication products allowed UN Women to promote the visibility of issues on its agenda through other perspectives, giving relevance to civil society positioning regarding UN Women mandate.
- CSAG members pointed out the limitation of their participation on decision making processes and the reduced space that UN Women

¹⁴ For example, ACRO Annual Report 2021 shows that the regional office organized 6 meetings with a broader group of CSOs and 4 with faith-based organizations and feminist and women organizations.

¹⁵ In the case of Argentina, CSAG developed and published at UN Women website a declaration in the context of the XV Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean

country offices provided for CSAGs to really influence on UN Women planning and implementation of initiatives.

- Despite these structural limitations for CSAGs influence over UN Women planning and decision-making processes, a series of relevant short to medium-term results were reached, as presented below:
 - **Colombia:** Relevant issues were discussed and agreed by the group, with clear recommendations for UN Women and formal takeaways and tasks to be implemented by UN Women and CSAG members, such as the organization of specific debates, extraordinary CSAG meetings or the elaboration of notes and documents;
 - **Colombia & Ecuador:** Another relevant topic was the binational CSAG meeting held with the Ecuador CSAG, in which the implementation of the Resolution 1325 was discussed and the Ecuador CSAG got familiar with this topic, widely debated in Colombia, but not that much in Ecuador. The binational meeting ended with the expectation of a closer relationship between both CSAGs, including regular binational meetings and the planning of joint initiatives. This has not yet occurred;
 - **Ecuador:** CSAG also gave relevant inputs to the UN Women Strategic Note planning and implementation, which resulted in activities implemented with CSAG guidance, such as a webinar on "How to address stress during the pandemic" in 2020;
 - **El Salvador:** CO has proposed between 2020 and 2022 a series of activities for the CSAG, such as the production and publication of articles written by CSAG members, the implementation of the *Foro: Fortalecimiento de capacidades, una mirada desde la política exterior FEMINISTA* focused on the strengthening of CSAG members capacity or other communication activities, such as the publication of a joint statement with the CSAG, making a call and expressing concern and rejection for all types of sexist and depreciative advertising that legitimizes and promotes violence against women and girls;
 - **Guatemala:** In 2021, Guatemala CSAG contributed to the construction of the UN Women Guatemala agenda for Women's Day and Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 65), also providing inputs for the new strategic note and planning joint activities for the campaign of the 16 days within the framework of the UNiTE Campaign;
 - **Honduras:** CO has no active CSAG since it's a Programmatic Presence, not a Country Office. Nevertheless, the UN System held in the country a National Reference Group of Civil Society with good representation of UN Women CSO partners and through which some relevant normative results were reached, such as the formal delivery to the Instituto Nacional de la Mujer (INAM) of the new revised version of the *Comprehensive Law to EVAW*, the review of the new Penal Code, in particular with regard to violence and femicide, and the project *Caring for life: Development of comprehensive intervention of women human rights defenders in the context of COVID-19* through which the Reference Group has been implementing actions to achieve three overarching results (self-care pedagogical model; training process based on the pedagogical self-care model; and influence the approval of a self-care protocol).
 - **Mexico:** CSAG operated as a relevant space to discuss the response to the COVID-19 pandemic with a gender perspective and the design of UN Women relevant programmes, such as the Spotlight Initiative and the Generation Equality Forum, which was criticized by CSAG members for its limited mechanism for civil society participation. Besides that, Mexico CSAG conformed working groups on specific thematic areas in order to provide outputs for UN Women's work, although their results were not clear on Annual Reports and other documents.
- Despite these relevant but occasional initiatives, there is a lack of a strategic approach to meaningfully incorporate CSAG members perspectives into UN Women programme planning and implementation and to guarantee that CSAG voices will be heard and taken into account.
- Survey results shows that 60% of CSAG members respondents agree or strongly agree that they influenced planning related to UN Women's strategies and programmes. Although this is undoubtedly a positive perspective, this is the worst result of the set of questions asked about CSAGs operation in the questionnaire.

Finding 11

Long-term results remained a main challenge for CSAGs in the region, both due to institutional instability and the lack of resources and

tools to convert CSAG inputs into concrete results. Limitations of the advocacy role also weakened the potential to engage in long-term initiatives for results with CSAGs and their members.

