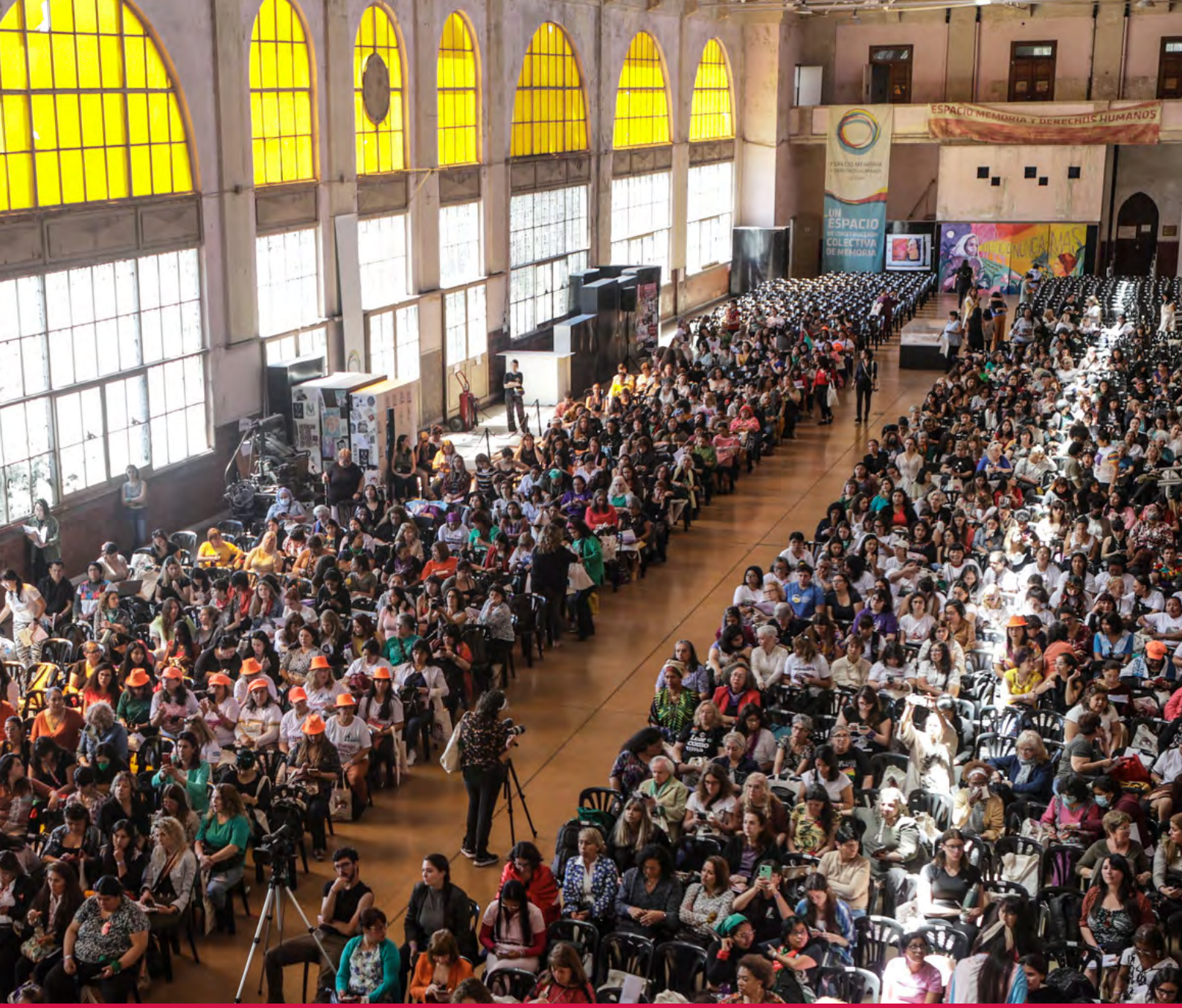

EVALUATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN THE AMERICAS AND CARIBBEAN

UN WOMEN

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EVALUATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN THE AMERICAS AND CARIBBEAN

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION AND AUDIT SERVICES (IEAS)
Independent Evaluation Service (IES)
UN Women

Panama, December 2023

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ACRONYMS

ACRO	Americas and the Caribbean Regional Office
CLACSO	Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSAG	Civil Society Advisory Group
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
DRF	Development Results Framework
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FLACSO	Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales
HIV/AIDS	Human immunodeficiency virus / acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
IEAS	Independent Evaluation and Audit Services
IES	Independent Evaluation Service
LGBTIQ+*	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and other people
OEEF	Organizational Effectiveness and Efficiency Framework
PGAMS	Partner and Grant Agreement Management System
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SOGIESC	Sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions, and sex characteristics
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

*The plus sign (+) represents those who identify with other terms to describe their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and/or sex characteristics.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EVALUATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN THE AMERICAS AND CARIBBEAN

Photo: ONU Mujeres/Lina Etchesuri

This brief summarizes the independent thematic evaluation of UN Women's engagement with civil society in the Americas and Caribbean region covering the period from 2018 to 2023. As a stakeholder group central to achieving UN Women's mission, the exercise aimed to provide a holistic assessment of the Entity's work with civil society across the range of programmatic, consultative and strategic partnership modalities.

CONTEXT

Civil society organizations (CSOs) have played a pivotal role in advocating for the rights of women in the Americas and Caribbean. Women's movements have led efforts to address systemic issues such as violence against women and shaped landmark regional and global agendas, notably since the first world conference on the status of women in Mexico in 1975. Women's and feminist CSOs engage in a range of mission-driven actions such as monitoring policies, fostering political participation, delivering services and advocating for transformative social change. Despite their central role in addressing societal inequities, civil society's space to defend women's rights in the region has faced constraints with regressions in human rights.

UN Women's 2022-2025 Strategic Plan underscores the imperative of deepening its civil society partnerships. Civil society was the most common stakeholder group for UN Women partnerships in the Americas and Caribbean: 88 per cent of all formal partnerships were with CSOs. UN Women aims to enable more women and girls to exercise their voice, agency and leadership within an environment supportive of women and youth organizations. In practice, collaboration with civil society is realized through several engagement modalities as shown below.

EVALUATION OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the evaluation was to enhance accountability, support learning and guide organizational decision-making. Accordingly, the exercise sought to assess implementation modalities, identify challenges, map civil society initiatives and recommend improvements for more impactful alliances. Intended users included UN Women management and staff, civil society partners and other United Nations entities in the region.

The scope included UN Women's portfolio in the Americas and Caribbean from 2018 to 2023 across the Entity's triple mandate. The evaluation adopted mixed methods using a theory-based and participatory approach, and focused on assessment of UN Women's efficiency, coherence, effectiveness and sustainability. A gender-responsive and human rights lens was integrated along with the leave no one behind principle to understand engagement with a variety of priority groups, including persons with disabilities.

CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT MODALITIES

- Direct implementation through executing projects and programmes.
- Institutional strengthening and capacity-building of CSOs through grants and partnerships.
- Knowledge partnerships collaborating on research, analysis and evidence-based advocacy.
- Multi-stakeholder dialogue to foster linkages between CSOs, governments and others.
- Civil Society Advisory Groups (CSAGs) and other participatory or consultative spaces.

CONCLUSIONS

1

The strength of UN Women's partnerships with feminist and women's organizations in the Americas and Caribbean region has been and will continue to be the bedrock for effectively achieving the Entity's mission of gender equality and women's empowerment. Strategic prioritization has helped UN Women consolidate its engagement with CSOs, although contextual shifts have posed important challenges to the effectiveness and sustainability of such partnerships.

UN Women's long-standing partnerships with civil society groups in the region have been instrumental to the success of its work. Near unanimous stakeholder feedback confirmed the Entity's value to women's and feminist organizations. An increased prioritization of civil society engagement over the evaluation period through dialogue at the regional level, as well as organizational strategic frameworks, has shown a deepening of its focus. Challenges posed by significant contextual shifts have nonetheless tested the resilience of these partnerships and underscored areas for systematic improvement. Acknowledging the increasing threats to funding, status and the safety of partner organizations, stakeholders emphasized the urgency of a more structured and deliberative approach to sustain organizations facing challenges from anti-rights or anti-feminist groups.

2

UN Women used engagement modalities for its partnerships with civil society organizations in a complementary manner across its integrated triple mandate to achieve policy results, agenda-setting and network-building.

The range of complementary modalities for partnerships with CSOs helped achieve results. First, programmatic work contributed to normative gains; and technical and financial support in disaster and humanitarian crises responded to the urgent needs of survivors of gender-based violence and human-rights defenders. Second, the facilitation of participatory spaces helped to amplify women's voices, including on indigenous women's rights and parity democracy. This strategy supported CSOs' increased role in decision-making spaces. UN Women also expanded its reach to civil society online through coordinated campaigns. Management and use of content developed by CSOs could further boost engagement with relevant partners.

3

UN Women effectively reached the CSO representatives of priority groups facing greater discrimination and vulnerability through agreements and other forms of engagement. There was a clear opportunity across the regional portfolio to scale support to other groups that had comparatively limited coverage. Capacity-building initiatives had systemic challenges in terms of their effectiveness.

There was a robust focus on UN Women's partnerships with civil society in the region, particularly on priority groups which aligned with the United Nations principle of leaving no one behind. Most agreements with CSOs were directed at groups experiencing heightened vulnerability and discrimination, often with a focus on survivors of gender-based violence. However, there were institutional challenges to extend reach to certain populations facing multiple vulnerabilities through an intersectional lens, which presents an opportunity for UN Women to further enhance the conceptualization and targeting of certain groups. Furthermore, as a key modality for supporting civil society, capacity-building and institutional strengthening had important gaps that required better quality institutional management and knowledge tools.

4

The policy and procedures for managing UN Women's formal partnerships with CSOs hindered the Entity's efficiency and broader reach to civil society. Consequently, UN Women's readiness for achieving impact at scale with civil society remained low.

Formal partnership modalities allowed UN Women to reach feminist and women's organizations. The introduction of the small grant modality was recognized for providing added flexibility for UN Women to create partnerships with smaller organizations, and was credited with enhancing responsiveness to CSO demands in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. While following a risk-management approach through UN Women's partnership frameworks, internal and external feedback nonetheless highlighted the inefficient nature of the processes and procedures. This was seen as hindering the timely implementation of CSO partnerships and indicated the need for the Entity to further streamline its processes in this area for a more responsive, agile and efficient organization.

5

UN Women's role in convening civil society with other actors produced notable achievements through conferences, movements and normative processes linked to the regional gender agenda in the Americas and Caribbean. Support to movement-building and the specialized role of CSAGs were valued but not fully utilized.

UN Women effectively managed flagship multi-stakeholder events that showcased the Entity's ability to convene civil society, government representatives and other relevant actors. The Regional Conference on Women (2022) exemplified key achievements in agenda-setting and advocacy, notably regarding the care agenda. In this respect, UN Women was recognized for its distinctive ability to engage in policy advocacy by leveraging its integrated triple mandate. Moreover, civil society participation in normative intergovernmental forums, particularly at the Commission on the Status of Women, was firmly established through UN Women's facilitation efforts. Participatory and consultative mechanisms such as CSAGs were considered useful for facilitating dialogue, although stakeholders indicated there was scope for stronger linkages with UN Women initiatives to leverage their advocacy role and enhance management.

UN Women made efforts to form coalitions and foster movement-building. Challenges in building ownership of multi-stakeholder initiatives such as the Generation Equality Forum remain, and UN Women has taken steps to strengthen dialogue channels through open meetings, events and reinforcing links to Action Coalitions. CSO partners expressed a clear and strong demand that UN Women continue to enhance and invigorate its support, emphasizing UN Women's role as a strategic and valued partner.

RECOMMENDATIONS[1]

1. UN Women should produce a **suite of internal guidance and tools** for UN Women offices to support civil society engagement in common areas of challenge and opportunity.

2. UN Women should **consolidate the technical assistance** provided for civil society's use in areas of joint advocacy, agenda-setting, research and communications.

3. UN Women should deepen its focus on **priority groups facing greater discrimination and vulnerability** through all engagement modalities with civil society by strengthening its intersectional approach.

4. UN Women should enhance the **corporate policy framework and systems** for partnerships with civil society to increase the efficiency, accessibility and reach of its partnerships.

5. UN Women should reinvigorate **movement-building, participatory spaces and alliances** to forge greater linkages between networks of feminist and women-led organizations at country and regional levels, including by leveraging guidance on CSAGs.

SUMMARY OF EVALUATION APPROACH

DESK REVIEW

Analysis and synthesis of key UN Women documentation

Portfolio analysis using feminist frameworks with a sample of 8 offices

PRIMARY DATA

Interviews and focus groups

Survey of 376 partners

Observation of Regional Conference on Women in 2022

CASE STUDIES

Case studies of Civil Society Advisory Groups in the region, and online campaigns using big data analysis with UN Global Pulse

518	66	16	1	376	2	570
stakeholders consulted	interviewees	focus groups	online survey of civil society partners	survey respondents	case studies	documents reviewed

[1] Section 7 provides the suggested Cronogramas, prioritization and steps for implementation of the recommendations.

Photo: ONU Mujeres/Lina Etchesuri

1 BACKGROUND

This section provides an overview of the evaluation's purpose, objectives, design and conduct.

1.1. Purpose, objectives and scope

Through an independent and formative assessment of UN Women's engagement with civil society in the Americas and Caribbean region, the evaluation's purpose was threefold: enhance accountability to partners; support learning through the identification of good practices and lessons; and facilitate organizational decision-making at regional and also global levels. Accordingly, the evaluation aimed to achieve the following primary objectives:

- Assess whether UN Women's implementation modalities are well-suited to foster effective achievement of programmatic results with civil society organizations (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 personnel based on what has or has not been achieved.
- Recommend improvements for driving impact with CSO alliances in the region, including those representing constituencies at risk of being left behind.

Primary intended users of the evaluation are UN Women management and office personnel at country and regional levels, the UN Women Executive Board, national government and CSOs. Secondary intended users are rights-holder representatives, development partners, implementing partners, UN Women headquarter divisions and other United Nations entities working on gender equality.

The evaluation assessed UN Women's portfolio across the Americas and Caribbean regional portfolio between 2018 and 2023,[1] including that related to the work of the Americas and Caribbean Regional Office, Country and Multi-Country Offices, programme presences, covering the Entity's triple mandate of coordination, programmatic and operational dimensions. Corporate policy, procedures and governance were also assessed to the extent that they provided the framework for the Entity's civil society engagement. The geographic scope covered UN Women's work in 19 countries in the Americas and Caribbean region where offices and programme presences were active over the evaluation period.[2]

1.2. Approach and methodology

Evaluation criteria and questions

The evaluation assessed UN Women's engagement with civil society using a framework of three overarching questions based on the key criteria of efficiency, coherence, effectiveness and sustainability, with the integration of human rights and gender in a cross-cutting manner.[3] The evaluation looked to identify lessons across UN Women's triple mandate of coordination, programmatic and normative dimensions for potential application to future programming in the region. The key evaluation questions operationalize various criteria:[4]

- To what extent has UN Women's programmatic work effectively leveraged CSO alliances to enable organizations to support women's empowerment and gender equality?
- To what extent have UN Women's internal systems enabled organizational effectiveness and efficiency for CSO engagement?
- To what extent has UN Women effectively enabled the inclusion of civil society in its work to influence gender priorities and policies, including those representing constituencies at risk of being left behind?[5]

[1] The exercise therefore covers UN Women's two consecutive programming cycles at the corporate level: the Strategic Plan 2018-2021 and ongoing Strategic Plan 2022-2025.

[2] The evaluation covers 10 country offices (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti and Mexico), 4 programme presences (Costa Rica, Paraguay, Uruguay and Honduras), and 5 countries covered by the Caribbean Multi-Country Office (Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Grenada, Guyana and Jamaica).

[3] The evaluation used the standard definitions of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee. Source: OECD, 'Better Criteria for Better Evaluation: Revised Evaluation Criteria Definitions and Principles for Use', OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation, Dec 2019.

[4] See Annex 8.6 on methodology for alignment with evaluation criteria.

[5] In line with the principle of leave no one behind, the evaluation Inception Report defined the following groups as facing greater vulnerability and discrimination: Afro-descendant women; gender-based violence survivors; human-rights defenders; indigenous women; LGBTIQ+; migrant and refugee women; rural women; women with disabilities; and youth. During the desk review, other targeted populations were identified as relevant, including women in post-conflict situations and ex-combatants; women affected by natural disasters; and displaced women.

Design, methods and approaches

The evaluation employed a non-experimental and theory-based approach. A theory of change was developed to frame UN Women's work in the area,[6] and assumptions were tested through contribution analysis. The evaluation was carried out in accordance with the UN Women and United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms and standards,[7] with an explicit emphasis placed on the integration of gender equality and human rights principles in the evaluation process. The evaluation employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, including desk reviews, semi-structured interviews, case studies, focus groups, observation and a partner survey.

To foster ownership and quality feedback, the evaluation adopted a bottom-up approach aligned with stakeholder needs to build learning and adaptation into UN Women's programming over the 2023–2025 period at the regional level. This included a participatory process of involvement of relevant UN Women stakeholders and partners. The exercise was designed to ensure an integration of gender equality and women's empowerment into the evaluation criteria, questions, approaches and analysis. To this aim, the exercise included: an evaluability assessment conducted from a gender perspective; gender-disaggregated data where available; feminist analytical frameworks for assessing results, namely the Gender@Work and Gender-Responsive Effectiveness Scale; and the participation of representatives of women and diverse groups in the data collection process.[8]

The leave no one behind principle was included in the evaluation framework through the integration of specific evaluation questions and analyses to understand UN Women's work with civil society addressing intersecting forms of discrimination. A disability lens was applied using UNEG guidance.[9] Additionally, leave no one behind was a key criterion used to define the sampling of interviewees and focus groups and to guide data collection and analysis processes. This included a comprehensive assessment of all agreements with CSOs with a leave no on behind perspective using priority groups defined in agreements and the degree to which root causes of inequality were addressed.[10]

The evaluation employed a purposive sampling of UN Women offices to conduct more in-depth analysis across the region (see Table 1). The sampling clustered offices into three tiers based on their respective programmatic activity levels with civil society, and used other key data points to provide a diverse and representative sample of UN Women's engagement modalities with civil society and contexts within which the organization operates. Other selection criteria included: the presence of CSAGs to indicate the use of formal channels for dialogue with civil society groups in each country; Human Development Index level to indicate the diversity of political, social and economic development in each country context; and finally, the sub-region.

TABLE 1. Sampling strategy for in-depth analysis of UN Women offices in the region

SAMPLED OFFICE	TIER	# OF PARTNER AGREEMENTS	# OF SMALL GRANTS	CSAG	SUB-REGION	HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX
Argentina	2	7	27	Yes	South America	Very High
Bolivia	1	5	3	No	South America	Medium
Brazil	2	6	29	Yes	South America	High
Caribbean	3	14	35	Yes	Caribbean	High[11]
Guatemala	1	7	0	Yes	Central America	Medium
Regional Office	2	8	23	Yes	Regional	N/A
Colombia	3	73	27	Yes	South America	High
Haiti	3	60	0	No	Caribbean	Low

Sources: Evaluation team based on PGAMS (as of Sept 2022); UNDP Human Development Report (2022); and desk review

[6] See Section 3 of the report for the theory of change.

[7] This includes: internally, the UN Women Evaluation Policy and guidelines; and externally, UNEG Norms and Standards, Ethical Code of Conduct, and Guidance on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation.

[8] A mapping of UN Women results achieved used the Gender@Work tool based on primary and secondary data sources. NVivo was used to code results identified during the revision in one of the four categories of this tool: 1) Access to resources and opportunities; 2) Consciousness and awareness; 3) Formal policies, laws and institutional arrangements; and 4) informal cultural norms and deep structure.

[9] UNEG, 'Guidance on Integrating Disability Inclusion in Evaluations and Reporting on the United Nations Disability Integration Strategy Entity Accountability Framework Evaluation Indicator', March 2022.

[10] The term "priority group" is used throughout the report in place of leave no one behind for clarity given that the definition and significance of leave no one behind is not widely understood outside the United Nations system.

[11] Approximate HDI level across sample of Caribbean countries.

Data collection and analysis

The evaluation data collection and analysis were primarily carried out remotely between March and August 2023 following the inception phase.[12] The evaluation process included consultation with 518 stakeholders through primary methods in addition to secondary data collection techniques.[13] Analytical frameworks employed to structure and communicate data analysis included the following: appreciative enquiry for identifying best practices; a strengths-weakness-opportunities-threats framework; process mapping to identify potential bottlenecks for streamlining systems related to CSO engagement; and disaggregated analysis of types of CSO groups for understanding representation with a leave no one behind lens. Illustrative quotes of CSO voices are included throughout the report from interviews and focus groups.[14]

Data analysis employed qualitative coding of primary and secondary data collected through NVivo coding software, in addition to descriptive statistics.[15] The analysis extracted key themes identified in consultations and identified key trends based upon the preponderance of available evidence. Descriptive statistical analysis was performed using survey data considering the frequency, proportion and salience of responses, as well as using other data from UN Women management systems, such as the Partner and Grant Agreement Management System (PGAMS) and Results Management System. Triangulation identified trends from various data sources (e.g. interviews, focus groups, observation and secondary information) and across different stakeholder groups (e.g. duty bearers and rights holders). Use of NVivo also allowed for text-based qualitative analysis of a total of 187 documents.[16]

FIGURE 1. Summary of data collection

DESK REVIEW

- **Analysis and synthesis** of key UN Women internal documentation using qualitative coding (NVivo) including annual reports, project documents and structured data from UN Women platforms
- **Portfolio analysis** using feminist frameworks such as Gender@Work

PRIMARY DATA

- 60 **semi-structured interviews** of 66 UN Women staff and external partners
- **Survey** of 376 CSO partners (175 implementing partners with 39 per cent response rate, and 201 other CSO representatives of non-random sample)
- 16 **focus groups** (11 with CSO partners from sampled offices and CSAGs; 5 with UN Women staff from thematic areas)
- **Observation** of Regional Conference on Women in 2022 held in Argentina

CASE STUDY + SAMPLE

- **Case studies** of CSAGs and two online campaigns using big data analysis with UN Global Pulse
- **Sampling for in-depth analysis** across 8 offices with varying portfolios and contextual characteristics in the region

518	66	16	1	376	2	570
stakeholders consulted	interviewees	focus groups	online survey of civil society partners	survey respondents	case studies	documents reviewed

Source: Evaluation team

[12] See Annex 8.5 for a detailed description of data collection methods and instruments.

