



GETTING THERE TOGETHER

A Synthesis of Inter-Agency Programme Evaluations on SDG 5



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A Synthesis of Inter-Agency Programme Evaluations on SDG 5

A companion report to:

Are We Getting There? A synthesis of UN system evaluations of SDG 5



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Getting There Together: A synthesis of inter-agency programme evaluations on SDG 5 was a collaborative effort conducted by evaluation specialists and independent consultants representing UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP. The report and overall synthesis process were informed and enriched by the participation of management group members who actively contributed to the design and methodology of the synthesis and provided their thoughtful comments and insights. The team is especially grateful to Sofiya Yuvshanova, Child Rights Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist at UNICEF, for supporting the coding of French evaluation reports.

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ACRONYMS

ACRONYM	FULL NAME
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSO	Civil Society Organization
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCHA	Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN AIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UN Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDRR	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNV	United Nations Volunteer
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Joint programming has been an increasingly common approach to UN efforts to advance progress under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5. At the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda, UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP took stock of lessons regarding SDG 5 through a synthesis of UN system evaluations related to SDG 5. That synthesis, [Are We Getting There? A synthesis of UN system evaluations of SDG 5](#), identified a significant number of evaluations of inter-agency programmes. Given increased emphasis on joint work and collaboration across UN agencies – most recently in the UN System-Wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan – the partner agencies saw an opportunity to take a closer look at the role of inter-agency programming in addressing SDG 5 targets. This report, a companion to the main report, examines inter-agency evaluations from the main synthesis, with additional evaluations that were completed in 2023 and therefore not represented in the earlier analysis. In total, 68 inter-agency evaluations were analysed for their evidence on five key questions about the strategic significance, effectiveness and coherence of inter-agency programming; enablers and barriers to inter-agency programming; recommendations from evaluations on inter-agency programming; evidence gaps in the available data; and lessons to draw from inter-agency programming for SDG 5.

The methodology of this synthesis mirrored that of the main synthesis in terms of inclusion criteria and coding and analysis approaches. UN Women contributed the most to the inter-agency evaluative evidence base on SDG 5 programming, followed by UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, ILO and WFP.

The distribution of inter-agency evaluations across SDG 5 targets was similar to that of the main evaluation synthesis in many respects, with women's leadership (Target 5.5), eliminating violence against women and girls (Target 5.2) and economic resources (Target 5.a) being the most represented targets.

RESULTS

The evaluations point to several dimensions of the strategic significance of joint work. Programmatically, joint programmes enable a more multidimensional and holistic approach to addressing gender inequality. They enhance the catalytic role of the UN by increasing the visibility of and advocacy on gender issues in national and global agendas. Normatively, they forge new partnerships for gender equality and combine the comparative advantages of multiple agencies in technical expertise and stakeholder networks. Operationally, they can enhance the effectiveness of intervention implementation by reducing duplication of efforts and ensuring a more efficient use of resources across UN agencies, although typically with a sizable increase in transaction costs in terms of human labour for coordination and communication for technical coherence and governance structures such as steering committees. The results of programming were typically measured in outputs rather than outcomes or impact, though inter-agency programmes for SDG 5 reported considerable accomplishments in multisectoral reach to beneficiaries and knowledge production.

There was limited evidence on the contextual enablers and barriers to effective inter-agency programming for SDG 5. While COVID-19 disruptions caused many programmes to fall behind, the pandemic also strengthened collaborations between UN agencies due to pandemic response planning and new lines of funding. One barrier identified was that government counterparts or civil society partners were, at times, overwhelmed by the demands of partnering with more than one UN agency due to competing demands and multiple reporting requirements. More evidence was available on elements of programme design, management and operations that enabled or hindered implementation and coordination. Stakeholders viewed Resident Coordinator leadership as important in bringing the UN system together to ensure a coherent approach to joint programming. In addition, a detailed programme design with an integrated results framework and a workplan for joint activities were found to strengthen programme coherence. One of the most common challenges was insufficient personnel, time and resources dedicated to coordination.

A number of recommendations across the evaluations had common themes. One was to clearly define the vision and identity of a joint programme, a common understanding not just of the programme's objectives but also the larger rationale for why the programme was jointly undertaken and what synergies were expected from doing so. Another group of recommendations focused on the need to be explicit about the roles, responsibilities and information flows among partnering agencies. Many evaluations noted the difficulties of administering joint programmes when agencies have different systems and requirements for financial, procurement and human resources, and different standards for establishing memorandums of agreement and contracts with partners. Related recommendations were variously directed to the UN system at large, headquarters of specific agencies, regional and country offices, often to

simplify or align processes across UN agencies. There were also recommendations to clearly identify accountability for gender – in all sectors – in the standard architecture of Humanitarian Coordination Teams and/or the cluster system.

The synthesis also identified gaps in the evidence. Monitoring and evaluation was sometimes uncoordinated across agencies, limiting the conclusions that could be drawn by evaluations and the contributions made to collective knowledge on what works in inter-agency programming for SDG 5. Evaluations provided little insight into the necessary preconditions for successful inter-agency work, either in the social, political and economic context or within the organizational culture of a given UN office. The synthesis found no strategic evaluations conducted during the SDG period on the effectiveness or efficiency of the joint programme approach in itself.

The synthesis points to lessons related to the strategic importance of joint programming for the achievement of SDG 5, including that inter-agency collaboration can create platforms for stronger and wider stakeholder cooperation extending beyond the life of a programme and that these effects can be amplified in programme design. Inter-agency initiatives are also especially beneficial for addressing complex gender issues. As gender equality concerns often cut across sectors, well-conceptualized and executed inter-agency work is essential to achieve SDG 5 targets, and is instrumental for driving social and political shifts. In addition, joint programming for gender equality develops capacity across the UN system: agencies that work closely together learn about each other's areas of expertise, often informally, and therefore become better equipped to conduct programmes that reflect the integrated nature of women and girls' lives, the interconnectivity of governance and the particular challenges faced by disadvantaged groups.

Other lessons can be drawn about how to improve inter-agency work for SDG 5. Joint programming has high transaction costs that need to be taken into account in programme design. Some of the additional labour required for joint programmes compared to single-agency projects may be offset by efficiencies resulting from collaboration, although evaluations did not offer rigorous evidence on such a trade-off. Many parts of the UN system are experiencing a learning curve with respect to managing and administering joint programmes; therefore, there remains room for improvement. With the support of leadership and donors, programmes can anticipate and plan for the high demands and challenges of joint work, particularly when programme aims require broad shifts in social norms, systems and infrastructure that cut across sectors, as they often do under SDG 5.

The right incentives – notably, a common purpose and joint funding streams – from donors and headquarters can support strong cooperation between UN agencies. Several improvements are possible that might build greater incentives, or at least remove disincentives, for joint programmes. Time frames for implementation and expenditure need to be longer; disbursement processes need to be sufficiently flexible to ensure that no agency is held back in programme implementation; the additional time needed for inter-agency coordination needs to be reflected in budgets; and the structure of funding should not inadvertently create competition between agencies. A longer time frame for implementation is especially important when gender transformative results are sought.

IMPLICATIONS

The synthesis team identified a number of implications of the synthesis findings for UN agencies, including the need to: strengthen inter-agency programming that leverages complementary expertise and stakeholder relationships, particularly to address gender equality in cross-sectoral programming; further align administrative systems and enhance existing guidance on joint programmes; train staff in models of joint programming; fill the gender gap in the humanitarian architecture; commit to longer time frames for effective joint programming for gender equality; and consider commissioning a study into the necessary preconditions for successful inter-agency work. For donors, there are implications related to allowing joint programmes to dedicate adequate human resources and time to coordination; improving funding mechanisms to optimize smooth implementation of joint programmes; providing funding to longer-term joint programmes under SDG 5 and the flexibility to make mid-course adjustments; and considering what kinds of gender equality programming warrant a joint agency approach.

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted in 2015. Goal 5 of this framework is to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” and includes nine targets with 18 indicators to meet this goal. While progress has been made on some of these targets, notable gaps and barriers remain. In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic; the increasing number of women and girls affected by disasters and conflict; and backlash against women’s empowerment have stalled and even undone some of the progress towards SDG 5.^{1,2,3}

At the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda, UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP took stock of lessons regarding SDG 5 through a synthesis of UN system evaluations related to SDG 5. By bringing together the evidence, lessons and gaps from our collective evaluations, the synthesis – [Are We Getting There? A synthesis of UN system evaluations of SDG 5](#) – provided UN agencies and their partners with a holistic view of the barriers and enabling factors to achieving SDG 5 and what works or does not work in interventions for gender equality and women’s empowerment.⁴

Through the evaluation mapping phase, the synthesis identified 619 evaluations from 33 UN agencies that met the inclusion criteria. Of these, 56 evaluations were jointly conducted by at least two UN partners, covering joint programmes or joint programming. There has been an increased emphasis on joint work and collaboration across UN agencies, including through the UN System-Wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan and other efforts to improve collaborative work across UN agencies (see Box 1).