Supporting evidence:

- There have been several attempts to translate CSAG discussions into concrete normative outcomes or partnerships between UN system agencies, governments and CSOs. However, while some initiatives have succeeded, there is no consistent strategy in this regard.
- The limitation on CSAG advisory role in the region contributed to a scenario of short to medium-term results on CSAG initiatives. This was exacerbated by both the limitation of financial resources available for CSAG operations, and overall CSAG scope and workplan management.
- On the latter, the widespread mandate of two years of CSAG members throughout the region

and the consequent development of workplans having this shorter timeframe resulted in a limited long-term vision on CSAGs activity and results planning.

- After being unable to renovate the CSAG both in 2018 and 2019, the Caribbean MCO created in 2021 a multi-country Civil Society Reference Group of the Spotlight Initiative¹⁶, which attracted relevant CSOs representatives of the Caribbean region, including grassroots organizations and civil society leaders with the desired profile for the CSAG. This reference group was apt to be more sustainable since it was based on a relevant and well-financed programme with local, regional, and global outreach. Although this same scenario is not feasible for CSAGs, it shows the need to look for solutions to provide long-term initiatives and perspectives for the implementation of CSAGs advocacy role.

¹⁶ See <https://caribbean.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2021/6/the-caribbean-regional-spotlight-initiative-civil-society-regional-reference-group-gears-for-action>.

4. ACTION POINTS

The following points for consideration by ACRO were developed based on the above analysis and based on the comments of UN Women colleagues with the aim to support the design and management of CSAGs. This analysis is complemented by the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the full evaluation report, and therefore does not attempt to provide a holistic path forward.

4.1. Design

In the design of CSAG roles, responsibilities, and functions – articulated primarily through TORs – as well as the selection process of CSAG members, consider:

- Clear guidance regarding inclusion of groups facing greater discrimination and situations of vulnerability (“LNOB categories”) in selection processes, including through inclusion of women with disabilities, rural women, migrant and LGBTQI+ women;
- Development of a clear communication strategy for disseminating CSAG calls for candidatures, including the use of social networks, the creation of communication pieces to outreach non-traditional partners and the active search and invitation of potential applicants with desired profiles.
- Modelling of an incentive structure focused on the CSAG member retention and as enabling activities for the CSAG advocacy and advisory functions:
 - Financial and logistical support for participation in key conferences/meetings (CSW), event/dialogue spaces, and/or peer exchanges with other CSAGs;
 - Capacity-building opportunities and self-care activities complementary to CSAG workplans (workshops, trainings, etc.);
 - Active management and follow-up with office focal points, including regular feedback on CSAG working mechanisms (*e.g.*, via annual pulse surveys).

Incorporation of CSAG responsibilities that facilitate genuine decision-making power, for example regarding allocation of core programmed CSAG resources to finance specific areas of workplans such as advocacy initiatives or call for proposals.

4.2. Management

In the work of CSAG management and organization, consider:

- Alignment between managing offices planning timeframes and CSAG agenda to have a deeper participation of their members on strategic and annual workplan design.
- Designation by each managing office of a focal point to manage and respond for the CSAG, creating a regional group of UN Women personnel to discuss strategies and solutions for CSAGs regionally.
- Development of quick and simple follow-up actions with CSAG members on the period between CSAG meetings in order to maintain a dialogue on a regular basis, receive their feedback and keep their engagement, taking care to not add an excessive workload to the group.
- Establishment of a clear regional CSAG strategy creating guidance package adapting the corporate strategy designed by ACRO in partnership with UN Women offices, outlining for example: design/TOR principles; core resourcing; modalities; good practices; lessons in risk management with members and divisive political contexts.
- Organization of a general annual meeting of national and regional CSAG members focused on the cross-fertilization between UN Women offices with CSAGs, creating a space for the exchange of experiences in relevant issues, fostering the regional dialogue between advisors and including an open space for the interaction of CSAGs that have a lower maturity level and others with longer term experience in managing such participatory spaces.
- CSAGs can have a commentary role to other spaces and take full advantage of its singularity, that is the combination of advisory and advocacy roles. Therefore, CSAGs’ role and

performance should consider the environment of multiple UN Women participatory spaces, ranging from international conferences to programme civil society reference groups, thematic committees and even informal meetings with civil society representatives.

- Invitation of CSAG members to dialogue with UN Women programme officers to contribute to the Country Office Annual Work Plan on their area of expertise, opening a formal space for CSAGs to influence on UN Women yearly planning.
- In the environment of social and political contextual challenges, CSAGs should operate as a safe space for its members, for which a risk management plan should be designed and implemented.
- Although CSAGs members opinions don't reflect UN Women positioning and this should be clear on communication products and releases, UN Women managing offices should create mechanisms and tools to amplify the voices of CSAGs members, influencing the public debate on issues under UN Women's mandate.