[13] Disaggregation by gender identity of the 518 consulted persons as follows: women (458 or 88.4 per cent of total); men (44 or 8.5 per cent); and others identifying as non-binary (7), trans (4) or not specified (5).

[14] Case studies are provided in Annex 8.10.

[15] See Annex 8.5 for NVivo coding structure.

[16] Including: 88 annual reports; 25 evaluations; 16 focus groups notes; and 58 interview notes

1.3. Ethics

The evaluation followed UN Women and UNEG Ethical Guiding Principles,[17] and members of the evaluation team were committed to the UN Women Evaluation Consultants Agreement and UNEG Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct. To operationalize such principles, the Data Management Plan provided protocols and guidance on informed consent; confidentiality and data storage; do no harm; and other ethical considerations.[18]

1.4. Limitations

A main limitation faced by the evaluation was the restricted in-person consultation with stakeholders. Data collection was accordingly carried out through remote approaches.[19] Mitigation strategies included: an exhaustive desk review process, including the revision of planning, reporting and evaluation documents from all UN Women offices in the region; a comprehensive primary data collection with a diverse group of UN Women personnel and stakeholders; provision of options for connecting with interviewees (e.g. videoconferencing, telephone, WhatsApp and email); and the wider consultation of civil society stakeholders through an online survey.

Other risks identified during the inception phase were addressed and mitigated throughout the evaluation process (see Table 2). One additional limitation was the separate information systems managing the trust funds managed by UN Women – namely the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, and the Women, Peace and Humanitarian Trust Fund – which were not assessed in-depth as part of the evaluation.

1.5. Governance and quality assurance

To support a high-quality evaluation process and product,[20] the main outputs of the evaluation were subject to review by an Internal Reference Group of UN Women personnel and an External Reference Group of civil society partners.[21] The two Reference Groups supported the review of the inception report, preliminary findings and the draft evaluation report. Their feedback was critical to ensuring full consideration of key contextual factors, factual accuracy, any gaps in the analysis, and avenues for use and dissemination of results. The feedback obtained was tracked for transparency. IES management and staff also provided comments through quality and peer review.

TABLE 2. Key limitations to the evaluation and mitigation strategies employed

RISK	LEVEL	POTENTIAL IMPACT	MITIGATION MEASURES
Lack of project and agreement documentation	High	Lower evidence of office engagement with CSOs	Focal points for this evaluation were defined in UN Women offices and documents requested through regular follow-up.
Limited analysis on results of capacity-building activities due to lack of quality monitoring data	Medium	Weaker understanding of capacity-building contribution	Review of annual reports, evaluations and other documents; and focus of primary data collection on capacity-building of CSOs, including through specific partner survey questions.
Lack of response from project stakeholders	Medium	Bias in data on key initiatives	Tailored follow-up with project stakeholders[22] and consultation of other data sources such as final evaluations.
Limited analysis on advocacy due to lack of reporting on some key activities	Low	Gaps in the evaluation report due to the lack of data	Information requested from communications teams and gathered from results documents; and UN Global Pulse data analysis of social media activity.

Source: Evaluation team

[17] United Nations Evaluation Group, 'Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation', 2020.

[18] Annex 8.9 provides a more detailed overview of ethical approaches.

[19] Observation was conducted in-person.

[20] UN Women Evaluation Policy (2020); UN Women Evaluation Handbook (2022); UNEG Norms and Standards (2016); UN Women Global Evaluation Report Assessment and Analysis criteria (2021).

[21] Annex 8.2 provides a list of roles and members of the reference groups.

[22] For selected projects, contact information was requested for email, phone and/or social media.

2. REGIONAL CONTEXT

2.1. Civil society in the Americas and Caribbean region

In the Americas and Caribbean region, feminist and women's movements and CSOs have represented a core partner for the United Nations in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, preceding the creation of UN Women. Indeed, the advocacy of CSOs was critical for the establishment of UN Women in 2011. At a corporate level, partnerships with civil society have aimed at strengthening "political solidarity and feminist movement building".[23] This approach is based on the leave no one behind principle in which the intersectionality of diverse variables – such as gender, race, ethnicity, income, region and age, among others – should be considered both in terms of identity and inequality dimensions.

For this evaluation, CSOs are understood as collective actors constituting an organization that is outside the state and market, such as: associations, unions, non-profit organizations, non-governmental organizations, collectives, community-based organizations, networks and social movements. In the Americas and Caribbean region, such collective and organized action often represents groups at risk of being left behind in the equitable social development process, including: feminists, Afro-descendant activists, indigenous peoples, the rural and urban poor, LGBTIQ+, environmentalists, human-rights defenders, persons with disabilities, persons living with HIV/AIDS and others.[24] CSOs can assume a mission-driven orientation that monitors public policies, promotes political participation, provides service delivery and advocates for social change.[25]

2.2. Role of civil society for women's empowerment and gender equality

The voice of civil society has historically acted as a critical force in the defence of human rights for greater gender equality and women's empowerment in the Americas and Caribbean. Women's and feminist movements represented through CSOs have shaped systemic change across the region over several decades, organizing into social movements that have sought to more fully actualize human rights, including "better access to education, healthcare, and urban services".[26] Feminist movements have influenced awareness and action against key structural problems such as violence against women and girls; questioned traditional political paradigms; and promoted equal participation in democratic institutions.[27]

The role of women's and feminist movements have also provided a key impetus for reaching consensus on regional agenda proposed by governments at regional conferences over the past several decades.[28] CSOs have played an important role in international conferences focused on gender equality at the regional level, starting from the first regional conference on women held in the region convened in Havana 1977, following the World Conference of the International Women's Year in Mexico in 1975.[29] Outcomes of these ground-breaking events called for national plans and strategies to be sensitive to the needs and problems of different categories of women and of women in different age groups, recognizing as a key principle the role of non-governmental organizations to "contribute to the advancement of women".[30]

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[23] https://www.unwomen.org/en/partnerships/civil-society

[24] UN Women uses both LGBTIQ+ and diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) where appropriate in global contexts, while respecting their distinctions. Neither term is universally applicable nor reflects the full diversity of sexual and gender formations, practices and identities that exist, that terms and their usage are constantly evolving, and that SOGIESC applies to all people. In practice, various culturally, linguistically and context-specific terms may be used, where appropriate.

[25] Annex 8.5 provides a more detailed background on civil society.

[26] Stephanie Rivera Berruz, "Latin American Feminism", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.): plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-latin-america.

[27] Vargas, Virginia, 'Feminism and Democratic Struggles in Latin America', in Rawwida Baksh and Wendy Harcourt (eds), The Oxford Handbook of Transnational Feminist Movements, 5 May 2015.

[28] ECLAC, 'Palabras de Alicia Bárcena, Secretaria Ejecutiva de la Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL), con ocasión del Foro de las Organizaciones Feministas de América Latina y el Caribe en el marco de la XIV Conferencia Regional sobre la Mujer de América Latina y el Caribe, Santiago, Chile, 27 January 2020.

[29] The first instance of the regional conference was called the Regional Conference on the Integration of Women in the Economic and Development of Latin America.

[30] Report of the World Conference of the International Women's Year, Mexico City, Mexico, 19 June – 2 July 1976 (E/CONF.66/34).

In 2016, the Montevideo Strategy, agreed at the XIII Regional Conference on Women, proposed a framework for the Regional Gender Agenda that positioned women's autonomy as a condition for change in the situation of women and in the social, political, economic and daily life of countries in the region. In addition to engaging the entire state structure in the achievement and consolidation of the agenda, the strategy premised its success on the "active engagement by civil society in all its diversity".[31]

Despite this central historical role, evidence has shown a regression in human rights (restrictive legislation and discrimination) and, accordingly, a shrinking space for civil society to defend the rights of women and girls. Such pushback on women's rights has been a cause of concern for civil society representatives. Human-rights defenders in Latin America operate in one of the most dangerous regions for activists.[32] This demonstrates the ongoing challenges faced by CSOs engaging in social change, particularly on issues such as the defence of the environment and investigation of corruption, and equally issues with a gender-based violence dimension suffered by many activists in the form of threats, sexual violence and harassment.

TABLE 3. External shifts in the region over the evaluation period presented key challenges to managing UN Women's relationship with civil society

AREA	KEY SHIFTS OVER THE EVALUATION PERIOD
Political	Pushback against women's rights and consolidation of an anti-rights agenda in some contexts
Social	Tendencies towards wider social division and growth in movements against perceived gender ideology
Institutional	Shrinking space for feminist and women-led organizations to acquire funding and, in the most restrictive cases, conduct activities
Multilateral	Decreased emphasis on development agenda compared to humanitarian and security agenda; limitations in financing from multilateral sources to support women's and feminist organizations
Crisis	Period of COVID-19 pandemic in which CSOs underwent greater pressure to meet urgent needs of constituencies, and challenges to effectively advocate for women's rights in key spaces

Source: Evaluation team

[31] ECLAC, Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030, March 2017 (LC/CRM.13/5).

[32] 138 people were killed in Colombia in 2021, in addition to other targeted killings of land, environmental and indigenous peoples' rights defenders in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru. Front Line Defenders, Global Analysis 2021: www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/2021_global_analysis

3. PORTFOLIO ANALYSIS

3.1. Engagement modalities and theory of change

For UN Women, civil society represents a core constituent group in building a better, safer and more sustainable world towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As non-state, not-for-profit, voluntary entities formed by people in the social sphere, civil society work with the United Nations is framed through participation in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and intergovernmental processes. This allows CSOs with consultative status on the Economic and Social Council to share information such as reporting on key issues and human rights concerns, and contribute to discussions at the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and major international conferences. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) also supports CSO participation at the regional level through the mechanism for civil society participation in the Sustainable Development Agenda and in the Forum of Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development.

UN Women recognizes civil society as a main partner. During implementation of its Strategic Plan 2018–2021, the Entity reinforced its alliance with CSOs in the Americas and Caribbean through meetings, dialogues and funding. In 2021, the Regional Fund to Support Women's and Feminist Organizations and Movements (Regional Fund) was launched with governments, CSOs and ECLAC under the aegis of the Regional Women's Conference with grants to 18 CSOs supporting the response to COVID-19. In addition, UN Women has promoted the substantive participation of CSOs in regional and global forums through regional dialogues and events. Work with CSOs in the region spans UN Women's normative, coordination and programmatic triple mandate, including collaboration through the following notable modalities:[33]

- **Direct implementation** of projects and programmes through partner agreements.
- **Institutional strengthening** of CSOs through grant-making (e.g. small grants) and programme partnerships to enhance management, communication, positioning and other areas.
- **Capacity strengthening** of CSO representatives to increase skills in advocacy, policy monitoring, thematic expertise and other skills.
- Partnerships with CSOs for **knowledge production**, analysis and research that support evidence-based advocacy, dialogue and action.[34]
- Fostering of **multi-stakeholder dialogues** and initiatives supporting CSOs to connect with each other and with other actors such as governments and the private sector.[35]
- Convening of **Civil Society Advisory Groups (CSAGs)** to facilitate consultations with CSOs, especially feminist and women's organizations, and UN Women offices.

In its Strategic Plan 2022–2025, UN Women highlighted the need to deepen existing partnerships with civil society, and as one of its systemic outcomes articulated the need for "more women and girls [to] exercise their voice, agency and leadership, including through an enabling environment that supports women's and youth organizations".[36]

Accordingly, engagement with CSOs is by nature a key organization-wide priority that cuts across all thematic areas of intervention and represents an important operational modality for implementation at the field level. As civil society constitutes a major stakeholder group that the Entity engages with across a range of initiatives and modalities, UN Women implements this work based on a range of implicit assumptions for achieving programmatic and organizational results. Overall, this body of work aims to support the voice, capacity and contribution of CSOs to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment.

[33] UN Women, Executive Board Regional Briefing: Americas and the Caribbean, 04 May 2022. Data on partner and small grants agreements as of Sept 2022.

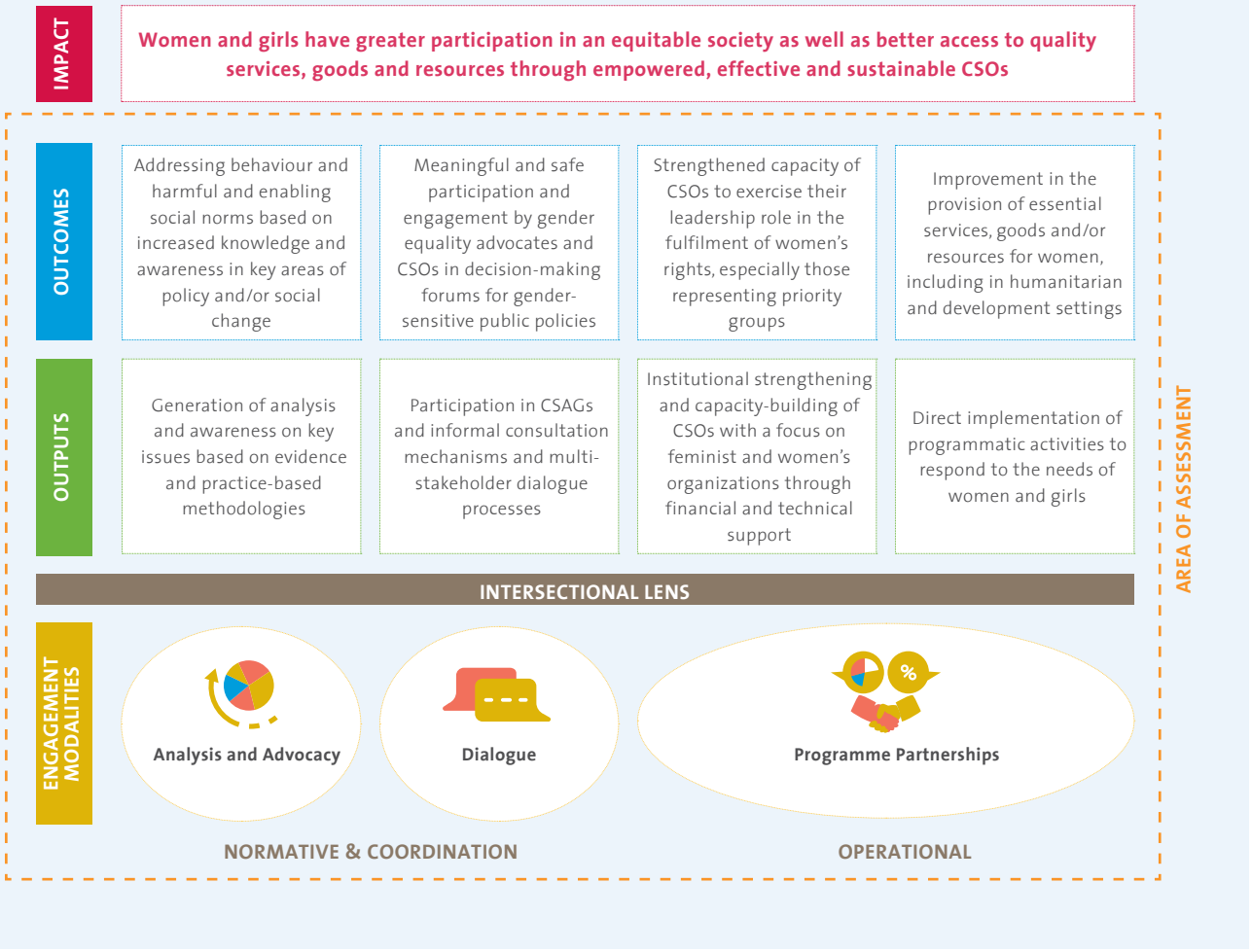
[34] Support to prepare inputs for CSW and CEDAW reporting is a key component of this modality.

[35] Such dialogues and initiatives include "participatory spaces" defined as conferences, forums, events and meetings in which CSO representatives can express their views in an open, inclusive and transparent manner.

[36] UN Women, Strategic Plan 2022-2025 (UNW/2021/6): https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/09/un-women-strategic-plan-2022-2025

Cascading from the corporate Strategic Plans, these approaches are reflected in the Strategic Notes of UN Women offices in the region, both through the adoption of global indicators to measure engagement with civil society as well as adaptation of engagement modalities that respond to local realities and demands. Planning documents show a clear focus on addressing women's organizations as UN Women core partners, designing expected results in partnership with them and placing CSOs not only as beneficiaries of UN Women's interventions but also as partners throughout the programming cycle. However, there is no unifying theory of change regarding UN Women's work with civil society. Accordingly, the main engagement modalities, outputs, outcomes and impact related to work with civil society in the region were mapped into a theory of change (see Figure 2). The model is cross-cutting in terms of thematic areas of work as well as the normative, programmatic and coordination areas of UN Women's triple mandate. The evaluation focused on the output and, where feasible, outcome levels.

FIGURE 2: Theory of change of of UN Women's engagement with civil society



Source: Evaluation team

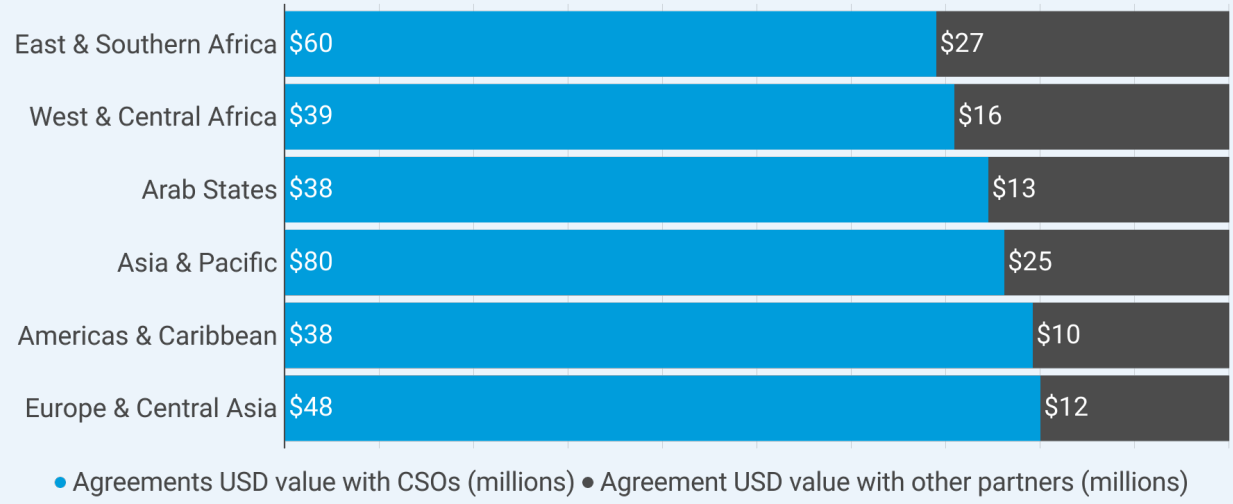
3.2. Financial analysis

CSOs were the most important programme partner group for implementation of UN Women projects at the regional level compared to other partner groups (especially through partner and small grants modalities).

The Americas and Caribbean region had a high proportion of CSO partnerships relative to other regional portfolios in UN Women. Agreements with CSOs comprised 88 per cent of the total number of formal partnerships, and 80 per cent of the total partner budget (see Figure 3).[37]

[37] Annex 8.5 provides a more detailed financial analysis.

FIGURE 3: Agreements with CSOs constitute most of UN Women's programme and grant-making partnerships across all regions in terms of the total number and value



Source: PGAMS (2018-2022)

3.3. Key partners

Between 2018 and 2022, UN Women signed 439 agreements with 377 different CSOs throughout the region. UN Women also partnered with civil society representatives through CSAGs, which functioned in eight countries [38]and at the regional level. UN Women also engaged CSOs through a multitude of other participatory spaces, such as ad hoc project/programme civil society reference groups; emergency and crisis-response consultation mechanisms; multi-stakeholder platforms and initiatives; open civil society meetings; and thematic committees. UN Women also supported the participation of civil society leadership in international forums and normative processes such as CSW and the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, with a specific focus on Afro-descendant and indigenous women. Finally, key partners from civil society were also active in specific initiatives, such as communication campaigns, multi-stakeholder alliances and advocacy initiatives in which UN Women operated as a bridge builder between CSOs and other institutions and social actors.

[38] Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico.

Photo: ONU Mujeres/Dzilam Méndez

4 FINDINGS

This section synthesizes evidence derived from the analysis of secondary data, cases studies, portfolio reviews, interviews, focus group discussions and surveys with internal and external stakeholders. Findings are grouped according to the three key evaluation questions.

4.1. To what extent has UN Women's programmatic work effectively leveraged civil society alliances to enable organizations to support women's empowerment and gender equality?

