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COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION **MALI**

SYNTHESIS REPORT
2024

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This evaluation report resulted from the participation of more than 120 stakeholders, ultimately reaching 133 individuals, 52 per cent of whom were female. The support and active engagement of everyone involved in the consultation process were instrumental in making this report possible.

The evaluation team included Gaston Bushayija (Senior Consultant), Lou Akusua De Giuli (Junior Researcher), Cheick Oumar Traoré (National Consultant) and was led by Cyuma Mbayiha (Regional Evaluation Specialist).

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EVALUATION TEAM :

Cyuma Mbayiha, Team Lead

Gaston Bushayija, Evaluator (International)

Lou Akusua De Giuli, Evaluator (International)

Cheick Oumar Traoré, Evaluator (National)



INDEPENDENT EVALUATION AND AUDIT SERVICES (IEAS)

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION SERVICE (IES)

UN WOMEN

ACRONYMS

API	Agence pour la Promotion des Investissements
CFA	West African CFA franc
CPE	Country Portfolio Evaluation
CREDD	Economic Recovery and Sustainable Development
CSA	Committee of the Algiers Agreements (Comité de Suivi des Accords)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
IEAS	Independent Evaluation and Audit Services
IES	Independent Evaluation Service
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MCA	Monitoring Committee of the Accords
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
PACINDHA	Pôle des Actions d'Intégration des Droits Humains en Afrique
PMSU	Programme Management Support Unit
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNCT-SWAP	United Nations Country Team System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
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
UNSDCF	UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
-------------------	---

SECTION 1. EVALUATION PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE	4
---	---

SECTION 2. COUNTRY CONTEXT	6
----------------------------	---

SECTION 3. PORTFOLIO ANALYSIS	8
-------------------------------	---

SECTION 4. METHODOLOGY	12
------------------------	----

SECTION 5. FINDINGS	17
---------------------	----

SECTION 6. LESSONS LEARNED	42
----------------------------	----

SECTION 7. CONCLUSIONS	44
------------------------	----

SECTION 8. RECOMMENDATIONS	47
----------------------------	----



Executive Summary

Purpose and scope

The purpose of this evaluation is to identify the successes and challenges related to UN Women Mali's contributions to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in the country. The evaluation assessed UN Women's Country Office portfolio over the Strategic Note period 2020–2024, examining its relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and alignment with human rights principles. The evaluation covers the exercise of UN Women's integrated mandate in Mali between 2020 and the first quarter of 2024. The evaluation serves a dual purpose: it looks back to assess overall successes and challenges since 2020; and also looks forward to anticipate new directions based on lessons drawn from implementation of the Strategic Note between 2020 and 2024.

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

The evaluation aimed to address several key questions. It sought to determine whether UN Women's portfolio was relevant for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in Mali, particularly in terms of its alignment with national policies and international human rights standards. It explored the coherence of UN Women's interventions within the Strategic Note and with the broader work of the UN Country Team in Mali. The evaluation also examined the extent to which UN Women's contributions have supported the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment, and whether the portfolio was designed and implemented in accordance with human rights principles, including the principle of "leave no one behind" and consideration of disability. The evaluation looked at whether UN Women Mali had adequate governance, capacity and skills to ensure effective use of resources, as well as whether the results achieved through the Strategic Note were likely to be sustained over time.

The evaluation employed a theory-based approach, using contribution analysis to assess UN Women's impact on target outcomes as set out in the theory of change. Mixed methods were utilized, including both quantitative and qualitative data collection. Quantitative data was primarily drawn from financial records and surveys, while qualitative data was gathered through document reviews, interviews and focus group discussions. The evaluation's method and processes were gender-responsive and human rights-based, in line with the UN Women Evaluation Policy and in accordance with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) guidance on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation. The evaluation analysed results using a detailed evaluation framework and took into account people's perceptions of results progression over time. Reported changes were assessed against planned result pathways, as sketched in a reconstructed theory of change. Qualitative data was used for a more nuanced assessment of both internal and external factors that influence performance. The evaluation was conducted in compliance with UNEG Ethical Guidelines, the UNEG Guidance on Integrating Disability Inclusion in Evaluation and the UNEG Code of Conduct for Evaluation.

Executive Summary

Highlights of findings

The evaluation revealed that the Country Office's portfolio is well-aligned with both national policies and international frameworks. The Strategic Note aligns with Mali's national development priorities, such as the Framework for Economic Recovery and Sustainable Development (CREDD), and global gender equality commitments, including the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. However, there are opportunities to deepen the integration of human rights commitments, particularly in combating harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and early marriage.

In terms of coherence, the Country Office has made significant progress, reducing duplications across its programmes and fostering stronger synergies within its interventions. Active participation in UN coordination mechanisms, such as the Gender Theme Group, has further enhanced coherence within the broader UN system in Mali. Nonetheless, some gaps remain in gender coordination mechanisms, as reflected in the UN Country Team's Gender Scorecard.

The evaluation also found that the Country Office has been effective in promoting women's political participation and preventing gender-based violence. Legislative advocacy and support for women candidates have contributed to significant achievements. There are opportunities for further impact, particularly in economic empowerment and promoting women's involvement in the digital economy and entrepreneurship. UN Women's portfolio demonstrates strong potential in advancing human rights and gender equality, although there is room for growth in addressing the needs of marginalized groups, including women with disabilities. Engaging men and boys in gender equality efforts could also broaden the impact, especially by leveraging religious narratives that support gender equity.

Operational improvements have enhanced resource management, particularly in recruitment and programme management, although challenges remain in procurement and recruitment processes. These issues impact the timely implementation of programmes and gaps in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems hinder the validation of results and the measurement of programme effectiveness. Additionally, the unstable position of the Operations Manager between November 2021 and December 2023 undermined the smooth conduct of business in compliance with UN Women policies and procedures.

Finally, while the Country Office has shown a strong commitment to sustainability through community engagement and partnerships, there is a need to reinforce long-term planning and integrate exit strategies earlier in the project cycle. These efforts are essential to safeguard the durability of results, especially in the context of political instability in the country and short-term funding cycles.

Key recommendations

In response to these findings, several recommendations have been made.

• Key Recommendation 1:



The Country Office should support the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children and Families in updating the National Gender Policy, focusing on integrating human rights commitments and intensifying efforts to combat harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and early marriage. To strengthen advocacy for legal reforms on women's rights, the Country Office should build strategic alliances with civil society and religious leaders, leveraging culturally adaptive strategies to challenge harmful practices while promoting progressive gender equality standards. Enhancing gender coordination mechanisms by addressing gaps in the UN Country Team's Gender Scorecard is also recommended, along with improving evaluation oversight and internal coordination across UN agencies to streamline efforts and reduce duplication.

• Key Recommendation 2:



Fostering normative change by deepening the understanding of local cultural contexts and building alliances with gender activists, religious leaders and civil society will further enhance UN Women's impact. Expanding economic empowerment initiatives, particularly in the digital economy and entrepreneurship, is also key. Strengthening M&E and resource management systems to enhance programme effectiveness is crucial, and efforts should be made to streamline procurement and recruitment processes. Regularly updated monitoring data should be used to inform decision-making, ensuring that programme designs incorporate lessons learned.

• Key Recommendation 3:



Long-term planning must be reinforced by integrating sustainability and exit strategies from the outset of projects. Engaging national stakeholders and communities in building local capacity is essential to ensuring continued gender equality progress beyond project completion. Finally, proactively engaging men and boys in gender equality efforts, particularly by using gender-equitable interpretations of religious texts to challenge harmful practices and promote inclusive norms, will help to ensure that gender equality initiatives have a broader and more lasting impact across Mali.





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SECTION 1. EVALUATION PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

The purpose of the Country Portfolio Evaluation (CPE) is to identify overall successes and challenges relating to UN Women's contribution to gender equality and women's empowerment in Mali; and, based on lessons drawn from this systematic assessment, look forward to inform the programme's new direction. The evaluation has two objectives, in line with the UN Women Evaluation Policy:

(a) The evaluation will serve in terms of accountability to key stakeholders for UN Women's contribution to gender equality and the empowerment of women; and

(b) its evidence and lessons learned about effective approaches will be reliably used for decision-making and will inform normative, operational and coordination work.

The Country Office will use the findings and recommendations to design and implement the new Strategic Note 2025–2028. Other primary users of this evaluation include the UN Country Team (UNCT), who will use findings and recommendations to feed into the development of joint programmes and the new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF); and UN Women personnel in the Regional Office and headquarters. The evaluation is also intended to be used by UN Women's strategic partners, stakeholders, non-governmental organizations, UN agencies, civil society organizations and development partners. The results of the evaluation will be publicly accessible through the Global Accountability and Tracking of Evaluation Use system for learning.

More specifically, the CPE will offer actionable recommendations and discern lessons learned based on its assessment of the relevance and coherence of UN Women's interventions at national level; the effectiveness, sustainability and organizational efficiency of the Country Office in achieving its expected results; and the extent to which the human rights approach and gender equality principles are integrated into the design and implementation of the Strategic Note.

Scope

The scope of the CPE is the Strategic Note period from January 2020 to March 2024, including the Development Results Framework and the Operational Efficiency and Effectiveness Framework as implemented in Mali.¹ The period of implementation of the Strategic Note covered by this evaluation runs from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2024. UN Women's entire workplan and integrated mandate were evaluated, including operational, coordination and normative aspects. The geographical scope of the evaluation includes all regions and the district of Bamako that have UN Women programmes, notably the regions of Sikasso, Segou, Timbuktu, Mopti, Kayes, Gao. The evaluation team was only able to conduct visits to Gao and Mopti, due to security reasons.

The evaluation included the four impact areas of the programme's development results and assessed achievements under each area (specific objectives of the UN Women Mali Country Office) and output (expected results of the Country Office).

¹ Notably the districts of Bamako and the regions of Sikasso, Segou, Timbuktu, Mopti, Kayes, Gao.



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SECTION 2. COUNTRY CONTEXT

Implementation of the Country Office's Strategic Note occurred in a context characterized by important political changes. In 2020, a military regime overthrew the government and, since then, the country has been ruled by successive military governments. Elections to restore civilian rule have been postponed multiple times, despite international condemnations and sanctions imposed by the Economic Community of West African States, of which Mali was a member until January 2024. Since September 2023, Mali has experienced escalating tensions involving separatist forces, along with ongoing threats from jihadist groups in the north of the country. National efforts to curb the activities of several remaining armed groups have intensified following the withdrawal of the French army in August 2022 and the UN Stabilization Mission in December 2023.

The prevailing security challenges during implementation of the Strategic Note 2020–2024 have significantly impacted the lives of women. Women's engagement in the peace process has yielded mixed results. The programme period coincided with execution of the third National Plan of Action for Resolution 1325 (2019–2023), which focused on women's active involvement in peace, reconciliation and post-conflict governance. Led by the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children and Families in collaboration with various stakeholders, including civil society and partners such as UN Women, the plan aimed to enhance women's roles in peace processes. Despite implementation of the National Plan of Action, women's active participation in peace processes remained only partial and several key mechanisms, such as the Integration Commission, continued to exclude women. Nonetheless, interventions such as the Peace Huts Initiative, serving as crucial women-led mechanisms for community-based peacebuilding efforts,² exemplify cases of success at grassroots level.

More broadly, women's political participation has not reached its full potential despite the existence of Law 052 requiring a minimum quota of 30 per cent for each of the two genders.³ Nonetheless, the analysis of parliament revealed important improvements, which saw 28.6 per cent of seats occupied by women in 2021, compared to 9.52 per cent in the previous legislature (2013–2020).⁴ Overall, women occupy

30.7 per cent⁵ of elected seats in local deliberating bodies, and 17.4 per cent in senior decision-making positions⁶ (compared to 13 per cent in 2019).

The fragile context continues to affect women's livelihoods in Mali: in 2019,⁷ 44 per cent of the population lived in extreme poverty and significant barriers to education affect women's economic empowerment, exemplified by lower enrolment rates (37 per cent versus 44 per cent) in high school and literacy rates (22 per cent versus 40 per cent) compared to men.⁸ Most of the population (68 per cent)⁹ obtains its revenues from agriculture and farming, where women constitute a significant portion of the workforce. Agricultural activities are mostly organized in small family enterprises, but women face important challenges related to the absence of land titles and can benefit from temporary access to land. To address this obstacle, women often organize in cooperatives, which are eligible for collective access to land. Agriculture also faces important challenges due to climate change. Mali's climate varies from sub-tropical to arid, which has been strongly affected by a significant drop in rainfall and desertification, directly reducing the availability and productivity of arable land in the country.¹⁰ Access to land and conflicting interests over its use are additional drivers of inter-community conflicts.¹¹ A study commissioned by UN Women in 2022 indicates that women contribute almost four times more time to domestic and care work, amounting to 21.6 hours per week against 5.7 for men. The Human Capital and Social Inclusion Pillar of the country's national development plan acknowledges this and highlights the importance of recognizing and reducing the burden of unpaid care work for equality of opportunities and accomplishments for both genders (Objective 5.4.1).

Insecurity serves as a major catalyst for violence against women, often perpetrated by armed groups active in the country.¹² This exacerbates an already critical situation: a 2018 report by the country's National Institute of Statistics revealed that 43 per cent of women aged 15–49 experienced physical violence, and 13 per cent survived sexual violence.¹³ Pervasive harmful practices include early marriage and female genital cutting, affecting 54 per cent of girls under 18, and 89 per cent women aged 15–49.¹⁴

² Women, Peace and Security and coordination of the implementation of Resolution 1325, Flagship Programme Presentation webpage - UN Women Mali website

<https://africa.unwomen.org/fr/femmes-paix-et-securite-et-coordination-de-la-mise-en-oeuvre-de-la-resolution-1325>

³ Law 2015-052, (2015): Law establishing measures to promote gender equality in access to appointive and elective positions.

⁴ MINUSMA, Three times more women elected in the 2020 legislative elections: significant progress towards equal representation, 12 May 2020.

⁵ This figure was retrieved from the [Global Data on National Parliaments](#) website.

⁶ Based on the list of [Members of the Government of Mali](#).

⁷ Mali Economic Update: Resilience in Uncertain Times - Renewing the Social Contract, [World Bank](#), 24 May 2022

⁸ Literacy rates: <https://countryeconomy.com/demography/literacy-rate/mali>

⁹ Employment in agriculture represented 68 per cent of total employment in Mali ([World Bank](#), 2022)

¹⁰ UN Women, 2021, [Empowering women through climate-resilient agriculture in West and Central Africa](#)

¹¹ UN Women, 2023, Policy Note, [Measuring and valuing unpaid care work in Mali](#)

¹² MINUSMA, [The impact of the crisis on Malian women](#)

¹³ National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), Planning and Statistics Unit, Health, Social Development and Family Promotion Sector (CPS/SS-DS-PF) et ICF, 2019. Demographic and Health Survey in Mali 2018 - synthesis report

¹⁴ Girls Not Brides, [interactive map](#).



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SECTION 3. PORTFOLIO ANALYSIS

Overview of the Strategic Note

UN Women's Strategic Note 2020–2024 is the Country Office's main planning tool to support achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment in Mali based on the Entity's integrated mandate: normative, coordination and operational. It covers the impact areas of Women's Leadership and Political Participation;¹⁵ Women's Economic Empowerment; Ending Violence Against Women; and Women, Peace and Security and humanitarian action through national and regional interventions.

The Strategic Note includes a Development Results Framework detailing expected results and indicators with targets and baselines (see Annex 2).

The Operational Effectiveness and Efficiency Framework includes the following goals to support intended development results:

1. Enhanced coordination, coherence and accountability of the UN system for commitments to gender equality.

2. Increased engagement of partners in support of UN Women's mandate.

3. High quality of programmes through knowledge, innovation, results-based management and evaluation.

4. Improved management of financial and human resources in pursuit of results.

Strategic Note theory of change

The theory of change is summarized in Table 1. The Country Office's overarching theory of change primarily centres on contributing to the six outcomes outlined in the UNSDCF 2020–2024, with a particular focus on coordinating the cross-cutting component related to gender equality and women's empowerment. While this emphasis on UNSDCF outcomes facilitates inter-agency collaboration by establishing a shared programme vision, the broad nature of these outcomes can sometimes make UN Women's contributions seem somewhat constrained.