5. ANNEXES

5.1. List of documents consulted

Americas and the Caribbean managing offices documents

Regional and national CSAGs Terms of Reference 2018-2022.
Regional and national CSAGs selection processes minutes 2018-2022.
Regional and national CSAGs meeting agendas 2018-2022.
Regional and national CSAGs meeting presentations 2018-2022.
Regional and national CSAGs meeting minutes 2018-2022.
Regional and national CSAGs press releases 2018-2022.
Regional and national CSAGs communication outputs 2018-2022.
Regional and national CSAGs members CVs and bios 2018-2022.
UN Women, Annual reports 2018-2022.
UN Women, Quarterly reports 2018-2022.

Corporate documents

UN Women. Civil Society Advisory Groups Strategy, 2015.
UN Women, 2011-2013 Strategic Plan.
UN Women, 2018-2021 Strategic Plan.
UN Women, 2022-2025 Strategic Plan (UNW/2021/6).

Evaluations

UN Women, Corporate Evaluation on UN Women's Policy advocacy work, 2022.
UN Women, Evidence and lessons on types of UN Women support - A Meta-Synthesis of UN Women evaluations, 2022.
UN Women, Country Portfolio Evaluation: UN Women Haiti Strategic Note 2018- 2021, 2022.
UN Women, Brazil Country Portfolio Evaluation, 2022.
UN Women, Evaluación de Portafolio de País Bolivia, 2022.
UN Women, Evaluación del proyecto "Una Victoria Lleva a la Otra", 2022.
UN Women, Corporate Formative Evaluation of UN Women's Approach to Innovation, 2021.
UN Women, Corporate Evaluation of UN Women's UN System Coordination and Broader Convening Role In Ending Violence Against Women, 2021.

UN Women, Final qualitative evaluation USAID project: End GBV (OVERCOMING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE TO ENSURE WOMEN'S FULL ENJOYMENT OF RIGHTS), 2021.

UN Women, Regional Programme Win Win: Gender Equality Means Good Business, 2021.

UN Women, Project final evaluation: Realizing the transformational effect of the Sepur Zarco reparation sentence to break the continuum of conflict and post-conflict related sexual and other forms of violence against women, 2021.

UN Women, Evaluation of Joint Pro- gram financed by the PBF: "Peacebuilding and protection of girls, boys, adolescents and young people in the Colombia- Ecuador cross-border area, affected by violence and armed conflict", 2021.

UN Women, El Salvador Country Portfolio Evaluation, 2021.

UN Women, Corporate Evaluation of UN Women's Support to National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security, 2020.

UN Women, UN Women Paraguay Country Portfolio Evaluation, 2019.

UN Women, Regional Evaluation on Women Economic Empowerment, 2020.

UN Women, Corporate Evaluation of UN Women's Contribution to Governance and National Planning, 2019.

UN Women, Corporate Thematic Evaluation: UN Women's Contribution to Humanitarian Action, 2019.

UN Women, Final evaluation of the Mexico Strategic Note 2014-2019, 2019.

UN Women, Evaluación Final de la Nota Estratégica de ONU Mujeres Colombia, 2015-2019, 2019.