FINDING 1

Collaboration with civil society in the Americas and Caribbean region has been enabled by long-standing partnerships with UN Women and the well-articulated networks of feminist and women's organizations. Challenges have included how to respond effectively to CSOs in anti-rights contexts.

The long-term and established nature of UN Women's relationships with CSOs in the region has been built over decades of partnership, as evidenced by the prior work of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).[39] Additionally, well-articulated and diverse civil society movements in the region have been a main pillar in democracy-building, political participation, social mobilization and knowledge production for advancing women's rights. In this context, UN Women's relationships with CSOs have been cultivated through constant dialogue at both regional and national levels. In addition to formal agreements and official participatory spaces, UN Women has created channels through online and in-person meetings, thematic dialogues and round table discussions.

In tandem to this institutional framework in the region, UN Women personnel built close partnerships with CSOs through sustained personal engagement. Overall, the organization's convening role – defined as the ability to bring together a diverse group of actors or institutions – was seen positively by survey respondents across key dimensions of bridge-building, alliance-making and dialogue (see Figure 5). Several interviewed partners credited UN Women senior management in the region with showing openness and responsiveness to CSO demands over the evaluation period.[40] This responsiveness contributed positively to UN Women's credibility and convening power to bring together a diverse range of CSOs. Accordingly, the Entity was better positioned to facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue.

Partners expressed concern about challenging national contexts in which the existence of feminist and women's organizations were under threat. The challenge of supporting CSOs in such contexts was most relevant in countries where space for feminist and women's organizations narrowed due to decreasing resources, the criminalization of social movements and agendas, and other factors. Partners expressed how UN Women's support could provide safe spaces for debate and build common strategies that recognized the diversity of social movements in the region; identify where dialogue was possible across common agendas; and, where feasible, establish a more proactive approach to defend women's rights and organizations. Overall, partners urged UN Women to strengthen support to sustain women's organizations in their struggle against anti-rights groups.

> "UN Women should address conservative groups, since they are dismantling everything we achieved, especially in terms of security and human rights...UN Women still has convening and soft power that is relevant to use to deal with this challenging context, for example by providing funding, capacity and generating networks across the feminist CSOs."
>
> – Representative of women's organization, Brazil

[39] UNIFEM was founded in 1976 and was active in the region largely from the 2000s. See for example: United Nations, 'Indigenous Women and the United Nations System: Good Practices and Lessons Learned', Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2007.

[40] These demands were communicated through an open letter to UN Women in 2020 from feminist and women's organizations that requested greater transparency and accessibility of the organization in its work with CSOs, after which an informal meeting was convened to identify concrete actions.

FINDING 2

The evolution of UN Women's strategic frameworks indicated an increased focus and scope on civil society as articulated through expected results across all UN Women thematic areas, including related to support through capacity-building and evidence-based advocacy.

UN Women increased the articulation of its engagement with civil society in various strategic frameworks at country, regional and global levels over the evaluation period. During 2018–2021, the intended results of UN Women's engagement with CSOs were not widely integrated across office reporting in the region. Output-level results related to civil society in the Strategic Plan 2018–2021 were reflected by the Regional Office in the Development Results Framework (DRF)[41] and several offices in the Organizational Effectiveness and Efficiency Framework (OEEF) related to the influence of civil society in certain processes.[42]

Since the formulation and rollout of the ongoing Strategic Plan 2022–2025, UN Women has placed more emphasis on its civil society engagement at both the outcome and output levels. This was evidenced first by a dedicated outcome on increasing women's voice, leadership and agency as an expected high-level development result across the organization and complemented by 20 indicators to measure results related to civil society. As defined in the Strategic Notes of UN Women Country Offices in the region, five or more offices showed alignment with six of these indicators, demonstrating a focus in the region on:[43] creation and strengthening of dialogue processes and platforms; CSO capacity-building; and the level of influence of CSOs in politics, policy and peace processes.[44]

FINDING 3

Through UN Women's partnerships with a variegated typology of CSOs in the region, the Entity focused primarily on capacity-building and institutional strengthening. There was scope to increase coherence between formal partnership modalities.

UN Women employed various modalities to reach CSOs across the region by adapting and tailoring strategies for specific territories, priority population groups, availability of resources, and institutional and political contexts. Smaller-sized women's and feminist organizations were mainly reached through grant-making.[45] Medium-sized CSOs benefitted from small grants and partner agreement modalities seeking results on sustainability, service delivery and capacity-building. UN Women partnered with larger CSOs to implement long-term programmes and regional strategies. Across the different types of engagement, there was a higher prevalence of capacity-building and institutional strengthening activities across the region (see Figure 4).

In both Haiti and Colombia, where the largest portfolios in the region were implemented, nearly one-fifth of initiatives focused on capacity-building that responded mainly to humanitarian and peacebuilding issues. Other offices had a relatively balanced distribution of capacity-building activities based on the size of UN Women programming.

UN Women offices would benefit from enhancing the coherence and complementarity of formal partnership modalities with civil society. While there is the possibility of sequencing partnership modalities over time, few CSOs in the region transitioned from small grants to partner agreements.

[41] Indicator 1.1.2 Number of dialogues convened, and platforms created by UN Women for non-governmental organizations to contribute to global policy discussions.

[42] Level of influence of CSOs working on gender equality and women's empowerment, including women's organizations, in key normative, policy and peace processes.

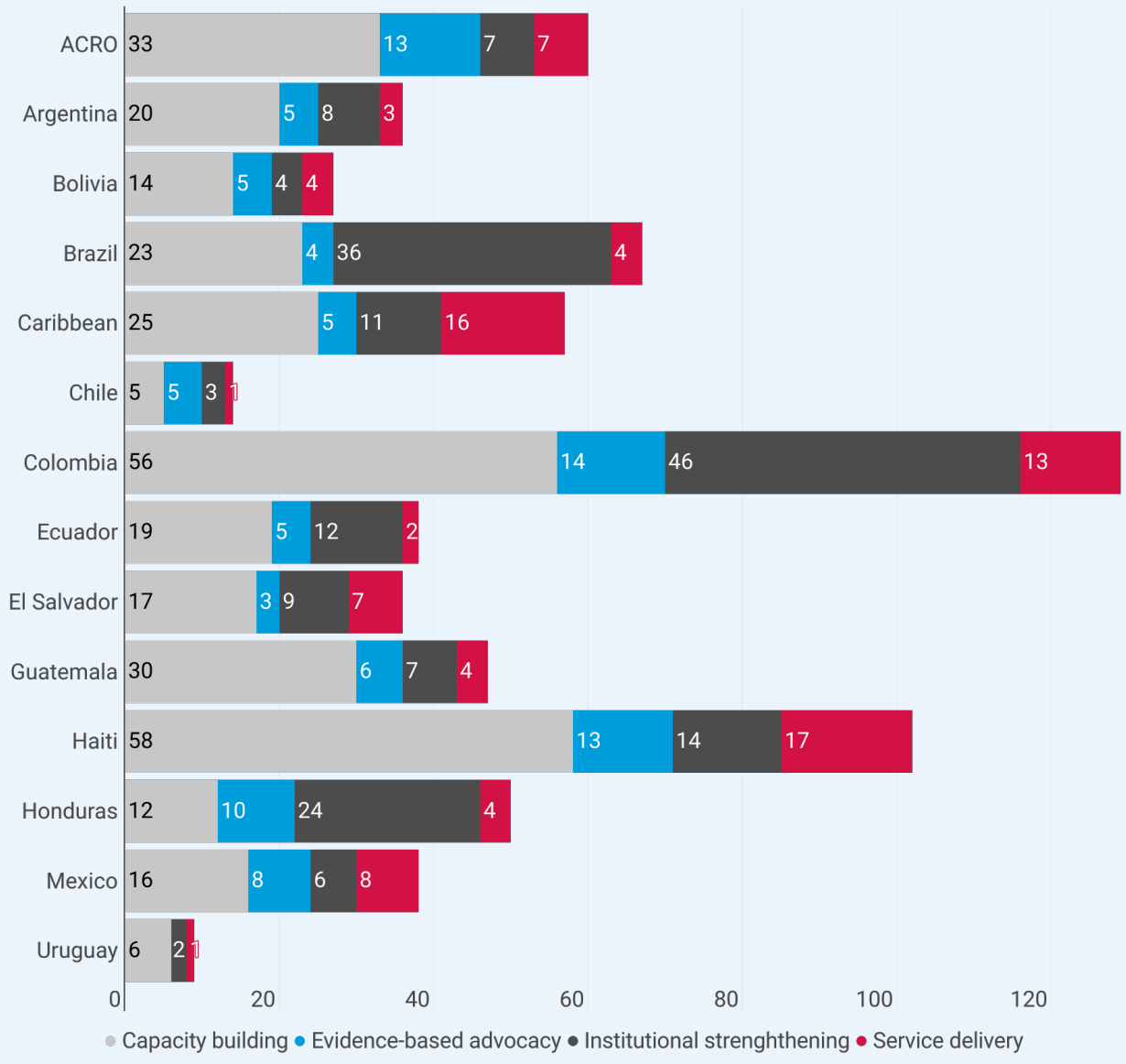
[43] Aligned refers to the fact that offices select indicators to report against the UN Women global Strategic Plan, which provide insight into how each office is approaching engagement with CSOs as well as regional trends on performance against these indicators.

[44] See Annex 8.5 for detailed indicator analysis.

[45] On average, organizations receiving small grants had about 19 persons compared to those with partner agreements that had about 33 persons. Source: UN Women survey of civil society partners (N=123).

UN Women signed more than one agreement with about 30 per cent of its total CSO partnerships,[46] but the majority remained in the same modality.[47] In this respect, important barriers remained to support small grantees to graduate to partner agreements and to provide sustainable support in the long-term for smaller organizations. Moreover, several UN Women offices have not leveraged the small grant modality, especially for reaching grassroots organizations and CSOs in vulnerable territories. Accordingly, office partnership strategies could more comprehensively articulate priority CSO engagement modalities in addition to formal partnerships, such as: campaigns; CSAGs; regional consultations; multilateral engagement; co-production of communications products; and normative work.

FIGURE 4: UN Women initiatives categorized by primary mode of engagement by office, 2020–2023



Source: Evaluation team based on analysis of agreements with CSOs in the region (N=439), as of July 2023

[46] This represented 124 of 439 agreements: 52 CSO partners signed 124 agreements; 36 of 52 CSOs had two contracts with UN Women; 12 CSOs had three contracts; and four CSOs had four separate contracts.

[47] Of all the agreements signed with CSOs, only five CSOs signed a combination of small grants and partner agreements; however, four of these CSOs signed partner agreements before receiving a small grant, whereas the small grant policy encouraged the inverse.

FINDING 4

In close cooperation with feminist and women's organizations as well as academic institutions, UN Women promoted the strengthening of key agendas in the region related to the care economy, women's engagement in peacebuilding and action against feminicide that contributed to normative and policy gains. The Entity was viewed as being uniquely positioned for policy advocacy based on its integrated triple mandate complemented by awareness-raising and research. Contextual shifts nonetheless generated setbacks in terms of results.

UN Women prioritized strategic agendas, combining technical advice, awareness-raising and fostering of multi-stakeholder dialogues and international conferences. This was achieved through formal partnerships combined with its convening power. Policy advocacy[48] relied on UN Women's comparative advantages in translating global norms and international practices to national contexts as well as in partnering with both government actors and CSOs throughout the region; building bridges between diverse social actors; and filling technical gaps through capacity-building initiatives. In addition to country level partnerships with universities and think thanks, UN Women partnered with regional academic networks, as evidenced by joint initiatives with the *Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales* (FLACSO) and the *Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales* (CLACSO). Such partnerships built on the comparative advantages of established academic institutions and helped to connect with other actors, including women's and feminist organizations.

UN Women successfully convened strategic stakeholders including academia, CSOs and governments on the care agenda. The organization contributed to the advancement of care's recognition in the region by providing technical inputs to include care issues in regional frameworks and local initiatives.[49] An example of the latter was the partnership with CLACSO, through which studies were produced on the rural care economy and care policies in the Caribbean.[50] UN Women also partnered with CSOs to strengthen care systems at the country level. In Argentina, UN Women projects targeted elderly women, people with disabilities and training of care workers.[51] UN Women also addressed domestic workers, including through initiatives in Brazil, Ecuador, Guatemala and Paraguay. These efforts supported the promotion of decent work for women, especially in the context of International Labour Organization Conventions 189 and 190, emphasizing labour rights and secure work conditions for domestic workers, of which there is a high prevalence of Afro-descendant and indigenous women across the region.[52]

UN Women demonstrated a historical and strong engagement on policy advocacy with CSOs related to the elimination of violence against women. In response to the high rates of feminicide in the region,[53] UN Women provided technical support for governments and CSOs seeking stronger protocols to investigate cases. The Entity produced knowledge products that have contributed to the typification of feminicide as a specific criminal case, such as the publication of studies on legal frameworks and evidence-based advocacy.[54] UN Women also sought the development of tools to incorporate prevention measures for feminicide cases, both by strengthening the support network for women at risk and by supporting initiatives to promote non-violent masculinities.[55]

[48] Policy advocacy is defined as the process of influencing and supporting decision makers, institutions and civil society to demand, adopt, develop, implement and uphold gender-responsive normative frameworks, legislation and policies. It is a process designed to foster policy change leading to improvements in the lives of women and girls and their increased access to rights. Source: UN Women Corporate Evaluation on UN Women's Policy advocacy work, Independent Evaluation Service, 2022.

[49] For example, the municipal law for the public responsibility of care in Cochabamba, Bolivia, 2019. Available at: https://oig.cepal.org/sites/default/files/2019_ley380cochabamba_bol.pdf

[50] See CLACSO/UNWomen, "Estado del arte sobre cuidados de ruralidad en América Latina y el Caribe", available at: https://www.clacso.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Iinforme-Final-de-Cuidados-rurales.pdf

[51] Based on UN Women PGAMS data.

[52] See ILO/UNWOMEN BRIEF v 1.1. 12.06.2020 "Domestic workers in Latin America and the Caribbean during COVID-19 crisis", available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---americas/---ro-lima/documents/publication/wcms_751773.pdf.

[53] According to the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, 11 of 18 countries or territories in Latin America had a rate equal to or greater than 1 victim of feminicide for every 100,000 women in 2021. This represents at least 12 violent deaths of women based on gender every day in the region.

[54] ACRO Annual Report 2021.

[55] ACRO Annual Report 2020 and Brazil Annual Reports 2018, 2019 and 2020.

The Spotlight Initiative provided a link to civil society in coordinated efforts to address feminicide and the wider issue of violence against women and girls.[56] Through the Spotlight Regional Programme, the UN Women Americas and Caribbean Regional Office in partnership with the Follow-up Mechanism of the Belém do Pará Convention (MESCEVI),[57] delivered workshops to parliamentarians, women's organizations, political movements and women members of political parties designed to further promote the model law on feminicide. In El Salvador, in close partnership with CSOs, UN Women's efforts focused on the reduction of feminicide rates and the training of police officers in the prevention and investigation of gender-based violence. In Guatemala, UN Women provided technical support to the governmental commission responsible for the discussion of the national Feminicide Law project and fostered dialogue between CSOs and governmental institutions. In Honduras, together with CSOs, UN Women and OHCHR provided technical input to include feminicide in the National Penal Code.[58]

> "The relationship [with UN Women] has been fundamental for institutional strengthening and [...] establishing the agenda and creating advocacy with regional governments."
>
> – Representative of CSO for Afro-descendant women, Brazil

UN Women promoted a gender perspective and civil society participation within peacebuilding processes, including through implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in close dialogue with local CSOs. In this respect, the Entity effectively adapted its response to the specificities of each conflict in the region. In Colombia, management reported that projects supported by the Women, Peace and Humanitarian Fund reached more than 20,000 people with a focus on territories affected by Colombian peacebuilding agreements.[59] In Guatemala, implementation of the National Action Plan was facilitated by UN Women and convened governmental institutions and civil society actors to establish the parameters for victim reparations of the armed conflict and peacebuilding for women in the affected territories, notably through support to Q'eqchi women to implement the *Sepur Zarco* sentence.[60] In both contexts, the focus was on providing a culturally sensitive response to the conflict, including specificities related to Afro-descendant, indigenous and rural communities.

Such UN Women policy advocacy initiatives with civil society engagement were implemented through support for CSO representatives' participation in high-level dialogues and decision-making spaces, as well as through joint work with CSOs, academic institutions and think tanks in the development and adaption of technical tools and research products. Advocacy initiatives were widespread across UN Women thematic areas, and UN Women's engagement was well evaluated as promoting joint advocacy strategies backed by related data and publications. Partners indicated that UN Women could have a stronger role in the production and dissemination of user-friendly and disaggregated data on key issues related to gender equality and women's empowerment for supporting clearer evidenced-based advocacy.[61]

[56] See https://www.spotlightinitiative.org/es/node/17440.

[57] See https://www.oas.org/en/mesecvi/.

[58] Honduras Annual Report 2018.

[59] UN Women Colombia Annual Report 2020.

[60] See https://gate.unwomen.org/Evaluation/Details?evaluationId=11448

[61] Other corporate evaluations similarly found that the production of evidence-based knowledge was central to UN Women's policy advocacy work, including the need for rigorous peer reviews and methodological consistency at the country level. Source: UN Women, Corporate Evaluation on UN Women's Policy Advocacy Work, Independent Evaluation Service (2022).

FINDING 5

UN Women's work with CSOs amplified women's voices in political spaces and ad hoc mechanisms, notably on indigenous rights and parity democracy. This strategy promoted the leadership of feminist and women's organizations in relevant decision-making spaces and created opportunities for the consideration of gender, ethnic and race perspectives in political processes.

UN Women's engagement with CSOs combined formal agreements with other support modalities for women leaders to increase their representation in relevant decision-making and political spaces. Through a comprehensive strategy, UN Women offered grants, technical advice, and invitations to national meetings as well as financial support for the participation of civil society leadership in international forums. Women's organizations were the main targeted group for this strategy with strong representation from feminist organizations.[62] Such work adopted a strong focus on agendas such as indigenous rights and parity democracy and was characterized by a growing emphasis on priority groups, especially human-rights defenders, indigenous, Afro-descendant, and migrant and refugee women. Although youth and women with disabilities were also targeted, UN Women's support to their organizations and collectives remained nascent.[63]

Regarding indigenous women, the Regional Office supported the participation of indigenous women at the XIV and XV Regional Conferences on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean and at CSW sessions during the period under review.[64] UN Women in Brazil has supported indigenous women and their organizations since 2014, which helped in creating a trusting relationship. In the Brazilian 2022 elections, two indigenous women who were previously UN Women partners were elected as representatives for the Lower House.[65] UN Women also supported indigenous women's organizations and networks with small grants, such as Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (APIB) and National Articulation of Indigenous Women Warriors of Ancestry (ANMIGA), the latter being a CSO of indigenous women supported by UN Women since its foundation.

UN Women enhanced the participation of indigenous women in peacebuilding processes in Colombia focusing on territory-based initiatives, and in Guatemala through the programme *Realizing the transformational effect of the Sepur Zarco sentence*. UN Women also supported the creation of the Platform for Indigenous Women in Guatemala, with the participation of 125 indigenous women from seven generations. The Platform created mechanisms for political, social and advocacy dialogue that resulted in the approval by National Congress of an increase of 8 million *quetzals* per year for the Centre for Women Survivors of Violence (CAIMUS). In Ecuador, UN Women supported the creation of the *Antisuyu Warmikuna* leadership school for Amazonian indigenous women.

UN Women has supported the participation of civil society in peacebuilding dialogues and processes. In Colombia, through the Women, Peace and Humanitarian Fund, UN Women funded 26 projects – including Afro-Colombian, ex-combatants and transgender women CSOs – focused on women's participation in peacebuilding initiatives and the capacity strengthening of displaced women, which reportedly reached more than 2,000 people. The Fund combined both partner agreements and small grants, the latter modality designed to strengthen local CSOs' organizational capacities. UN Women Guatemala combined a series of initiatives that resulted in the stronger participation of civil society – mainly women's organizations – in the national peacebuilding process. UN Women focused on increasing the participation of a diverse range of women's social groups in national dialogues, especially indigenous and rural women. A good example of this are the efforts made by UN Women using its convening role to foster multiple dialogues and to promote women's participation at the *Mesa Interinstitucional sobre Mujeres, Paz y Seguridad* (MIMPAZ) and the Guatemalan 1325 National Action Plan [66].

[62] Based on desk review.

[63] Annual Reports.

[64] ACRO Annual Reports.

[65] Celia Xakriabá and Sonia Guajajara, the latter appointed as the first Minister of Indigenous People of Brazil.

[66] Evaluación de la Nota Estratégica 2015-2019 – ONU Mujeres Guatemala. Available at: https://gate.unwomen.org/EvaluationDocument/Download?evaluationDocumentID=9410.

> "The UN Women programme has generated leadership among the producers that participated in the process. [...] It generated leadership roles in the grassroots organizations with which we worked since it allowed them to improve in programmatic and administrative areas."
>
> "UN Women support helps to strengthen not only individ-ual leadership but also networks of leadership, reaching territories in a weblike way."
>
> –Representatives of women's organizations, Colombia

In this respect, UN Women's convening power has been a major asset, as the building and strengthening of networks among feminist and other organizations was considered an effective strategy.[67] Such networks in the region included a diverse range of experts on violence against women and girls, women mediators and peacemakers, as well as disability movement networks. In some cases, UN Women helped to create specific networks, which was especially relevant in the case of indigenous women and the peacebuilding agenda. In other cases, UN Women supported the strengthening of existing or nascent networks, such as the *Red Afrolatinoamericana, Afrocaribeña y de la Diáspora*.