Box 1

Joint programming in context

The United Nations Sustainable Development Group Guidance Note on a New Generation of Joint Programmes defines a joint programme as “a cooperation strategy. It is a way to achieve a catalytic development result that depends upon the comparative advantages of two or more participating UN organizations (PUNOs) working together with partners as a team in a highly coordinated and integrated manner.”¹ Joint programming is a wider approach to collaboration under a UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework or Humanitarian Response Plan. “Delivering As One” reforms encouraged joint programmes and programming, with a stronger horizontal role for Resident Coordinators. The Independent Evaluation of Delivering As One, completed in 2012, notes that joint work is strategically important for addressing gender equality.² In its call to action, the recent UN System-Wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan similarly includes the aim that, “Our coordinated and joint activities result in the reversal of systemic gender inequality across all sectors and UN pillars in all Member States.” The plan emphasizes system-wide efforts to strengthen leadership and accountability for gender equality and build partnerships across all UN stakeholders.

Taking a closer look at the inter-agency evaluations in the evidence base for the SDG 5 synthesis can offer unique insights into UN joint programmes and programming under SDG 5 on the role and significance of inter-agency work in achieving the goal’s targets; what is working well in inter-agency collaboration on gender equality programming; how agencies can improve their coordination in the context of the SDG 5 umbrella; and where gaps in knowledge exist.

This report presents a synthesis of lessons from those inter-agency evaluations, along with additional inter-agency evaluations published in 2023 that were not included in the previous synthesis. The primary users of this synthesis are intended to be the UN agencies involved in supporting SDG 5, notably UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP. Additional users include the United Nations Economic and Social Council, UN Resident Coordinators, national governments, regional economic commissions, civil society organizations (CSOs), women's organizations, donors and others who support implementation of SDG 5.⁵

PURPOSE AND SYNTHESIS QUESTIONS

The purpose of the additional synthesis of inter-agency evaluations was to gather evaluative evidence and lessons from inter-agency programmes and collaborations on SDG 5 to support learning and decision-making for future inter-agency programming related to SDG 5.

The objective of the synthesis was to answer a series of synthesis questions. These questions build on the synthesis questions that guided the main synthesis process and analysis (see below) with specific sub-questions focused on inter-agency programming added (in bold).

1. What interventions and approaches to SDG 5 have worked well and which have not?
 - a. **What is the strategic significance of UN inter-agency programmes in advancing SDG 5?**
 - b. **How have UN agencies created coherence and leveraged comparative advantages in the design and implementation of inter-agency programmes?**
 - c. **Has inter-agency cooperation enhanced the effectiveness of interventions and approaches to advance gender equality outcomes? If so, how?**

2. What are the enabling factors and what has hindered progress towards achieving the SDG 5 targets?

- a. **What factors have enabled effective inter-agency programming, and what barriers have hindered inter-agency programming to advance SDG 5?**

3. What policy and programme recommendations have been made to advance and accelerate progress towards SDG 5 by 2030?

- a. **What recommendations have been made to enhance joint programming and UN system coordination?**

4. Where is evaluation evidence the strongest and where are the main gaps in evaluation evidence across the nine SDG 5 targets?

- a. **Do the inter-agency evaluations identify any additional evidence gaps or priority areas for future evidence generation to support the acceleration of SDG 5?**

5. What lessons have been learned regarding different UN activities and approaches to advance SDG 5?

- a. **How can inter-agency programming be leveraged to advance SDG 5?**

SECTION 2: METHODOLOGY

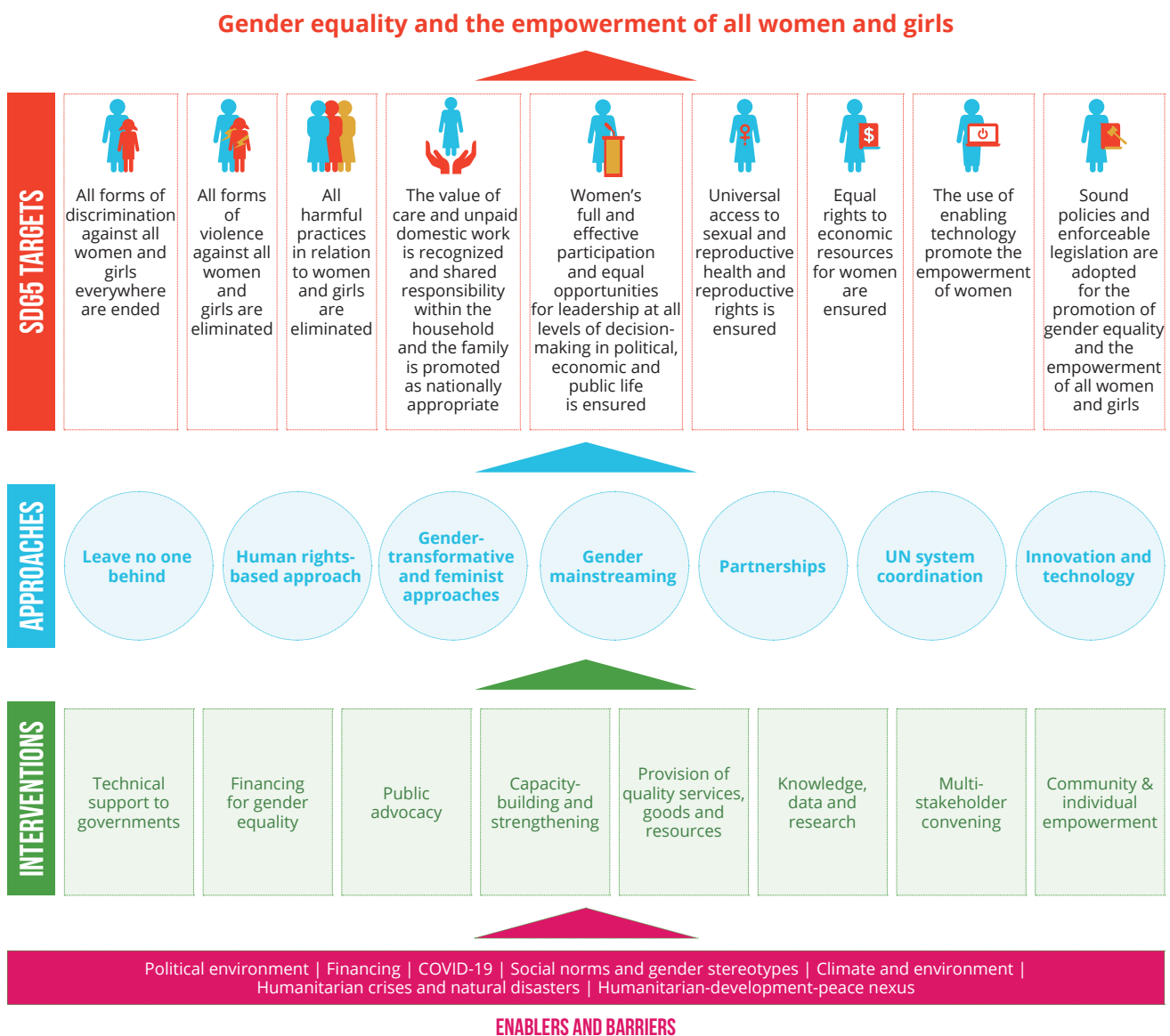
This section presents a brief description of the methodology for the synthesis. Please see the main synthesis report and annexes for a full description of the methodology.⁶

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework developed in the main synthesis to portray the logic of UN contributions to the achievement of SDG 5 was applied to this inter-agency evaluation synthesis. The framework drew on the strategic plans and theories of change of UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and

WFP and identification of commonalities across spheres of activity and programmatic approaches. The outlines of the coding structure for qualitative data analysis came from the conceptual framework, which was carried forward into the inter-agency evaluation synthesis.

Figure 1
Conceptual framework for the SDG 5 evaluation synthesis



Source: created by the synthesis team

INCLUSION CRITERIA

A number of criteria were used to determine the inclusion of evaluations into the synthesis. These eight criteria are depicted in Figure 2 and fully defined in Annex 1 of the main synthesis report.⁷ The same inclusion criteria were used in the inter-agency evaluation synthesis with two modifications. One, because the new synthesis was

conducted in 2024, the time frame for the evaluation publication year was extended to include 2023. Second, included evaluations were those of programmes conducted jointly between two or more UN agencies or economic commissions, or otherwise were evaluations commissioned by two or more agencies of their joint work.