TABLE 1. Theory of change for UN Women Mali Country Office programme 2020–2024

Purpose	Men and institutions are respectful and responsible for women's human rights, and support gender equality.
Key assumptions	If an enabling environment is created for women of all ages to participate actively and equally in political, economic, social and peace processes and institutions
	If the relevant governance systems (laws, policies, institutions, processes, programmes, plans and budgets) are gender-sensitive at all levels, transparent and inclusive in all sectors
	If consistent funding is allocated to the implementation of gender equality commitments
	If public decision-making is informed by reliable gender statistics
Impact	Then women, men, boys and girls of Mali, especially the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, will benefit from strengthened institutions that are more effective, accountable, transparent, inclusive and gender-sensitive in the provision of essential services at national and sub-national levels.

Source: Mali Country Office Strategic Note 2020–2024

The above theory of change does not reflect the full scope of the Country Office's work as presented in the Strategic Note. The Country Office's programme results framework features six UNSDCF outcomes. As these do not always have links to the impact areas¹⁶ with which they are associated, nor consistently connected to outputs,¹⁷ the theory of change cannot reflect the logical cause-and-effect chain of the Strategic Note. To better understand the logical flow between outputs and

higher-level results, the evaluation team developed a reconstructed representation of the underlying theory of change (see Annex 3) after it was discussed with programme personnel and key stakeholders during the inception workshop. This revised model places greater emphasis on the impact areas outlined in UN Women's corporate Strategic Plan (including corporate outcomes), offering a clearer and more nuanced depiction of the organization's contributions and pathways to impact.

¹⁵ This is also called "Leadership and Inclusive Governance" in Mali's Strategic Note.

¹⁶ This is the case for Outcomes 5 and 6 (Ending Violence Against Women Impact Area), which broadly refer to vulnerable groups' access to basic social services. As such, Outcomes 5 and 6 do not contribute to the Ending Violence Against Women Impact Area and their indicators cannot be used to assess this contribution. However, Outcomes 1, 2, 3 and 4 are aligned with UN Women's impact areas.

¹⁷ Outputs are directly linked to outcomes for only three of six outcomes. Several outputs are formulated, not as tangible goods or services contributing to the achievement of outcomes, but in terms of behavioural change, which in essence is an outcome.

Interventions

The Country Office's interventions mainly take place in Bamako, Gao, Kayes, Koulikoro, Mopti, Segou, Sikasso and Tombouctou. Peace, security and humanitarian action received the highest amount of funding. The other three impact areas received roughly the same amount of funding.

Annex 5 outlines the programmes implemented during the Strategic Note period, including impact area, budget and status (either in progress or completed) mapped against UN Women's impact areas. It shows that the Women, Peace and Security impact area had the highest number of interventions (11) followed by Women's Economic Empowerment (5), Elimination of Violence Against Women (3) and Leadership and Inclusive Governance (3).

The financial resource analysis (see Annex 6 for details) covers the period from January 2020 to December 2023. Between 2020 and 2023, the Country Office mobilized an average annual budget of US\$ 11.4 million and spent US\$ 9.1 million on a yearly basis. The top four donors account for 58 per cent of the total budget: Denmark (18 per cent), Multi-Partner Trust Fund-Spotlight Initiative Fund (15 per cent), Sweden (13 per cent) and the Peacebuilding Fund (12 per cent).

The largest area of work in terms of financial investment is Peace, Security and Humanitarian Action accounting for 43 per cent of Development Results Framework expenditure during 2020–23, followed by Ending Violence Against Women (32 per cent) and Women's Economic Empowerment (19 per cent).

According to the UN Women Country Office Assessment Tool's programme resource efficiency indicators, the Country Office's non-core to core ratio, management ratio and operational ratio for 2020–22 are all rated "green" as per UN Women's benchmarks. The Country Office's use of core funds for staffing at 32 per cent is rated "yellow".¹⁸

In 2023, based on the organization chart accompanying the workplan, the Country Office employed 51 people in total:

30 personnel in programmes, 16 in operations / finance, 2 senior managers, 1 communications specialist, 1 planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting specialist and 1 reporting specialist.

The timeliness of donor reporting was strong: between 2020 and December 2023, 98 per cent of reports were submitted on time.

Stakeholder mapping and analysis

The Country Office collaborates with duty bearers from the public sector and civil society (see Annex 8) to implement its programmes for the benefit of its primary stakeholders. These stakeholders, recognized as rights-holders, encompass women, girls, individuals living with disabilities, marginalized groups and community-based organizations, alongside the grassroots networks amplifying their voices.

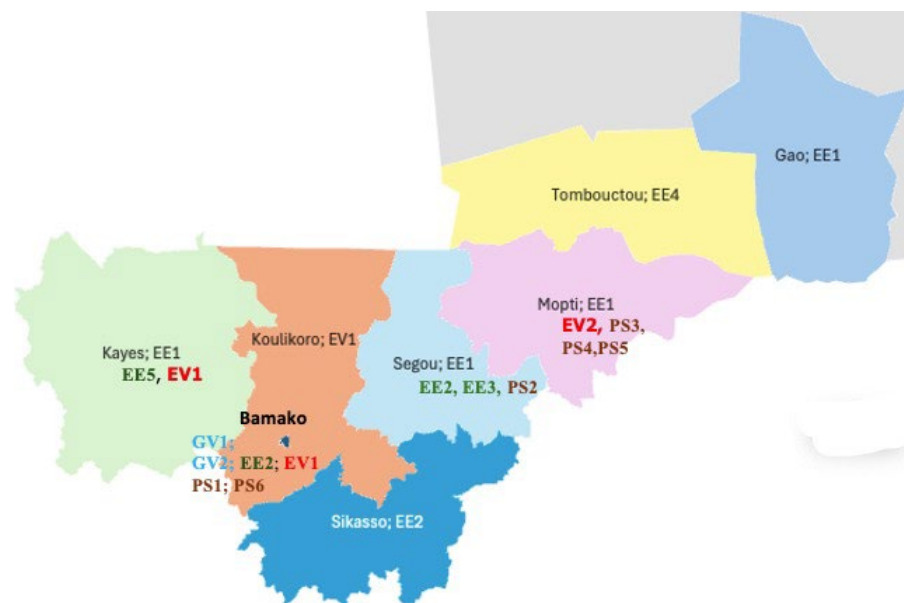
The Country Office's advocacy efforts for policy and legal reform rely on partnerships with a spectrum of public institutions such as Parliament; the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children and Families; the Ministry of Reconciliation, Peace and National Cohesion in charge of the Peace Agreement; the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights; the Ministry of Security and Civil Protection; the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization; the Ministry of Defence and Veterans; the Ministry of Economy and Finance; the Ministry of Reconciliation; the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries; local technical services and government departments; and the National Police, among others.

In fulfilling its gender coordination mandate, the Country Office collaborates with sister agencies (UNDP, FAO, WFP, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNHCR, WHO, UNODC) in joint programmes and engages with the UN Mission through key consultation mechanisms.

Annex 8 outlines additional information on each stakeholder group, and their main contributions to the Country Office's Strategic Note.

¹⁸ Country Offices are required to reach 30 per cent to be rated "green".

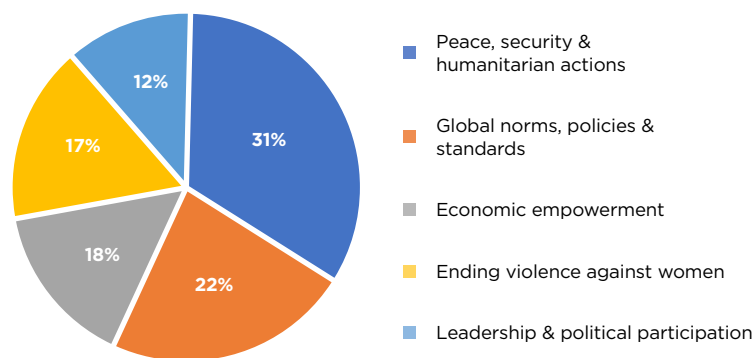
FIGURE 1. Interventions and funding. Source: OneApp



THEMATIC AREAS

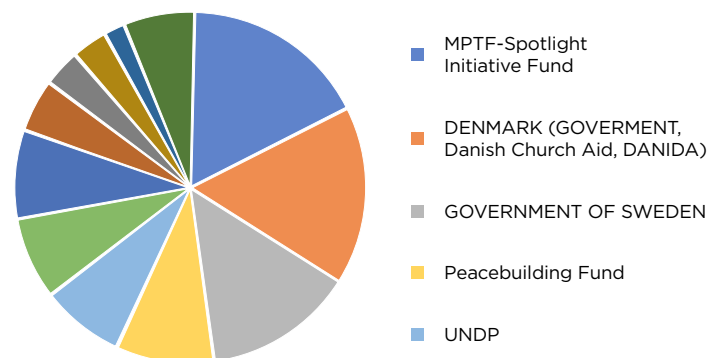
GV	Gender and inclusive governance
EE	Women's economic empowerment
EV	Elimination of violence against women
PS	Peace, security and humanitarian action
Area	Interventions
Bamako	GV1, GV2, EE2, EV1, PS1, PS6
Gao	EE1
Kayes	EE1, EE5, EV1
Koulikoro	EV1
Mopti	EE1
Mopti	EV2, PS3, PS4, PS5
Segou	EE1, EE2, EE3, PS2
Sikasso	EE2
Tilaberry	PS3
Tombouctou	EE4

Geographic spread of interventions



Budget share per impact area 2020–2023

LEGEND



Donor share of the Country Office budget 2020–2023



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SECTION 4. METHODOLOGY

Evaluation approach

The evaluation approach is theory based and contribution analysis was used to assess UN Women's contribution to targeting outcomes as set out in the theory of change¹⁹ (see Annex 3). The evaluation utilized the Country Office's underlying theory of change to assess achieved results and understand the reasons behind observed changes. An inception workshop, carried out at the beginning of the field mission, facilitated a theory of change discussion involving programme staff and programme partners.

The evaluation used mixed methods, drawing on both quantitative data (primarily financial data and survey data on participants' perceptions) and qualitative data (from document review, interviews and focus groups). In line with UN Women's Evaluation Handbook, this CPE embraces a gender-responsive approach: it assesses the extent to which power relationships shift due to an intervention using an inclusive, participatory and respectful process involving all stakeholders. A dedicated evaluation criterion was adopted to assess specific contributions to gender equality, with specific reference to progress made against Universal Periodic Review²⁰ recommendations. Moreover, Human Rights and Gender Equality issues are covered in all sections of the report (findings, lessons learned, recommendations).

The gender-responsive nature of the evaluation characterized the evaluation process itself: the Mali CPE was designed as an inclusive process to enable the active participation of all relevant stakeholders – including UN Women personnel, implementing organizations, national authorities, civil society members and project participants – fostering an environment where they could share their perspectives on both the achievements and shortcomings of the Mali Country Office's work. The desk review of national documents on the country context was mainly focused on progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment. The evaluation relied on a stakeholder mapping exercise (see Annex 8) to identify suitable data collection methods for the full engagement of a diversity of stakeholders. The evaluation team collaborated closely with Country Office personnel and partners to address any possible barriers affecting the participation of different groups of stakeholders.

The evaluation team made explicit attempts to encourage the participation of persons with disabilities, by explaining the rationale behind this with both UN Women programme personnel and programme partners. The team asked relevant focal points for support in assessing and

addressing possible obstacles and for their overall collaboration in facilitating the participation of programme participants with disabilities in data collection exercises. Nonetheless, the evaluation was only able to consult a limited number of persons with disabilities, which could be explained as a consequence of the absence of deliberate efforts made to address the needs of persons with disabilities. To assess how the "leave no one behind" principle and gender equality were taken into account in the design and implementation of initiatives on gender equality and women's empowerment, the evaluation drew upon Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality framework. Further details are presented in the gender, human rights and disability inclusion section of this report.

Stakeholder analysis was used to select a diverse group of stakeholders to engage in the evaluation, including women and men, and those who are marginalized and may be difficult to reach.

Evaluation questions

The evaluation sought to answer the following overarching questions:²¹

Relevance:

Is UN Women's portfolio (programmatic, normative and coordination), including its thematic focus, relevant for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in Mali and in line with national policies and international human rights standards?

Coherence:

Have UN Women's interventions achieved coherence both within the Strategic Note and with the UN Country Team?

Effectiveness:

To what extent have UN Women's contributions supported the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment in Mali?

Efficiency:

Does UN Women Mali have adequate governance, capacity and skills to ensure good use of resources (staff, funding and assets) to deliver results?

Sustainability:

Are results achieved through implementation of the Mali Strategic Note likely to be preserved over time?

The evaluation matrix (see Annex 9) and the sampling approach (see Annex 12) explain how the evaluation questions were applied across projects and stakeholders.

¹⁹ The Country Office's own theory of change emphasized its contribution to the six outcomes outlined in the UNSDCF 2020-2024. The CPE relied on a reconstructed theory that is reflective of UN Women's thematic areas and corresponding outcomes (see Annex 3).

²⁰ The Universal Periodic Review is a mechanism that reviews the human rights performance of all 193 UN member states on a regular basis. Member states are encouraged to improve their human rights practices through dialogue, peer review and recommendations from other member states. The process is part of the broader UN framework for monitoring human rights treaties and standards and is grounded in international human rights law, drawing from key conventions such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. In this report, the Universal Periodic Review provides an important reference to assess progress on gender equality, violence against women and other human rights issues in line with national commitments and international obligations, including those relevant to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Sustainable Development Goals.

²¹ As per the Terms of Reference, CPEs are not expected to assess the achievement of impacts, hence impact has not been added as a criteria.

Human rights and gender equality:

Has the portfolio been designed and implemented in accordance with human rights and the principle of “leave no one behind”, including consideration of disability?

Data collection

The evaluation team conducted a comprehensive desk review of relevant documents on the country context and gender equality progress, beginning in the Inception Phase and continuing throughout the evaluation, with documentary review contributing to data triangulation following primary data collection. Annex 28 lists the documents reviewed. Data collection tools (see Annex 11) were developed for different stakeholder categories, and interviews were conducted with UN Women personnel, programme partners, UN system representatives, government officials, local authorities and civil society members. The evaluation also reached a sample of project participants through focus group discussions. A survey involving 70 respondents²² was also conducted, targeting programme partners and donors, UN system personnel and UN Women staff. The team visited project sites in Bamako, Ségou and Mopti to meet with participants and partners.

The sampling strategy ensured representation from at least one project in each thematic area. The selected locations were chosen based on geographic accessibility and security considerations. In total, the evaluation aimed to engage 120 stakeholders, ultimately reaching 133 individuals, 52 per cent of whom were female (see survey results in Annex 31).

Desk review

The desk review was conducted throughout the evaluation cycle, beginning in the Inception Phase. It provided the foundation for the Inception Report, as well as the evaluation methodology and sampling. This review encompassed project documentation from UN Women Mali, strategic organizational documents and background information on the country and its gender context. Videos and visuals were also incorporated to complement the analysis of UN Women’s work.

Key informant interviews

Interviews were conducted with UN Women project personnel, programme partners, national stakeholders identified through stakeholder analysis and UN system representatives. Tailored interview guides, based on the evaluation matrix, were developed for various stakeholder categories to focus on different aspects of UN Women’s strategic work, coordination, project design and implementation. These guides are presented in the next section.

Focus group discussions

The evaluation engaged project participants through focus group discussions, offering insights into beneficiaries’ perceptions of the projects and their satisfaction with the strategies, implementation and outcomes. The focus group discussion guide is detailed in the next section.