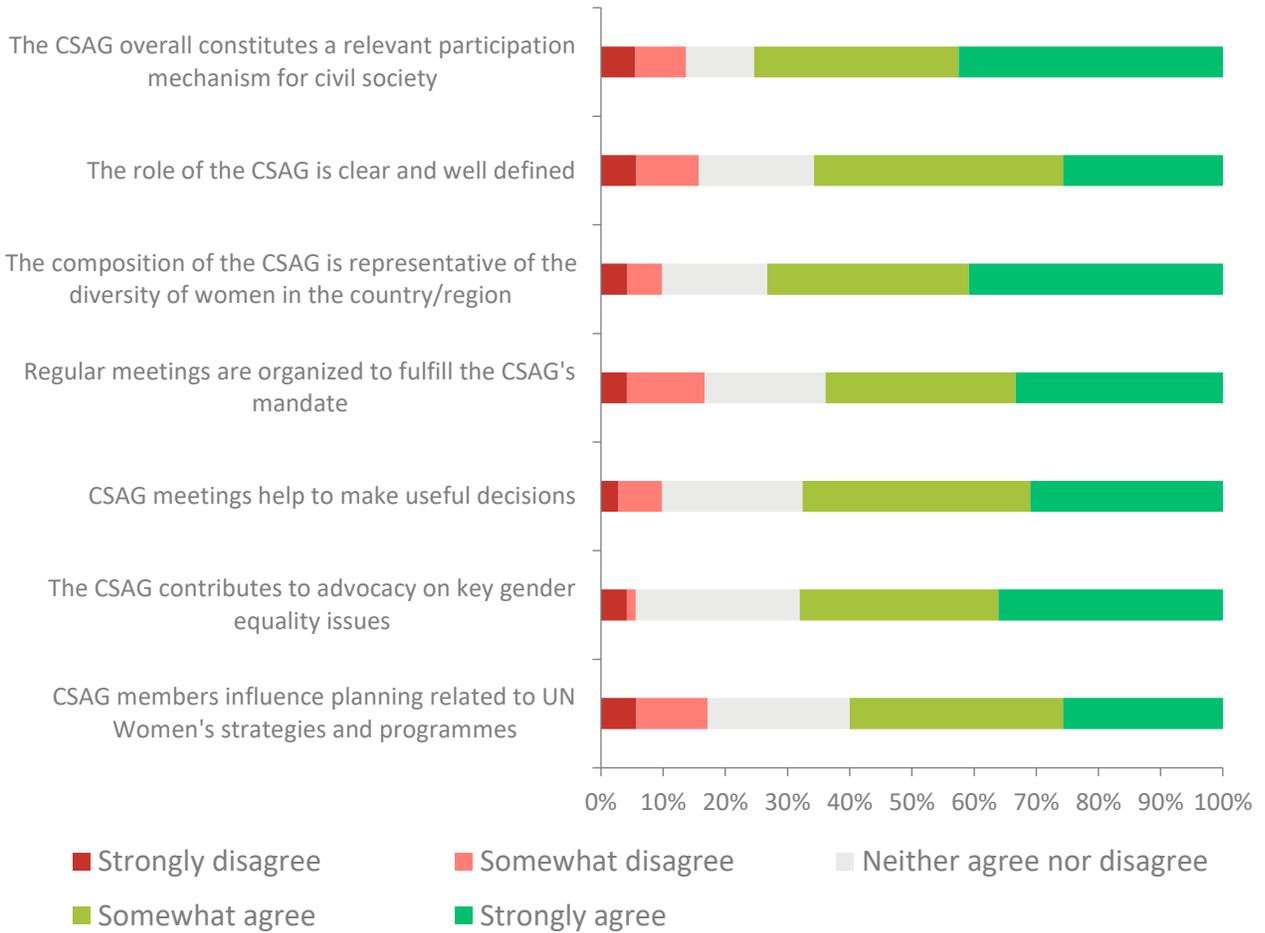
UN Women, Country Portfolio Evaluation – Guatemala, 2019.

UN Women, Social Mobilization Pro- gramme to end Gender- Based Violence in the Caribbean (2014-2017 and 2018), 2019.

5.2. Additional data

Survey results

12. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the Civil Society Advisory Group (CSAG) in which you have participated?



	STRONGLY DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	TOTAL
The CSAG overall constitutes a relevant participation mechanism for civil society	5.48% 4	8.22% 6	10.96% 8	32.88% 24	42.47% 31	73
The role of the CSAG is clear and well defined	5.71% 4	10.0% 7	18.57% 13	40.0% 28	25.71% 18	70
The composition of the CSAG is representative of the diversity of women in the country/region	4.23% 3	5.63% 4	16.90% 12	32.39% 23	40.85% 29	71
Regular meetings are organized to fulfill the CSAG's mandate	4.17% 3	12.50% 9	19.44% 14	30.56% 22	33.33% 24	72
CSAG meetings help to make useful decisions	2.82% 2	7.04% 5	22.54% 16	36.62% 26	30.99% 22	71
The CSAG contributes to advocacy on key gender equality issues	4.17% 3	1.39% 1	26.39% 19	31.94% 23	36.11% 26	72
CSAG members influence planning related to UN Women's strategies and programmes	5.71% 4	11.43% 8	22.86% 16	34.29% 24	25.71% 18	70

5.3. CSAG current membership

- CSAG ACRO

Ruth Spencer

Chair of the Marine Ecosystem Protected Areas Trust (MEPA Trust), Antigua and Barbuda.

Eduarne Cárdenas

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Camila Maturana

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Floralma López

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Daphne Cuevas Ortiz

Member of the Political Coordination of the Articulación Feminista Marcosur, AFM, Mexico.

Olga Montúfar Contreras

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Ni Una Menos.

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Anny Ocoró Loango

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Mariana Paterlini

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