Figure 2

Evaluation inclusion criteria

Objective Strong evaluative or programmatic focus on an SDG 5 target	Evaluation publication year Between 2018 and 2022	Intervention time frame Majority of programme within SDG period	Quality Meet UN quality assurance criteria
Geographic scope Global, regional, national and subnational	Evaluation type Programme, country, regional, thematic, impact	Implementing agencies UN agencies and economic commissions	Language English, French, Spanish, Arabic and Russian

Source: created by the synthesis team

SEARCH STRATEGY AND REPORT SCREENING

The addition of 2023 as an included evaluation publication year meant that the team was required to conduct a search for new evaluations. The same methodology as the main synthesis was used to identify evaluations published in 2023, i.e. through searching publicly available UN agency evaluation databases.⁸

Overall, 68 reports were identified including 56 inter-agency evaluations meeting the inclusion criteria from the original synthesis and 12 evaluations from the search for 2023 reports.⁹

All 68 evaluations were analysed using the same thematic coding approach designed for the main synthesis report. Please see Annex 1 of the main synthesis report for the full methodology, which includes additional information on the screening process, quality assurance and coding approach.¹⁰

LIMITATIONS

This inter-agency evaluation synthesis faced similar limitations as the main synthesis:

1. **Limited evaluative evidence:** Some targets have limited evaluative evidence, impacting the ability to draw firm conclusions. This is discussed in the evaluation mapping section.
2. **Scope of synthesis:** The synthesis does not include evaluations outside of the UN system, such as those from governments, academia, think tanks or civil society. This may exclude non-UN perspectives and evidence.
3. **Incomplete evaluation discovery:** Not all relevant UN evaluations may have been identified. Contacting UN agencies helped mitigate this by validating and suggesting additional reports.
4. **Lack of impact evaluations:** Few impact evaluations with scientific designs, including counterfactuals, were found. This limits the rigour of evidence available to assess intervention impact. Evidence from impact evaluations is highlighted where available.

SECTION 3: EVALUATION MAPPING

EVALUATIONS BY AGENCY

Overall, a total of 68 evaluation reports from 19 different UN entities met the inclusion criteria (Table 1). UN Women contributed the most to the inter-agency evaluative evidence on SDG5 programming, followed by UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and ILO. The most common UN agency collaborations on

SDG 5 evaluations were ILO/UN Women (6), Inter-agency Humanitarian Evaluations (4), UNDP/UNICEF (4) and UNICEF/UNFPA (4). Table 2 presents a full list of the number of joint programme evaluations by mix of agencies.

Table 1

Number and per cent of evaluations per agency

Agency	Total	Per cent	Agency	Total	Per cent	Agency	Total	Per cent
UN Women	34	50%	OCHA	5	7%	IFAD	1	1%
UNDP	23	34%	UNODC	5	7%	UNEP	1	1%
UNICEF	23	34%	IOM	3	4%	UNDRR	1	1%
UNFPA	20	29%	UNAIDS	3	4%	UN Habitat	1	1%
ILO	12	18%	OHCHR	3	4%	UNESCO	1	1%
WFP	7	10%	WHO	2	3%			
FAO	6	9%	UNCDF	2	3%			

Table 2

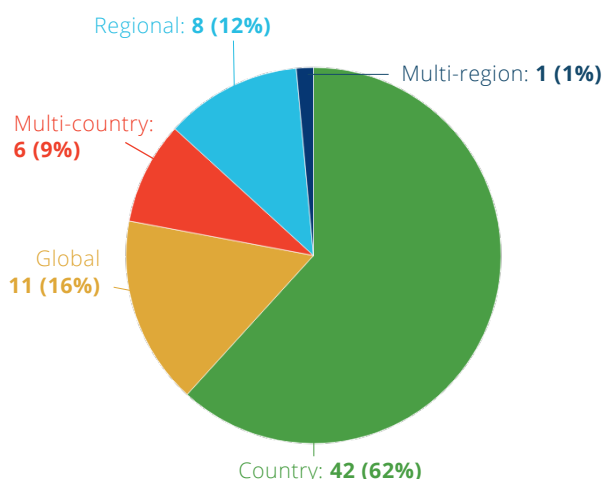
Number of joint programme evaluations by mix of agencies

Agencies	Evaluations	Agencies	Evaluations
ILO/UN Women	6	UN Women/UNDP/OHCHR	1
IAHE/OCHA	4	UN Women/UNDRR	1
UNDP/UNICEF	4	UN Women/UNEP	1
UNICEF/UNFPA	4	UN Women/UNICEF	1
UN Women/UNDP	3	UNCDF/UN Women/UNDP	1
UNDP/UNFPA	3	UNCDF/UN Habitat	1
FAO/UN Women	2	UNFPA/UN Women/UNDP	1
UN Women/UNDP/UNFPA	2	UNFPA/UN Women/UNICEF	1
UN Women/UNFPA	2	UNFPA/UNDP/UNICEF	1
UN Women/UNODC	2	UNFPA/UNICEF/WFP	1
UNICEF/WFP	2	UNFPA/WHO	1
FAO/ILO	1	UNCHR/UNAIDS	1
FAO/UNDP	1	UNICEF/ILO/UNFPA	1
ILO/IOM	1	UNICEF/UNAIDS/UNFPA	1
IOM/UNDP/UN Women	1	UNICEF/UN Women/UNDP	1
IOM/UNODC	1	UNICEF/UNDP/UN Women	1
UNICEF/UNFPA/UNDP/UNODC	1	UNICEF/UNESCO	1
OHCHR/UN Women	1	UNICEF/UNFPA/UN Women	1
OHCHR/UNDP	1	UNICEF/WFP/FAO	1
UN Women/FAO/WFP	1	WFP/IFAD/UN Women	1
UN Women/ILO/UNODC	1	WFP/ILO/UNICEF	1
UN Women/OCHA	1	WHO/UNAIDS	1
UN Women/UNDP/ILO	1	TOTAL	68

GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS OF EVALUATIONS

Most of the evaluations had a country focus (62 per cent), followed by a global/headquarters (16 per cent), regional (12 per cent) or multi-country (9 per cent) focus (see Figure 3).

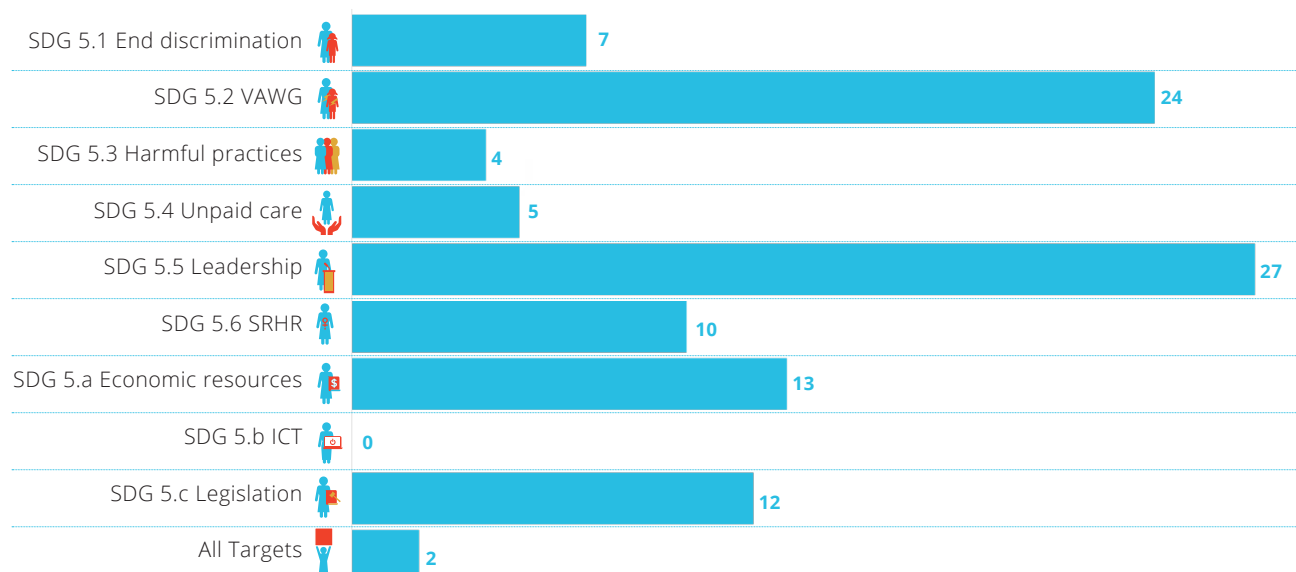
Figure 3
Number (and per cent) of evaluations by geographic scope



EVALUATIONS BY SDG 5 TARGET

All inter-agency evaluations that met the inclusion criteria were tagged with up to three SDG 5 targets. The most covered target was SDG 5.5 (Ensure women's full participation in leadership and decision-making) with 27 evaluations.