Survey

To enrich data collection, a survey was developed for three different stakeholder categories, including donors. The questions for donors delved into coordination and strategic partnerships; UN system personnel, to explore UN Women’s role in coordination and gender mainstreaming; and UN Women personnel, to assess internal aspects such as human resources management and organizational performance. The survey collected both quantitative and qualitative data to triangulate with other findings.

Data analysis

The analysis of data was made against the evaluation matrix, to assess evidence against the questions guiding this CPE. To ensure the accuracy and quality of the collected data, the evaluation team compared notes during data collection to identify emerging trends and gaps, which allowed the team to carry out additional data collection sessions when needed. Collected data was quality assured as part of triangulation and analysis processes to validate findings and identify other perspectives worth incorporating. At the end of the data collection process, a workshop was held with key evaluation stakeholders, which provided an opportunity to identify information gaps for complementary data collection. The workshop was carried out remotely.

Contribution towards each target outcome was analysed

Contribution analysis evaluates the outcome of a programme by examining the strength of evidence for achieving the target outcome and the role played by UN Women, as well as the influence of other factors and the testing of assumptions. Contributions of other factors were also considered, testing the assumptions underlying the outcome with the broader context in mind.

Ethics

The main ethical and methodological framework of this evaluation is constituted by existing UN guidance documents²³ and UN Women standards on ethics. The evaluation followed strict guidelines to ensure respect for the dignity of all participants, including those who are

²² Of the 70 survey respondents, 27 were from UN Women personnel (of 53 surveyed), 34 were programme partners and donors (of 93 surveyed) and 9 were UN personnel (of 78 surveyed).

²³ The evaluation adhered to UNEG and UN Women Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct, and UNEG guidance on integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in evaluations with gender-responsive and human rights approaches integrated into the evaluation.

disabled and/or marginalized. At the start of each interview, participants were provided with a clear understanding of the evaluation's purpose and how the information they shared would be used by the evaluators. The evaluators emphasized their independence; participants were informed about their rights, including the option to decline participation (see Annex 27 – consent form); and were assured that their responses would be treated confidentially. To maintain confidentiality, online survey information was kept completely anonymous and transcripts from interviews did not refer to individual identities. Information gathered was stored in line with IES Data Management Guidance.

Limitations and mitigations

The evaluation process was hindered by the limited availability of project documentation and significant limitations mentioned in Section 3 regarding results chains and indicators. The evaluation collaborated with the Country Office to ensure available project documentation was progressively shared. The anticipated limitations in relation to primary data collection were confirmed: security challenges affected access to programme locations for data collection and the evaluation team was only able to reach urban sites.

Field work was complemented by remote data collection to reach a wider number of evaluation stakeholders. This allowed for more flexibility and facilitated the conduct of follow-up meetings where needed. Considerations concerning data management are included in Annex 14.

Dissemination and use

The dissemination approach for sharing the evaluation findings involves different strategies tailored to specific audiences, along with methods for tracking the effectiveness and reach of these dissemination efforts. The evaluation team will share a two-page brief with the Country Office and host a meeting to discuss the next steps. For Regional Office and headquarters colleagues, the evaluation team will distribute a two-page brief and conduct a webinar.

To monitor the adoption of the recommendations, Country Office M&E personnel will regularly collect data from the Global Accountability and Tracking of Evaluation Use website, which features the implementation status of the Management Response actions committed to by the Country Representative.

Evaluation management and quality assurance

The Director, IEAS and Chief, IES reviewed and approved the evaluation report prior to its wider circulation. The evaluation team of Malian and non-Malian consultants was led by the UN Women Regional Evaluation Specialist and this report is subject to an external quality assessment through UN Women's Global Evaluation Report Assessment and Analysis System process.

The Management Group, consisting of the Country Office's Executive Team, provided institutional and administrative support for the evaluation. The Evaluation Reference Group (see Annex 22) ensured a high-quality, transparent process by providing technical reviews. This group included four delegates from donor agencies, 13 representatives from programme partners and several UN Women personnel. A peer reviewer from IES contributed another review of the draft evaluation report.

Overview of the country portfolio evaluation

General objective

To strengthen learning, decision-making and accountability by analysing UN Women's contributions to development results in gender equality and women's empowerment in Mali.

Evaluation process and methodology

- Preparation: gender-responsive design
- Conduct
 - Inception & portfolio analysis
 - Data collection using mixed methods for triangulating evidence
 - Field visit of key sampled interventions
 - Data analysis (contribution analysis informed by theory of change)
- Use and follow-up

133 people (59% female) participated in interviews and focus groups

70 respondents to 3 surveys

- 27 (of 53) UN Women personnel
- 34 (of 93) stakeholders, including international
- 9 (of 78) UN personnel



121 report documents analysed

Planning documents, reports, national strategic documentation and others



Evaluation criteria

- Relevance
- Coherence
- Effectiveness
- Efficiency
- Human rights and gender equality



Strategic Note 2020-2024

Evaluation was conducted between December 2023 and June 2024.



Evaluation scope

Programmatic and organizational result areas Women's Political Participation; Women's Economic Empowerment; Ending Violence Against Women; Women, Peace and Security; and the Operational Effectiveness and Efficiency Framework



Total budget between 2020 and 2024

US\$ 47.1 million





Photo©UN Women Mali

SECTION 5. FINDINGS

Relevance

Is UN Women's portfolio (normative, coordination and operational), including its thematic focus, relevant for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in Mali and in line with national policies and international human rights standards?

FINDING 1. The Country Office's Strategic Note 2020–2024 development results mirror the six outcomes of the UNSDCF (2020–2024), aligning closely with Mali's Framework for Economic Recovery and Sustainable Development (CREDD 2019–2023) and the National Gender Policy. However, while UN Women is widely perceived as playing a pivotal role in aligning Mali's gender equality and women's empowerment efforts with international standards, the programme does not specifically target key Human Rights Council recommendations, such as criminalizing female genital mutilation and early marriage.

The evaluation examined the Strategic Note's alignment with national priorities; regional and global normative frameworks in human rights; UN Women's strategic positioning; whether UN Women addresses underlying causes of gender inequality; and whether its programme is internally coherent and coherently implemented with sister agencies and key stakeholders.

As shown in Annex 4, the development result outcomes of the Strategic Note are identical to the six outcomes of the UNSDCF 2020–2024. This alignment ensures that the Strategic Note directly corresponds with the Framework for Economic Recovery and Sustainable Development (CREDD 2019–2023) from which the UNSDCF is derived, particularly regarding gender equality and women's empowerment in Mali. This is exemplified by Specific Objective 27, which aims to "promote gender equality, women's empowerment, and the development of children and the family." The Strategic Note is also consistent with Mali's ongoing National Gender Policy, established in 2011. Lastly, the Country Office Strategy 2020–2024 is aligned with the UN Women Global Strategic Plan 2022–2025, with the exception of Outcomes 5 and 6 under the Ending Violence Against Women impact area, which focus on facilitating access to basic social services for vulnerable groups.

Alignment with international human rights standards and norms

UN Women is perceived as playing a pivotal role in supporting Mali's alignment with international standards and norms for gender equality and human rights. A survey targeting the Country Office's partners revealed that 32 of 34 programme partners acknowledge UN Women's substantial contribution to implementing international

normative frameworks subscribed to by Mali, a perception confirmed by 8 of 9 UN staff respondents to the survey (see Annex 31).

The evaluation team cross-checked this representation by analysing the Country Office's support in implementing gender-sensitive recommendations from the third cycle of the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review in 2018. While the Strategic Note 2020–2024 articulates broad goals and outcomes to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment are integral parts of the human rights agenda at both national and international levels, a review of the Strategic Note outputs revealed no evidence indicating that the programme intentionally targeted specific recommendations from the Universal Periodic Review or supported their implementation. Although the Strategic Note's outputs align with broader goals of gender equality and combating violence against women, they do not address the specificity or urgency of certain Human Rights Council recommendations. This includes recommendations to criminalize female genital mutilation and early marriage.

UN Women adaptation to change

FINDING 2. To strengthen its relevance as the primary actor for gender equality and women's empowerment, the Country Office has adapted its implementation approaches and portfolio to address the decade-long context of political and security crises.

In the context of political instability marked by two military coups, the Country Office consulted with sister agencies and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) on matters of security and how to ensure the safety of its staff while maintaining programme effectiveness. UN Women also relied on the presence of local programme partners to follow up on project implementation, e.g. in 2021, when villages located beyond 15 km of the urban part of Segou or Mopti became “off-limits”²⁴ for UN Women.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Country Office followed an adaptive strategy that was applied elsewhere²⁵ in the West and Central Africa region by replacing activities rendered unfeasible by the health crisis with alternative income-generating initiatives in the context of COVID-19, including the production of clay handwashing kits and the manufacture of antiseptic soaps and hydroalcoholic gels based on natural plants, equally beneficial to the target populations.

Coherence

Have UN Women's interventions achieved coherence both within the Strategic Note and with the UN Country Team?

FINDING 3. The Country Office has demonstrated its focus on achieving internal coherence by taking measures to reduce duplication and by fostering synergy between programmes. Contribution to coherence with the UNCT took place through coordination mechanisms, including joint programming. The Gender Theme Group still faces challenges highlighted by the UNCT Gender Scorecard and the delayed update to the National Gender Policy, but improvements are anticipated following the Gender Theme Group's recent revitalization.

Although not explicitly stated in the Strategic Note, there are indications that, in its day-to-day practices, the Country Office aimed to avoid duplication of interventions and create synergies between different programmes. These practices included regular staff consultations, training sessions and annual retreats, which provided opportunities to explore ways to reduce silos between thematic areas. For instance, the team managing the LEAP initiative (“Advancing women's leadership, protection and access to learning and livelihoods”) wanted to strengthen its resilience component. The Women's Economic Empowerment unit agreed to share its experience in crop selection in the context of climate change. The Women's Economic Empowerment team drew some lessons from the exchange with the humanitarian initiative. The lessons

included ensuring social cohesion is not overlooked while supporting displaced persons' economic subsistence. The Women's Economic Empowerment unit also shared its network of small enterprises with the Spotlight Initiative to provide stakeholder networks skill training for 100 targeted beneficiaries from the most excluded groups of young women (living with HIV, with albinism or disability). The plan was that after six months the young women would be equipped with skills and relevant kits for self-employment (hairdresser, pedicure, tailoring, etc.).

Coherence with UN agencies was achieved essentially through UN Women's contribution to the gender coordination agenda. According to results from the survey²⁶ conducted by the evaluation team in February

²⁴ In 2019, Jihadist activity, primarily from groups like Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, was concentrated in rural areas north of Ségou, around 100 km away. By 2020, the security situation had worsened as jihadists established control over key areas in central Mali, increasing their presence in the countryside. In 2021, the geographical range of jihadist activity expanded even further towards Ségou. While the city had not been directly attacked, the threat encroached, and the radius of safe zones around Ségou decreased. By 2022, the proximity of jihadist actions reached as close as 15 km from Ségou.

²⁵ For more details, see Finding 3 of Thematic Evaluation of Women's Economic Empowerment, 2023, p. 24

²⁶ Annex 31: UN personnel survey, Q.8

2024, five of nine personnel from the UN agreed with the statement that “The United Nations System works in a coordinated manner to implement the gender agenda in Mali.” This opinion is probably drawn from experience with any of the 10 existing joint programmes involving UN Women. Beyond joint programming,²⁷ UN Women has promoted gender mainstreaming in inter-agency work across UN coordination mechanisms in its various capacities such as:

- Chair of the Gender Theme Group and Permanent Secretariat of the Dialogue Group on Women’s Empowerment.
- Member of the Programme Management Team, Humanitarian Country Team, Operations Management Team, UN Communication Group, Inter-Agency Group on Disarmament, Demobilization and Integration, and the M&E Thematic Group.
- Chair of the thematic group “Rule of law and security initiatives” of the Integrated Strategic Framework until the departure of MINUSMA in 2023.

The Country Office was also the lead agency responsible for commissioning the UNCT-SWAP Gender Scorecard in September 2023 (see Annex 18: Graphic representation of its key performance indicators). The exercise found that while joint programmes (see Annex 19) meet minimum requirements for contributing to reduced gender inequalities, the Gender Equality and Women Empowerment result indicator²⁸ was reported as missing requirements. The contrasting scores between the indicator on reduced gender inequalities (by joint programmes) and the indicator on significant contribution to gender equality are difficult to interpret, presenting an apparent contradiction²⁹ that should have caught the attention of two recent evaluations.³⁰

Country Office personnel are not familiar³¹ with the UNCT-SWAP Gender Scorecard exercise. Only four of nine UN personnel who responded to the evaluation survey believed the UNCT SWAP Gender Scorecard was “known and discussed”.³² Neither the evaluation of the UN Gender Strategy 2016–2019 nor the UNSDCF evaluation mentioned the UNCT SWAP Gender Scorecard. The Gender Theme Group, which had a key reviewing role in both evaluations, did not raise this omission, and the two evaluations did not determine why the omission went unnoticed.

The 2023 UNCT SWAP Gender Scorecard enquired whether the UNCT had reassessed any of its indicators to compare with the performance reported in 2018. The answer was “Yes” for seven indicators, indicating that the Gender Theme Group has made a concerted effort to track progress.

The five-year delay in renewal of the UN Gender Strategy 2016–2019 points to limitations in the UN Gender Theme Group’s role, not only in terms of management of the strategy but also in terms of foresight. An updated Gender Strategy would have promoted coherence of programming to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment across the UN system and ensured that the UN system is more responsive to recent changes in the country context. In particular, it could have integrated lessons drawn from recent legal reform efforts to inform (a) UN coordinated work on gender during 2020–2024; and (b) advocacy work and support for an update to Mali’s National Gender Policy in 2011. As the new UN Gender Strategy 2023–2026 is developed, there are hopes that things are moving in the right direction: 23 of 27 UN Women personnel believe that “clear progress has characterized gender mainstreaming of UN interventions”.³³

²⁷ Annex 19: List of joint programmes

²⁸ The Gender Equality and Women Empowerment result indicator is worded as follows: “UN programmes make a significant contribution to gender equality results in the country”.

²⁹ If UN programmes are assessed as failing to ‘meet the minimum requirements for significantly contributing to gender equality’ (Indicator 2.1 of the Gender Scorecard), it would be inconsistent to state that joint programmes are ‘meeting requirements for reducing gender inequalities’ (Indicator 7.1). For Indicator 7.1 to be met or exceeded, a satisfactory note should be attributed following a gender analysis of a sample of joint programmes, specifically focusing on: (a) programme descriptions, particularly the wording of their results; (b) the joint programme’s M&E indicators; and (c) management and implementation arrangements, including partnerships. As these elements are also integral to Indicator 2.1, there should be no contradiction in both indicators’ assessments.

³⁰ Evaluation of the UN Gender Strategy 2016–2019 and the UNSDCF evaluation.

³¹ 15 of 27 Country Office personnel consider the UNCT SWAP Gender Scorecard “little known or discussed” and one responded that it was “neither known nor discussed”. Q.16 of UN Women personnel survey, February 2024.

³² Three of nine UN personnel respondents stated that it was “little known or discussed” and one responded that it was “neither known nor discussed”. Q.11 of UN personnel survey, February 2024.

³³ UN personnel survey, Q.14

Effectiveness

To what extent have UN Women's contributions supported the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment in Mali?

Several initiatives led by UN Women Mali span multiple areas of focus. This section presents programme results categorized within the four impact areas, organized thematically. Any intersections with other areas will be mentioned whenever relevant.

Women's leadership and political participation

FINDING 4. The Country Office has demonstrated its focus on achieving internal coherence by taking measures to reduce duplication and by fostering synergy between programmes. Contribution to coherence with the UNCT took place through coordination mechanisms, including joint programming. The Gender Theme Group still faces challenges highlighted by the UNCT Gender Scorecard and the delayed update to the National Gender Policy, but improvements are anticipated following the Gender Theme Group's recent revitalization.