In terms of results on parity democracy, UN Women has supported CSOs and individuals and contributed to relevant normative and political gains in the region. In Bolivia, UN Women promoted advances in national legislation by contributing to the drafting of the Political Organizations Bill. In Mexico, UN Women took part in the negotiation between the government and CSOs that resulted in the Constitutional Reform on Gender Parity, which guarantees parity in all public charges. In Argentina, UN Women supported the multi-stakeholder coalition *Ojo Paritario*, which monitors implementation of parity democracy initiatives in the country. Throughout the region, according to management reporting, UN Women built the capacity of over 1,000 women in political participation, mainly those aiming to take part in local and national elections. Training courses on political participation were especially relevant in Argentina, Bolivia and Brazil, including a partnership with FLACSO Argentina through which the ATENEA-FLACSO Virtual Platform for Political Training was promoted, driven by UN Women, UNDP, International IDEA and FLACSO Argentina.[68]

In addition, UN Women promoted civil society participation in its own governance structures through a series of participatory spaces and channels, including CSAGs.[69] Despite the centrality of regional and national CSAGs in the region, UN Women created and maintained a diverse portfolio of participatory spaces and channels, such as the Civil Society Reference Groups convening CSOs under the Spotlight Initiative;[70] regular and thematic regional meetings with CSO representatives organized by the Regional Office, where feedback from CSO partners was received and responded to by UN Women personnel, normally with senior management presence; and quarterly meetings held with CSO representatives and UN Women in the Caribbean. Building on this work in the Caribbean and the Spotlight Initiative CSO retreat held in 2022, several CSOs decided to form the Caribbean Gender Alliance as a regional partnership to promote healthy gender relations across the region.[71]

Such efforts to promote CSO participation and women's leadership was recognized by partners. The stakeholders consulted provided a positive assessment of UN Women's convening role in terms of bridge-building, fostering of multi-stakeholder alliances and creation of dialogue spaces (see Figure 5). On the other hand, nearly one-quarter of CSO partners consulted in interviews and focus groups (18 of 78) provided critical feedback regarding UN Women participatory spaces. Some observed that such spaces did not lead to relevant results despite being time-intensive for partners; others noted that their participation supported an inclusive and consultative approach, but that in practice had limited results in terms of their needs and priorities.

[67] Gisela Zaremberg and Débora Rezende de Almeida, 'Feminisms in Latin America: Pro-choice Nested Networks in Mexico and Brazil', Cambridge University Dec 2022.

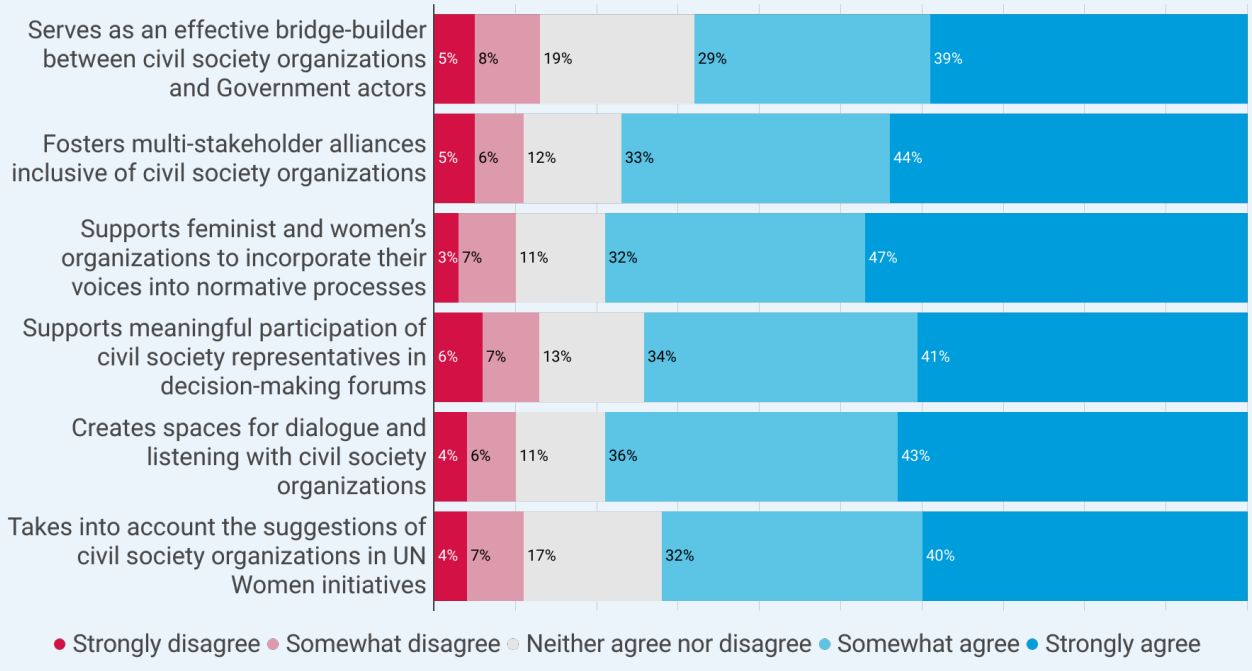
[68] ACRO Annual Reports 2020, 2021 and 2022.

[69] See Section 4.3.

[70] ONU Mujeres, La participación de la sociedad civil en la Iniciativa Spotlight: informe basado en la retroalimentación de los grupos de referencia de la sociedad civil de América Latina, 2022.

[71] This was partially thanks to exchanges between civil society leadership within the participatory spaces facilitated by UN Women. See https://www.caribbeangender.org/#.

FIGURE 5: Civil society partners found UN Women's convening role relevant in terms of bridge-building, fostering of multi-stakeholder alliances and creation of dialogue spaces



Source: UN Women evaluation survey of civil society partners (N=320)

FINDING 6

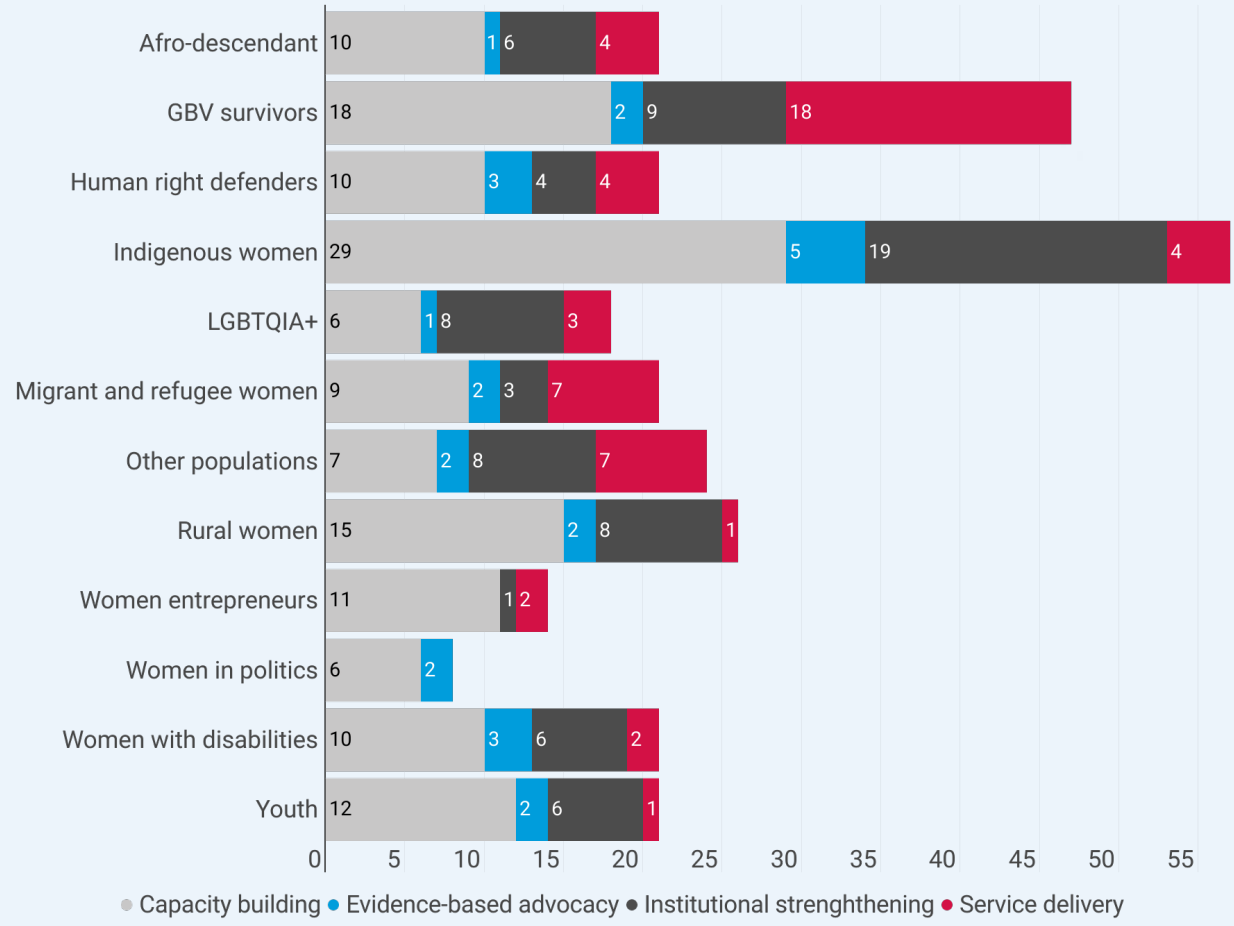
UN Women contributed to the strengthening of CSOs in exercising their leadership role in the fulfilment of women's rights, and promoted the improvement of gender equality advocate capacities representing a diverse range of priority constituencies, such as human rights-defenders, youth, migrants, refugees and indigenous women. However, gaps in operationalizing capacity-building hindered sustainable results.

UN Women developed a mixed approach to capacity development for civil society partners at individual and organizational levels.[72] The Entity provided technical and methodological tools for CSOs, aiming to improve both their administrative and programmatic performance. In terms of administrative capacity-building, there was a stronger focus on UN Women contractual modalities (partner agreements and small grants) rather than operational issues overall. However, some relevant results on partner capacity development emerged in the context of agreements under the coordination of UN Women's Technical Secretariat in Colombia, *One Win Leads to Another* programmes in Argentina and Brazil, and the Win-Win Programme at the regional level. Individual level capacity-building showed a twofold approach, promoting both workforce training for partner CSOs (e.g. technical support for care workers in Argentina) and implementing initiatives to improve the skills of individuals in key areas (e.g. workshops on political participation for women candidates in Bolivia and Brazil).

Capacity-building constituted the most common mode of engagement within UN Women initiatives across almost all priority groups (see Figure 6). The approach was especially relevant for groups facing intersectional vulnerabilities and discrimination, such as Afro-descendant, indigenous and rural women. In some cases, long-term capacity-building activities were combined with the short-term delivery of services to tackle emergency situations, including for gender-based violence survivors, migrant and refugee women and other population groups facing humanitarian crises. Initiatives addressing indigenous women (19 per cent) through capacity-building activities were combined with a growing focus on institutional strengthening of their constituent organizations.

[72] Capacity development is defined as the process whereby people, organizations and society unleash, strengthen, create, adapt and maintain capacity over time. Adapted from: UN Women, 'Key Lessons Learned on Capacity Development', 2021.

FIGURE 6. UN Women modes of engagement with CSOs by targeted population



*Other populations refer to other categories of priority groups

Source: Desk reviews, interviews and focus groups discussions; figures refer to the total number of coded entries per category (N=299)

The monitoring and management of data for capacity development programming was not coordinated effectively and suffered from a lack of readily usable tools for offices to track, measure and target efforts. A common approach for monitoring the various stages of CSO capacity-building was absent.[73] Following the roll-out and implementation of the small grants policy, suggested capacity-building indicators were to be defined and reported by offices for organizational systems and processes, as well as individual workforces. There was no clear mechanism in UN Women to track these intended capacity changes nor corporate tools adapted to these purposes. Survey respondents rated UN Women's effectiveness in capacity-building as lower than most other surveyed areas.[74] Several interviewees suggested institutional capacity development should be a higher priority area for UN Women to focus on its future support to CSOs, including through financial and institutional strengthening.

[73] See also https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-08/evaluation-capacity-development-of-partners-to-respond-to-the-needs-of-women-and-girls-at-national-level-en.pdf. .

[74] Regarding most dimensions of capacity-building, between 15 and 18 per cent of respondents found UN Women not effective. Source: UN Women evaluation survey of civil society partners (N=172).

FINDING 7

UN Women provided technical and financial support for CSOs to deliver services for women, with a focus on the protection of human-rights defenders; preventing and responding to gender-based violence; providing emergency income and entrepreneurship training to build the autonomy of women in crisis contexts; and the insertion of a gender perspective in peacebuilding processes and responses to humanitarian crises.

Through service delivery by CSO implementing partners, UN Women provided essential services, goods and resources for women in humanitarian and development settings. Such partnerships enabled UN Women's response to COVID-19, disasters (e.g. the 2021 earthquake in Haiti), conflict situations (e.g. Colombia and Guatemala) and displaced, migrant and refugee women (e.g. Venezuelan migration flows to Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador). Overall, service delivery through CSO partnerships allowed UN Women to address the emergency needs of women facing intersecting vulnerabilities while building CSO capacity.

Of the 439 agreements with CSOs in the region, over half (237) represented initiatives focused on implementation through programme partners with the provision of service delivery from UN Women through CSOs. An estimated 19 per cent (84 of 439) of agreements with CSOs provided services and solutions in humanitarian settings, including for women who were in situations of migration, post-conflict, disaster and displacement (see Figure 7). Although service delivery was not the focus of UN Women in the region, the increase in the number and intensity of humanitarian needs[75] has demanded a stronger response from UN Women to promote women's rights and well-being in emergency contexts.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, UN Women focused both on the provision of women's basic needs and the additional barriers to respond to violence against women in the region in the context of social distancing measures. In Brazil, UN Women partnered with the National Federation of Domestic Workers (FENATRAD) to strengthen the organization and support its members with emergency care during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Colombia, the Entity reported strengthening the capacity of 2,554 women and delivering 6,118 humanitarian aid and biosafety kits in partnership with eight CSOs across seven departments through the Women, Peace and Humanitarian Fund. In Brazil and Argentina, the *One Win Leads to Another* programme was adapted to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and provided training to peripherical girls on sports and life skills to prevent gender-based violence, and also provided food cards which allowed them and their families to have higher food security. UN Women provided grants to CSOs in Guyana, Jamaica, Grenada, and Trinidad and Tobago to promote educational and psycho-support to address violence against women and girls.

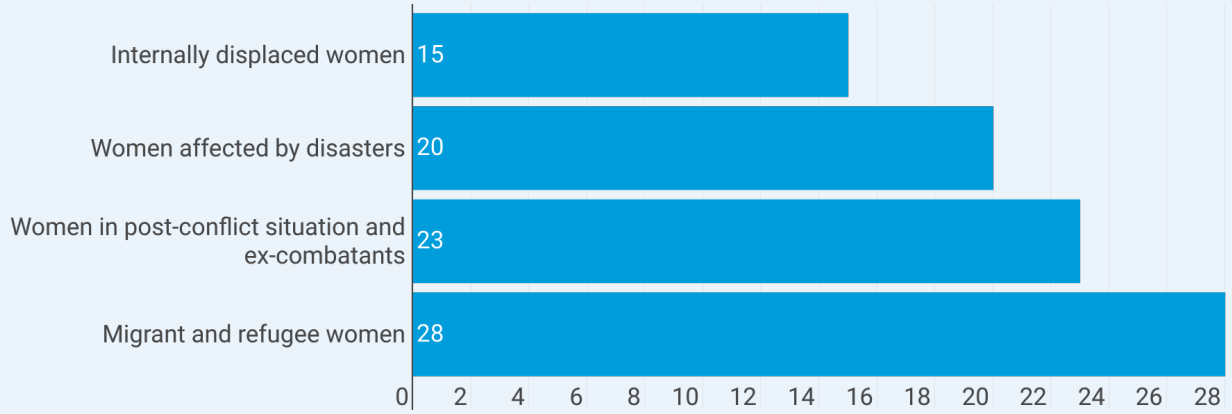
UN Women also worked to promote safe spaces for women human-rights defenders developing collective action, advocacy and protection strategies and promoting public outreach to address harmful stereotypes and hate speech. Support to women human-rights defenders was achieved through projects such as *Connecting Women, Defending Rights Programme* in Brazil and *Pro-Defensoras Programme/ Women Peace and Humanitarian Fund* in Colombia.

Regarding the Venezuela crisis, UN Women provided support to CSOs to respond to the influx of Venezuelan migrants and refugees with technical advice to local and national CSOs (Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador), which resulted in the insertion of a gender perspective in the humanitarian response both through the capacity-building of local partners and the provision of financial and life-saving assistance to migrant and refugee women. UN Women also partnered with CSOs (e.g. *Instituto Migração e Direitos Humanos*) to reach Venezuelan women in situations of vulnerability and provide them with an emergency financial allowance and entrepreneurship training to promote their employability and economic autonomy.

In Colombia, especially in the departments of Chocó and Nariño, dozens of CSOs had their capacity strengthened to respond to the crises of mixed migratory flows caused by both the Venezuelan influx of migrants and refugees and forced displacement resulting from the conflict in Colombia. CSOs were trained to activate protection mechanisms in dialogue with local public institutions, which includes the partnership between Venezuelan and Colombian women organizations and the development of community road maps for protection and attention in cases of gender-based violence as a tool for the consolidation of peace within the framework of the Peace Agreements signed by the Colombian state with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

[75] The Global Humanitarian Overview 2022 estimates that the number of people in need in Latin America and the Caribbean increased from 9.6 million in 2018 to 26.4 million in 2021. Available at https://reliefweb.int/report/colombia/latin-america-caribbean-global-humanitarian-overview-2022-summary-december-2021.

FIGURE 7. Number of projects focused on priority humanitarian populations*



*Count of population groups is not mutually exclusive

Source: Evaluation team based on analysis of CSO agreements (N=439)

FINDING 8

UN Women reached grassroots organizations and groups by combining diverse approaches to partnership with civil society, which demonstrated a clear orientation towards social groups facing greater vulnerability and discrimination. Nonetheless, opportunities to scale this work and increase coverage for targeted populations through an intersectional lens remain challenging.

UN Women defined social groups facing situations of greater vulnerability and discrimination as priority populations in most of its agreements and initiatives. In the region, 63 per cent of UN Women agreements signed with CSOs (277 of 439) adopted a leave no one behind perspective by orienting towards a target population and addressing drivers of inequality and discrimination (see Table 4).[76] This effort created a solid channel of dialogue and a strong component of participation for diverse population groups, with emphasis on indigenous women, rural women, women human-rights defenders, gender-based violence survivors and youth.[77] The UN Women partnership framework also included a broad definition of CSO partners, which supported such engagement with diverse profiles and entity types.

In terms of targeted populations, gender-based violence survivors were the main group addressed by agreements signed with CSOs, which was in line with the thematic focus of programmes in the region as evidenced by the Spotlight Initiative, responsible for 162 of the 439 agreements analysed.

This showed the extent to which UN Women had strongly institutionalized its partnerships with CSOs in this thematic area. Data also indicated the proportion of priority groups included in CSO agreements in offices as follows:

- Youth (17 per cent, distributed more evenly across the region).
- Human-rights defenders (10 per cent, concentrated in Brazil and Colombia).
- Rural women (10 per cent, concentrated in Colombia and Haiti).
- Women entrepreneurs (10 per cent, distributed throughout the region with a higher representation in Colombia).
- Indigenous women (8 per cent, relatively distributed throughout the region with a higher representation in Brazil and Colombia and lower representation in Mexico, a country with a prevalent indigenous population).

[76] An agreement was classified as having a leave no one behind perspective based on two factors: (1) orientation towards a specific population in its design considering their needs, territorialities and intersectionality; and (2) addressing root causes of discrimination and inequality. Source: UNDG, Leaving no one behind - A UNSDG Operational Guide (2022).

[77] Considering the 37 per cent of agreements not classified as having a leave no one behind orientation, many were designed to cover specific issues or to produce ad hoc products not directly related to specific priority groups. Some of these products might have indirectly impacted priority groups but did not include explicit targeting.

Some thematic areas within UN Women's portfolio had a stronger leave no one behind perspective than others, such as the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Through small grants, UN Women reached local CSOs working on strategic territories and with a clear focus on indigenous, Afro-descendant and rural women working on the promotion of human rights and peacebuilding processes. In this realm, UN Women supported capacity-building initiatives and the inclusion of women from diverse social groups in the elaboration and implementation of peace agreements and peacebuilding processes, especially in Colombia and Guatemala.

A small subset of agreements with civil society were considered both highly inclusive and demonstrated an intersectional focus; 3 per cent of agreements covered four to five priority groups facing greater discrimination and vulnerabilities.[78] These initiatives were distributed across the Regional Office, Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia and Haiti, and targeted mainly youth (9), rural women (8), and indigenous women (6). Although these projects represented a small proportion of the total agreements, they showed that rural women and youth could operate as relevant entry points to address populations and their inequalities through an intersectional approach; and rural women and youth are cohorts cross-cutting all relevant targeted populations for UN Women.