Figure 4
Number of inter-agency evaluations by SDG 5 Target¹¹ (n = 68)



Four other targets also had significant coverage: SDG 5.2 (24 evaluations), SDG 5.a (13 evaluations), SDG 5.c (12 evaluations) and SDG 5.6 (10 evaluations).

The distribution of inter-agency evaluations across SDG 5 targets is similar to that of the main evaluation synthesis in many respects. The number of evaluations is certainly shaped by the distribution of programming across targets, and the areas in which agencies endeavour to undertake joint work. Evaluations are concentrated under Target 5.2 (eliminating violence against women and girls) and Target 5.5 (women's leadership). There were no evaluations of programming under Target 5.b (information and communications technology). Proportionately, more evaluations addressed Target 5.4 (unpaid care) than in the main synthesis, which might reflect the intersectoral nature of social protection work and therefore the greater likelihood that more than one agency would be involved. However, the same might be said of programmes addressing Target 5.3 (harmful practices), which had proportionately fewer evaluations in the inter-agency synthesis. This could be because inter-agency work on those issues is largely contained within two global programmes on child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) led by UNICEF and UNFPA. For the inter-agency synthesis, there were also few evaluations on Target 5.1.

Note: Each evaluation can be tagged with up to three SDG 5 targets.

SECTION 4: RESULTS

Tackling complex issues such as gender inequality requires a collaborative effort.

Joint programmes aim to achieve outcomes that a single UN entity cannot accomplish alone, or at least not as effectively, efficiently or sustainably. This section synthesizes evaluative evidence on what works and what does not for inter-agency programming for gender equality, identifying factors that either enable or hinder joint efforts. It also presents recurring recommendations and key lessons learned from the evaluations.

4.1 WHAT'S WORKING AND NOT WORKING IN INTER-AGENCY PROGRAMMING FOR GENDER EQUALITY

4.1.1. Strategic significance of joint programmes

Joint programmes enable a more multidimensional and holistic approach to addressing gender inequality by leveraging the combined strengths and expertise of various UN agencies, fostering inter-agency collaboration and engaging diverse stakeholders.

For example, the Joint Evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation (2019) highlights the importance of a holistic strategy that operates across global, regional, national and grassroots levels, encompassing sectors such as education, health, child protection and justice. This comprehensive design has facilitated the engagement of a wide variety of stakeholders, from religious leaders to youth peers, successfully creating synergies and elevating the profile of FGM abandonment efforts.¹² A follow-up evaluation on Phase III of the programme (2021) noted that this holistic approach significantly strengthened the provision of prevention and response services, comprehensively addressing both supply and demand sides.¹³

Similarly, the Safe and Fair Programme draws on the comparative strengths of UN Women and ILO, jointly planning, implementing and reporting on shared results to support holistic programming. This collaboration created interlinkages across thematic areas and stakeholder groups, allowing the programme to effectively target violence against women in the realm of labour migration.¹⁴

Joint programmes support advocacy by increasing the visibility of gender issues on national and global agendas.

Evaluative evidence suggests that, by combining the technical expertise of multiple agencies, joint programmes can enhance the visibility, legitimacy and advocacy of gender issues. The collective voice of several UN agencies can mobilize higher levels of government and key stakeholders more effectively than a single UN entity operating alone.¹⁵ For instance, the Joint Evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation (2019) highlighted how the programme successfully elevated the issue of FGM abandonment within UN planning and priorities.

This joint effort was instrumental in advocating for the inclusion of FGM abandonment as a target within SDG 5, greatly enhancing visibility and accountability, as all countries are required to report on progress against this target to the UN Secretary-General.¹⁶ The programme's evaluation also highlighted its credibility and influence in national arenas and its ability to provide a platform for CSOs with less visibility to participate in national processes. This engagement amplified their voices and strengthened the movement for gender equality. As a global programme connected with civil society and faith-based actors at various levels, the Joint Programme on the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation has the potential to consolidate these voices, further enhancing its outreach impact.¹⁷

Evaluations of global joint programmes, including those addressing FGM and child marriage, have demonstrated their effectiveness in raising the visibility of these issues through comprehensive global campaigns.¹⁸ These campaigns leverage a variety of tools, including high-level panels with Member States and social media outreach. Similar results were observed at the country level. For example, the midterm evaluation of a joint programme for strengthening the resilience of Syrian women and girls in host communities in Iraq, Jordan and Turkey found that the programme gained visibility through events supported by the joint efforts of ILO and UN Women, even linking to broader campaigns such as the "16 Days of Activism."¹⁹ The evaluation of the regional joint programme, Win-Win: Gender Equality Means Good Business, implemented by ILO and UN Women in six Latin American and Caribbean countries, found that the biggest recognizable impact of the programme among interviewed stakeholders was the increased visibility of women's economic empowerment at the highest levels of business organizations, leading to changes in the participation of women in leadership positions.²⁰

Joint programmes have forged new partnerships for gender equality.

For instance, initiatives such as EmPower in the Asia-Pacific region have shown how integrating the mandates of UN Women and UNEP can create new synergies around gender equality, human rights, climate change and renewable energy.²¹ UNEP and UN Women mobilized their national partners, who in turn bridged their respective networks. Evaluators noted that the EmPower project engaged CSO networks and national stakeholders, leveraging new partnerships to enhance capacities for gender mainstreaming in climate policies, programmes and budgets at regional, national and local levels.²²

In humanitarian settings, joint programmes have also created new partnerships. The evaluation of the UN Women and OCHA Joint Action Plan in Palestine, Strengthened Gender Focus in Humanitarian Action, highlighted a productive working relationship that leveraged synergies between the agencies to advance gender-responsive action in humanitarian and fragile settings.²³ OCHA accessed UN Women's gender expertise, while UN Women used the space provided by OCHA to emphasize the importance of gender mainstreaming in programme planning. As UN Women does not lead any clusters, having OCHA on board allowed for gender responsiveness to be integrated into the humanitarian architecture.²⁴

Joint programmes have demonstrated potential in building synergies and extending outreach for gender initiatives by leveraging the comparative advantages of multiple agencies.

By promoting synergies and avoiding duplication, joint programmes effectively address complex issues through the combination of resources, expertise and networks. For example, the Safe and Fair Programme, a collaboration between UN Women and ILO, tackled the intersection of ending violence against women, anti-trafficking and labour migration.²⁵

Through research dissemination, workshops and dialogues, the programme raised awareness about violence against women migrant workers and advanced this critical issue across the ASEAN states. By harnessing the technical expertise and networks of both organizations, the programme integrated ending violence against women priorities into national labour policies and enhanced the capacity of service providers to support women migrant workers.²⁶

In Moldova and Georgia, the EU4GE joint programme between UNFPA, UN Women and the EU capitalized on synergies in communications, showing how shared resources and collaborative efforts can enhance the effectiveness of gender-focused interventions.²⁷ The joint programme for the Early Childhood and Comprehensive Care System in Argentina underscored the value of joint interventions in broadening relationships with government counterparts and improving inter-agency communication, promoting synergies at national, provincial and municipal levels.²⁸ The UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Abandonment of FGM has benefitted from the synergistic and multiplier effects of combining the strengths of UNICEF and UNFPA.²⁹ Positioned within child protection (UNICEF) and gender-based violence (UNFPA), the programme facilitated linkages between FGM and other relevant areas, such as family planning and adolescent health.³⁰

4.1.2. Effectiveness of joint programmes

Joint programmes can enhance the effectiveness of intervention implementation by reducing the duplication of efforts and ensuring a more efficient use of resources across UN agencies.

In Sierra Leone, the Human Security Project, a collaboration between UNDP and FAO, effectively utilized resources to advance human security, livelihoods and the dignity of vulnerable populations in three chiefdoms. By sharing project concepts and updates with other UN agencies through the UN Country Team, UNDP and FAO were able to avoid duplicative initiatives and ensure coherence with ongoing interventions.³¹ This coordination

extended to sharing lessons and good practices with agencies such as IOM and UNODC, which facilitated the exploration of joint activities and enhanced the overall impact of their projects.³²

Similarly, the joint programme on Accelerating Progress Towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal and Rwanda from 2014 to 2019, demonstrated the benefits of inter-agency cooperation. In Ethiopia, for example, WFP, FAO and UN Women targeted the same beneficiaries but provided different types of support to ensure comprehensive assistance.³³ This included business skills training and savings cooperatives by WFP, agricultural inputs and training by FAO and cooperatives and gender training by UN Women. In Nepal, FAO introduced new agricultural technologies, UN Women supported leadership development and gender mainstreaming, and WFP organized storage centres and nutrition improvement plans.³⁴

Joint programmes have documented their multi-sectoral and holistic achievements, particularly at the output level.