Review of the Country Office's donor and annual reports highlighted substantial operational activity dedicated to strengthening implementation of Law 2015-052 on the promotion of gender in elections, which establishes a 30 per cent minimum representation for each gender. In the early phases of the Strategic Note 2020–2024, the Country Office continued work initiated during implementation of the previous Strategic Note in support of the national electoral process which took place in March and April 2020. Its activities included raising awareness among the general public on the importance of the democratic process and women's participation in politics. Initiatives aimed at encouraging participation in the elections included dissemination of the electoral law and the law for the promotion of gender through television sketches and radio broadcasts.³⁴ The Country Office also reportedly provided training and coaching to 100 women candidates to equip them with skills for effective participation in political life.

These efforts took place along other initiatives carried out by key actors, including ministries, local and international non-governmental organizations and MINUSMA and were said to have contributed to the election of 32 candidates who had benefitted from UN Women coaching, and to the total of 28.6 per cent women elected to the National Assembly in 2021.³⁵ This marked a significant improvement from previous legislative elections (only 9.5 per cent women were elected in 2013³⁶).

Consulted programme partners praised UN Women's work in supporting women to take up space in political decision-making institutions, both in elected and nominated

posts, but fear that external factors such as the country's political situation have partially undermined the results achieved. For instance, following a coup in August 2020 after the elections, the National Assembly³⁷ was dissolved and replaced by the National Transition Council. Nonetheless, a member of UN Women personnel highlighted that subsequent governments have encouraged women's participation in Mali's political change process, and demonstrated sensitivity to gender, welcoming UN Women's efforts to continue to promote women's participation within the new political processes.³⁸ UN Women supported women leaders technically and financially to ensure their active participation in transition processes, including through support to the establishment of a consortium uniting five women's organization networks to carry out advocacy efforts.

This contributed to the representation of women in the National Transition Council (26.4 per cent), and supported women's groups in influencing the transition charter and elaboration of the transition road map – key strategic processes which took place in late 2020 to establish the country's objectives and direction for the next four years.³⁹ The evaluation was unable to reach women leaders directly to gather their perspectives on the realities and challenges of women's political participation within the country's evolving context, primarily due to time constraints during the two-week mission in Mali. The limited duration of the mission made it challenging to arrange meetings, retrieve participant contact details and manage follow-up. The need to anticipate potential delays in responses or participants' availability further complicated efforts to secure direct engagement.

³⁴ UN Women, 2021, UN Women Mali Country Programme Report p.60

³⁵ Interview with the Gender and Inclusive Governance Unit of UN Women Mali.

³⁶ In the legislative elections of 2013, only 14 women were elected of 147 seats, representing 9.5 per cent of the total. Source: « Parité, participation et leadership des femmes au Mali : état des lieux et perspectives », UNDP and UN Women (2016).

³⁷ Interview with implementing partner, Bamako, 26/01/2024

³⁸ Interview with member of UN Women personnel, Bamako, 29-02-2024

³⁹ UN Women, 2021, UN Women Mali Country Programme Report p.61

Throughout the ongoing transition context, the Country Office has collaborated with other UN entities, national institutions and civil society to support preparation to return to civil rule through democratic elections. Its activities have focused on ensuring enhanced women's participation in political life and on prevention of electoral violence through an ongoing project implemented in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).⁴⁰ The evaluation's review of documentary evidence of project implementation suggests that sensitization and social cohesion efforts are contributing to enhance confidence in the electoral process, and that women in targeted areas of the country have successfully been strengthened to prevent risks of conflict and violence resulting from miscommunication about the political processes taking place in Mali.⁴¹ Women and youth have increasingly engaged in dialogue with political parties, laying the foundations for future political and electoral processes. To this end, two training courses were organized for women and youth affiliated with political parties, and four training sessions were delivered to enhance capacities in electoral mediation for different stakeholders.⁴² Despite the progress reported in periodic project reports, the evaluation was unable to find factual evidence of enhanced capacities resulting from UN Women's contributions. This is because there were no recorded activities aimed at measuring such capacity improvements.

Some accounts of positive contributions towards women's participation in political life have emerged from interviews with a programme partner operating at the local level and focus group discussions. Participants pointed to the important changes on the ground due to efforts concerning the *Espaces d'Interpellation Démocratique* (democratic consultation spaces). Direct communication was facilitated between citizens (with particular attention to women) and local authorities in Ségou and Bla. Having direct access to authorities is not common in Bamako or the targeted localities. This contribution is said to have consisted of facilitating the possibility of bringing up women's challenges and priorities for consideration by political leaders. There was no indication that any concrete actions had resulted from the increased access to leaders and enhanced advocacy capacity.

Nonetheless, with UN Women's support in Mali, the active participation and advocacy efforts of women's groups have influenced decision-making and secured reforms with tangible gender equality results despite the changing political scene. A key example is the technical and financial support provided to women's groups who successfully advocated for gender mainstreaming leading to the adoption of a gender-responsive constitution in 2023, which notably also highlights the importance of protecting women against all forms of gender-based violence. Similarly, the conversations with a staff member pointed to capacity-building efforts supported by UN Women which contributed to women's participation in the 2021 popular consultations (*assises*) culminating in the positioning document by Mali's civil society on the country's refoundation and transition.⁴³ The national-level efforts involved 725 representatives, with women representing 40 per cent of participants.⁴⁴ It provided a key input for the identification of priorities and strategies for Mali's upcoming policy-making and political processes and ensured the mainstreaming of gender across the Strategic Framework for State Refoundation (*Cadre Stratégique de Refondation de l'Etat*) 2022–2031, notably in pillar 4 dedicated to human development.⁴⁵

Additionally, UN Women's normative work in Mali in the domain of Women's Political Participation and Governance has been instrumental in supporting the government in drafting key policy documents. UN Women took part in the development of the Gender Sector Strategy for Reconciliation⁴⁶ and the Gender Strategy of the General Staff,⁴⁷ which aim to promote gender equality and inclusivity in reconciliation efforts and military operations, respectively. The Country Office actively participated in consultations on the new electoral law,⁴⁸ ensuring that gender perspectives were integrated into the legislative framework to promote women's participation and representation in the political sphere. These efforts underscore UN Women's commitment to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in Mali through normative advocacy and policy support.

⁴³ National Conference on the Refoundation – Panel of High Personalities National Organization Commission (CNO ANR), 2021, Conclusions of the National Conference on the Refoundation of the State, National Level.

⁴⁴ Nations Unies, 2021, Rebuilding the State for a successful transition: Malian civil society recommends, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/fr/refondation-de-letat-pour-une-transition-reussie-la-societe-civile-malienne-recommande>

⁴⁵ Ministry of Refoundation, 2021, Strategic Framework for the Refoundation of the State 2022–2031 available at: <https://it.scribd.com/document/601753950/MALI-Cadre-Strate-gique-de-la-Refondation-de-l-E-tat-2022-2031-Version-Nume-rique1>

⁴⁶ Provisional Gender Report: The National Strategy for Reconciliation and Cohesion, and its 2022–2026 action plan, MRPCN, August 2022

⁴⁷ Diagnostic report for the development of a gender strategy at the level of the Malian Armed Forces, General Staff of the Armed Forces, MFAAC, December 2020

⁴⁸ Document from the Support Project for Reforms and Elections in Mali (PAREM), a joint project of UNDP and UN Women, 2021–2023

Ending Violence Against Women

FINDING 5. In collaboration with other UN agencies, the Country Office contributed to ending violence against women, primarily through the Spotlight Initiative. Within this framework, participating communities across the country have benefitted from behavioural change initiatives, which have concretely contributed to preventing some instances of violence against women at the local level. In terms of legislative advocacy, the inclusion of gender-based violence provisions in the penal code helps compensate for the rejection of a dedicated gender-based violence law and can still serve as an effective deterrent to potential perpetrators.

Working with communities and civil society organizations

UN Women's efforts in Mali have focused on mobilizing and empowering key national and community actors to engage in the fight against gender-based violence, focusing on preventing episodes of violence by addressing its root causes related to norms and behaviour. The Spotlight programme entrusted UN Women Mali with the responsibility of supporting the establishment of one national and three regional consultation forums involving a variety of actors, including religious and traditional leaders, and representatives from local administration and civil society members such as youth groups to spark discussions around harmful practices and violence. This was accompanied at the local level by initiatives to sensitize communities and raise awareness of the root causes of harmful practices and on their impact on girls and women's lives. Local consultation groups were informed about the content of the draft law and policy frameworks in support of efforts against gender-based violence, and were reported to have reached over 2,000 stakeholders by 2021.⁴⁹ Participating actors collaborated with other partners, including community workers, and directly engaged to address misconceptions negatively affecting popular engagement to eradicate harmful practices and forms of violence.⁵⁰

According to the programme partners consulted, this was key to ensuring changes in perception surrounding the issue. They reported directly experiencing changes in the language used by participants. While participants would disregard the practices at the beginning, participation in activities directly contributed to increased understanding of violence and ways to contribute to fighting it.⁵¹ Programme partners also shared that participants who received capacity strengthening on gender-based violence became active advocates in their communities, generating a multiplier effect. For instance, in 2022, several of the religious leaders targeted by the Country Office's capacity

strengthening activities were reported to now carry out sensitization activities,⁵² including gender-based violence-related messages during their Friday prayers with the intention of changing perceptions related to women and girls' rights.⁵³ Thanks to their social function within communities, the religious leaders were also able to directly intervene in stopping cases of harmful practices before they occurred.⁵⁴ Interviewed programme partners reported that upon being informed of imminent child marriages, religious leaders were able to contact the families involved persuading them to call off the arrangements.⁵⁵ Box 1 below summarizes some of the local-level results indicated in UN Women's periodic reports. However, the evaluation team was unable to independently consult individuals involved in these cases, and the absence of standardized monitoring across programme areas prevents assessment of the scale of such results and to fully capture how power dynamics have evolved in the communities following their participation in the Spotlight programme.

Box 1: Instances of positive outcomes resulting from sensitization on gender-based violence reported by management⁵⁶

- The training of 10 paralegal workers in 2020, who reportedly then carried out larger sensitization efforts in Koulikoro.
- Community mobilization by a women's collective in Sikasso:
 - It was reported that domestic violence was ended for 13 household in Sikasso in 2020 after sensitization activities targeted 50 women.
 - Domestic violence was reportedly ended⁵⁷ for 13 household in the Bamako area.⁵⁸
 - Sensitization sessions were conducted in Koulikoro targeting 400 parents.⁵⁹ There was no result reported for this region.

⁴⁹ PACINDHA, 2021, Spotlight Quarterly Report April-June p.6

⁵⁰ APDF, 2020, Quarterly Report June-August, pp. 5-6

⁵¹ Interview with programme partners, Bamako, 26/01/2024

⁵² PACINDHA, 2021, Spotlight Quarterly Report April-June pp.19-20

⁵³ APDF, Quarterly Report July-September, 2022

⁵⁴ Interview with programme partners, Bamako, 26/01/2024

⁵⁵ Interview with programme partners, Bamako, 26/01/2024 reported the prevention of four cases in Kayes region and seven in Koulikoro region thanks to the intervention of local imams.

⁵⁶ As reported by Spotlight Quarterly Report June-August, PACINDHA, 2020 pp.5-10. In 2022, the community component of the Spotlight Initiative recorded support to 154 gender-based violence survivors, all female. There was no age disaggregation in this reported data.

⁵⁷ These observations may not be guaranteed beyond the relatively short lifespan of a gender-based violence project. A longer period is required to confirm sustained changes in the life of survivors of gender-based violence.

⁵⁸ UN Women, 2021, Spotlight Half-Yearly Narrative Report January-June 2021 p.8

⁵⁹ UN Women, 2021, Spotlight Half-Yearly Narrative Report January-June 2021 p.8

The Country Office also contributed to increasing the availability of, and women's access to, adequate services, including health services and services for gender-based violence survivors both through the Spotlight Initiative and within the framework of the Health Peace Vector programme jointly implemented with MINUSMA, WHO and UNDP in the Mopti region. In 2021, the activities carried out under the responsibility of UN Women Mali focused on providing infrastructural support to drop-in centres. Survivors of gender-based violence and conflict also benefitted from psychosocial support sessions, where they could share their experiences.⁶⁰ Activities implemented under the Spotlight programme include: in 2021, reported contribution to strengthening capacities for effective response through the 8-0-3-3-3 emergency number for gender-based violence survivors;⁶¹ and, in 2022, collaboration between community and religious leaders and project programme partners to provide support to 154 gender-based violence survivors.⁶² The absence of a systematic data monitoring and reporting system resulted in a lack of gender and age disaggregated data covering the overall programme implementation period.

Working with the media

Findings from the desk review of project documentation indicate close collaboration with different types of media to disseminate gender-sensitive and gender-based violence messages. A training of trainers course was conducted for the benefit of key media actors on how to communicate on gender-based violence using gender-sensitive approaches and terminologies. This included a workshop organized in the second quarter of 2021 for 30 participants including bloggers, influencers, radio and television workers. Another workshop on gender-based violence communication targeted musicians, including 20 rappers so that they can disseminate gender-sensitive messages through their art. Also of note were six debates on radio and television around violence against women.⁶³ There is anecdotal evidence of more reach being achieved through radio than television. According to reported testimonies, messages broadcast through radio contributed directly to addressing cases of violence, including avoiding two child marriages and ending violence against a pregnant woman in Kayes region.⁶⁴ The evaluation did not have the opportunity to verify these reported results.

Cross-thematic collaborations

The Health Peace Vector programme is an interesting case of cross-thematic collaboration between UN agencies.⁶⁵ The programme is built around the provision of health services, but also addresses women's economic resilience and community cohesion, including community leaders through sensitization sessions on conflict prevention and mediation.⁶⁶

Recognizing that loss of income is associated with increased risk of gender-based violence (and other vulnerabilities), a stream of income-generating activities was included in the Spotlight interventions managed by UN Women.⁶⁷ In the Ségou region and Bamako, 460 women were reportedly⁶⁸ trained to acquire tailoring skills and learn how to make handmade artisan soap. The programme partners consulted mentioned⁶⁹ that such efforts led to reduced dependencies and risk of gender-based violence by increasing women's decision-making power within their households. The claim is plausible as the project included preventive measures such as sensitization for ending violence against women and capacity strengthening to address impunity. However, the evaluation faced limitations in accessing monitoring data and was unable to directly engage with the women involved in the interventions. As a result, the evaluation team could not verify how the training translated into increased incomes, or explore how these changes influenced household power dynamics, including any potential impacts on instances of violence.

Advocacy with the government for gender-based violence laws and policies

In 2021, the Spotlight Initiative targeted the justice system for institutional capacity-building. A total of 45 civil servants, mostly magistrates and prosecutors, were reportedly provided with gender-responsive skills for the analysis and review of legal texts. Reportedly, 150 police officers received training on gender-responsive planning and mainstreaming gender in their work. This contributed to the elaboration of a workplan to fight against gender-based violence.⁷⁰

While UN Women's advocacy work in Mali for a stand-alone law on gender-based violence did not bear fruit due to religious pressures preventing the adoption of the law, the inclusion of specific gender-based violence provisions in the penal code is a notable result. In addition, UN Women Mali partnered with the government to contribute to the development of multiple key policy documents aimed at combating gender-based violence and ensuring justice for survivors. Notably, the Country Office provided technical assistance in drafting the Investigation Strategy,⁷¹ which outlines a comprehensive framework for conducting police investigations into gender-based violence cases. In addition, UN Women facilitated the development of legislation in Mali to strengthen legal protections for survivors, including the law establishing rules on reparations and its implementing decree.⁷² UN Women also supported initiatives such as the drafting of the Law on Combating Trafficking in Persons,⁷³ further highlighting the Entity's commitment to addressing various forms of violence against women and girls in Mali.