TABLE 4. Analysis of CSO agreement orientation towards priority groups facing vulnerability and discrimination

PRIORITY GROUP	ARGENTINA	BOLIVIA	BRAZIL	CARIBBEAN	CHILE	COLOMBIA	ECUADOR	EL SALVADOR	GUATEMALA	HAITI	HONDURAS	MEXICO	REGIONAL	URUGUAY	TOTAL	% GROUP
Afro-descendant	0	0	6	1	0	9	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	19	4%
Gender-based violence survivors	19	2	3	46	0	40	8	4	4	29	13	30	18	1	217	49%
Human-rights defenders	4	0	18	0	0	13	0	0	3	0	4	4	2	0	44	10%
Indigenous women	4	3	7	2	0	10	1	0	3	0	2	1	3	0	36	8%
LGBTIQ+	29	0	3	1	0	4	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	14	3%
Migrant/refugee women	13	0	3	1	0	14	2	0	0	0	0	6	1	0	28	6%
Rural women	30	1	3	4	0	17	0	0	2	10	0	0	3	1	45	10%
Women in politics	18	1	0	1	6	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	17	4%
Women entrepreneurs	217	1	0	2	0	14	1	0	2	9	3	3	3	2	44	10%
Women with disabilities	8	0	0	2	1	3	0	0	0	8	3	0	1	0	26	6%
Youth	4	3	11	15	1	15	1	4	1	11	3	1	3	0	73	17%
Other target groups**	14	0	15	9	0	40	4	0	0	27	5	2	1	0	117	27%
# agreements orientation*	22	4	31	25	3	76	8	3	6	44	15	21	17	2	277	63%
Total agreements	**37**	**8**	**35**	**53**	**6**	**109**	**11**	**5**	**7**	**57**	**19**	**49**	**38**	**5**	**439**	
Orientation by office	**59%**	**50%**	**89%**	**47%**	**50%**	**70%**	**73%**	**43%**	**86%**	**77%**	**79%**	**43%**	**45%**	**40%**	**63%**	

Source: Evaluation team based on analysis of CSO agreements (N=439)

**Other groups refer to 26 additional categories; *Count is not mutually exclusive

The breadth and depth of UN Women's focus on the leave no one behind principle through partnerships with CSOs was uneven across offices in the region and across priority groups. While six UN Women offices had approximately 70 per cent of partnerships oriented towards such groups (Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras), most had 50 per cent or less. There was also a lower proportion of agreements targeting Afro-descendant women, women with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ groups. Afro-descendant women were articulated as a priority group in 4 per cent of CSO agreements, although it is a population group historically relevant to UN Women in the region.

The LGBTIQ+ population was represented in 3 per cent of CSO agreements, which echoed feedback in interviews and focus groups regarding the need for UN Women to address this group more proactively through its initiatives. Women with disabilities were articulated in 6 per cent of UN Women agreements, most of which were implemented in Argentina and Haiti (63 per cent of projects focused on this population were implemented in these two countries). Migrant and refugee women also comprised 6 per cent of agreements; half of these agreements were implemented in Colombia.

[78] 12 of the 439 agreements with CSOs in the region reviewed (9 partnership agreements and 3 small grants).

Although stakeholders recognized UN Women's efforts to include priority groups in its programmes and agreements, there was a shared perception among partners that UN Women faced relevant barriers to reach grassroots organizations, and as a result certain segments of populations facing greater vulnerabilities and risks had not been reached. Approximately 15 per cent of CSO partners consulted through focus groups and interviews (12 of 78) provided critical feedback about the capacity of UN Women to reach priority groups. This perception was especially relevant in the Caribbean region. Factors inhibiting a more robust articulation included the lack of institutional experience and partnerships in working with key priority groups such as LGBTIQ+ groups; weak design at the project initiation phase where a research and evidence-based approach could provide clearer potential for targeting, including through a clear results framework and monitoring approaches; and the need to prioritize among a diversity of groups.

FINDING 9

UN Women developed tools that promoted the sustainability of its partnerships with CSOs through capacity-building and technical assistance on programmatic areas. Relevant challenges remained for long-term partnerships, including local ownership considering the unpredictability of financing, administrative barriers for access, and lack of quality institutional tools for knowledge management and capacity development.

To improve the sustainability of its interventions, UN Women supported organizational strengthening initiatives to increase the knowledge and institutional capacity of partners, especially those receiving small grants. This strategy was complemented by UN Women's technical support to partners through training and knowledge production and dissemination, which contributed to promoting local appropriation and evidence-based advocacy. UN Women also created solutions to facilitate its reach with CSOs and support the sustainability of interventions among implementing partners. This was evidenced by "umbrella" and alliance models[79] that allowed smaller CSOs to associate with larger and more established organizations with whom UN Women partnered, including in Colombia, Honduras and Brazil.[80] In the context of emergency responses, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, some offices reallocated resources of grantees to humanitarian needs to ensure they remained operational and met changing local needs.[81]

Partners generally agreed on the relevance and utility of the data and publications issued or supported by UN Women.[82] Nonetheless, many partners suggested that UN Women more actively publicize and circulate such products, as well as consider that it could be more user-friendly and adapted to larger audiences. Partners suggested adapting language to non-academic audiences; including visual data such as geo-referenced maps, dashboards and infographics to summarize complex processes or quantitative information; translating products into indigenous languages; actively disseminating publications through mailing lists and other channels; and promoting wider dissemination not only of the publications themselves, but also of parts of their content through social media and other channels. Both UN Women personnel and CSO partner groups also criticized the lack of a structured knowledge management strategy at the regional level. Sustainability of results could have been enhanced through a coordinated effort to produce and disseminate data to raise awareness, support evidence-based advocacy, strengthen CSO knowledge production, fill gaps on official data on gender inequality, and identify and systematize best practices.

[79] Also called "sub-contracting" and "sub-granting".

[80] Several examples in the region of this approach included: Oxfam in Honduras, which supported multiple CSOs; Colombia's use of umbrella CSO partnerships to build administrative capacity with grassroots organizations; and Empodera in Brazil, which supported local organizations as part of One Win Leads to Another.

[81] For example, under the One Win Leads to Another project in Brazil, 11 organizations were authorized by UN Women to reallocate funds to humanitarian focus to unsure their operational sustainability, including payment of rent, utility bills, facilitator's salary, hand sanitizers, masks, and other expenses resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the project Connecting Women, Defending Rights, seven organizations received small grants to invest and adjust their human rights assistance and advocacy to adapt to the challenges of the pandemic. Source: UN Women Brazil Annual Report 2020.

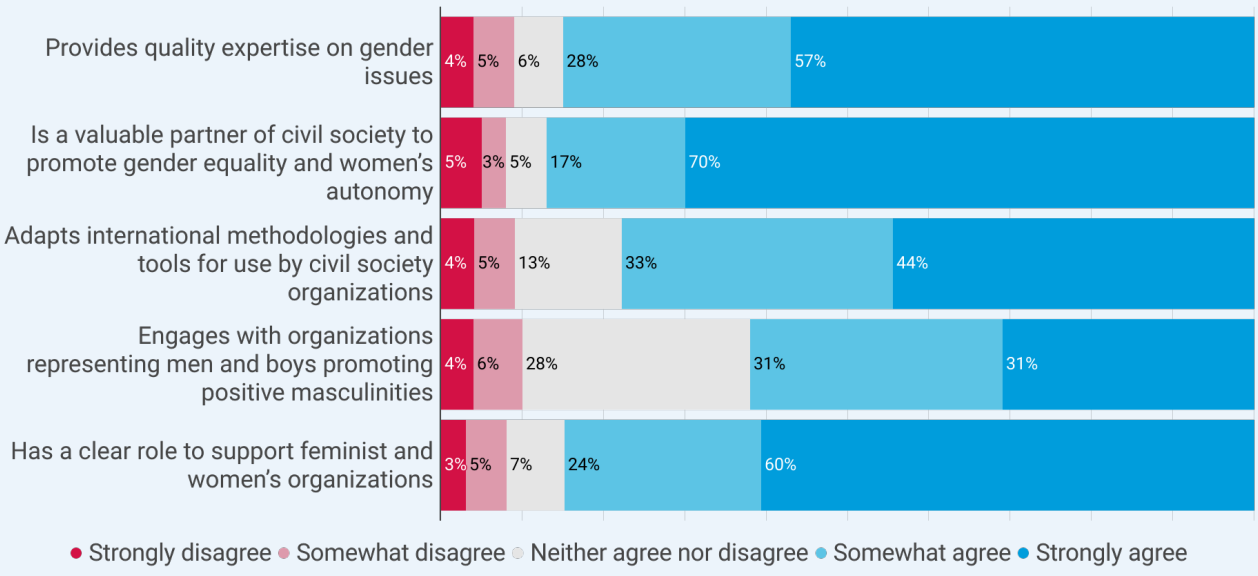
[82] Based on interviews and focus groups.

Other challenges were raised considering the policy restrictions of UN Women's partnership modalities,[83] including what were reported to be the following key inhibiting factors to the sustainability of CSO engagement:

- The learning curve for administrative requirements tended to be steep and long compared to the average short length of agreements.
- There was a "unfilled space" in which some CSOs could not receive small grants after previous support but were not yet prepared to sign partner agreements.
- Political and resource instability resulted in high turnover rates of CSO personnel, which posed an additional challenge for administrative capacity-building.
- Some CSOs or collectives, such as grassroots and youth organizations, did not necessarily want to become larger or more formalized organizations.
- Delays in payments posed a challenge to the sustainability and Cronogramass of projects, especially for those CSOs that did not have sufficient resources to keep working.
- Negative feedback from partners – based on reported poor communication, administrative delays, and perceived competition among other issues – discouraged some CSOs from continuing future partnerships.

Despite these challenges to promote sustainability in its CSO engagement, survey results indicated positive feedback on UN Women's role in promoting long-term results, which showed an enabling environment to engage partners for sustainable results (see Figure 8). Feedback also indicated room to enhance UN Women's engagement with organizations representing men and boys to promote positive masculinities, including through work with gender cultural norms that comprise the root causes of inequality.

FIGURE 8 : Civil society partners' feedback on UN Women's overall role



Source: UN Women survey of civil society partners (n=319)

[83] See discussion in Findings 11-12.

FINDING 10

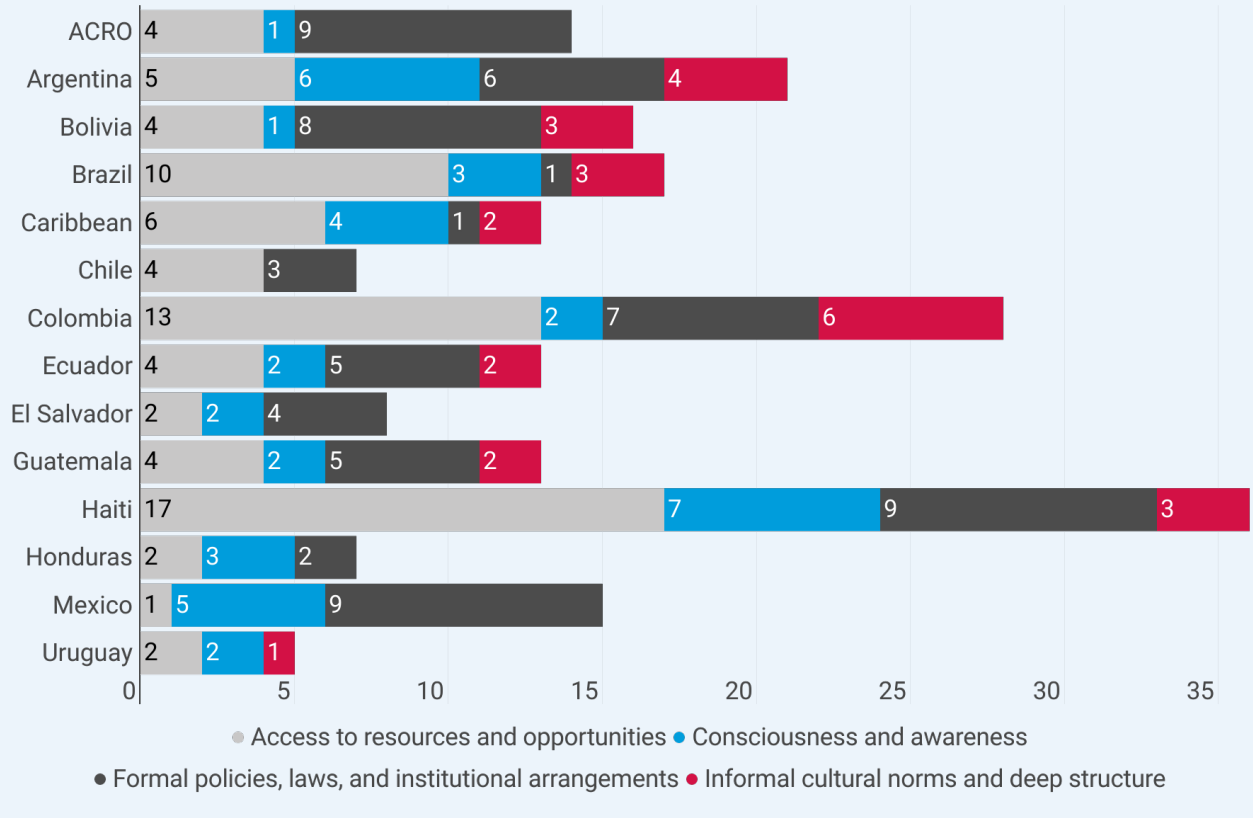
The analysis of UN Women's reported results on its civil society engagement through the lens of the Gender@Work tool demonstrated its focus on access to resources and formal policies, laws and institutional arrangements. Results were less evident in terms of awareness-raising, informal cultural norms and social structures.

A mapping of UN Women results across the Gender@Work quadrant framework found that most results in the region were concentrated on access to resources and opportunities, as well as the consolidation of formal policies, laws and institutional arrangements (see Figure 9). Access to resources encompassed the financial support UN Women provided to CSOs for institutional strengthening and service delivery. This also included support for events and capacity development of organizations and individuals. UN Women offices with a higher proportion of small grants (Brazil and Caribbean) or a high number of partner agreements focused on service delivery in humanitarian settings (Colombia and Haiti) were normally classified as having a higher proportion of results within the category of access to resources and opportunities.

In the context of offices that have achieved outcomes in formal policies, laws and institutional arrangements (Regional Office, Bolivia, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico), UN Women placed greater emphasis on evidence-based policy and advocacy. Furthermore, such results were supported by a conducive political context (e.g. Bolivia has notably pursued a national proposal for gender parity and Mexico achieved constitutional reforms for gender parity in democracy).

The results concerning awareness and sensitization varied significantly in intensity throughout the region but demonstrated relevance in Argentina, the Caribbean, Honduras, Mexico and Uruguay primarily due to the dissemination of communication campaigns supported by or in collaboration with UN Women (e.g. the *#bastadechineo* campaign in Argentina, or campaigns under the umbrella of the *One Wins Leads to Another*). Reported results regarding informal cultural norms and social structures were more limited in the region, indicating the challenge of disseminating results at the level of impact, especially concerning compartmentalized changes with a focus on transforming gender patterns and structures. In this regard, a limited number of initiatives addressed arts, cultural production, media and masculinities or reached non-traditional partners such as religious organizations.

FIGURE 9. Gender@Work analysis of results achieved through UN Women's engagement with civil society



Source: Evaluation team based on desk review

4.2. To what extent have UN Women's internal systems enabled organizational effectiveness and efficiency for civil society engagement?

FINDING 11

UN Women modalities for formal partnerships were generally assessed by civil society as providing value, and some offices in the Americas and Caribbean leveraged the introduction of the small grant modality to allow for greater responsiveness to CSO demands.

Civil society partners in the Americas and Caribbean generally expressed satisfaction in collaborating with UN Women. In rating the partnership experience, 89 per cent of CSO survey respondents assessed their experience as good or very good, while 79 per cent agreed that UN Women added value to their respective organizational missions.[84] Additionally, the civil society partners surveyed provided a positive assessment in several key areas related to transparency and information: 81 per cent agreed that UN Women chose its partners in a transparent manner; and 78 per cent agreed that there was sufficient information to access partnership opportunities (see Figure 10). This feedback was indicative of the clarity in the partnership process.

In addition, UN Women introduced modalities for partnering with civil society that enabled stronger organizational responsiveness. In the Americas and Caribbean region, the small grants mechanism was leveraged actively in comparison to other regions.[85] Between 2020 and 2023, the region used an increasing number of small grants with CSOs following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Approximately 45 per cent of all agreements with CSOs used small grants, which is comparatively higher than other regions,[86] although certain UN Women offices and programme presences in the region had still to use this modality.[87] Most surveyed partners (81 per cent) agreed that UN Women was responsive to demands and issues that arose, and personnel also cited examples of adaptability in the face of urgent contexts, such as fast-track procedures with human-rights defenders.[88]

However, there was evidence of a need to continue to enhance the competitive nature of UN Women processes for partnering with organizations. Forty per cent of partner agreements with civil society between 2020 and 2023 were through direct, non-competitive selection processes in the Americas and Caribbean.[89] While such modalities may have a clear justification,[90] for example in humanitarian crises or when facing supply constraints, several offices had a high proportion of non-competitive selection processes with civil society in non-humanitarian contexts.[91] Interviews indicated that this was influenced by offices seeking to increase efficiency as well as limitations in UN Women's partner sourcing beyond a common circle of CSO partners.[92] Such practices risked perceptions of bias with external partners.

[84] Survey of civil society partners (N=161 and N=171, respectively).

[85] The comparatively high usage of small grants in the region was also influenced by the regional context, particularly more limited traditional donor financing for development. This was evidenced by the Europe and Central Asia region being the second highest ranking region using small grants given the similarities in its development and donor financing context.

[86] Europe and Central Asia (26 per cent); Asia and Pacific (9 per cent); Arab States (5 per cent); West and Central Africa (4 per cent) and East and Central Africa (4 per cent). Data based on PGAMS as of July 2023.

[87] Uruguay, Honduras, Haiti, Ecuador, and El Salvador.

[88] Survey of civil society partners (N=161).

[89] This was higher than the global average proportion of direct contracting with partner agreements of 33 per cent. Data based on PGAMS as of July 2023.

[90] CSO partners are selected through competitive processes along with risk and capacity assessments. Sole sourcing remains an exception allowed in very specific situations and with the request of relevant additional requirements.

[91] Argentina (82 per cent), Bolivia (67 per cent), Brazil (83 per cent) and Uruguay (75 per cent).

[92] In this respect, an evaluation in Colombia recommended to increase the availability of competitive bidding for initiatives with CSOs. Source: UN Women, 'Final qualitative evaluation: USAID project to End Gender-Based Violence to ensure women's full enjoyment of rights', 2021.

FINDING 12

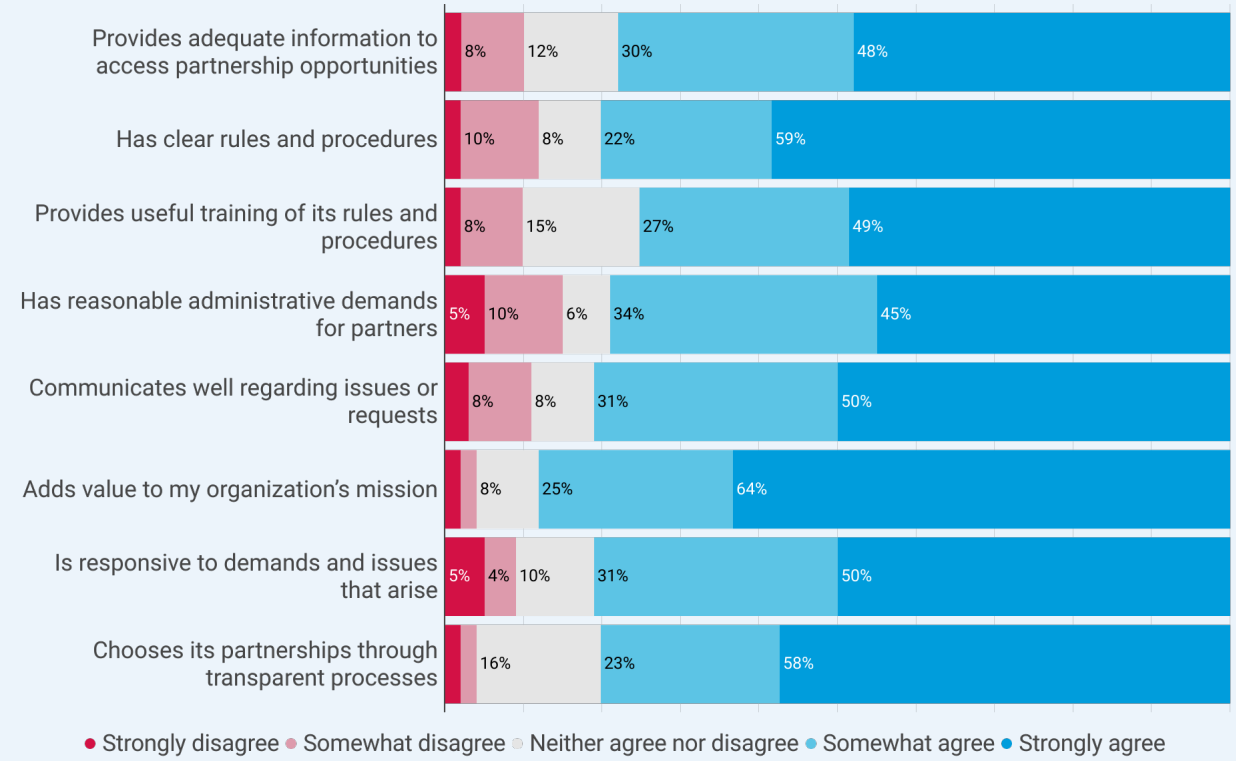
UN Women faced challenges in efficient collaboration with civil society partners, which weakened timely implementation, reduced the focus on results rather than processes, and decreased the potential reach to grassroots organizations and communities facing intersectional discrimination.