For instance, the final evaluation report on the Integrated Response to Violence Against Women and Girls in Serbia – a joint programme involving UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women and UNFPA – highlighted significant improvements. The legislative framework was enhanced, general service providers improved their practices and media reporting on violence against women and girls was more effective, all benefitting vulnerable groups of women.³⁵ Similarly, Phase III of the Global Programme for the Abandonment of FGM reported the development or strengthening of legislative frameworks, translating them into costed action plans and advocating for appropriate financial resources to implement these plans.³⁶ The programme also invested in capacity-building for relevant stakeholders, including providing substantive training for judicial and medical staff to support law enforcement.³⁷

As with the evaluations reviewed in the main synthesis report, joint-programme evaluations are not exempt from the challenges of measuring

outcome-level results towards gender equality. Challenges in measuring the contribution versus attribution of joint interventions persist. Evaluators noted difficulties in monitoring quantitative results at both output and outcome levels, especially when results frameworks for global inter-agency programmes are designed at a global level, without sufficient flexibility to be contextualized locally.

Operational effectiveness of interventions remains a persistent challenge for joint programmes.

Evaluations identified gaps in technical or operational capacity and an insufficient number of personnel as significant impediments to the effectiveness of joint programmes. Differences in UN operational systems and procedures across agencies often require additional time and effort to navigate, leading to perceived inefficiencies and occasional confusion for those implementing the programme.³⁸

For example, the Evaluation of the Joint Programme between UNODC and IOM for Global Action to Prevent and Address Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants in Asia and the Middle East highlighted several administrative challenges: lengthy procedures led to project delays and cost overruns, creating potential friction with external partners; and resource-intensive processes resulted in vendors and consultants withdrawing their services due to the perceived impact of bureaucratic rules on procedural efficiency.³⁹ Evaluators underscored the need for streamlined processes and enhanced inter-agency coordination to improve the operational effectiveness of joint programmes.

Box 2

Challenges of mainstreaming gender in joint programming in humanitarian settings

The Inter-agency Humanitarian Evaluation of Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls found that global clusters struggled to deploy gender equality expertise in a timely manner during sudden onset emergency responses.⁴⁰ This limitation hindered immediate front-line responders from ensuring that activities, such as needs assessments, adequately considered gender equality. Gender equality is often deprioritized in the initial phase of a response, not being viewed as a “life-saving issue” to the same extent as other humanitarian needs, except in cases of sexual exploitation and abuse, or gender-based violence under the protection mandate.⁴¹

Source: IAHE. Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls. (2020)

4.1.3. Joint programming coherence

Inter-agency programming coherence at the country level is often supported by governance structures involving key national stakeholders. However, the effectiveness of these structures in producing robust and sound results is mixed.

Most joint programmes establish steering committees and technical coordination meetings to improve coherence; reduce duplication of efforts and services; and ensure a clear division of labour, roles and responsibilities between UN agencies.

Some evaluations found that joint steering committees play an important role in connecting strategic discussions and decision-making with operational activities.⁴² For example, an inter-agency evaluation of a joint programme for inclusive security in Liberia found that the presence of a high-profile steering committee ensured national recognition of the national gender machinery and promoted the active engagement of the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion. This enhanced the programme’s capacity to place its agenda on national platforms, including with the cabinet and parliament.⁴³ Similar positive results were found in an evaluation of the Joint Programme for Advancing and Sustaining Gender Equality Gains in Rwanda.⁴⁴

Other evaluations suggest there is limited evidence that steering committees significantly affect the coherence and effectiveness of programming.⁴⁵ Some noted that high-level steering committees, often composed of senior-level representatives from respective UN entities, can be difficult to convene regularly and therefore prove ineffective in ensuring programming coherence.⁴⁶

Operationally, technical coherence is often achieved through technical coordination meetings; however, evaluations have noted that these meetings are not always managed effectively.

Coordination, information-sharing and strategizing between agencies is generally perceived as useful.⁴⁷ For instance, the inter-agency joint programme “Hemayati” between UNFPA, UN Women and UNICEF in Jordan served as a platform for discussing how agencies could collaborate and leverage each other’s connections and expertise.⁴⁸ The “Afya Bora” joint programme in Tanzania documented operational technical coherence, with UNICEF and UNFPA each having a presence in the same health facilities and communities. The exchange of technical knowledge and coordination among team members from different agencies happened in both structured technical coherence meetings and informal communications, without blurring the roles of each agency during programme implementation.⁴⁹ The role of joint-programme coordinators, as seen in the SDG Fund Joint Programmes in Somalia and Kenya, further exemplifies how inter-agency technical coordination can align activities with broader strategic goals, avoiding overlaps and ensuring that interventions fit well into the overall agenda.⁵⁰

At the same time, evaluations noted that technical coherence meetings were consistently found to be time-consuming, especially challenging given short implementation periods, with significant room to improve the efficiency of joint working arrangements. Evaluations often noted that coordination among UN agencies frequently does not go beyond a platform for information-sharing and consultation.⁵¹ Despite existing technical coordination groups, there are often reports of scarce information-sharing among agencies; duplication of efforts; unclear roles and expectations; and varied interpretations of how to operationalize joint programmes.⁵² Additionally, management structures often interfere with joint programme coherence, as they support siloed implementation and approaches.⁵³

Stakeholders viewed UN Resident Coordinator leadership as important in bringing the UN system together to ensure a coherent approach to joint programming, particularly under Multi-Partner Trust Funds.⁵⁴

These funds often involve the country UN Resident Coordinator in ensuring programme coherence, in line with UN reform principles. For example, the evaluation of a joint programme to enhance social protection for female tea garden workers in Bangladesh, funded by the Joint SDG Fund, found that the presence, guidance and support from the UN Resident Coordinator’s office were fundamental throughout the project. Weekly meetings between staff at the Resident Coordinator’s office and participating UN agencies steered day-to-day operations and provided updates to the Heads of Agencies and the UN Resident Coordinator for further advocacy at higher levels of government and with employer organizations.⁵⁵ Staff from participating UN agencies mentioned that this process led to a cultural shift among agencies in planning, monitoring and reporting for joint programmes.⁵⁶ While placing country programmes under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator aligns with UN reform principles, some evaluations noted that UN personnel reported confusion on how to effectively operationalize the Resident Coordinator’s role.⁵⁷

A detailed programme design with an integrated results framework and a workplan for joint activities enable programme coherence.

In addressing programme coherence, several evaluations suggested the importance of joint production of planning and strategy documents. Joint results frameworks developed at the country level were found to generate a common understanding of the programme vision, goals and direction when they were jointly undertaken rather than through separate development of outcomes and outputs and their later compilation into one document.

Evaluations noted annual inter-agency planning and joint monitoring visits as crucial for coordinating efforts, avoiding duplication and making necessary adjustments. These processes allow agencies to review progress, share information and capitalize on complementary skills, ensuring a more streamlined and effective delivery of services.⁵⁸

One shortcoming often noted was at the more detailed planning level, that agencies shared little information about their activity workplans with each other and therefore missed opportunities to create synergies in joint implementation, such as through joint advocacy, public events, community mobilization or service delivery.⁵⁹

The evaluation of Moldova's Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development noted the need to ensure that planning "is not done as the sum of agency plans, but as a process that consolidates and integrates the efforts of the agencies."⁶⁰

4.2 ENABLING AND HINDERING FACTORS FOR INTER-AGENCY PROGRAMMING

While COVID-19 disruptions caused many programmes to fall behind, the pandemic also strengthened collaborations between UN agencies.