⁶⁰ Organisation pour un Développement Intégré au Sahel, 2021, Health Peace Vector report pp. 4-5

⁶¹ UN Women, 2021, Spotlight Half-Yearly Narrative Report January-June 2021 p.9

⁶² APDF, 2022, Quarterly Report July-September. The evaluation team did not meet beneficiaries of the Spotlight Initiative to independently verify results reported in programme documents.

⁶³ UN Women, 2020, Spotlight Annual Report.

⁶⁴ UN Women, 2021, Spotlight Half-Yearly Narrative Report January-June 2021 p.8

⁶⁵ MINUSMA, UNDP, WHO

⁶⁶ Organisation pour un Développement Intégré au Sahel, 2021, Health Peace Vector report p. 5

⁶⁷ See UN Women Mali programme presentation page, <https://africa.unwomen.org/fr/lutte-contre-les-violences-faites-aux-femmes-et-aux-filles>

⁶⁸ APDF, 2022, Quarterly Report July-September

⁶⁹ This is from an interview with Spotlight programme partners conducted in Bamako on 26/01/2024. The evaluation did not verify the reported information, in the absence of data on reduced gender-based violence prevalence (or probability) among beneficiary populations.

⁷⁰ UN Women, 2021, Spotlight Half-Yearly Narrative Report January-June 2021 p.9

⁷¹ Investigation strategy, Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Committee, October 2018

⁷² Law No. 2022.041 of 15 Nov. 2022, establishing general rules relating to the compensation of damages caused by serious violations of human rights, Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Committee, November 2022

⁷³ Bill No. 2021 on the fight against human trafficking, replacing Law No. 2012-023 of 12 July 2012 on the fight against human trafficking and similar practices.

Women's Economic Empowerment

FINDING 6. UN Women's work in Mali for the economic empowerment of women has yielded more tangible results in the agricultural sector than in areas such as the digital economy and female entrepreneurship. While training sessions in the latter areas generated positive expectations from stakeholders, they both felt short of delivering lasting and measurable results.

Economic empowerment of rural women

The results previously established by the AGRIFED Programme⁷⁴ with rural women cooperatives were maintained during the current Strategic Note, including access to finance and land. Support for women's involvement in fish farming was revealed to be profitable despite humble beginnings.

The Country Office has carried out multiple interventions in support of rural women, which have yielded important results for women's empowerment. During the current Strategic Note period, the office has continued implementation of the AGRIFED programme, which started during the previous cycle (2018–2021). [The final programme evaluation](#) confirmed the results achieved in support of increased women's production and resulting revenues, supporting participating women in almost doubling the sold production in the 2019/2020 season (1 583 461 kg) compared to 2018/2019 (811 088 kg).⁷⁵ The programme enhanced access to finance, including increased access to funding for women's cooperatives at reduced rates (8 per cent instead of 12 per cent by the Banque Nationale du Développement Agricole).⁷⁶ Consultations with a programme partner during the field visit in Ségou⁷⁷ further highlighted that despite the end of AGRIFED programme, collaboration between cooperatives and the Banque Nationale du Développement Agricole is still in place, with important progress in terms of adaptation of procedures to the local context to facilitate more inclusive access to financing for women. For example, programme partners pointed to the simplification of requirements for access to funding exemplified in Bambara by the substitution of a business plan requirement with an application form. The interviewee reported that 20 women cooperatives were still benefitting from loans at the time of evaluation, and that they were all able to repay past loans, which are activated on a yearly basis. However, no monitoring documentation was available concerning cooperatives' budgets, repayment rates and timelines during or after AGRIFED implementation, resulting in the evaluation team's inability to independently verify how these financing mechanisms fit into cooperatives' business structures.

As underlined in the final evaluation, the AGRIFED programme was catalytic in advancing land rights and contributed to the acquisition of 349,822 hectares and the securing of 263,72 hectares through partnerships with traditional leaders and administrative services. Programme activities also supported the adoption of 19 gender-responsive land management charters, which acknowledge women's role in agriculture; highlight the need for their participation in decision-making; and describe the modalities for access to land for women and vulnerable groups. In parallel, the Country Office also collaborated with national and local stakeholders to strengthen local-level land committees (commissions foncières) through capacity strengthening, advocacy and enhancing women's and youth participation. The activities carried out between 2020 and early 2021 allowed the inclusion of 340 women and 327 youth in 180 committees, which were reported to improve land conflict management and strengthen social cohesion by providing mediation services and facilitating reconciliation between parties.⁷⁸

UN Women Mali and its partners intervened in the fishing value chain to enhance women's involvement in fish farming. Interventions through the Support Project for the Improvement of Sustainable Livelihoods for the Mitigation and Adaptation of Fishing Communities to Climate Change [fish (2021-2024) project] focused on creating and rehabilitating suitable fish farming sites (ponds and floating cages), providing the necessary resources for fish farming and training beneficiaries. Documentary review indicates that in the first half of its implementation period, the project contributed to the rehabilitation of four ponds and installation of two floating cages, increasing the production capacity of 400 cooperative members, including 225 women. Following its environmental

⁷⁴ AGRIFED (Agriculture, Women, and Sustainable Development Programme) is an initiative by UN Women in Mali aimed at enhancing women's access to production resources for climate-resilient agriculture. Operating from 2016 to 2021, the programme focuses on providing economic support to women, particularly those in poverty and vulnerable situations, to foster their economic autonomy and improve their quality of life. It was funded by Luxembourg, along with contributions from Denmark and Sweden. The programme spans six regions – Ségou, Sikasso, Kayes, Koulikoro, Gao, and Mopti – and encompasses 15 communes, targeting areas where women face significant challenges in accessing resources and support for sustainable agricultural practices.

⁷⁵ UN Women, AGRIFED Final Evaluation, <https://gate.unwomen.org/Evaluation/Details?EvaluationId=11631>

⁷⁶ UN Women Mali, Country Programme Report, 2021: "Creating a safer world for women and girls in Mali" p.3

⁷⁷ Interview with implementing partner, Ségou, 03/02/2024.

⁷⁸ AMEDD, 2021, Concerted action around sustainable management of agricultural land through the revitalization of communal and village land commissions in the regions of Mopti, Ségou, Gao and Menaka, Quarterly Report p.4

approach, the project has also assured the planting of 1,200 trees as a contribution to mitigate the effects of climate change.⁷⁹ In terms of training, in August 2022, 24 representatives of cooperatives received capacity-building and then shared the knowledge on fish farming with members of their respective cooperatives.⁸⁰ The fish farming processes led to considerable production, with 786 kg of fish translating into CFA⁸¹ 1,618,500 during the first half of 2023.⁸² Nonetheless, the absence of monitoring data on cooperatives' baseline revenues, details of the costs of production (including labour) and the allocation/redistribution of profit makes it impossible for the evaluation to assess the economic impact the programme had on the cooperatives and their members. Despite the overall progress reported in advancing fish production, conversations with partner organizations at one implementation site highlighted important challenges, which undermined achievements at the local level.⁸³ Interviewed stakeholders from implementing organizations and regional technical services noted that implementation of activities does not always translate into concrete results.

According to interviewed respondents, the first round of farming was hindered by the limited capacities of project participants, which led to a loss of most alevins. Some improvements were reported during the second phase, which led to a turnover exceeding CFA 1 million (US\$ 1,650). While the third round of farming seemed promising, it failed following an incident, which led the cage to open and all fish to escape. A member of Country Office personnel consulted to discuss this specific case stressed its exceptional nature, highlighting that all other cooperatives involved in the project have been successful in sustaining profitable fish production.

Also noteworthy are cross-thematic efforts⁸⁴ within the Women, Peace and Security portfolio addressing the needs of women affected by conflict. Reported results include a profit of US\$ 301,575.79 for 1,277 women involved in market gardening in the Ségou region,⁸⁵ and profits ranging between US\$ 7,460 and US\$ 9,950 for women in the Bandiagara region.⁸⁶ Additional details are provided in the Women, Peace and Security section of this report.

Support for female entrepreneurs

The Country Office's support to female-led businesses contributed to increased registration rates for women-led businesses but there is no verifiable data on how training initiatives translated into improved business administration.

The Country Office's collaboration with the National Agency for the Promotion of Investments (Agence pour la Promotion des Investissements [API]) and the World Bank has resulted in the establishment of the Women Business Centre, providing a package of services to women entrepreneurs. The collaboration has reportedly resulted in the formalization of women's businesses, with the registration of 320 women-led enterprises and API centres across the country reportedly facilitating the registration of close to 800 women-led businesses, directly contributing to improving national rates of women-owned business. API representatives reported an increase in the rate of women-owned business registration from 14 per cent to 19 per cent following these efforts.⁸⁷ Businesses registered within the framework of the collaboration between UN Women and API benefitted from access to training for women entrepreneurs, who were enabled to strengthen their capacities in different aspects of business management. This was made possible thanks to the partnership with the World Bank, which provided technical support to the initiative, notably through the provision of the human resources who assisted entrepreneurs in the development of their business plans.⁸⁸

UN Women personnel and the implementing partner alike indicated that such efforts resulted in improved business

administration and increased turnover. However, the absence of systematic monitoring efforts to produce reliable data has made it impossible for the evaluation team to verify the magnitude of the reported profits.

The Country Office also supported women's entrepreneurship in the mine and gem industry, including through the mobilization of private funds. This has been operationalized through collaboration with AFEMINE, the Mali women miners' association. As planned, the project successfully supported the opening of a gem-cutting workshop in March 2023,⁸⁹ with a potential production capacity of 150 kg/month, and facilitated the acquisition of an initial contract worth CFA 1,600,000. However, due to unexplained delays in the availability of subsequent funds, several planned activities could not be implemented. Notably, the full operationalization of the workshop did not commence within the project's time frame. According to conversations with UN Women personnel, the organization is unaware of any production possibly occurring outside of the project's framework.⁹⁰ Additionally, AFEMINE had planned to register its trademark in 2023 as part of project activities. However, the suspension of further funding led to the discontinuation of this effort. The UN Women focal point consulted held no information on whether AFEMINE intends

⁷⁹ UN Women, 2022, narrative report of the second quarter of the activities of the pacp project in the Segou region p.15

⁸⁰ UN Women, 2022, narrative report of the second quarter of the activities of the pacp project in the Segou region p.5

⁸¹ CFA (originally from "Colonies Françaises d'Afrique") is a currency guaranteed by the French Treasury and used in West and Central Africa

⁸² UN Women, 2023, Summary of activities carried out (July 2023) p.3

⁸³ Interviews with programme partners, Ségou, 31/01/2024 – 01/02/2024

⁸⁴ In addition to the other cross-thematic programming between Women's Economic Empowerment and Ending Violence Against Women as presented earlier in this report.

⁸⁵ Annual Report 2022. Program support National Plan of Action 1325 UNSC. January-December 2022.

⁸⁶ WPHF Annual Report 2022 from 20.02.2023.

⁸⁷ Interview with programme partners, Bamako, 26/01/2024

⁸⁸ Interview with member of UN Women personnel, online, 28/02/2024

⁸⁹ UN Women Mali donor report, *Support by Diadie dit Amadou Sankare - SAER to UN Women for improving the income of Malian women through the mining and gemstone industry*, March 2023 p.6

⁹⁰ Interview with member of UN Women personnel, online, 28/03/2024

to pursue the trademark registration independently, outside the project's scope.

It is too early to assess the contribution of UN Women support in Mali to the national entrepreneurship strategy and action plan. At the time of the evaluation, the Country Office had recruited consultants⁹¹ to assist the Ministry of Entrepreneurship, Employment and Professional Training (Ministère de l'Entrepreneuriat national, de l'Emploi et de la Formation Professionnelle) to develop its entrepreneurship strategy and action plan. Conversations with a member of UN Women personnel highlighted that the Country Office's review of the first draft of the document found an explicit focus on the promotion of women's and youth businesses.⁹²

Upcoming steps include developing a monitoring framework; clarifying roles and responsibilities; analysing the extent to which implementation of the strategy is gender-responsive; and mobilizing the necessary funds. While concrete results are yet to materialize, the efforts made so far suggest possible evolutions towards an improved policy environment for the flourishing of women's businesses.

Additional contributions include development of the National Policy on Prisoner Rehabilitation, which aims to provide support and opportunities for the economic reintegration of women prisoners.⁹³ This policy is still at draft stage for the evaluation to assess its influence.

Digital access and marketing

The training sessions organized by UN Women Mali for female entrepreneurs in 2022 and 2023, which aimed to enhance digital marketing skills and facilitate access to procurement opportunities, generated high expectations among stakeholders. However, in 2024, during the evaluation period, the outcomes appeared intangible, largely due to the absence of comprehensive post-training assessments.

The Country Office collaborated with ImpactHer – a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering female entrepreneurs through digitalization – on training which has reportedly reached 80 women entrepreneurs in August/September 2022. Participants were chosen by prioritizing entrepreneurs working in hospitality, service provision, construction, ICT and office materials retail, and handicrafts.⁹⁴ Its objective was to provide participants with digital skills to enhance their economic and financial freedom and facilitate their access to public procurement opportunities. The final report⁹⁵ submitted by ImpactHer highlights the training's positive reception by its participants, with their totality indicating it improved and strengthened their knowledge on business growth and durability, over 85 per cent attributing the training a score of 4 or 5 (out of 5). The course addressed skills development on digital marketing, focusing on the use of Google tools and social media. Participating businesswomen were supported with the necessary skills to integrate tools into their own existing enterprises, adapting them to their specific needs. A participant cited in the final report indicated she had expanded her advertising strategy from Facebook and WhatsApp to including Instagram, Twitter and Google My Business, which resulted in an increase in contacts and shop visits. Ten businesses were also registered on Google Maps for increased accessibility. At the time of evaluation (March 2024) three of four for which details are provided in the report are still available on Google Maps. Participants also received information concerning online

legal protection and were trained on how to buy an online domain for their businesses' website. Five businesses were directly supported by ImpactHer personnel in the creation of their website; however, a verification exercise by the evaluation team found that the addresses provided were no longer active at the time of evaluation. Perhaps other communication channels were eventually preferred by the entrepreneurs for ongoing marketing activities.

Despite the important training efforts undertaken through the Women Business Centre and in collaboration with ImpactHer, no records concerning the concrete impact on beneficiary businesses were made available to the evaluation team. Consultation with an organization partnering with UN Women to advance women's entrepreneurship confirmed the absence of dedicated monitoring mechanisms and tools to track results on women's businesses.⁹⁶ The organization also indicated the absence of adequate funding as a reason for its inability to closely follow up on the business evolution of entrepreneurs who had benefitted from their support services.

Since 2023, UN Women Mali has launched efforts related to increasing women's involvement in ICT through organization of a training programme providing 50 young women with an introduction to coding, robotics and artificial intelligence. The establishment of this initiative in Mali, as part of the African Girls Can Code Initiative kickstarted across several

⁸⁹ UN Women Mali donor report, *Support by Diadie dit Amadou Sankare - SAER to UN Women for improving the income of Malian women through the mining and gemstone industry*, March 2023 p.6

⁹⁰ Interview with member of UN Women personnel, online, 28/03/2024

⁹¹ UN Women, consultancy Terms of Reference, https://jobs.undp.org/cj_view_job.cfm?job_id=113559

⁹² Interview with member of UN Women personnel, online, 28/03/2024

⁹³ National policy for post-prison monitoring of ex-detainees in Mali 2022-2026, National Directorate of Prison Administration and Supervised Education (DNAPES), June 2022

⁹⁴ UN Women, 2022, Terms of reference for training women's businesses on digital marketing

⁹⁵ ImpactHer, 2022, UN Women Training Programme Report

⁹⁶ Implementing partner, Bamako, 26/01/2024

countries in Africa, provides a valuable entry point into promoting women's participation in ICT, a sector in which they have historically been underrepresented across the continent.⁹⁷ While a participant in the training programme interviewed as part of a video reportage on the initiative confirmed her willingness to apply the acquired digital skills to enhance her entrepreneurial activities, no post-training

monitoring is available to assess the impact of this initiative.⁹⁸ In addition, the limited duration of the training programme raises doubts about its actual capacity to transfer the necessary skills to enhance the economic condition of the target population.