Stakeholders in the region reported that he most common UN Women modalities for partnering with civil society required a high level of effort to initiate and manage. Both UN Women personnel and civil society representatives found the modalities to be time-intensive, despite areas of recent progress in streamlining and the introduction of the more flexible small grant modality. Partners identified the administrative burden of contractual modalities as negatively affecting timely implementation. The partners surveyed rated the reasonability of administrative demands posed by UN Women as the lowest of partnership management assessment criteria (see Figure 10). This feedback was reiterated by interviewees and focus group participants.

UN Women personnel in the region and headquarters commonly cited accessibility issues that limited their ability to reach grassroots organizations, as well as other CSOs representing groups facing intersectional discrimination, given several key constraining factors. First, official partnership documentation, such as contracts and face forms, lacked consistent translation into national languages, which posed barriers for many CSOs in the region. Even when documents were translated unofficially by certain offices, they required English to be filled out. This affected both the amount of time UN Women teams had to communicate and coordinate with partners, and increased the accessibility barrier for smaller, emerging and other organizations representing grassroots and rural communities such as indigenous women.

> "UN Women needs to go down to territorial spaces. Few of the funds reach highly vulnerable women who do not have access because they do not meet the requirements to be UN Women partners."
>
> – Representative of women's organization, Argentina

FIGURE 10: Surveyed civil society partners found UN Women's partnership management positive across dimensions of information-sharing, training, communication and overall value



Source: UN Women survey of civil society partners (N=173)

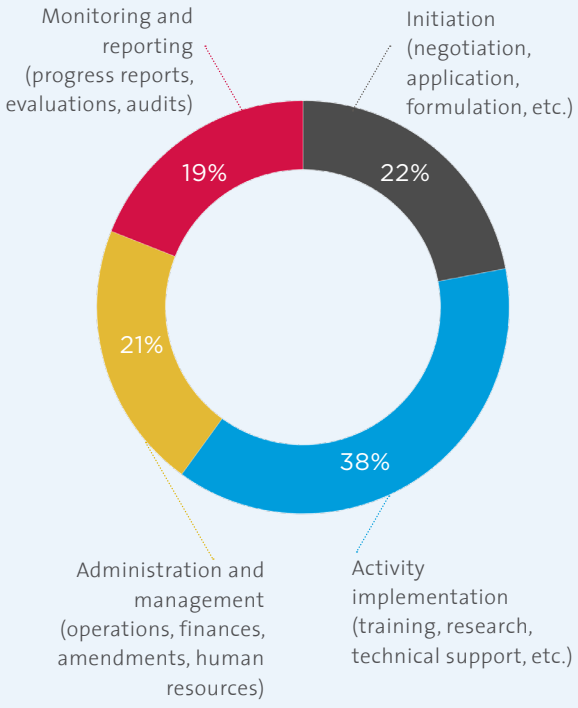
Second, UN Women personnel in the region and headquarters found that the policy framework, including the selection criteria for small grant recipients and processes for partner agreements, created barriers for partnership with priority groups and organizations. For the small grant framework, interviewees and focus groups indicated that several key conditions created undue barriers for access by youth and emerging organizations. In particular, they noted the requirement for recipient organizations to have been in operation for three years, and the cap of consecutive grants of US$ 30,000 each for a cumulative amount of a maximum of US$ 60,000. Such conditions were seen as commensurate with the risk appetite of UN Women when adopted in 2020, and some staff noted this could be reconsidered for revision following the initial three-year period of implementation,[93] which could enhance the accessibility and sustainability of such partnerships.

UN Women's partnership modalities were also reported as presenting challenges when collaborating with certain types of CSO partners in the region, such as youth organizations and emerging movements. Civil society interviewees expressed a common perception that the Entity provided financial support to the same type of CSOs, notably more well-established and urban women's organizations. While agreements were oriented towards diverse priority groups, the persistence of this perception remained entrenched and showed the challenges posed by UN Women's systems in limiting access to grassroots organizations and non-formalized networks. This feedback also echoed recent corporate assessments commissioned by management that indicated UN Women tended to "prioritize partnerships with larger, more established CSOs and women's organizations".[94]

There were efficiency challenges considering the proportion of time that UN Women personnel and CSO partners reported spending on processes. Most organizations reported the strain of a high number of processes required for partnership management.

A time estimate by civil society partners implementing small grant and partner agreements in the region indicated a low proportion of effort spent on activity implementation (38 per cent) relative to other areas such as partnership initiation; management and administration; and monitoring and reporting (see Figure 11).[95] While the small grants modality was cited by some stakeholders as a step in the right direction to reduce these burdens, the estimated distribution of time did not vary significantly compared to partner agreements. Such trends were consistent across contextual and geographic areas in the region.

FIGURE 11. Survey respondents estimated over 60 per cent of work time was spent on non-implementation areas in their partnership with UN Women



Source: UN Women evaluation survey of civil society partners (N=164)

Efficiency, as measured by timely implementation, was also a challenge across the partnership and programming cycle with civil society partners. Overall, UN Women reported extending about half of its agreements with CSO partners in the region.[96] Extensions occurred in over one-third of

[93] According to UN Women management, the consultative process when developing the small grants framework used UNFPA financial thresholds for benchmarking.

[94] Gender at Work, 'The Power of Partnerships: UN Women's Collaboration with Civil Society to Advance Gender Equality', Assessment Report commissioned by UN Women, July 2020.

[95] Total time estimate based on non-weighted average across 164 UN Women partner respondents.

[96] Based on PGAMS available data from 2018 to 2023 in the region.

small grants agreements provided to civil society (35 per cent), which prolonged implementation Cronogramas on average by 48 per cent of their original period. Extensions occurred in a higher ratio for partner agreements (58 per cent), which extended implementation Cronogramas by 50 per cent of their initial period. While in certain cases this was related to substantiated cost extensions in which the donor provided additional funding, many agreement extensions with CSOs listed non-cost justifications or no rationale.[97]

UN Women personnel and partners in the region underlined the important constraints posed by the small grant policy framework to effectively reaching grassroots and emerging organizations. Cited factors included the prescriptive nature of the policy, such as constraints on financial thresholds, Cronogramas and legal status. In this respect, the overall value for money of small grants was questioned by some stakeholders.[98] Both UN Women offices and CSO partners invested in over 200 small grant processes across the region as measured by time and financial sources, with an average value of approximately US$ 14,300.[99] In several countries, stakeholders indicated that the amount was low to enable real organizational capacity-building.[100] Moreover, evidence indicated that grants were used in some cases beyond their limited scope for institutional strengthening.[101] Approximately 14 per cent of small grant agreements reviewed included programmatic activities,[102] which indicated potential use beyond their intended purpose.

Overall, the reported drivers of challenges to efficient partnerships with CSOs were multidimensional (see Figure 12). Additionally, the selection of partners at the activity level was also underlined by UN Women management as a contributing factor to generating an undue administrative burden for UN Women offices and CSO partners to monitor and manage. In contrast, a more balanced engagement with strategic partners at scale[103] that would prioritize the selection of partners at higher project, workplan and Strategic Note results could lessen administrative burdens and increase the efficiency of partnership management. Offices must therefore strike a balance between engagement with smaller, fledging organizations and those with more demonstrated capacity for scale.

UN Women appeared to be applying a low-risk appetite regarding third-party engagement and management, especially due to reputational risks and UN Women's zero-tolerance of risks related to fraud, corruption and other forms of wrongdoing.[104] Within this framework, risk management through controls was evidenced by the number of estimated process steps for two key partnership modalities, estimated at a minimum to be 42 and 29, respectively (see Table 5).[105] The distribution of process steps indicates the highest proportion of effort for UN Women to initiate, report and monitor agreements with CSOs.

97 Analysis performed on a sample of Partner Agreement extensions to understand their rationale. All small grant extensions are non-cost.

98 The "best value for money" principle is defined by UN Women as requiring consideration of "all relevant factors" across social (including gender-related), economic and environmental policy objectives in the procurement process by looking "at the combination of whole life-cycle costs, quality and efficiency." Source: UN Women, 'UN Women procurement principles' (accessed July 2023).

99 Because corporate guidance allows individual grants up to US$ 30,000, the average value can also be attributed to office-level financing and partnership strategies.

100 When using purchasing power parity for indicative comparison, there were significant discrepancies in the nominal value of these grants, particularly in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil and certain Caribbean countries.

101 According to UN Women Small Grants Policy (2020), the modality is intended "exclusively to finance a limited range of activities to support the development of strengthening of a CSO's institutional capacity" such as the "introduction or improvement of organizational systems, tools and processes, training of workforce in technical and managerial skills and support with adequate equipment." The policy states that the purpose "is not to finance the delivery of a programmatic activity or an output on behalf of UN Women since such activities may be financed through Partner arrangements."

102 Of the 205 small grants classified according to their intended objectives or purpose, 29 (14 per cent) had a combination of institutional strengthening and other modalities oriented towards programmatic outcomes.

103 Scale is defined as an organization's capacity to reach a wide target population group.

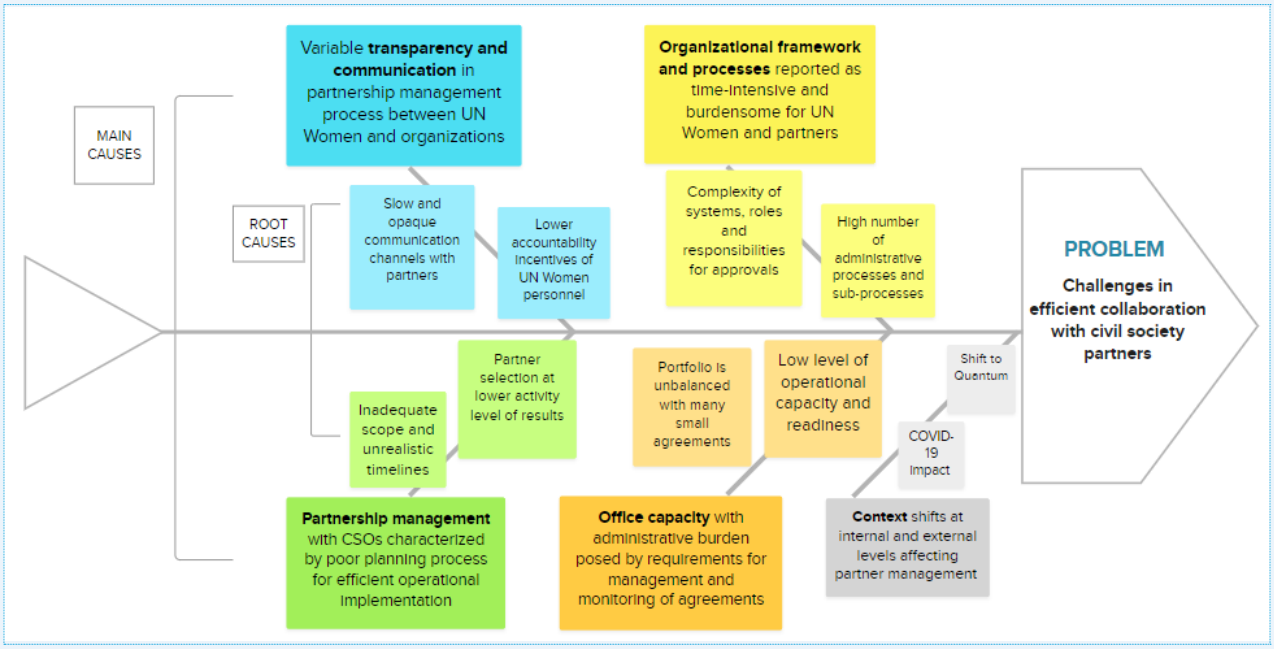
104 UN Women, Risk Appetite Statement, 2022.

105 This is a minimum estimate based on the number of related organizational processes for any one given process. For example, one step for payment will include multiple sub-processes of submission and approval in both the Enterprise Resource Management system Quantum as well as through normal communication channels. See Annex 8.5 for a more detailed process and bottleneck map.

CSO partners identified the most common bottlenecks for timely implementation as relating to processes around partnership initiation, payments and amendments. CSOs reported that the timely resolution of issues was often worsened by a lack of mutual accountability in which partners and UN Women can both hold one another accountable for key responsibilities.[106] The most common issue was late payment for activities, which was reported by 16 of 44 CSO partners.[107] In the most serious reported cases, CSO partners from two offices in the region indicated that they were not able to meet the time-sensitive needs of survivors of violence because of delays in payment.

To increase harmonization and efficiency with other United Nations partners, UN Women joined the UN Partner Portal in 2022 with the United Nations Secretariat and seven other agencies, funds and programmes.[108] The Entity's incorporation into the platform over two phases has provided an opportunity to streamline the sourcing of CSOs and leverage economies of scale to reduce Cronogramas and improve processing. However, in the Americas and Caribbean region, the transition has been slow during the concurrent changes to UN Women's enterprise resource platform, and the platform may take time to bear evidence of the intended value.[109]

FIGURE 12. Reported causes of perceived efficiency challenges were multidimensional



Source: Evaluation team based on review of primary data

[106] Defined as accountability between the providers and recipients of development cooperation, for the effectiveness of that cooperation in producing development results. Source: United Nations, 'Mutual Accountability for Development Cooperation Results: Where Next?', Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2012.

[107] Based on interviews and focus groups.

[108] FAO, UNDP Crisis Bureau, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO.

[109] As of June 2023, 8 per cent of civil society partners were registered in the Americas and Caribbean region and 10 per cent globally.

TABLE 5. Processes and common bottlenecks in formal agreement implementation with CSOs[110]

PHASE	ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY	ESTIMATED # PROCESS STEPS FOR UN WOMEN		COMMONLY REPORTED BOTTLENECK AREAS AND IMPACT
		PARTNER AGREEMENTS	SMALL GRANTS AGREEMENTS	
Partnership initiation	UN Women internal approval processes at initiation	7	7	Approval process of partnerships affecting selection of partners for formalization and timely initiation
Initiation of the agreement	UN Women internal approval processes and partner's response to requests	12	4	Approval process of partnerships affecting selection of partners for formalization and timely initiation
Payment	UN Women validation of procedures and pre-requisitions	1	1	Processing of payments affecting timely activity implementation
Reporting and monitoring	Partner submits reports (mid-term or quarterly), and UN Women reviews and approves	11	8	Reporting revision and approval affecting partner agreement management and requiring significant, regular time investment
Other payments, if applicable	Partner submits financial and progress reports and receipt, and UN Women validates products and financials	3	3	Payment of tranches caused some partners to advance their own resources to not pause activities with increase in amendments and extensions
Closure	UN Women internal approval processes and partner's response to requests	8	6	Project closure with reputational risks in the case of inadequate implementation of activities and limited monitoring of results

Source: Evaluation team based on review of UN Women policy, procedure and guidance

[110] Quantification in the table estimates process steps, and will differ based on several factors. Not all steps are mandatory.

4.3. To what extent has UN Women effectively enabled the inclusion of civil society in its work to influence gender priorities and policies, including those representing constituencies at risk of being left behind?

FINDING 13

CSAGs provided a representative and meaningful participatory mechanism in contexts of stability by promoting CSO engagement in UN Women's work and providing advice from a diverse range of civil society partners. This resulted in positive feedback from CSAG members and UN Women regarding the relevance of CSAG meetings and debates. However, CSAG members also expressed frustration with unmet expectations in collaboration with UN Women initiatives, including their notional advocacy role.

CSAGs had a dual and complementary role in the Americas and Caribbean region to act as both an advisory body to UN Women and an advocacy platform to advance the gender equality agenda. In total, nine UN Women offices in the region had an active CSAG at some point since 2018. Operational stability was a challenge in the region and resulted in the total or temporary suspension of CSAG activities in certain countries during the evaluation period (see Figure 13).

Three factors were the most relevant in this fluctuation: the wide-ranging impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the ability of UN Women to maintain regular or active groups; national contexts that limited the advocacy space; and UN Women institutional risks, such as changes in senior management. Accordingly, the maturity level of CSAGs varied across the region based on the operational duration and activity (see Annex 8.10 case study for more detailed analysis).

FIGURE 13. The distribution of CSAGs throughout the region by country indicated the level of variable activity as a main consultation mechanism of UN Women with civil society[111]

*Recently or currently activating CSAG

Source: Evaluation team based on desk review (as of July 2023)

[111] As indicated in the figure, no/limited presence of UN Women in certain countries (Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela) meant that there was no institutional rationale for a CSAG. Other countries inactive without a previous CSAG have a programme presence (Uruguay and Honduras) or recently created office (Chile).

In general, the composition of CSAGs was representative of diverse groups. Inclusion was a relevant concern within selection processes, and this resulted in a satisfactory level of representativeness within CSAG membership. Priority groups of women at risk of being left behind were identified in the selection processes of all nine UN Women offices that had at least one CSAG between 2018 and 2022. Such groups included Afro-descendant, indigenous and young women. However, there were larger gaps in terms of women living with disabilities, rural women, migrant women and the LGBTIQ+ community. UN Women in Colombia was the only office during this period that advertised specific terms of reference for its CSAG, highlighting certain priority groups on two occasions, including indigenous women (2020) and women living with disabilities (2023).

At a technical level, the selection processes also sought candidates with diverse thematic expertise and profiles, which resulted in CSAGs with strong technical capacities that were assessed positively. Selection demonstrated the targeting of member profiles with relevant experience in the promotion of gender equality, and considered representativity of candidates in terms of race, ethnicity and region. This supported selection of CSAG members who were generally representative of the diversity of a given country or region; 73 per cent of survey respondents positively evaluated CSAG composition (see Figure 14). However, selection rules did not normally establish specific criteria for representativeness. Another challenge was the lack of interest of relevant candidates, particularly in certain contexts such as in the Caribbean.

Operationalization of the CSAGs' advisory role contributed to concrete dialogue and more sustainable relationships between UN Women and CSOs in certain cases. CSAG members provided relevant contextual analysis and technical inputs for UN Women offices, assessing UN Women initiatives and providing relevant information to inform decision-making. CSAGs also operated as a relevant participatory space for civil society representatives. However, CSAGs demonstrated more limited results in serving as an advocacy platform. The effectiveness of CSAG meetings also varied significantly among offices and between periods of time for the same office. Some meetings produced rich dialogue between UN Women and civil society allowing for the exchange of experiences and best practices; while other meetings showed a lack of focus and the absence of strategic objectives, missing the opportunity to take full advantage of the convening of relevant civil society leadership and experts. In some cases, CSAGs served as a bridge between UN Women and the broader universe of CSOs in countries, but this was generally not evident across the region's various iterations.[112]

Long-term results remained a challenge and were negatively impacted by the aforementioned factors causing the temporary suspension of some CSAGs, as well as the limited resources and tools to convert CSAG inputs into concrete results. This was in line with the lack of a strategic approach to meaningfully incorporate CSAG members' perspectives into UN Women programme planning and implementation and to guarantee that CSAG voices be heard and considered in the long-term. Survey results in the region reflected this perspective with the lowest rated area regarding the degree of influence of CSAG representatives on planning related to UN Women's strategies and programmes (60 per cent positive).

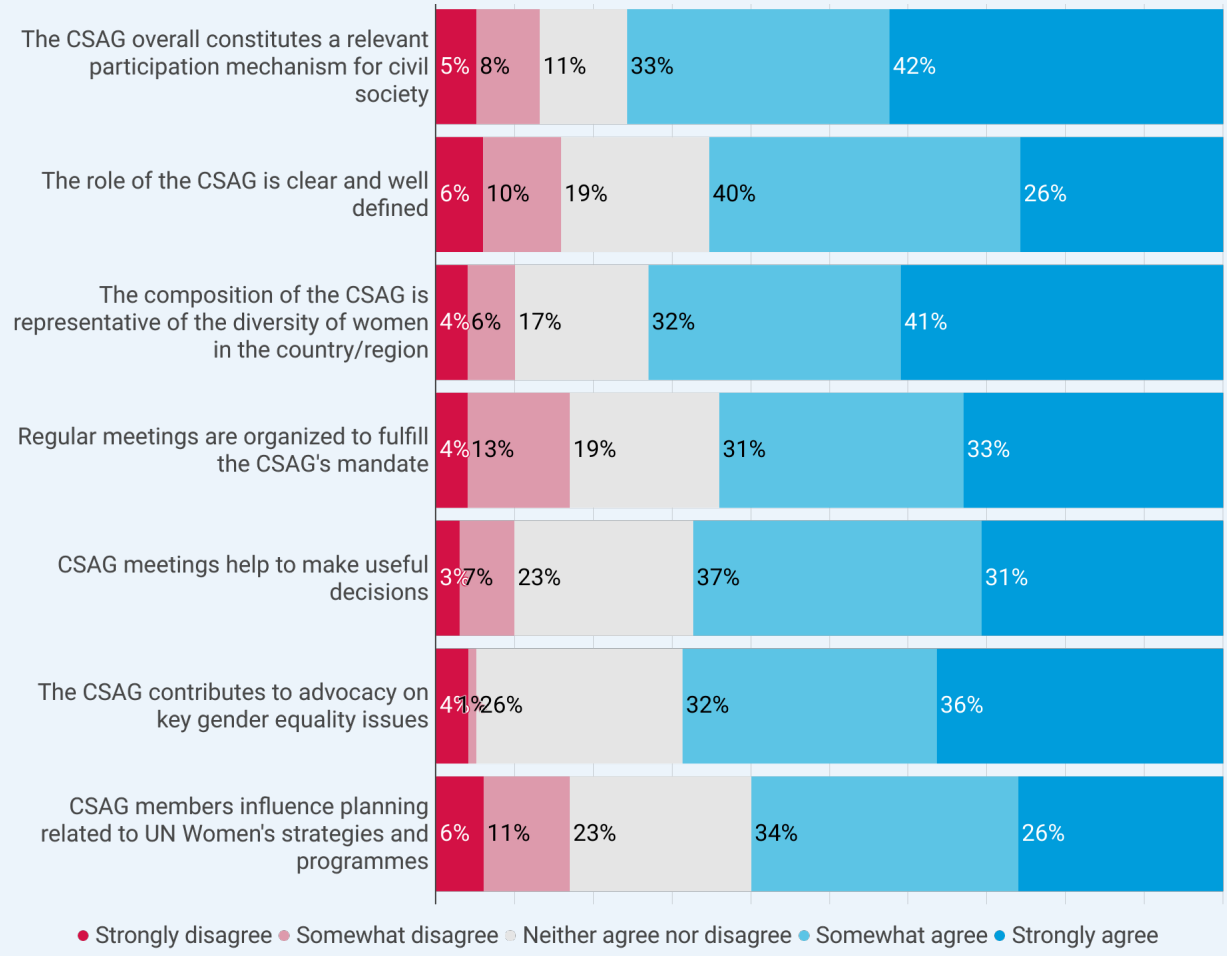
Relevant outputs achieved throughout the region included communication products and strategies, contextual analysis and ad hoc technical inputs. Communication outputs were especially relevant in some contexts (e.g. press releases and interviews), which helped to amplify the voices of their members and respective organizations, including in Argentina and Mexico.