The incentives for coordinating activities changed with COVID-19, due to the joint purpose it created and enabled by the availability of joint funding. As a result, joint assessments of the impact of shutdowns and service interruptions, joint response plans and continuity plans were developed in several countries. For example, the Win-Win Programme in Brazil developed greater coherence in part because the business continuity plans required after the pandemic began contributed to more effective communication.⁶¹

In Moldova, where agencies already closely collaborated under the Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development, evaluations noted the unifying effect of the pandemic and the UN system response, which carried over into an improved, synchronized plan for the next programme cycle.⁶²

Government counterparts and CSO partners were, at times, overwhelmed by the demands of partnering with more than one UN agency.⁶³

When agencies are partnering with the same ministry or office but failing to coordinate their activities well, there are competing requests for the partner's time and attention. For example, the evaluation of Enhancing Resilience and Acceleration of the SDGs in the Eastern Caribbean noted bottlenecks in programme implementation because activities were being proposed by different UN agencies for the same governmental partner without communicating schedules and plans.⁶⁴ Several reports also pointed to high transaction costs for partners when UN agencies had unaligned processes for formalizing and managing partnerships or when different reporting demands and procurement systems created challenges for counterparts trying to navigate multiple sets of requirements and expectations. For example, the Jordanian Women's Union had to duplicate reporting on some activities to both UNFPA and UN Women, because each agency funded the Hemayati programme in a different location and followed their own reporting requirements.⁶⁵ Evaluations suggested that these challenges could be managed by integrating and simplifying the expectations of UN partner agencies or by conducting realistic assessments of a partner's absorptive capacity in the formative stage and adapting plans accordingly.

Insufficient personnel time and resources dedicated to coordination was commonly experienced as a hindrance to programme progress.

Coordination mechanisms often require a high degree of consultation between agencies, resulting in time-consuming and potentially inefficient processes.⁶⁶ This can lead to heavy workloads for programming staff, risking potential burnout and potentially negatively impacting the quality of programming and the results achieved.⁶⁷ Sometimes agencies seemed to underestimate this issue, for example by anticipating a part-time role for a national coordinator or allocating portions of existing personnel to inter-agency work.⁶⁸ An evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative Safe and Fair Programme pointed out that the cap for staffing of 30 per cent of the budget did not reflect the additional workload that coordination creates. Half of respondents to a survey of programme personnel estimated that an average 25 per cent of their time was spent on coordinating with the other UN agency; and one quarter estimated they spent over 50 per cent of their time on such tasks. However, comparing across countries in the programme revealed that having fewer staff across agencies, which reduced the number of people needing to be involved in coordination, did not lead to more manageable coordination time – the highest workloads were in countries and regions with only one person representing both agencies.⁶⁹

4.3 RECURRING RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN INTER-AGENCY PROGRAMMING

Although the specifics of recommendations offered in evaluation reports were generally tailored to the programme under evaluation, several common themes emerged related to strengthening inter-agency programming.

Clearly define the rationale and vision of a joint programme.

Evaluators often commented on the importance of a shared vision for a joint programme, a common understanding not just of the programme's objectives but also the larger rationale for why the programme is undertaken jointly and what synergies are expected from doing so. Recommendations addressed challenges in the interpretation of a programme's identity both internally within agencies – among the staff operating and overseeing programmes – and externally in the public or partners' understanding of the programme's reasons for existing. Internal factors included agencies lacking a common idea of the synergies of a programme or what advocacy messages best reflected programme aims, particularly for cross-sectoral work. Sometimes, a midterm review or other reflective process resulted in greater unity within teams about the programme vision. Evaluations also recommended team building across agencies to better orient personnel to one another; well-constructed inception periods for early coordination and creating joint directions; and a stronger role for country or regional leadership in the programme.⁷⁰

There were also concerns about how a lack of unity inside the programme was reflected in its outside image, so that the public or beneficiaries perceived several agencies versus one unified programme. In some cases, country partners may not have considered there to be a joint package of technical support, which can limit a programme's ability to serve a catalytic purpose and create momentum. Suggestions to address these concerns included joint communications plans, a common programme brand and greater attention to the content of advocacy messages.⁷¹

UN Women and UNEP's EmPower programme provides an example of the challenges faced when a programme's intended synergies are not well articulated or integrated into workplans. According to those involved in the design, the rationale for the programme was to provide joint technical assistance across respective partners' networks in the areas of disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and gender equality. The programme had several successes, but agency teams at the country level had little interaction with each other and therefore missed opportunities for joint normative work, advocacy, strategic thinking and building the business case for gender equality in climate change adaptation. As a result, evaluators were not sure that government or non-governmental organization (NGO) partners were able to see the added value of a joint programme.⁷²

Be explicit about roles, responsibilities and information flows among partnering agencies.⁷³

This was a frequent recommendation for improvement, as well as a factor highlighted as a best practice. There were several examples of programmes that benefitted from clear lines of accountability and delineation of duties across UN agency partners, as well as programmes that grappled with these issues. When the responsibilities of each partner are not well defined, a programme can risk duplicating efforts or leaving important tasks undone. The evidence suggests that this is about

much more than who implements which activity – it also includes defining roles in communications, reporting, external relationship management and clarifying what kinds of decisions should involve all agencies.⁷⁴ When the flow of information between the partnering agencies was not explicitly set out, evaluations suggested that more formal structures could build inter-agency dialogue⁷⁵ or that the Resident Coordinator could play a stronger role in coordinating information exchange.⁷⁶ Multi-country programmes were sometimes advised to do the same for information-sharing between country and regional offices and between agencies at the regional level.⁷⁷ Evaluations also noted the importance of external partners knowing each agency's role.⁷⁸

Develop improved systems for the administration of joint programmes.

This recommendation was variously directed to the UN system at large, headquarters of specific agencies, regional and country offices. It often dealt with the need to simplify or align processes across UN agencies to avoid duplicating reporting or finance and procurement recordkeeping when the systems of different agencies were built on different platforms or had different requirements. For example, in the Global Programme on the Abandonment of FGM, along with UNFPA, UNICEF established a manual financial reporting system so that spending could be tracked by output and outcome.⁷⁹ Similarly, delays in programme start-up were commonly mentioned in evaluations due to the administrative hurdles of working across agencies. These challenges also affected partners when they had to navigate different request forms and different expectations with each agency. One of the most common recommendations was to develop new kinds of agreements and methods of approval for joint projects so that a single document could be used to formalize partnerships between the UN agencies on one side and a government or civil society partner on the other. A few evaluations also recommended that the UN

system develop guidance and standards for the management structure of joint projects, identifying key dedicated staff, competencies and core functions at country and regional levels, including where they should be housed.⁸⁰

Clearly identify accountability for gender in the standard structure of Humanitarian Country Teams.

Evaluations that focused on humanitarian action were consistent in describing weak accountability for inter-agency gender equality work outside of the sexual and reproductive health and protection areas. Gender working groups and networks had little influence with other sector clusters and Humanitarian Country Teams, and gender was usually not part of inter-agency discussions outside of those groups. For example, in Ethiopia, interviewees in the evaluation of the drought response of 2015–2018 said that although there is clear evidence the gender gap has a negative effect on agricultural productivity, the topic remained limited to the gender network.⁸¹ As the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls noted, “[T]here is a gap in the humanitarian architecture for inter-agency gender expertise that can influence both strategic and operational considerations and which is present throughout the entire time period of the response.”⁸²

Recommendations to address the problem focused on filling gaps in the standard design of humanitarian response by mandating dedicated senior gender experts at either a higher level within the Humanitarian Country Team or within each cluster (or both) to ensure that strategic gender expertise is a standard feature of all Humanitarian Country Teams and an active part of inter-agency planning and strategizing across sectors. Other proposals were to strengthen accountability for gender in the performance reviews of Humanitarian Coordinators and Resident Coordinators and to ensure that funding for full-time expertise is available on a continuous basis.⁸³

4.4 EVIDENCE GAPS

Monitoring and evaluation was sometimes uncoordinated across agencies, limiting the conclusions that could be drawn.

Evaluated joint programmes typically had joint results frameworks with accompanying monitoring and evaluation plans. However, several evaluations noted that this “jointness” less often extended into joint data collection activities or sharing data across agencies, particularly when the implementation of activities was divided across outcome and output areas. Some programmes used coordination meetings to disseminate their monitoring data, but there were also examples of oversights in agencies sharing information from needs assessments or monitoring data that not only may have benefitted the wider programme but could also contribute to learning on what works in inter-agency programming on SDG 5.⁸⁴ There were examples of good practices as well: the agencies involved in the Bangladesh programme for the social protection of female tea garden workers credited joint monitoring visits with facilitating joint decision-making, based on a common understanding of the progress made.⁸⁵

There was limited insight into the necessary preconditions for successful inter-agency work.

Evaluations generally did not explore the underlying factors for successful joint programming, especially which factors in the environment or context are favourable for joint programming, such as existing levers of coordination across ministries or a strong intersectoral civil society. A small number of evaluations did provide some reflection on what agency conditions at the country or regional level shape the success of programming. For example, the evaluation of the joint ILO, WFP and UNICEF programme, Toward a Somali Led Transition to National Social Protection Systems, reflected on a similar project in Rwanda and drew

the conclusion that coordination and synergies can be more, or less, successful depending on the agencies involved.⁸⁶ Beyond technical expertise, the elements of organizational capacity and culture that were mentioned in evaluations, which might impact how well partnering agencies collaborate, included internal commitment to learning about new technical areas; the feasibility of adapting to alternative ways of working (not just programmatically but also administratively); and previous relationships between agencies.⁸⁷

The synthesis found no strategic evaluations of the effectiveness or efficiency of the joint programme approach in itself for the achievement of SDG 5.