Women, Peace and Security

FINDING 7. The Country Office's interventions to advance women's participation in peace processes contributed to increased female representation in the Monitoring Committee of the Algiers Agreements and in community-level conflict resolution mechanisms. Although the Women's Observatory of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement did not materialize, the newly established Inter-Malian Dialogue for Peace and National Reconciliation continues to uphold the legacy of women's representation achieved under the Algiers Agreements.

Of the four pillars⁹⁹ of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, UN Women's interventions within the Women, Peace and Security agenda have predominantly focused on participation and relief/recovery to foster inclusive peace processes and provide comprehensive support for women in conflict and post-conflict settings, thereby addressing the broader objectives of the Women, Peace and Security

agenda. Prevention and protection were featured as components of interventions primarily related to rehabilitation of affected communities and displaced persons. Similarly, as if there were an unspoken division of labour within the UN, MINUSMA's focus on protection did not imply the neglect of the other pillars.

Pillar 1 of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 – participation in peace mechanisms

The Country Office has made efforts to strengthen women's presence in peace mechanisms, particularly the Monitoring Committee of the Algiers Agreements (or Comité de Suivi des Accords, hereafter "CSA").

UN Women Mali and its partners advocated for at least 30 per cent¹⁰⁰ participation by women in peace mechanisms.

As reported by the Country Office,¹⁰¹ the number of women in the CSA increased from 0 of 20 to 9 of 29 (31 per cent) in 2020, and further to 12 of 29 (38 per cent) in 2022. Three more women have since joined the CSA; 12 joined its sub-committees; and 5 of the 25 commissioners (20 per cent) on the Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission are women.

Box 2: Perspectives from a training workshop¹⁰²

Women in peace mechanisms were reported to be "either tolerated or accepted by men", as some of them had previously expressed being sceptical about women's participation in peace and security in Mali. This was shared by male participants during a capacity-building workshop attended by members of the CSA, male and female.¹⁰³

Women participants regarding the CSA workshop: During workshops, when there are role-playing activities, both men and women are fully engaged. Previously, men attended workshops out of curiosity. Now they participate more actively... We learn a lot from these men. They have started to interact with us. During the training sessions, this created greater closeness... The men from the CSA used to be observers. We woke them up... Initially, the men from the CSA were distrustful of us. The training sessions helped break the ice... Men know that what they cannot say, we say. As women, we are better positioned to convey certain messages about education, health, or the increasing insecurity... Men have brought us a lot through the exchange of experiences... Following the workshops, we decided to have a meeting with the leaders of different movements... I have had more contact with men from other movements, and today, I am more comfortable discussing and keeping in touch with them.

Men's perspective: "It has allowed us to learn a lot of things that we did not know... We have learned to better understand women and to have better discussions... Until now, women have not yet reached the level where they are able to interrupt men while speaking."

⁹⁷ UN Women, 2023, AGCCI (African Girls Can Code Initiative) Program - Final Report of the 1st Coding Camp, p. 1

⁹⁸ Mali: Lancement officiel Projet Girl can code 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSctjAzvjMM>

⁹⁹ Namely participation, prevention, protection, rehabilitation/relief.

¹⁰⁰ The proportion of 30 per cent is directly inspired from Law 052, which mandates equitable gender representation in appointed or elected positions.

¹⁰¹ UN Women Mali report, June 2023

¹⁰² As reported by project management personnel.

¹⁰³ Annual Report 2021. Program support National Plan of Action 1325 UNSC. January-December 2021.

After the Government of Mali ended¹⁰⁴ the Peace Agreement, the Steering Committee for the Inter-Malian Dialogue for Peace and National Reconciliation was established on 26 January 2024. Comprising 20 per cent women, the Committee is tasked with the primary mission of preparing and organizing dialogue among Malians to foster peace and harmonious coexistence.

Community initiatives

According to data from the Mid-Term Review of the Strategic Note, women's and youth representation in community peace and security mechanisms has increased in areas where UN Women Mali is active. Their participation in managing community conflicts (see Annex 32) grew significantly, rising from 8 per cent in 2019 to 34 per cent by the end of 2021, particularly in the Mopti (Koro and Douentza Circles) and Gao (Menaka and Ansongo Circles) regions. As a result, women became involved in resolving over 121 community and family conflicts and allegedly conducted 154 mediations across Mopti, Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal.¹⁰⁵

The conflict resolution mechanisms supported by the Country Office are diverse, including peace huts, networks of women peace ambassadors, women peace mediators and regional reconciliation support teams. While there has been no formal evaluation of the quality of these resolutions, interviews with ex-MINUSMA personnel indicate that women's involvement in these mechanisms has allowed them to better understand and express their concerns.

According to the "Report on peace huts approaches in the regions of Mopti, Gao, Timbuktu and Menaka,"¹⁰⁶ peace mechanisms range from "peace hut forums" (26 women's peace huts, 13 inclusive peace labs and inclusive land commissions) to "women peace ambassadors" or "regional reconciliation support teams" which can be found in the northern (Gao, Menaka, Kidal) and central regions (Mopti, Bandiagara, Segou).

Additionally, for survivors of the crises and conflicts that Mali has experienced since 1960, the Ministry of National Reconciliation has established a mechanism called the "Authority for the Management of Reparations for Victims of Crises in Mali". Created on 31 March 2023, the mechanism has a five-year action plan and is in the process of becoming operational, with a Steering Committee, Executive Secretariat and five regional branches already established.

Women's observatory of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement

In 2020, efforts were made to establish a women's observatory to monitor implementation of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, stemming from the

Algiers process. This initiative, supported by MINUSMA, UN Women, the Folke Bernadotte Academy and Norway, ultimately did not materialize. The evaluation team was told that the primary reason was disagreements about the institutional anchoring of the observatory, i.e. its proposed attachment to a specific government department was seen as a risk to its independence.

Pillar 4 of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 – relief and rehabilitation

UN Women's peace and security initiatives often have a relief and rehabilitation component which leverages the Entity's experience gained through the Women's Economic Empowerment impact area. The Country Office reported¹⁰⁷ in 2021 that its interventions in the field of peace and security enabled 12,302 women, 1,419 young girls, 815 men and 287 young boys affected by conflict to increase their incomes by 40 to 60 per cent.¹⁰⁸ All peace and security initiatives have a gender-based violence component, so the support was combined with sensitization and prevention aspects.

According to the same source, 100 women with disabilities work in the beauty industry in Bamako, Sikasso, Ségou and Kayes, and 90 women in the Ségou and Bamako regions work in the sewing and soap-making industries.¹⁰⁹ Further investigations are needed to assess the improvement in the living conditions of gender-based violence survivors.

¹⁰⁴ A government statement released on 25 January 2024, terminated the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali resulting from the Algiers process.

¹⁰⁵ The figures are presented in the report on the Mid-Term Review of the UN Women Mali Strategic Note, 2022.

¹⁰⁶ Status of the peace case approach in the regions of Mopti, Gao, Timbuktu and Ménaka. September 2023 (Final report).

¹⁰⁷ UN Women Mali Country Programme Report, 2021.

¹⁰⁸ For more details on reported income improvements resulting from rehabilitation components of Women, Peace and Security Programmes, see UN Women Mali Country Programme Report, 2021.

¹⁰⁹ Same as above.

Efficiency

Does UN Women Mali have adequate governance, capacity and skills to ensure good use of resources (staff, funding and assets) to deliver results?

Country Office absorption capacity

FINDING 8. The Country Office has enhanced its non-core fund spending capacity by recruiting a Programme Management Support Unit (PMSU) personnel to improve management and reporting processes. However, challenges with outstanding partner advances persist, highlighting the need for adjusted responsibilities to ensure timely liquidation of cash advances. Additionally, the instability of the Operations Manager position between November 2021 and December 2023 hampered smooth operations and compliance, causing further delays in procurement and recruitment processes.

With an average yearly budget of US\$ 11 million, the Country Office has proactively taken steps to improve its capacity to manage and utilize non-core funds by recruiting personnel for a Programme Management Support Unit (PMSU) in 2021. The PMSU Officer, who reports to the Deputy Representative, is tasked with strengthening programme management processes and facilitating timely, high-quality financial and narrative reporting. This support includes systematic guidance to programme partners, beginning with the signing of Project Collaboration Agreements and extending through to the validation of partner expenses. The PMSU Officer also facilitates training on key topics such as budget management, compliance and partner expense documentation and ensuring alignment with relevant rules and policies.

However, challenges persist, particularly regarding the liquidation of cash advances by programme partners. The

Country Office still faces high levels of outstanding partner advances, which amounted to US\$ 1,647,967.57 by December 2023 – one of the highest figures in the region. While the number of advances outstanding for between 7 and 12 months was the lowest in the region, suggesting a reduced risk of funds being written off due to incomplete documentation, improvements are still necessary to ensure the timely liquidation of all advances. The evaluation team conducted interviews with key stakeholders, including M&E Officers, Programme Managers, the Finance/Budget Officer and programme partners, to identify recurring issues related to programme management. These discussions, complemented by findings from the desk review, highlighted several partner challenges, particularly in managing advances and adhering to programme protocols. Table 2 provides a summary of the most frequently encountered issues, compiled from the evaluation team's interviews, field visits and document review.

TABLE 2. Common issues encountered with programme partners

Issues	Brief description
Inadequate procurement practices	Some programme partners from local governments break down major purchases into smaller ones to comply with restrictions imposed on the maximum value of tenders they could engage in. This is likely to be inappropriate and such fragmentation is likely to lead to increased costs.
Weak accounting systems	Some transactions on FACE forms did not match bank statements. This was partly due to payments made to individuals instead of organizations and partly due to an absence of audit trails. Many programme partners cannot afford to purchase accounting applications and still rely on manual accounting methods and Excel.
Programme participant selection and monitoring	The selection process of programme-supported individuals is often not documented. In addition, when various kits are delivered to them, there is no control mechanism (e.g. stickers indicating "not for resale" preventing re-selling on the market). The risk is particularly high for economic empowerment activities that require more than six months to generate income in a humanitarian context. For instance, providing cows along with the necessary fattening food.
Delayed financial reporting	Several organizations were unable to submit their FACE forms on a quarterly basis as required by project agreements. However, in 2023, the major delaying factor was roll-out of the new corporate ERP system, Quantum. As the Country Office made efforts to switch from Atlas to the new ERP tool, there was a six-month transition period during which payments could not be issued in the system.

Source: Evaluation team's compilation of notes from interviews, desk review and field visits

Despite progress, the persistent issue of delayed partner advances signals that the Country Office's capacity to manage partner advances requires strengthening. While the recruitment of a PMSU personnel has improved financial controls and reporting, the current set-up places too much reliance on one individual. As highlighted during interviews and further confirmed by corporate feedback, the PMSU role is critical but insufficient by itself to address all capacity-building needs and the financial controls required for sustainable programme management. A more comprehensive approach is needed to ensure that roles and responsibilities (such as monitoring of partner performance, timely liquidation of advances and capacity-building for partners) as outlined in the Programme Partner Procedures, are fully adhered to across the Country Office. This includes conducting a comprehensive risk-based capacity assessment before engaging partners and developing capacity-building plans where necessary. Such assessments are essential to identify risks at an early stage and to tailor engagement strategies to mitigate these risks through appropriate mechanisms and payment modalities.

The Country Office must ensure that programme managers consistently monitor the quarterly performance of partners and address issues identified during these reviews. This will help prevent the accumulation of outstanding advances and ensure that partner engagements are sustainable and compliant with corporate standards.

Overall, while the Country Office has taken important steps to improve its financial management, further efforts are required to fully apply corporate procedures and distribute responsibilities more effectively. An appropriate alignment of roles would help to maintain the momentum gained and address the outstanding challenges in managing partner advances.

TABLE 3. Personnel size and contract types in 2023

Contract type	Total	Grades
Regular staff	19	7 SB1, 5 SB3, 9 SB4, 1 SB5, 1 G3, 2 G5, 3 G6, 1 G7, 2 NOB, 7 NOC, 2 P4, 1 P5
Non staff	20	7 SB1, 5 SB3, 9 SB4, 1 SB5, 1 G3, 2 G5, 3 G6, 1 G7
UN volunteers	10	Includes 4 international volunteers
Total personnel	49	

Source: Human Resource Unit (UN Women Mali)

Human Resources

Currently with a workforce of 53 individuals, the Country Office is quantitatively better staffed than any other UN Women office in the region. As shown on UN Women Mali's organization chart (see Annex 26), there is at least one Programme Specialist for each of the four impact areas. Each of the Programme Specialists is supported by an Analyst and an Assistant. In addition, two impact areas have dedicated drivers.

One person was deployed at the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children and Families to strengthen its interactions with the Country Office. The Budget and Finance Officer also plays a key role in management of the Country Office's coordination portfolio, including reinvigoration of the Gender Theme Group.

The Operations Unit is composed of associates in finance, procurement, HR, administration, ICT and security. Each Associate has an Assistant, except the Security Officer. However, the unstable¹¹⁰ position of Operations Manager between November 2021 and December 2023 undermined the smooth conduct of business in compliance with UN Women policies and procedures. For procurement and recruitment, the Country Office often requests assistance from the Regional Office, which delays the normal conduct of business.

Similar to many UN Women offices, a key characteristic of the Country Office's human resource composition is the high prevalence of non-staff contractual arrangements (see Annex 24). Unstable short-term contracts will be challenging to move away from, especially given diminishing resources amid donor sanctions.¹¹¹ The Country Office is considering a realignment of its upcoming strategy towards humanitarian efforts which is more likely to attract funding.

¹¹⁰ The individual still listed as "Finance Associate, G7" in OneApp is, in fact, the Operations Manager (OM). Until his recent confirmation as OM, he had been fulfilling this role on an interim basis since the departure of the previous OM in 2021.

¹¹¹ See European Union's [Restrictive measures in view of the situation in Mali](#), United States' [Mali-Related Sanctions](#) and Sweden [ends its Development Aid to Mali in aftermath of Ukraine rift](#). Between 2020 and 2024, EU and Sweden contributed more than 30 per cent of the Country Office's budget.

Results-based management

FINDING 9. While the Country Office has achieved high-quality evaluation scores and effectively conducted systematic results-based management capacity-building for its programme personnel, there are still gaps in clarifying reporting roles and responsibilities, hindering systematic reporting on standardized indicators and higher-level objectives. Its broad outcomes are worded to reflect alignment with the UNSDCF; however, this is at the expense of a clear and coherent understanding of UN Women's logical chain of results.

Country Office programme monitoring and reporting is handled by a four-person M&E unit: three M&E Specialists and one M&E Officer providing support to process monitoring of programme implementation and result monitoring.¹¹² The Strategic Note 2020–2024 does not reference any plans for conducting a baseline study. Although two baseline studies were anticipated and budgeted at the programme level, they have not yet been carried out. The primary reason for this delay is the rapid pace at which projects are implemented once funding agreements are secured. Baseline studies require sufficient time for preparation before the planned project activities can commence in the field.

The baseline study for the *Prevention of Electoral Violence Programme* has been awaiting administrative approval from a government office since June 2023. The baseline study of the project titled *Program for the Elimination of Discrimination and Violence Against Women* is still at the conceptual stage.

Without baseline data, there is a lack of reference points to measure changes over time, which hampers the Country Office's ability to effectively assess and report on progress; identify areas for improvement or adaptation; and make informed adjustments to its priorities and strategies outlined in the Development Results Framework. Regular reviews of the Development Results Framework are opportunities to re-assess the relevance of planned outputs or reformulate related outcomes and associated indicators. These reflective exercises must be informed with context-tailored indicators (see Annex 21) and a theory of change related to UN Women's own outcomes.