CSAG representatives raised concerns about the clarity of the group's role and frustrations around unmet expectations in leveraging the group's full potential as a space for dialogue and bridge-building. UN Women personnel also indicated varying commitment from members, which was exacerbated by the absence of proper planning and tangible incentives, as CSAG members are not remunerated and activities were often limited to meetings.[113]

[112] The country portfolio evaluations of UN Women Country Offices in Mexico (2019), Colombia (2019), El Salvador (2020), Haiti (2021), Bolivia (2022), and Brazil (2022) suggested various actions to strengthen CSAGs. Several evaluations recommended that offices convene CSAGs together with other relevant CSOs on strategic priorities, including to assess progress and challenges of the 2030 agenda (Colombia); debate emerging issues (Mexico); and provide greater accessibility and dynamism for dialogue (Bolivia and El Salvador).

[113] See full case study in Annex 8.10.

FIGURE 14. Feedback from surveyed CSAG members indicated lower ratings in the regular organization of CSAG meetings, clarity of roles and influence on UN Women's strategies and programmes



Source: UN Women evaluation survey of civil society partners (N=73)

FINDING 14

UN Women's management of flagship feminist and women's rights conferences demonstrated its strong convening power and engagement with civil society actors by facilitating representation in decision-making and advocacy spaces. Other forums and alliances underscored the potential for a stronger convening role regionally.

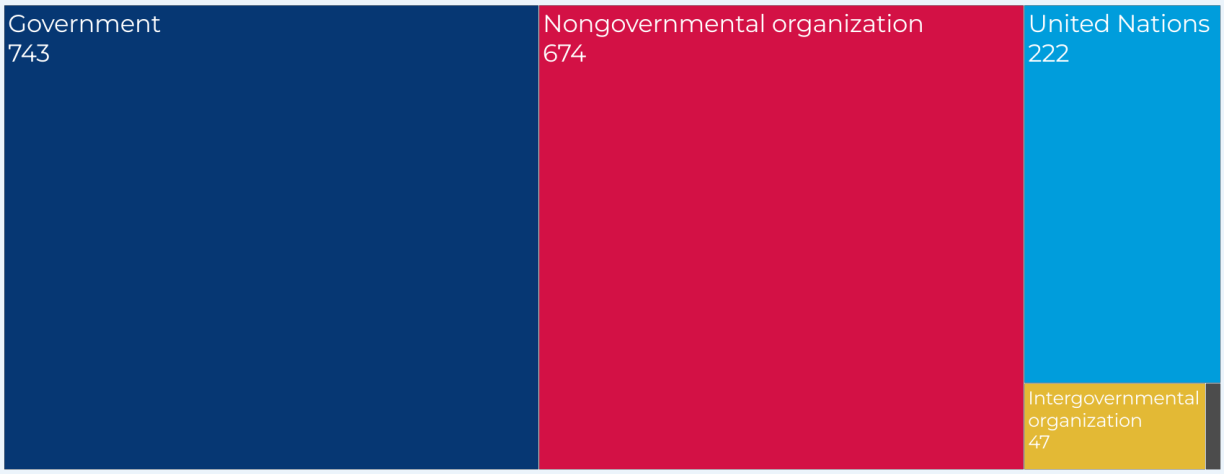
Civil society voices were included and elevated in multilateral spaces by UN Women's facilitation, as evidenced in the Regional Conferences on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean co-organized with ECLAC since 2020. In the most recent iteration held in Argentina in November 2022, there was a high proportion of civil society participation: representatives from civil society constituted 40 per cent of registered conference participants, or the second largest group following government actors (Figure 15).[114]

Compared to the preceding Regional Conference on Women held in Chile in January 2020, this was an increase of more than double the total number of civil society representatives.[115] In the panels and events co-organized with UN Women, observation confirmed the high level of interest, participation and enthusiasm of civil society actors to engage in such multi-stakeholder spaces.

[114] ECLAC, Report of the Fifteenth Session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, Buenos Aires, 7-11 November 2022 (LC/CRM.15/5/Rev.1).

[115] An increase from an estimated 302 civil society representatives in 2020 to 674 in 2022; note that this change also reflected an overall increase in the total number of conference participants in 2022. ECLAC, Report on the Fourteenth Session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, Santiago, 27-31 January 2020 (LC/CRM.14/7/Rev.1).

FIGURE 15. Civil society made up the second most represented group at the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2022



Source: Evaluation team based on ECLAC (2023)

In addition to such evidence of overall participation, the voices of women's and feminist organizations were also reflected in spaces for multi-stakeholder dialogue in the region. Representatives from feminist and women's organizations consistently comprised panelists and co-organizers of events together with UN Women. Of the side events co-organized by UN Women during the Regional Conference on Women in 2022, the majority (10 of 12) included panelists from civil society, and approximately one half of the participants were CSO representatives who often represented diverse groups facing discrimination in the region such as rural women, domestic workers and indigenous women, among others.[116]

The Regional Conference on Women in 2022 illustrated UN Women's effective coordination with ECLAC across the distinctive comparative advantages of United Nations partners to facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue on a policy issue. Several characteristics reinforced the conference's potential for policy contribution, including the mixed panels across expert and stakeholder groups; high-level participation from Member State representatives; and the agenda structured around issues across the policy spectrum of care work. Observation confirmed the complementary nature of roles: ECLAC leveraged its track record in conference management and research, and UN Women produced complementary or joint research, as well as engaging in agenda-setting and advocacy targeted at care issues. Stakeholder perceptions indicated positive feedback on such coordination work as being effectively leveraged across each partner's comparative advantage. Further, as an outcome of previous conferences, a Regional Fund to Support Women's and Feminist Movements was established in 2018 to support the development of projects that contribute to women's empowerment, materialization of women's rights and gender equality. UN Women administered the fund's initial grants in 2022 based on voluntary contributions from the Government of Mexico and UN Women.

Civil society has built on the regional precedent of participating directly in Regional Conferences on Women: Latin America and the Caribbean is the only region in the world where civil society – represented by women's and feminist organizations, workers' unions, academia and other groups – comes together with government, the United Nations system, international organizations and the private sector through such a regional conference.[117] This has proved an enabling factor in strengthening the participation of feminist and women's organizations in distinct milestones of the Regional Conference on Women, including through preparatory meetings;[118] position papers; and other participatory spaces. UN Women has been effective in harnessing this conducive environment and collaborating with ECLAC to align positions across various networks. This has been achieved through the facilitation of online consultations with civil society.

[116] Based on observation of 8 side events between 7-11 November 2022 in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

[117] ECLAC, 'CEPAL presents opportunities to place women's autonomy and gender equality at the center of multi-stakeholder cooperation', 31 May 2023: https://www.cepal.org/en/notes/cepal-presents-opportunities-place-womens-autonomy-and-gender-equality-center-multi

[118] UN Women, 'Latin America and the Caribbean Must Move Towards a Care Society that Puts the Sustainability of Life and the Planet at the Center', 22 June 2022: https://lac.unwomen.org/en/stories/comunicado-de-prensa/2022/06/america-latina-y-el-caribe-debe-avanzar-hacia-una-sociedad-del-cuidado

UN Women's co-organization of the XV Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean (2022) contributed to the parallel meeting of an estimated 2,200 activists from 29 countries in the region at the Feminist Forum in Buenos Aires, Argentina.[119] The event provided a participatory space complementary to the Regional Conference on Women in 2022. UN Women partnered with the CSO *Andhes* to organize the event logistics and facilitation by supporting financially and technically.[120] As reported by interviewees and observed during the main conference proceedings, the effort resulted in the successful adoption of the Political Declaration of the Feminist Forum and presentation during the main conference proceedings.[121] As a result of the conference, the Buenos Aires Commitment was a notable normative output that benefitted from relevant advocacy from the CSOs gathered at the Feminist Forum, which enshrined a clear leave no one behind perspective and road map to create and strengthen gender-responsive care systems and policies.[122] There were nonetheless challenges both in structuring the organization of these two concurrent events and in the degree of incorporation of the Feminist Forum's Political Declaration into the Buenos Aires Commitment.

FINDING 15

UN Women's coordination with civil society to support participation in normative intergovernmental spaces was well established, notably the Commission on the Status of Women. Other efforts for coalition and movement-building provided avenues for civil society to engage in multi-stakeholder alliances, but ownership from feminist and women's organizations as well as internally within UN Women was limited to achieve meaningful results and scale.

UN Women's role in the region, facilitating the inclusion of civil society voices in normative processes, especially at the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), was a valuable contribution by the organization in close partnership with other United Nations agencies and government partners. UN Women promoted regional consultations before CSW sessions, including with a broader range of CSOs to discuss key themes, and effectively supported and facilitated the participation of feminist and women's organizations in the annual CSW sessions held in New York, working closely with UN Women headquarters units and with the coordination of the Civil Society Division. In terms of direct support to civil society partners at CSW and its regional preparatory meetings, CEDAW, Beijing+25, UNPFII, and other regional and global participatory spaces, UN Women reported supporting 155 women in 2018; 180 women in 2019; 212 in 2020; 969 in 2021; and more than 2,500 in 2022, a higher number due to the organization of the XV Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean.[123] Of the numerous side events organized during the sixty-seventh session of CSW in March 2023, an estimated 20 were co-organized by UN Women and partners from the Americas and Caribbean region.[124]

> "I've participated in previous CSW meetings with UN Women support. For civil society, it is very relevant to be part of the activities in dialogue with governments, intergovernmental organizations, and the United Nations System. Last year we had the 30th anniversary of the gender agenda and it was only possible thanks to the engagement of civil society and UN."
>
> – Representative of a regional women's network

In contrast, the effectiveness of UN Women's role in convening country and regional actors from the Americas and Caribbean at the global level was less pronounced in certain areas. There was an opportunity to strengthen their representation in global forums, particularly those extending beyond CSW. Conversations with UN Women personnel at both headquarters and regional levels indicated a consensus in this area, which could encompass a variety of other thematic and global conferences in which UN Women has been involved at a corporate level but has not often shown an integrated approach linking country and regional levels (see Table 6).

[119] Final Report of the project Coordinación del Foro Feminista en el marco de la XV Conferencia Regional para la Mujer de América Latina y el Caribe (Fundación Andhes).

[120] Andhes, 'Un Foro Feminista para incidir en las políticas regionales', 02 Feb 2023: https://www.andhes.org.ar/contenido/15/foro-feminista-para-incidir-politicas-regionales.html

[121] Foro Feminista, Construcción colectiva de la Declaración Política del Foro Feminista previo a la XV CRM, Buenos Aires, Argentina 2022.

[122] See https://conferenciamujer.cepal.org/15/en/documents/buenos-aires-commitment.

[123] ACRO Annual Reports 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022.

[124] UN Women, CSW67 Side Event Schedule: https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw67-2023/side-events/schedule (accessed 25 Aug 2023)

TABLE 6. Other international forums hosted by United Nations partners provide an underused avenue for enhancing participation of civil society representatives in key decision-making spaces

INTERNATIONAL FORUM*	FREQUENCY	MAIN TOPIC	CSO PARTICIPATION	RELATED GENDER AGENDA	UN WOMEN'S CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT FROM REGION[125]
Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)	Yearly	Gender	Yes	Gender focus as the principal global inter-governmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality women's autonomy[126]	Medium
Financing for Development (FfD) Forum	Yearly	Development finance	Yes	The FfD process gender agenda is expressed as a cross-cutting issue in activities and outcomes[127]	Low
Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)	Yearly	Climate change	Yes	The UNFCCC Gender Action Plan and amend-ments articulate gender-responsive climate action objectives and priorities, including with implementation of 'other' actors from civil society[128]	Low
SDG Summit	Every 4 years	Sustainable development	Yes	SDG 5 as a gender-focused goal, as well as mainstreaming across other SDGs	Low
International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS)	Every 10 years	Sustainable development of SIDS	Yes	SAMOA Pathway and associated gender actions	Medium

Source: Evaluation team based on secondary review

* This list of international forums is not exhaustive.

The Generation Equality Forum was launched by UN Women at the global level for mobilizing action through a multi-stakeholder initiative inclusive of civil society, governments, United Nations entities and the private sector.[129] In Mexico, UN Women hosted the Generation Equality Forum held in March 2021 that included a wide range of high-level panels, thematic dialogues and gath-ering spaces for a wide range of actors.[130] The event was recognized for creating an inclusive platform for civil society participants, including youth,[131] and marked a step in bolstering alliances with CSOs and other stakeholders focused on gender equality priorities. This was exemplified by the establishment of the Alliance for Care initiated by ~~UN Women and t~~he Government of Mexico.[132]

Despite the results associated with the Generation Equality Forum launch in Mexico, the initiative has shown limited outcomes in the region in serving as an effective platform for engaging with civil society. CSOs evaluated the effort as falling short of effectively reaching the feminist and women's movement, and they perceived the initiative as being inaccessible to civil society.[133] Stakeholders consulted in the region did not report the Generation Equality Forum as achieving notable results or as an opportunity for ongoing partner engagement. Based on the number of commitments in the region and their progress, the Generation Equality Forum initiative has yet to find trac-tion in the region both within UN Women and with CSO partners.[134]

[125] Based on review of country, regional, and corporate UN Women reporting.

[126] UN Women, Commission on the Status of Women: www.unwomen.org/en/csw (accessed Aug 2023).

[127] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Financing for Development Office: financing.desa.un.org (accessed Aug 2023).

[128] UNFCCC, The Gender Action Plan: unfccc.int/topics/gender/workstreams/the-gender-action-plan (accessed Aug 2023). Civil society in-cludes the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform Facilitative Working Group.

[129] The global initiative includes a Civil Society Advisory Group as part of the Generation Equality Forum "Core Group" along with UN Women and the governments of France and Mexico.

[130] UN Women, Outcome Report: Generation Equality, 29-31 March 2021, Mexico City: https://forum.generationequality.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/GEF%20in%20Mexico%20City_Report_072021.pdf

[131] The event reported more than 13,000 registered participants. Youth represented an estimated 44 per cent of participants when including participants 34 years-old or younger. Source: https://forum.generationequality.org/generation-equality-forum-mexico-city

[132] The Alliance for Care had 52 CSOs participating in the initiatives as of July 2023. Source: alianzadecuidados.forogeneracionigualdad.mx

[133] Such views were raised by UN Women personnel and partners in interviews and highlighted in open meetings with civil society that the evaluation team observed.

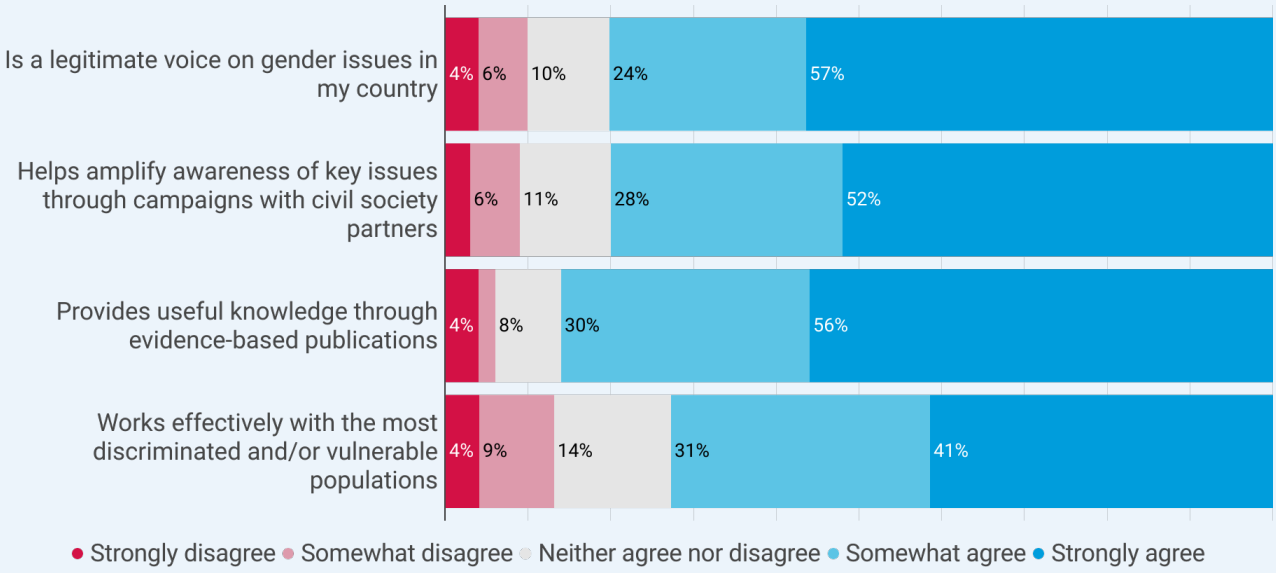
[134] The Americas and Caribbean had the second least engagement of other regions globally in Action Coalitions of the Generation Equality Forum. As of June 2023, there were 89 of which 54 per cent were not initiated.

FINDING 16

UN Women's advocacy role in alliance with CSOs in the region was recognized for its credibility and evidence-based approaches. Feedback indicated that the Entity was less effective in advocating for populations facing greater discrimination of vulnerability, as well as reaching more local grassroots organizations. Big data analysis of online campaign efforts indicated a lower proportion of CSO engagement.

There were strong cases of UN Women's advocacy in which the organization leveraged its triple mandate connecting CSOs with government. Evidence-based advocacy to eliminate violence against women was notably strong with CSOs, including on feminicide, gender-based violence and sexual violence. Overall, survey results were positive across CSO partners and non-partners on advocacy (see Figure 16). That said, there was a strong demand for greater advocacy in countries with more vocal anti-rights movements, in countering harmful social norms, and in speaking for those at risk of being left behind.[135]

FIGURE 16. Overall feedback from civil society partners was positive regarding UN Women's advocacy work



Source: UN Women evaluation survey of civil society partners (N=320)

In addition to improving both capacity and financing of CSOs, surveyed partners suggested that UN Women should prioritize support to networks and convening other CSO and non-CSO stakeholders, complemented by communications and advocacy. Civil society representatives expressed a demand for UN Women's support to connect with one another and other partners through multi-stakeholder platforms using UN Women's facilitation of networks and convening. Such priorities were equally reflected in evaluations conducted in the region over the period. There was also a strong demand for greater advocacy, communications and territorial presence of its work.[136]

Among CSO representatives consulted through focus groups, there was a clear demand for a stronger territorial focus in resourcing, for example of women's organizations, with a focus on enabling the representation of more vulnerable populations. Feedback often indicated a gap in communications given that many suggested priorities were already part of UN Women's workplans. This reiterated the need for stronger communication channels among networks of feminist and women's organizations to complement the more formal and deliberative spaces such as CSAGs and conferences.

[135] Several Country Portfolio Evaluations conducted from 2021-2023 in the region (Haiti, Bolivia, and Brazil) found that advocacy with such priority groups was less positively assessed by both UN Women personnel in the organizations as well as external partners, which indicated a wider institutional challenge.

[136] Territorial focus is interpreted as in regions, provinces, states, and areas outside of urbanized zones.

Since 2018, UN Women's online presence through communications efforts in the region has experienced a significant increase, including expanded outreach to partners both at the regional and country levels. This growth was reflected in the greater number of civil society partners now actively engaged through social media channels, driven by the presence and activity of UN Women's official accounts. This progress has been made possible by the professionalization of the communications team in the region since 2020 through a well-defined strategy and increased capacity.

A current strategic approach by UN Women, as evidenced by the social media analysis, involves amplifying messaging through collaboration with other UN Women offices and countries sharing similar political goals, adopting a 'broadcast' approach. In this regard, most content identified in analysis of selected UN Women campaigns was generated by UN Women and its partners and then shared within this network. Nevertheless, big data analysis of social media activity – using UN Women's main hashtags for the Regional Conference on Women and the 16 Days campaigns in 2022 – indicated a more limited civil society voice in the conversation, which suggests there are opportunities to complement campaigns with organically-driven content. The share of civil society reached as a proportion of UN Women's engagement on social media was limited compared to other groups.[137] With a view to further amplifying UN Women's reach, an alternative and potentially complementary approach would be to adopt an interactive posture in which the UN Women team seeks to pick up, engage with and react to organic content generated by others through more focused tracking and engagement with its network of partners.