However, any evaluation without SDG 5 or gender equality strongly integrated into the objectives or evaluation questions would have been outside the scope of the synthesis and therefore not captured. Such an evaluation could generate significant insight across programmes with more detailed and standardized data gathering on the trade-offs inherent in joint work compared to single-agency work. Lessons might be drawn on when it makes the most sense to pursue inter-agency efforts to advance SDG 5 and when the challenges of joint programming are likely to outweigh the value added.

4.5 LESSONS LEARNED

Inter-agency collaboration can create platforms for stronger stakeholder collaboration.

The comparative advantage or value-add of each agency in a collaboration is made of more than technical expertise – it includes relationships, credentials and local knowledge. UN agencies often have stronger relationships with certain ministries, departments, administrative units and civil society sectors than others. Agencies involved in inter-agency programmes that bring their

stakeholders together can build mechanisms of routine engagement and strengthen networking across government bodies and non-profit organizations, triggering a mobilization of actors that lasts beyond the programme.⁸⁸

For example, through coordinating UN agencies at a national level, the Hemayati programme in Jordan paved the way for better coordination at local levels between governmental bodies, such as the National Council for Family Affairs and NGOs, including the Jordanian Women’s Union, for the integration of gender-based violence response services at the point of service, including sexual and reproductive health care.⁸⁹ Similarly, in Lebanon, UNICEF and ILO addressed a highly fragmented social protection sector that was duplicating efforts and lacked an overarching policy framework by bringing together national authorities from several ministries and departments, CSOs and research institutions for policy dialogue. The multi-stakeholder forums that resulted have been the foundation for a systematic approach to social protection that can recognize and bring forward more complex issues in disability, end-of-service indemnity and other areas.⁹⁰ These spinoff effects should be planned for so that they can be deliberately nurtured and become part of sustainability strategies.

The right incentives from donors and headquarters can support strong cooperation between UN agencies.

The arena in which inter-agency collaboration is routinely a key part of programming generally – although not always perfectly executed – is in emergency response. Certainly this is in part because agencies share a strong mandate to ensure that people’s basic needs and rights are protected in an emergency situation, which requires a swift response. Duplications of effort that result in key gaps in the provision of food, shelter, clean water, protection and health care can have a particularly high cost in terms of human life and well-being.

The humanitarian cluster system offers the necessary structure for collaboration not only among UN agencies but also NGOs. In addition, joint funding appeals and platforms incentivize cooperative planning.

Evaluators of the UN–Republic of Moldova Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development noted two factors – a common purpose and rapid response funding streams – as being the impetus for improved coordination across UN agencies in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. They drew the following lesson:

“Close cooperation between United Nations agencies can emerge when the right incentives for cooperation are in place. In this case, the onset of the COVID-19 crisis and the clear guidance from headquarters, coupled with the availability of rapid funding, created the right incentives for the agencies to rally together under the coordination of UN RCO and produce a strong SERP, as well as a range of other assessments that provided solid foundations for developing a synchronized and well-coordinated response in the upcoming programme cycle. The structure of funding is a critical factor in rallying United Nations agencies to work together. The fragmented nature of United Nations funding is a serious shortcoming that impedes joint implementation. However, the COVID-19 crisis served as a rallying factor for United Nations agencies by combining joint funding with a joint purpose.”⁹¹

Agencies also often have shared goals at different points in the triple nexus. Funding mechanisms for joint programming target those places where agendas overlap, but the evidence suggests that several improvements are possible that might build greater incentives, or at least remove disincentives, for joint programmes. Time frames for implementation and expenditure need to be longer;⁹² disbursement processes need to be sufficiently flexible so that no agency is held back in programme implementation;⁹³ the additional time needed for inter-agency coordination needs

to be reflected in budgets;⁹⁴ and the structure of funding should not inadvertently create competition between agencies.⁹⁵ A longer time frame for implementation is especially important when gender transformative results are sought.

Inter-agency initiatives are especially beneficial for addressing complex gender issues that touch several sectors such as cross-border peacebuilding,⁹⁶ harmful practices,⁹⁷ migration⁹⁸ or social protection.⁹⁹

Joint work can provide a holistic approach to programming that is not possible when a single agency undertakes the work. It is sometimes essential for bringing together the right stakeholders, who may not normally interact across sectoral silos. Without such joint efforts, agencies risk duplication, competition for time and attention, or the use of strategies that work against each other. In contrast, agencies that work closely together learn about each other’s areas of expertise, often informally, and therefore become better equipped to conduct programmes that reflect the integrated nature of women and girls’ lives, the interconnectivity of governance and the particular challenges faced by disadvantaged groups.

For example, the evaluation of the UN Women and OCHA Joint Action Plan in Palestine highlighted multi-sectoral interventions that addressed gender-related vulnerabilities from multiple angles as good practice.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, the relationship between women’s economic disempowerment and grievances and conflict became clearer to personnel in an ILO-FAO joint programme in Sierra Leone through the course of the programme.¹⁰¹ Because gender equality concerns often cut across sectors, well conceptualized and executed inter-agency work is essential to achieve SDG 5 targets.

Joint programming has high transaction costs that need to be taken into account in programme design.

The demands on resources and time for coordination and parallel management systems are high in collaborative work and joint programming. For example, the cost-benefit analysis of the project Enhancing social protection for female tea garden workers and their families in Sylhet Division, Bangladesh – a project that evaluators said was exemplary in its coordination and collaborative decision-making – found high transaction costs across all four UN partner agencies.¹⁰² Some of the additional labour required in joint programmes compared to single-agency projects is probably inevitable, although efficiencies resulting from collaboration may offset some of the transaction costs.

UN reforms mandating “Delivering As One” have been taken up to different degrees in different country settings and funding streams. As the Safe and Fair Programme midterm evaluation noted, “due to the relatively new focus on joint programming across the UN system, most current joint programmes are experiencing a learning curve with respect to the ideal management arrangements to maximize efficiencies.”¹⁰³ As collective experience grows, the UN system may find ways to better mitigate transaction costs with new options for management and administration of formal inter-agency collaboration. With the support of leadership and donors, programmes can anticipate and plan for the high demands and challenges of joint work, particularly when the aims of the programme require broad shifts in social norms, systems and infrastructure that cut across sectors, as they often do under SDG 5.

SECTION 5: THE WAY FORWARD

Based on the findings and lessons from the inter-agency synthesis, the synthesis team identified several implications for UN agencies and donors. These implications are designed to support the interpretation and use of the synthesis results by different stakeholders; however, the implications are not exhaustive, and stakeholders can derive further implications for their work by examining the findings and lessons in the results section above.

IMPLICATIONS FOR UN AGENCIES

- Continue to undertake inter-agency programming to leverage complementary expertise, facilitate knowledge exchange across agencies and enhance cross-sectoral programming for the achievement of SDG 5.
- Strengthen integrated programmes to include gender equality across sectors and address complex multisectoral issues, such as violence against women and girls, sexual and reproductive health and decent work for women. Ensure integrated programmes include gender equality measures such as gender assessments, gender expertise, dedicated gender budget for gender actions and consultations with women and girls throughout the design and implementation of programming.
- Clarify the place of gender expertise in the standard set-up of Humanitarian Country Teams and/or clusters, positioning gender across clusters and/or at upper coordination levels.
- Commit to the longer time frames required not only for effective joint programming but also for tackling the root causes of entrenched gender inequalities in collaboration with women and girls and their communities.
- Monitor application of the tools and recommended management structures for joint programmes outlined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Group's Guidance Note on a New Generation of Joint Programmes and assess the improvements they produce in gender equality programming. Enhance the guidance as needed to address recommended management structures for different types of programmes and for the achievement of SDG 5.
- Work together to further align finance, procurement and human resources systems and processes, as well as templates for partnership agreements, across agencies engaged in SDG 5 programming to ensure efficient management and sufficient gender technical expertise and associated budget.
- Train staff in the modalities, models and requirements of joint implementation, including joint measures to advance gender equality which build on previous work and successes, so they understand the benefits and the drawbacks of inter-agency programming for SDG 5.
- Consider commissioning a study of the preconditions necessary for successful gender equality inter-agency programmes, looking both within and outside agencies.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DONORS

- Consider what kinds of gender equality and SDG 5 initiatives warrant participation of agencies with different technical knowledge and relationships and when joint work should be mandated.
- Provide funding to and ensure sufficient gender technical expertise for longer-term joint programmes and initiatives to support the achievement and measurement of intermediate gender equality outcomes and target-level impact.
- Provide flexibility to programme implementers to make mid-course adjustments to programme strategies and administrative arrangements to facilitate innovations in partnership models that might accelerate progress on SDG 5.
- Allow joint programmes targeting SDG 5 to dedicate adequate human resources, including gender expertise, and time for inter-agency coordination, in budgets as well as time frames, including sufficient inception periods for coalescing the programme vision and inter-agency relationships.
- Avoid implementing rules for fund transfers that require all participating agencies within a programme to collectively spend a certain percentage of received funds before any agency may request the next instalment. This requirement fails to account for the differing timelines and expenditure plans of the various agencies within an SDG 5 joint programme.
- Review funding mechanisms to ensure they do not inadvertently discourage inter-agency collaboration on SDG 5 through difficult administrative requirements or factors that generate competition between agencies engaged in a partnership.