An alternative representation of the theory of change (see Annex 3) places greater emphasis on the impact areas outlined in UN Women's corporate Strategic Plan 2022–2025, offering a clearer and more nuanced depiction of the Country Office's contributions and pathways to impact.

Consulted stakeholders from both UN Women and programme partners highlighted limited monitoring efforts. This is attributed to several factors, including inadequate funding to

match monitoring needs, and the security situation affecting several project locations. Consultations with programme partners highlighted the absence of both funding and adequate tools to monitor project progress.¹¹³

For example, a respondent involved in implementation of a Women's Economic Empowerment project indicated they are unable to share precise data concerning improvements in the revenues of entrepreneurs involved in their project due to the lack of funds for monitoring visits and the absence of specific indicators in their reporting templates. Country Office personnel highlighted the challenges related to field visits to project sites. Security restrictions have significantly affected the Country Office's capacity to visit project locations outside of main cities.¹¹⁴ According to reports made to the evaluation team, project staff rely on organizations on the ground to monitor project implementation.¹¹⁵ The stakeholders consulted, including organizations implementing projects and representatives from local institutions, highlighted their wish to see increased UN Women presence on the ground, including through the strengthening of existing sub-offices and the establishment of new offices in the different target regions.¹¹⁶ Members of Country Office Senior Management confirmed their inability to carry out regular visits to the field,¹¹⁷ which affects direct oversight of UN Women's operations in Mali.

The evaluation's documentary review highlighted important result-based management gaps within project-level reporting. Activity-based reporting is predominant in both periodic and event-driven reports. Despite the existence of adequate indicators across the monitoring frameworks in many UN Women initiatives, limited reference to higher-level indicators is made during the reporting phase. This may be attributed to the fact that in the first instance responsibility for regular reports lies with programme partners, who may not have received full results-based management training. This is supported by consultations with representatives from programme partner organizations, who praised the Country Office's capacity-building efforts, but also confirmed the need for further training on the different steps of the project cycle.¹¹⁸ The analysis of the reports suggests their primary use may be to

¹¹² One M&E Specialist was on leave between December 2022 and July 2024.

¹¹¹ See European Union's [Restrictive measures in view of the situation in Mali](#), United States' [Mali-Related Sanctions](#) and Sweden [ends its Development Aid to Mali in aftermath of Ukraine rift](#). Between 2020 and 2024, EU and Sweden contributed more than 30 per cent of the Country Office's budget.

¹¹³ Interviews with programme partners, Bamako, 26/01/2024, Ségou 01/02/2024.

¹¹⁴ Interviews with members of UN Women personnel, Bamako, 25/01/2024 - 29/01/2024

¹¹⁵ Interviews with programme partners, Bamako, 26/01/2024-28/01/2024, interviews with members of UN Women personnel, online December 2023 and Bamako, 25/01/2024 - 29/01/2024

¹¹⁶ Interviews with programme partners, Ségou, 02/02/2024

¹¹⁷ Interview with member of UN Women personnel, Bamako, 29/01/2024

¹¹⁸ Interviews with programme partners, Bamako, 26/01/2024

justify the implementation of activities and serve as a means to access additional funding, as opposed to being a source of evidence used to adapt project implementation and for the purpose of accountability towards results.

A focus group discussion with UN Women personnel also highlighted the absence of clear responsibilities concerning reporting, with confusion regarding the expected involvement of the M&E Unit in project-level reporting. During the discussion, it emerged that project managers expect the M&E Unit to collect data for all projects, while M&E personnel maintained that they are mostly responsible for office-wide, higher-level reporting – which they should base on the data made available by project managers themselves.

The Country Office's review of reporting in UN Women's results management system highlights important data gaps, preventing the office from systematically reporting on standardized indicators. In multiple cases, the narrative sections are not informed with indicator data on progress and resort to highlighting activities that UN Women implemented within the given thematic area. While UN Women may not have the capacity to collect country-level data to inform national indicators, it is important for the organization to provide results-based accounts of its contributions towards the realization of higher-level objectives.

Infrastructure, mobility and internet

FINDING 10. The Country Office leverages the advantages of shared premises with other UN agencies to ensure access to high-quality internet infrastructure and benefits from shared logistical, security and office space-related services. However, the adoption of the new ERP system, Quantum (an Entity-wide corporate initiative), has led to increased processing delays in finance, HR and procurement management.

Access to the internet is one of the services that benefits from economies of scale, resulting from the Country Office being located in common UN premises. This arrangement helped UN agencies pool their resources to face contextual challenges such as frequent power cuts, network and security issues. During its two-week stay in Bamako, the evaluation team experienced first-hand the presence of high-quality internet infrastructure in the UN Women Country Office. This allows the Country Office to participate and interact optimally with the rest of the organization at regional and global levels.

Beyond the use of tools that facilitate communication (Outlook, Teams, Zoom, One Drive, Sharepoint etc.), collaboration and content sharing, other organization-wide processes require robust internet facilities, such as annual planning, reporting and resource management.

As illustrated by the corporate introduction of Quantum in early 2023, every new initiative requires a transition period to allow for user learning and system adjustments. While the

In contrast with the shortcomings experienced in systematizing the use of data during project implementation, the Country Office demonstrates successful engagement in evaluation processes. UN Women Mali has directly commissioned or participated in external evaluations for a significant number of projects and programmes implemented during the Strategic Note period, including six evaluations directly managed by the Country Office, all of which were rated externally as either "good" or "very good". However, a misalignment with UN Women's evaluation norms and standards was observed when the Country Office conducted the UN System Gender Coordination Evaluation without first including it in the Evaluation Plan, thereby bypassing standard quality assurance procedures.

Despite the challenges, it is important to note the efforts made to enhance evidence-based approaches across the Country Office, such as the two-day result-based management training in February 2023 led by an experienced staff member aimed at strengthening capacities across the office. The training provided an overview of the project cycle, focusing on the importance of results-orientation in all managerial processes. The Country Office also encouraged personnel to complete the online result-based management course available on UN Women's portal, which served as a pre-requisite for attendance. The evaluation of the training by participants showed a nearly unanimous satisfaction rate (95 per cent of trainees), including a majority of 54 per cent attributing it a score of 70 per cent and above.

corporate resource planning tool was rolled out in early January 2023, personnel estimated that, until August 2023, the Country Office was still struggling to adjust to the use of Quantum to manage its finance, HR and procurement needs. This was a major delaying factor for payments, including those related to project implementation.

A lesser-known initiative introduced by UN Women's Information Systems and Telecommunications Services for increased efficiency is the Automation of Delegation of Authority and Internal Control Framework. As of March 2024, the Country Office was reported to have zero Internal Control Framework conflicts and 79 missing Delegations of Authority (see Annex 25).

This performance will probably evolve more positively as the Country Office is still learning about the different roles and processes required for raising, validating, clearing and approving requests using the online Internal Control Framework/Delegation of Authority Management Platform.

Sustainability

Are results achieved through implementation of the Mali Strategic Note likely to be preserved over time?

FINDING 11. The evaluation found that indications of sustainable changes in community norms were achieved when sensitization and capacity-building interventions involved and empowered local communities to advocate for women's rights using their own context-relevant messages. Technical capacity-building was key in securing sustainable livelihoods and enhancing women's business strength. Partner selection based on field presence and collaboration with institutional actors contributed to national ownership.

Political instability in Mali, coupled with tensions between the government and regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States and international donors, is likely to lead to funding freezes or reductions. These tensions stem from concerns over what is perceived as violations of the [Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali](#), which have prompted some donors to re-evaluate their support. As a result, project continuity may be uncertain; donor agreements may be revised with reduced intervention time frames; and challenges related to staffing could impact overall effectiveness and sustainability. Additional challenges to sustainability include the absence of exit strategies and post-project monitoring, hindering the long-term achievement of UN Women's interventions in Mali.

Capacity-building and ownership

The Country Office's focus on sensitization and capacity-building fosters sustainable changes in community norms and perceptions of gender equality in Mali. These efforts have helped to empower communities to independently advocate for women's rights and ensured ongoing engagement. However, support for an observatory and advocacy network without strong local roots was less successful, emphasizing the need for longer set-up phases and organic, bottom-up initiatives for lasting impact.

Consulted stakeholders across different categories, including government officials, civil society organizations, community leaders and beneficiaries, emphasized UN Women's work in capacity-building and changing norms and perceptions through sensitization efforts. Partner organizations collaborating with UN Women reported that their projects have strong capacity-building components, often constituting the majority of the activities they

implement.¹¹⁹ This approach is seen as crucial for preserving results on the ground.

UN Women's interventions on gender-based violence exemplify its strong commitment to sensitization, mobilizing communities around the fight against violence. Under the Spotlight Initiative, various stakeholders, including state actors, traditional and religious leaders, and civil society members, were targeted through diverse approaches to enhance their knowledge and capacities regarding gender-based violence. In turn, participants in these activities continued disseminating information and sensitizing communities about gender-based violence in Mali, leading to reported changes in behaviour. These changes are attributed to efforts to shift perceptions about gender roles and the impact of violence on women's lives.¹²⁰ A partner organization highlighted the ongoing engagement of religious leaders who participated in Spotlight activities, noting their continued leadership in community discussions on violence way beyond the programme timeline, contributing to the prevention of harmful practices such as early marriage and marital violence.¹²¹ The involvement of religious and traditional leaders promotes sustainability due to their strong community ties.

The Women's Political Leadership programme demonstrated that capacity-building within women's groups can yield positive outcomes long after UN Women's activities end. Support for women leaders led to their effective participation in political processes and influenced key documents, such as Mali's refoundation and transition positioning paper and the gender-responsive constitution. Despite disruptions following changes in Mali's political context, women's groups continued advocating for their rights and engaging in political processes, partly due to the technical support previously provided by UN Women.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Interview with implementing partner, Bamako, 26/01/2024

¹²⁰ Interview with a member of UN Women personnel, online, 06/12/2023

¹²¹ Interview with implementing partner, Bamako, 26/01/2024

¹²² Interview with a member of UN Women personnel, online, 29/03/2024

Participatory approaches are essential for sustainability, empowering participants of capacity-building interventions to become agents of change. This is evident in a case where UN Women supported the creation of an observatory and advocacy network connecting various organizations working on gender-based violence. The network was active for a short period and when UN Women withdrew its support, it partially disintegrated. Interview respondents indicated that the set-up phase was too short to ensure full ownership by the participating actors.¹²³

Technical capacity-building was found to be effective for women in income-generating activities, enhancing their business strength and securing sustainable livelihoods.

Stakeholders noted that practical training for women in income-generating activities and business management was crucial for sustainable women's economic empowerment. Women trained in the AGRIFED programme were reported to continue using climate-smart agriculture techniques, ensuring livelihoods beyond the project's end.¹²⁴ This includes adopting off-season cultivation, a new practice that farmers have found beneficial, and producing their own seeds, reducing reliance on artificial fertilizers. In entrepreneurship, capacity-building in areas such as business analysis, marketing and quality management provided to 360 women through the Women's Business Centre has significantly bolstered women's entrepreneurship. Programme partners report that this training has strengthened business models and equipped women with skills to maintain successful, sustainable businesses.¹²⁵ Training for an additional 80 women entrepreneurs has similarly been praised for enhancing business viability.¹²⁶

Partner choice

UN Women selects project partners based on field presence and thematic expertise, facilitating the acceptance and sustainability of activities. However, the lack of post-project monitoring limits the assessment of long-term sustainability.

Presence in the field and thematic expertise are some of the criteria used by UN Women for project partner selection. According to stakeholders consulted, the choice of organizations with strong ties on the ground facilitates the acceptance of project activities for effectiveness and ultimately, sustainability.¹²⁷ The Country Office Programme Management Unit has been entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring that all selected partners receive training from Operations and Programme staff on good

financial and procurement practices and day-to-day administrative procedures.

A representative of a programme partner previously involved in the AGRIFED project reported providing continued support to women's cooperatives who had been trained through UN Women's intervention.¹²⁸ The programme partner stated it was still involved in supporting groups in their self-management, for instance through the review of their documents and applications for funding, and that the organization consolidates and replicates results already achieved with UN Women by including the same beneficiaries where possible.

The evaluation team did not find any documentation to verify this claim that could have helped understand how project results evolve over time. The absence of post-project monitoring constitutes a key limitation to assessing the sustainability of UN Women's interventions.

Similar accounts of continued collaboration beyond project life cycles were provided by programme partners active in the field of gender-based violence. As previously discussed, religious leaders who participated in sensitization activities as part of the Spotlight Initiative were found to have continued the dissemination of gender-based violence related messages. The programme partners consulted confirmed that they continued to monitor the work taking place on the ground to support involved actors and ensure the results achieved are maximized and replicated.¹²⁹

By partnering with institutional actors, UN Women has strengthened national ownership of its efforts, and contributed to capacity strengthening that can support continued action through large-scale national interventions. However, the sustainability of results achieved through these collaborations remains vulnerable to the country's changing context and political turnover.

The Country Office's strong collaboration with national partners, both at central and local levels, is considered another key element in the sustainability of gender equality and women's empowerment results to which UN Women contributed in Mali. The technical support and training provided by UN Women at legal and policy levels is expected to guarantee the continued integration of gender concerns in upcoming policy-making efforts and implementation.¹³⁰ The training of trainers course delivered on gender-responsive planning and budgeting within the Spotlight Initiative is an example of a mechanism that requires continued implementation beyond direct collaboration with UN Women. For example, it involves ensuring that capacities in gender-sensitive budgeting are progressively strengthened across different ministerial departments.

¹²³ Interview with programme partners, Bamako, 26/01/2024

¹²⁴ Interview with member of UN Women personnel, online, 28/03/2024. For more on livelihood income improvements, see Annex 30.

¹²⁵ Interview with implementing partner, Bamako, 26/01/2024

¹²⁶ ImpactHer, 2022, UN Women Training Programme Report. Further information on this training effort is presented under the third Women's Economic Empowerment finding in the effectiveness section of this report.

¹²⁷ Interviews with programme partners, Bamako, 26/01/2024

¹²⁸ Interview with implementing partner, online, 14/03/2024

¹²⁹ Interviews with programme partners, Bamako, 26/01/2024

¹³⁰ UN Women, 2020, Spotlight Annual Report

At the operational level, the Country Office's collaboration with national actors was also regarded as a means to directly enhance ownership levels and create or strengthen permanent structures that could institutionalize activities and services to continue actions in the long term. The collaboration with Mali's API in establishing the Women Business Centre is an exemplary case of this approach. Interviewed professionals from API stressed that the choice to locate the Women Business Centre within API had ensured national appropriation of the project, resulting in commitment to maintain the operations of the Women Business Centre beyond the lifespan of the collaboration with UN Women.

Interviewed UN Women personnel nonetheless highlighted how political turnover and changes in personnel working in national institutions pose an important risk to the sustainability of results.¹³¹ Focal points in public entities and structures frequently changed over the project/Strategic Note implementation period, resulting in institutional memory loss and a decrease in available gender capacities.

Political changes in Mali have disrupted donor commitments crucial for UN Women's operations, leading to uncertainty in future funding. This poses challenges for maintaining ongoing projects and stable staffing, impacting the organization's capacity and institutional memory.

In addition to determining the turnover of institutional professionals collaborating with UN Women, political changes have strongly affected donor commitment to funding programmes in Mali. Mali's positioning in the international arena has resulted in severed diplomatic ties with historically important donors, with direct implications for UN Women's budget forecasts: some key donors are currently reviewing their plans for future contributions to the country. It is important to recall that UN Women's funding diversification remains partial, with a substantial portion of its funding (58 per cent) coming from four donors (Denmark, Spotlight, Sweden and the Peacebuilding Fund), and resources from foreign development partners the most frequent funding typology. As a consequence, changes in key bilateral donor strategies are likely to have significant effects on the Country Office's financial structure. While UN Women has successfully mobilized resources from Mali's private sector, these resources only account for a minor portion¹³² of the current Strategic Note implementation budget.