[137] See case study included in Annex 8.10.

5. LESSONS LEARNED

This section provides generalizable lessons, examples of good practices that could be replicated and details of innovations that could be used by partners and other offices within UN Women. The section is based on a synthesis of the report's findings using a complementary analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the organization in its ongoing engagement with civil society.

By the nature of UN Women's historic relationship with civil society and the network of offices that have to respond to distinct country or sub-regional contexts, there was a wealth of practices over the five-year evaluation period that highlighted innovations for potential replication and areas of strong results.

The translation of **global norms and practices** to national contexts was underscored as a key comparative advantage of UN Women in its collaboration with CSOs in the region, particularly priority agendas around elimination of violence against women and the care economy.

Communication efforts through **online multi-stakeholder campaigns** such as #16Days showed an important and sustained reach to increase public visibility of priority issues such as elimination of violence against women. Engaging with the more organic messaging created by civil society in the region would further amplify such messaging.

The **partnership with ECLAC** to co-organize conferences, coordinate regional consultations and bring together organizations for civil society engagement with feminist and women's organizations showed the strong value of United Nations coordination across complementary roles. In parallel to the research and meeting agenda for the Regional Conference on Women in 2022 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, UN Women's support to organize the Feminist Forum integrated a diverse cross-section of participants from the region.[138]

The use of grant-making, together with trust fund mechanisms including through the **Regional Women's Fund,** provides an opportunity for scaling projects and for UN Women to use its convening power to support organizations more systematically across the region.

UN Women support to the participation of feminist networks and women's organizations in **key multilateral forums,** other than the Commission on the Status of Women, can push advances in gender-sensitive climate work, development financing and other priority agendas.

[138] The breakdown of stakeholder groups included: 9.5 per cent indigenous women, 6.4 per cent Afro-descendant women, 5.3 per cent migrant women; 17.7 per cent LGBTIQ+ community; 3 per cent people living with disabilities; 15 per cent youth; 6.5 per cent rural women. Source: Final Report of the project Coordinación del Foro Feminista en el marco de la XV Conferencia Regional para la Mujer de América Latina y el Caribe (Fundación Andhes).

Various **tools for capacity monitoring** developed by UN Women Colombia have built upon corporate practices by systematizing the way CSOs are supported throughout the partnership cycle, including by developing a more robust institutional capacity index that provides actionable and trackable insights.

The timely response of UN Women in providing support to civil society during the **COVID-19 pandemic** demonstrated the organization's capacity in the region to mobilize coordinated assistance with United Nations partners and relevant government counterparts.

UN Women support at the regional level to respond to the **anti-rights movement** in the region was an area of strong demand – both by UN Women offices and feminist and women's organizations – to respond to the growth in conversative movements, regressive policies and other challenges.

Umbrella models implemented by several offices in the region, in which larger organizations that have partnerships with UN Women then partner with other smaller CSOs, allowed for grassroots organizations to build capacity through sustainable mentorships, especially where monitoring of capacity-building was a priority.

FIGURE 17. An array of factors influenced UN Women's internal and external positioning for supporting civil society in the region and highlighted areas of strength and opportunity to continue to leverage, as well as weaknesses and threats to address

Photo: ONU Mujeres/Dzilam Méndez

6 CONCLUSIONS

This section presents key insights based on a synthesis of the evidence presented in the findings to provide a basis for identifying areas of recommendations.

CONCLUSION 1

The strength of UN Women's partnerships with feminist and women's organizations in the Americas and Caribbean region has been and will continue to be the bedrock for effectively achieving its mission of gender equality and women's empowerment. Strategic prioritization has helped the Entity to consolidate its engagement with CSOs, although contextual shifts have posed important challenges to the effectiveness and sustainability of such partnerships.

The long-standing and deep partnerships between UN Women and civil society have been an asset in efforts to advance gender equality and defend women's rights across the Americas and Caribbean. Near unanimous feedback from stakeholders confirmed the value that UN Women provides to feminist and women's organizations across its triple mandate. Since 2018, UN Women has sharpened its articulation of civil society engagement through its strategy and reporting architecture at global and regional levels. In addition to the systemic outcome at the corporate level, expected results across UN Women's network of offices demonstrated a stronger focus on how civil society would be supported, including specific priority groups. The organization has also prioritized feminist principles for empowering women's organizations through efforts to enhance dialogue and transparency.

Stakeholders also widely acknowledged threats at the national and regional levels to the financing and legal status of feminist and women's organizations, as well as the safety of their representatives. Accordingly, the role played by UN Women must adapt to the new needs and demands of its long-standing CSO partners. Many stakeholders emphasized the urgency of a more structured and deliberative approach for UN Women to sustain organizations in their struggle against anti-rights or anti-feminist groups. Many found that contextual shifts since the COVID-19 pandemic have limited these results and even generated setbacks to hard-earned gains.

Related findings: 1,2

CONCLUSION 2

UN Women used engagement modalities for its partnerships with civil society organizations in a complementary manner across its integrated triple mandate to achieve policy results, agenda-setting and network-building.

CSOs comprised the highest number of formal partnerships with UN Women in the region compared to other stakeholder groups. The deployment of complementary engagement modalities for partnering with CSOs allowed UN Women to achieve long-term results across its triple mandate. First, programmatic partnerships with CSOs supported legislation, protocols and policy frameworks in the region that contributed to relevant normative gains through CSO partner engagement in multi-stakeholder dialogue. In contexts of disaster and humanitarian crises, technical and financial support with a focus on the protection of human-rights defenders was responsible for preventing and responding to gender-based violence; providing emergency income and entrepreneurship training to build the autonomy of women; and the insertion of gender perspectives in peacebuilding processes. UN Women facilitated the advancement of women's rights and autonomy together with CSOs in work related to women's engagement in peacebuilding and feminicide.

Second, UN Women's facilitation of participatory spaces amplified women's voices and CSO participation both through traditional political and ad hoc mechanisms. The elevation of indigenous women's rights and parity democracy stood out. This strategy enhanced civil society leading's role in relevant decision-making spaces and created opportunities for the insertion of gender, ethnic and race perspectives in political processes. UN Women promoted women's leadership in the long-term and enabled the achievement of sustainable results through the configuration of civil society networks on strategic agendas.

UN Women has significantly expanded its reach to civil society in the region through its online communication channels and coordinated multi-stakeholder campaigns. Communication teams strengthened coordination of campaigns and more effectively adapted corporate efforts to the regional context to connect with civil society. Based on big data analysis, civil society still represented a smaller proportion of overall engagement with stakeholder groups in selected social media outlets. Accordingly, there was scope to take a more proactive approach in engaging with the organic content generated by external sources. One effective strategy would involve examining trending hashtags and establishing closer links with CSO movements that are active through other communication channels. UN Women could then tap into broader conversations and engage with other communities.

Related findings: 3-5, 7, 14

CONCLUSION 3

UN Women effectively reached the CSO representatives of priority groups facing greater discrimination and vulnerability through agreements and other forms of engagement. There was a clear opportunity across the regional portfolio to scale support to other groups that had comparatively limited coverage. Capacity-building initiatives had systemic challenges in terms of their effectiveness.

UN Women's collaboration with civil society in the region clearly emphasized a robust focus on priority groups and strategies aimed at addressing the fundamental causes of inequality, all while applying a human rights perspective that aligns with the United Nations principle of leaving no one behind. Most agreements with civil society were directed at groups experiencing heightened vulnerability and discrimination, often with a focus on survivors of gender-based violence. Through a combination of partnership approaches, UN Women also managed to engage with grassroots organizations to a certain extent.

However, there were institutional challenges that constrained the Entity's capacity to extend its reach to certain populations, including those facing multiple vulnerabilities through an intersectional lens. Youth organizations represented an estimated 16 per cent of formal partnerships, but still faced challenges in accessing UN Women's partnerships given institutional barriers. In this regard, there is a clear opportunity to enhance the conceptualization and approach of many programmes and partnerships by incorporating more comprehensive data and design, particularly in offices where the emphasis on target groups was less pronounced.

As the most common approach for working with civil society, capacity-building and institutional strengthening had important gaps particularly with the small grant modality. At both the individual and institutional levels, UN Women's approaches for measurement, tracking and following up on changes within feminist and women's organizations were not robust across most offices. Relevant areas for strengthening included the extent to which UN Women could support longer-term capacity and institutional strengthening that was sustainable, inclusive, well-coordinated, accessible and rigorously assessed. In this respect, there was an opportunity to further strengthen institutional tools for knowledge management and capacity-building with CSOs. The Entity needs to improve upon these management areas to help organizations capitalize effectively on the 2030 Agenda's goals of strengthening civil society to participate more fully in sustainable development.

Related findings: 6, 8-10

CONCLUSION 4

The policy and procedures for managing UN Women's formal partnerships with CSOs hindered the Entity's efficiency and broader reach to civil society. Consequently, UN Women's readiness for achieving impact at scale with civil society remained low.

UN Women's modalities for formal partnerships through small grants and partner agreements allowed the organization to reach feminist and women's organizations. These modalities were generally recognized as providing value for CSOs and facilitating partnership management. The introduction of the small grant modality was recognized for having provided added flexibility for UN Women offices to create partnerships with smaller, local organizations, and for supporting institutional capacity strengthening. These grants were utilized flexibly to improve UN Women's responsiveness to CSO demands, including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

UN Women's partnership frameworks with civil society followed a risk management approach set out through the administrative requirements. However, feedback from both internal and external stakeholders was almost unanimous in highlighting the cumbersome and inefficient nature of the processes and procedures for partnerships. This hindered the timely execution of work with CSOs and required most efforts to be concentrated on initiating, managing and reporting rather than implementing activities. This indicates a need for UN Women to further streamline its processes in this area for a more responsive, agile and efficient organization.

Related findings: 11-12

CONCLUSION 5

UN Women's role in convening civil society with other actors produced notable achievements through conferences, movements and normative processes linked to the regional gender agenda in the Americas and Caribbean. Support to movement-building and the specialized role of CSAGs were valued but not fully utilized.

UN Women effectively managed flagship multi-stakeholder events, including the Regional Conference on Women held in Argentina (2022) and the Generation Equality Forum held in Mexico (2021). These events showcased the Entity's ability to convene civil society, government representatives and other relevant actors. These forums promoted active CSO participation to engage in dialogue and agenda-setting. When coupled with systematic research and prioritization, as exemplified in UN Women's work on care, significant achievements were made in agenda-setting and advocacy. In this respect, the Entity was recognized for its distinctive ability to engage in policy advocacy thanks to its integrated triple mandate. Moreover, civil society participation in normative intergovernmental forums, particularly at the Commission on the Status of Women, was firmly established through UN Women's facilitation efforts.

CSAGs provided a consistent institutional space for a focused dialogue with representatives of feminist and women's organizations at the country and regional levels, albeit to varying degrees of activity. Members of CSAGs also indicated scope for stronger linkages with UN Women initiatives to leverage their advocacy role more fully. CSAG members nonetheless commonly observed a lack of clear agendas, objectives and missed opportunities to use such dialogue spaces for movement-building.

UN Women made efforts to form coalitions and foster movement-building. However, achievement of meaningful and scalable results was hindered by some obstacles, particularly the high resource cost of supporting movement-building initiatives; challenges in building ownership of these coalitions among feminist and women's organizations as well as within UN Women itself; and limitations of sustainable results in the long-term due to fatigue among partners involved in many coalitions. In continuing to foster collaboration and dialogue between governments and civil society in the Americas and Caribbean, UN Women should maintain clear communication about its role and responsibilities. Concern was raised in some country contexts about the perception of UN Women competing with civil society, particularly due to limited funding for feminist and women's organizations.[139] Challenges in building ownership of multi-stakeholder initiatives such as the Generation Equality Forum remain, and UN Women has taken steps to strengthen dialogue channels through open meetings, events and reinforcing links to Action Coalitions. CSO partners expressed a clear and strong demand for UN Women to enhance and invigorate its support, emphasizing UN Women's role as a strategic and valued partner.

Related findings: 13-16

[139] These challenges were exacerbated by the development financing landscape in the region where predominantly middle and high-income countries received less traditional development funding.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents recommendations based on the report's findings and conclusions for supporting UN Women's engagement with civil society in the Americas and Caribbean, targeting change at the regional and corporate levels. The areas of action were discussed during the evaluation process with both the Internal and External Reference Groups and other relevant UN Women units at headquarters to ensure their utility and feasibility.

RECOMMENDATION 1

UN Women should produce a suite of internal guidance and tools for UN Women offices to support civil society engagement in common areas of challenge and opportunity.

Priority
HIGH

Cronograma
SHORT-TERM

Difficulty
MEDIUM

Suggested steps to be taken:

- Develop a toolkit for UN Women offices in the region to support women-led organizations in their endeavours to **counter anti-rights groups** and collaborate effectively with different social movements on shared agendas.
- Deploy **measurement tools** for capacity-building and institutional strengthening in all offices to enable more consistent, aggregated and quantifiable methodologies for tracking results with CSO recipients of small grants and partner agreements.[140]
- Provide messaging, communications and tools for **strengthening networks** among feminist and other organizations using horizontal linkages (between CSOs representing diverse priority groups) and vertical linkages (between CSOs and governments or other entities).
- Provide more regular **facilitation among UN Women offices** for exchanges on comprehensive civil society partnership strategies that are complementary across priority modalities (e.g. campaigns, CSAGs, normative and CSW consultations, conferences, programmes and co-production of communications products).
- Seek **resourcing opportunities** focused on civil society network building, flexible funding, emerging issues and priority groups facing greater discrimination.
- Support UN Women offices to enhance civil society **partnership management practices**, including by: prioritizing partner selection at higher result levels; organizing open informational sessions when advertising for CSO partnerships; tailoring programme manager trainings to key strategies for CSO engagement; conducting regular feedback surveys of programme partners; and other relevant areas within the remit of the Regional Office's Programme Management Support Unit.

To be led by: Americas and Caribbean Regional Office.

Impact: Increased adaptation to contextual challenges; enhanced measurement of capacity-building and institutional strengthening efforts; and clearer understanding of organizational impact.

If not implemented: Engagement with civil society will be piecemeal and lack strong coherence, responsiveness and clarity across the network of UN Women offices and presences.

[140] This action point considers Recommendation 1 of the Corporate Formative Evaluation of UN Women's Support for Capacity Development of Partners to Respond to the Needs of Women and Girls at the National Level (2023).

RECOMMENDATION 2

UN Women should consolidate the technical assistance provided for civil society's use in areas of joint advocacy, agenda-setting, research and communications.

Priority
MEDIUM

Cronograma
MEDIUM-TERM

Difficulty
HIGH

Suggested steps to be taken:

- Finance **evidence-based advocacy** in collaboration with CSOs to further progress on priority agendas concerning care, indigenous women and women's rights defenders, and emerging issues such as violence against women involved in politics and climate change activism.
- Articulate a **coordinated advocacy approach** that allows women's and feminist organizations from the region to participate more proactively in global advocacy spaces, including regular international multilateral forums where they are underrepresented.
- Strengthen **communications channels** with feminist and women's organizations through dashboards and infographics on UN Women's work, active dissemination and translation of products.[141]
- Develop a regional strategy for the establishment and management of **multi-stakeholder coalitions**, including tools for active civil society participation from initiation; mechanisms for generating national appropriation; focus on the 2030 Agenda; and management of expectations on achieving joint results.
- Promote the involvement of communications teams in engaging with **organic digital content** generated by civil society to enhance the relevance and reach of messaging and campaign initiatives.
- Strengthen **data analysis and research** for generating collaborative knowledge products with CSOs, awareness-raising and engaging in evidence-based advocacy, including through research consortiums and user-friendly data for dissemination.

To be led by: Americas and Caribbean Regional Office.

Impact: Increase in the salience of research and advocacy as well as the visibility of key priority issues.

If not implemented: This knowledge-research-communication value chain will not be optimized for advocacy.

[141] To consider use of interviews conducted during the Regional Conference on Women.

RECOMMENDATION 3

UN Women should deepen its focus on priority groups facing greater discrimination and vulnerability through all engagement modalities with civil society by strengthening its intersectional approach.

Priority
HIGH

Cronograma
MEDIUM-TERM

Difficulty
MEDIUM

Suggested steps to be taken:

- Promote a more detailed **definition of priority groups** in Strategic Notes, Annual Workplans, ProDocs and other UN Women planning documents through a structured approach to address the needs of such groups in a cross-cutting manner.
- Facilitate the **alignment of priority groups** by creating regional partnership frameworks and multi-stakeholder alliances that connect country-level constituencies, including through events, conferences and transnational initiatives, taking into consideration cultural sensibilities and political differences between diverse social groups.
- Integrate an **intersectional perspective** as a quality criterion throughout the project and programme cycle that encompasses context analysis; stakeholder mapping; geographic prioritization; implementation; risk mitigation; and monitoring and reporting.
- Conduct internal learning and **reflection sessions** in the region to explore different office-level strategic and programmatic approaches for engaging with priority groups, including LGTBQI+ and women living with disabilities.
- Establish **criteria for the inclusion** of priority groups facing greater discrimination and vulnerability on calls for proposals, CSAG member selection and other competitive processes implemented by UN Women offices.

To be led by: Americas and Caribbean Regional Office.

Impact: Strengthened reach and portfolio with priority groups.

If not implemented: UN Women risks not deepening its real engagement with and support to priority groups.

RECOMMENDATION 4

UN Women should enhance the corporate policy framework and systems for partnerships with civil society to increase the efficiency, accessibility and reach of its partnerships.

Priority
HIGH

Cronograma
MEDIUM-TERM

Difficulty
HIGH

Suggested steps to be taken:

- Generate **communication packages** that assist CSOs in navigating UN Women's procedures and processes, providing user-friendly guidance, videos tailored to languages and diverse needs and managing expectations regarding UN Women procedures.
- Enhance the **accessibility and inclusion** of youth and emerging CSOs to partnership opportunities in conjunction with participatory spaces.
- Scale up the good practices identified to **facilitate UN Women's reach** with CSOs, including grassroots organizations, and support the sustainability of interventions among implementing partners.
- Consider tools to encourage greater **responsiveness and transparency** for tracking key partnership management processes, such as a dashboard or a help desk.
- Simplify **reporting requirements** by reducing the frequency and by streamlining processes, where allowed by corporate policies and procedures.
- Ensure resources are available to national offices for the **translation of key partnership documents** into national languages for greater accessibility, especially in the case of contracts, face forms, reporting templates and other relevant documents related to partnership agreements and small grant allocations.[142]
- Review key thresholds of the **small grants policy** with a view to enhance accessibility, including potentially related to the minimum period of an organization's legal status, the maximum total eligible funding and other relevant changes to policy criteria.
- Support acceleration of the use of the **UN Partner Portal** in the region for enhanced uptake that will help achieve economies of scale for UN Women and partners.

To be led by: Policy, Programme and Intergovernmental Division / Programme Management Support Unit.

Impact: Enhanced systems will enable more timely results, greater access to priority groups that currently face barriers in partnership and improve overall efficiency.

If not implemented: UN Women will not enhance its readiness for achieving greater impact at scale.

[142] To be coordinated with UN Women Strategic Planning, Resources and Effectiveness Division.

RECOMMENDATION 5

UN Women should reinvigorate movement-building, participatory spaces and alliances to forge greater linkages between networks of feminist and women-led organizations at country and regional levels, including by leveraging guidance on CSAGs.

Priority
HIGH

Cronograma
SHORT-TERM

Difficulty
MEDIUM

Suggested steps to be taken:

- Provide offices with operational guidance documenting good practices of **CSAG design and management** at the country level, which could offer lessons and updated tools (e.g. agendas and objectives for participatory spaces; clear roles and workload expectations for potential members; advocacy actions; linkages to other movements in the country/region).
- Facilitate approaches that nurture stronger participation and **collaboration with CSAG members** (e.g. fostering capacity-building opportunities related to country and regional events; linking members to advocacy, campaign or other communication channels; and structuring a regular annual CSAG meeting to conduct a joint review of results, discuss areas of improvement, etc.).
- Introduce **opportunities for cross-fertilization** between UN Women offices regarding experiences in managing CSO participatory spaces and CSAGs, including for those with a lower maturity level to learn from those with longer-term experience.
- Strengthen **feedback channels** to hear networks of feminist and women's organizations in to complement to formal and deliberative spaces, including through the model of "open meetings", spaces inclusive of emerging and youth representatives, and regular meetings gathering all CSAG members of UN Women offices in the region.
- Assist CSOs in fostering connections with each other and various partners through **multi-stakeholder platforms** and events, and by promoting high-level strategic debates, including by reinforcing participation in other multilateral conferences.

To be led by: Americas and Caribbean Regional Office; Civil Society Division.

Impact: Strengthened networks and participation of feminist and women's organizations with UN Women's support.

If not implemented: Relationships with CSOs and movements risk remaining ad hoc and not sustained.

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The UN Women Independent Evaluation Service is co-located with the Internal Audit Service under the Independent Evaluation and Audit Services. The UN Women Independent Evaluation Service main purpose is to enhance accountability, inform decision-making and contribute to learning about the best ways to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment through the organization's mandate, including its normative, operational and coordination work. The Independent Evaluation Service also works to strengthen capacities for gender-responsive evaluation within UN entities, governments and civil society organizations.

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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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