ANNEX: LIST OF INCLUDED EVALUATION REPORTS

Evaluation Title	Agencies	Year Completed
Final Evaluation Report JP GEWE in Rwanda	UNDP, UNFPA	2018
Regional Joint Programme for Violence against Women and Girls Prevention in Asia Pacific	UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women, UNV	2018
Malawi JP for Girls Education	UNICEF, UNFPA, WFP	2018
Evaluation finale du projet FSP-VGMS Appui à la Lutte Contre les Violences de Genre en Milieu Scolaire	UNESCO, UNICEF	2018
CIV_Joint evaluation of conflict prevention	UNICEF, UN Women	2019
Liberia_Evaluation Report_IncluSec_Liberia	UNDP, IOM, UN Women	2019
JP Rural women's WEE Evaluation_final report	IFAD, WFP, UN Women	2019
JP Hemayati Promoting Women and Girls health and wellbeing	UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women	2019
Inter-agency Humanitarian Evaluation - Ethiopia	Inter-agency Humanitarian Evaluation	2019
UNJP Mid-term Evaluation Report Final	UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA	2019
Joint Evaluation of UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage	UNFPA, UNICEF	2019
Joint Evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation Accelerating Change	UNFPA, UNICEF	2019
EU-UNW-ILO Strengthening the resilience of Syrian women and girls in host communities in Iraq, Jordan and Turkey - Midterm Evaluation	UN Women, ILO	2019
Special Program on Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction	UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO, World Bank	2019
Informe Evaluacion Final Independiente Proyecto PBFIRF194	FAO, UN Women	2020
Addressing Sexual Bribery To Enable Resilience And Sustained Peace	UNDP, UN Women	2020
Central African Republic Evaluation Finale Du Project Conjoint Promotion De La Participation Politique Et Leadership De La Femme	UNDP, UN Women	2020
Inter-agency Humanitarian Evaluation on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls	Inter-agency Humanitarian Evaluation	2020
MTE Women in Leadership in Samoa	UN Women, UNDP	2020
IELD Mid-Term Evaluation_Final Report	UN Women, UNCDF, UNDP	2020
MTE of Win-win Gender Equality means good business	UN Women, ILO	2020
Final_Evaluation_Report_UNDA_2019_001	UN Habitat, UNODC	2020
UNICEF-UNFPA Afya Bora ya Mama na Mtoto Project (2015-2019)	UNFPA, UNICEF	2020

Evaluation Title	Agencies	Year Completed
Joint Action Plan Gender Focus In Humanitarian Action	OCHA, UN Women	2021
Regional Programme Win Win Gender Equality Means Good Business	ILO, UN Women	2021
Final Evaluation Empowering Youth For A Peaceful Prosperous And Sustainable Future	UNDP, UNICEF	2021
Mid-Term Evaluation Safe And Fair Joint ERAW Programme	ILO, UN Women	2021
Finale Du Projet De Renforcement De Resilience Securitaire Et De La Prevention Des Conflits Intercommunautaires	UNDP, OHCHR	2021
UNJP on Gender Equality - Systematization of Final Results	UN Women, UNFPA	2021
JP on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women	FAO, UN Women, WFP	2021
Joint Evaluation Preventing Responding Violence Women Girls Report	UN AIDS, UNESCO, UNFPA, ILO	2021
Final Evaluation Report 1819U	UN Women, UNODC	2021
Joint evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF joint programme on the abandonment of FGM, Phase III (2018-2021)	UNFPA, UNICEF	2021
United Nations–Republic of Moldova Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development (PFSD) 2018-2022 (2)	UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF	2021
Evaluacion summativo appui aux femmes leaders communautaires pour la prévention des éventuels conflits liés aux élections législatives et présidentielles de 2020	UNDP, UNICEF	2021
EU-MPTF Spotlight Initiative ILO-UNW JP Safe and Fair Realizing women migrant workers right and opportunities in the ASEAN region	ILO, UN Women, UNODC	2021
Final Evaluation - Win-win gender equality means good business	UN Women, ILO	2021
Creating peaceful societies through women's management of natural resources, land tenure rights in Sierra Leone	ILO, FAO	2021
Mitigando el impacto socioeconomico del COVID-19 sobre el empleo y los ingresos de mujeres trabajadoras	UNDP, UN Women, ILO	2022
Enhancing Social Protection for Female Tea Garden Workers and Their Families in Sylhet Division Bangladesh - Joint evaluation	ILO, UNICEF, UNFPA	2022
Priority Implementation Actions of the AU-ILO-IOM-ECA JP on Migration Governance for Development	IOM, ILO, African Union Commission	2022
Gender Inequality of Risk Final Evaluation Report	UNDRR, UN Women	2022
Informe final de evaluación GPI6 Rv compilada vf	UN Women, ILO, UNODC, UN Peacebuilding Commission	2022
Projet Femmes Agriculture	FAO, UN Peacebuilding Fund, UN Women	2022
UNW_Joint Evaluation_EmPower	UNEP, UN Women	2022
Inter-agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Yemen Crisis	Inter-agency Humanitarian Evaluation	2022

Evaluation Title	Agencies	Year Completed
Final Evaluation Report Sirte Joint Project	UN Women, UNICEF, UNDP	2022
JP Transforming Social Protection for Persons with Disabilities in Georgia	UN Women, UNFPA, UNDP	2022
Resilience of Local Communities Against Health, Environmental and Economic Insecurities	UNFPA, UNDP	2022
Programme Evaluation- Early Childhood and Comprehensive Care System Argentina	UNICEF, UNDP, ILO	2022
Joint_Evaluation_Report_UNAIDS	UN AIDS, WHO, UNODC, UNESCO	2022
Terminal evaluation of Project 2023AA-Building urban economic resilience during and after COVID-19	UNECA, UNECE, ECLAC, ESCAP, ESCWA, UN Habitat, UNCDF	2022
Evaluation of Joint Programme 'Enhancing Resilience and Acceleration of the SDGs in the Eastern Caribbean	UNICEF, WFP, ILO, UN Women, UNDP	2022
Final Independent Evaluation for "Transforming national dialogue for the development of an inclusive national Social Protection system for Lebanon" January 2020 – September 2022	UNICEF, ILO, UN Women, UNDP, WFP	2022
Independent Final Evaluation of the UN Joint Programme – Toward a Somali Led Transition to National Social Protection Systems (2020-2021)	ILO, WFP UNICEF	2022
Final Evaluation of the Joint Programme - Improving the system of social protection through the introduction of inclusive quality community-based social services	UNICEF, UNFPA, Joint SDG Fund, UNDP, UNODC	2022
IAHE_Covid_Report	Inter-agency Humanitarian Evaluation	2022
EU4GE-Final-Evaluation-Report	UNFPA, UN Women	2023
UN Women ILO JP MTE synthesis report_Eng	UN Women, ILO	2023
Umbrella evaluation - final evaluation report	UN Women, UNFPA, UNICEF	2023
Final Report_Mid-term review of Human Security	UNDP, FAO	2023
Integrated Response to GBV 3-Report with Annexes	UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women	2023
Rapport d'Evaluation PBF Mécanisme Droits Humains 2023	UNDP, UN Women, UNFPA	2023
Rapport Final Evaluation projet feminisation PBF Juillet 2023 VF	UNICEF, UNDP	2023
Evaluacion_Final_ParticiPaz_VFJUL2023	UNDP, UN Women, OHCHR	2023
evaluation-country-envelopes-2018-2022-report_en	UN AIDS, UNICEF, UNFPA	2023
Final_Evaluation_Report_GLOZ67	UNODC, IOM	2023
Final evaluation of Joint UN SDG Social Protection Kenya	WFP, UNICEF, FAO	2023

ENDNOTES

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