According to the members of Senior Management interviewed, the Country Office will experience a reduction of unearmarked funds used to advance Strategic Note implementation – including financing of stable personnel posts. Changes to funding strategies were reported to have

already had an effect on the 2024 budget, and high uncertainty is foreseen in the coming years. The expected reduction of funds directly conflicts with the Country Office's ambition to stabilize human resources and is likely to expose the Country Office to higher risk of personnel turnover and consequent institutional memory and capacity losses.¹³³

While adaptive measures are expected to be fully articulated in the next Strategic Note, conversations with members of the UNCT suggest that Humanitarian Action will be the main source of funding during the next five years. This provides an opportunity for the Country Office to adapt UN Women's global Humanitarian Strategy to the national context. The Country Office could make the most of the opportunity offered by its recent membership of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to highlight the value of UN Women's coordination mandate in humanitarian response and mobilize the required resources accordingly.

Policy work

The Country Office's support in institutionalizing respect for women's human rights in Mali's legal and policy frameworks is an enduring contribution to sustainable changes towards gender equality and women's empowerment.

Through its contributions to institutionalize gender equality and women empowerment concerns in Mali's legal and policy frameworks, UN Women has achieved results that can be sustained despite challenges related to the political context within which it operates. These results include, among others, the adoption of Mali's gender-responsive constitution, the Gender Sector Strategy for Reconciliation and the Gender Strategy of the General Staff, which aim to promote gender equality and inclusivity in reconciliation efforts and military operations, respectively. Other examples are the country's penal code currently under revision, which introduces forms of gender-based violence such as harassment; the Investigation Strategy, which provides a comprehensive framework for carrying out investigations into cases of violence against women; and the Gender Action Plan of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Committee, which incorporates gender perspectives into reconciliation processes to facilitate women's participation in peacebuilding.¹³⁴

Both members of UN Women personnel and representatives of civil society organizations have characterized UN Women's support to elaborate and adopt the different documents as long-term, sustainable efforts. While additional support may be necessary to ensure the effective translation of normative frameworks into concrete interventions, all consulted stakeholders are optimistic about the importance

¹³¹ Interviews with members of UN Women personnel, online, 06/12/2024

¹³² Mali's private sector contributed 0.2 per cent of the total donor contributions between 2020 and 2024 (see Annex 6 - Budget)

¹³³ Interview with member of UN Women personnel, Bamako, 29/01/2024

¹³⁴ For more details on key policy and normative achievements, see the Effectiveness section of this report.

of having institutionalized gender equality commitments within official documents. In their opinion, this will ensure gender continues to be taken into consideration during national decision-making processes and actions, providing a solid basis for future gender advocacy.

Short-term projects

The limited time frame of interventions and short-term funding are major barriers to sustaining results. Longer-term budgeting would help to achieve meaningful impact.

Multiple stakeholders consulted, from both UN Women and programme partners, noted that the limited time frame of interventions was a significant limitation to the sustainability of results.¹³⁵ Programme partners highlighted that short-term planning prevents them from engaging in more adequate activities which they could otherwise implement to achieve overall impact, but that this requires longer turn-around times to show concrete results. Programme partners also reported being concerned that some of the short-term results achieved within the project lifespan were likely to dissipate in the absence of additional efforts to consolidate them. As an example, representatives of a programme partner involved in implementation of a gender-based violence project highlighted that the length of the activities they implement is insufficient to ensure changes in norms, and that ongoing efforts would be necessary to ensure the full eradication of harmful practices and negative perceptions towards women. While programme partners have highlighted that the involvement of community leaders often serves as a mitigation mechanism for the limited duration of interventions, continued efforts at community level are not automatic and, at times, would benefit from longer-term support. Two implementing organizations reported using a 'breakdown'

approach, dividing interventions into smaller, individual projects for funding and administrative purposes. While this approach enables access to the full range of expected funds, it can lead to fragmentation that negatively impacts implementation. Specifically, the division of interventions into separate projects may cause activity suspensions, which often result in missed opportunities to build on ongoing work. According to these organizations, disruptions cause a loss of momentum and undermine sustainability efforts. Although they employed strategies to mitigate the risks associated with interruptions between project phases, they emphasized the need for longer-term planning to further consolidate the gains achieved.

Absence of sustainability planning and monitoring

The absence of sustainability planning during project/programme elaboration, and the lack of fully-fledged exit strategies towards the final phases of interventions on the ground constitute important obstacles to the sustainability of results.

Poor sustainability planning is a critical issue that jeopardizes the long-term preservation of UN Women's achievements in Mali. While positive factors supporting the durability of results are evident in UN Women's actions, a review of project documents revealed a lack of systematic planning aimed at sustaining changes beyond the intervention period. These documents primarily focus on achieving short-term results without outlining strategies or mechanisms for long-term sustainability, learning or post-project monitoring. The absence of detailed exit strategies during the final phases of implementation creates a significant gap. Limited funding and resources compound the issue, which restricts the Country Office's ability to establish clear sustainability objectives and corresponding indicators and hampers effective analysis of the sustainability of results and undermines the potential for lasting impact.

Human rights and gender equality

Has the portfolio been designed and implemented in accordance with human rights and the principle of "leave no one behind", including consideration of disability?

One of the key assumptions of the Country Office's theory of change is that an enabling environment is created for women of all ages to participate actively and equally in political, economic, social and peace processes and institutions. The evaluation suggests that review of the Country Office's four-year programming through the lens of Mali's complex response to recommendations from human rights bodies, such as the 2019 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women report¹³⁶ and the 2023 Universal Periodic Review¹³⁷ can help to determine whether there is such a conducive environment and identify, with a

forward-looking perspective, strategic limitations or thematic gaps that could be overcome in the next planning cycle,¹³⁸ if properly approached. The most recent Human Rights Council review on the overall human rights situation in Mali is summarized in a letter¹³⁹ addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Mali early this year. The letter presents several recommendations that were either "supported" or "noted" by the Government of Mali. Recommendations that enjoy the support of the state under review are more binding as they are supposed to be implemented before the next review, while there is no time restriction on "noted" recommendations.

¹³⁵ Interviews with UN Women personnel, Bamako, 29/01/2024; interviews with programme partners, Bamako, 26/01/2024.

¹³⁶ "Inquiry concerning Mali under article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women", 24 December 2019 (available on www.OHCHR.org)

¹³⁷ The status of human rights in Mali were the subject of a review as part of the Universal Periodic Review in May 2023. Of the 275 recommendations that Mali received, 218 were "supported" in September 2023.

¹³⁸ In its sixth conclusion, the evaluation of Mali's UNSDCF suggests that for increased prioritization, a stand-alone gender outcome should be added to the next UN development cooperation dedicatives. As the lead on gender coordination, UN Women will have to decide whether the UNSDCF evaluation recommends that a gender outcome be placed in each of the three UNSDCF axes or only one gender outcome would suffice for the entire framework. The three axes of the UN development cooperation framework are aligned to the first and second axis of Mali's CREDD, the third and fourth axis of the CREDD, and the fifth axis of the CREDD respectively.

¹³⁹ Letter from the High Commissioner of OHCHR to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 19 January 2024.

Mali committed to implementing most of the human rights bodies' recommendations issued in 2023. Those related to UN Women's mandate are summarized as follows:

- Ensuring women's full participation in decision-making processes and political activities.
- Taking measures to combat discrimination and violence against vulnerable groups such as women, children and persons with disabilities.
- Adopting legislation to combat trafficking, forced labour and descent-based slavery, and increasing penalties for such offences.
- Eradicating harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and forced marriage, along with combating gender-based violence through legal measures and national programmes.
- Enhancing women's economic empowerment, access to finance and entrepreneurship.

Expanding the rights of women, while preserving traditional and religious practices, has been the subject of debates and tensions in Malian society. This section reviews UN Women Mali's programming through three areas

covered by recommendations from human rights bodies, namely (a) women's political empowerment; (b) women's participation in peace and security; (c) women's freedom from forced marriage and genital mutilation; and (d) disability integration. Although Women's Economic Empowerment is not explicitly addressed in the recent Human Rights Council review,¹⁴⁰ the Government of Mali responded positively to recommendations on "economic growth" and "poverty reduction". The Country Office's efforts in advancing women's economic empowerment align well with these priorities.

Universal Periodic Review recommendations with a "Supported" position from the Government of Mali

The Government of Mali committed without reservations to implement all Universal Periodic Review recommendations that requested more participation of women in governance and political spheres, including conflict prevention and resolution. While UN Women's interventions demonstrate relatively good achievements in these areas,¹⁴¹ they present some challenges that need to be tackled in the next strategic planning cycle.

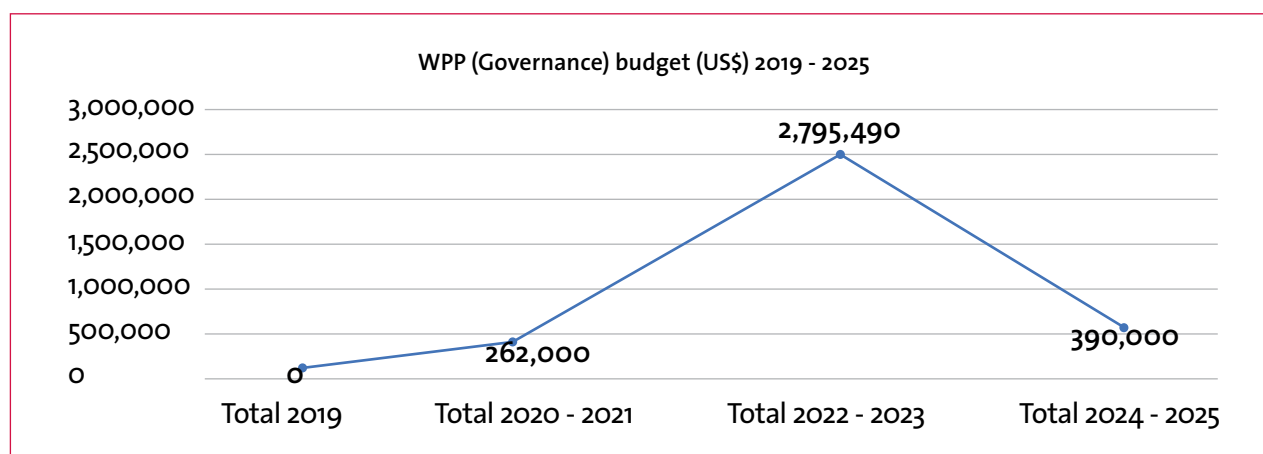
Women's political empowerment

FINDING 12. The funding pattern for women's political empowerment suggests a short-term focus on participation tied to electoral cycles, rather than sustained investment. This approach risks undermining long-term partnerships and impactful initiatives.

The Universal Periodic Review recommendation on women's full participation in decision-making processes and political activities (women's political participation) was marked with a "Supported"¹⁴² position by the Government of Mali. Women's political participation features quite explicitly in key UN Women strategic planning documents,

including at the UN gender coordination level. However, not all outputs were budgeted during the Strategic Note period. As suggested by Figure 2 below, budget allocations for women's political participation seem to be predicated on the imminence of elections.

FIGURE 2. Women's political participation (governance) budget trends 2019–2025 (Source: data from OneApp)



¹⁴⁰ Universal Periodic Review of Mali (4th Cycle - 43rd session): A/HRC/54/8/Add.1 - Para.7

¹⁴¹ Due to limited space, please refer to the Effectiveness Section on achievements in the areas of Women, Peace and Security and Women's Political Participation.

¹⁴² Recommendation 135.168 (from: A/HRC/54/8/Add.1 - Para.7): "Increase women's full and equal participation in all forms of the decision-making process to accomplish the legal provision of a 30 per cent quota of women in public office". This recommendation on women's political participation was unequivocally "supported" by the Government of Mali. Equally uncontroversial are the Universal Periodic Review recommendations on women's political participation.

In 2022, the year of elections, there was a sudden increase in allocations for women's political participation from US\$ 1,213,690 (in 2022) to US\$ 1,581,800 (in 2023). A budget of US\$ 763,690 was dedicated to training and consultancies related to women's political participation in preparation for elections, which unfortunately were cancelled.¹⁴³ This allocation marked a significant departure from the average funds the Country Office allocated to women's political participation activities over the period 2020–2024. The sudden shift extends to broader UN pooled funding mechanisms, notably with UNDP's regular funding opportunities for elections. In 2023, there was less funding under an output on "equitable access

to quality social services"¹⁴⁴ of US\$ 270,000; and in 2024, less funding was allocated to an output related to women's political participation of US\$ 100,000. Often, funds from donors are earmarked for swiftly consumable activities, rather than being strategically invested in cultivating long-term partnerships with diverse government entities and non-state actors. This short-term approach contradicts a key assumption of the Strategic Note's theory of change ("If consistent funding is allocated to the implementation of gender equality commitments, then (...)") and undermines the potential for fostering lasting alliances and forging impactful initiatives.

Women's participation in peace and security

FINDING 13. The progress achieved in terms of women's participation in the Monitoring Committee of the Accords¹⁴⁵ experienced a significant setback following the departure of MINUSMA amid escalating tensions between the Government of Mali and regional as well as international organizations.

A key instrument of conflict resolution in Mali has been the 'Algiers Accords.' The main challenge for women was their meaningful participation in the Monitoring Committee of the Accords (MCA), which is the primary oversight mechanism for implementing the Algiers Accords. UN Women worked to advocate for increased numbers of women in the MCA. The 38 per cent representation of women in the MCA is credited to the collaboration between UN Women and MINUSMA Gender and Mediation Units.¹⁴⁶ Evidently, this achievement would not be possible without the commitment of the government through its Ministry of Reconciliation, Peace and National Cohesion and the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children and Families. In September 2022, 15 women were added to the list of MCA members.

Mali's administration has been in transition from elected executive power since September 2020. Following the National Reformation Conference (ANR) held in December 2021 by the Transitional Administration, a road map (2024–2026) was adopted in August 2023 after six months of nation-wide inclusive consultations to address sustainable governance reforms in the context of peace and reconciliation. As suggested by its title, the three-year road map was explicitly gender focused: "The Roadmap for the effective integration of the gender dimension into the electoral process and political and administrative reforms in Mali". The process was owned by the Minister of Territorial Administration and Decentralization, in coordination with the Minister for the Promotion of Women, Children and Families and was jointly supported by

MINUSMA's Mediation and Gender Units and UN Women, with funds from Sweden.

Both the road map and women's representation in the MCA were indicative of the goodwill and commitment from the government to implement the agreement. Despite the cabinet reshuffle and the withdrawal of MINUSMA, the road map project was fully appropriated by the state. The new Minister of Territorial Administration endorsed the road map and even contacted the Resident Coordinator for the launch event¹⁴⁷ in February 2024.

Unfortunately, the momentum gathered for gender mainstreaming in peace stabilization and national reconstruction was derailed by the international sanctions against the new Transitional Authorities. The US\$ 15 million requirement for implementation of the road map could not be achieved as hostilities from armed group resumed in the north of the country following the withdrawal of MINUSMA, and the new government of Mali decided to terminate the Algiers Accord in January 2024, thus increasing tensions between donors and the government. As a result, the Ministry of Territorial Administration decided not to use the funding¹⁴⁸ allocated for support to women's participation in the MCA.

¹⁴³ Mali's government recently announced the cancellation of elections scheduled for February 2024, citing security challenges and ongoing conflicts with insurgent groups. The decision raised the Economic Community of West African States' concern about political stability and the democratic process in a country already grappling with a history of military coups.

¹⁴⁴ From the wording of its activity, its relation to women's political participation becomes clear. It is a capacity strengthening activity targeting religious and traditional leaders on the importance of women in politics.

¹⁴⁵ Mali's Algiers Accords, signed in 2015, are a peace agreement aimed at resolving the conflict in northern Mali. The accords seek to address the political, security and economic grievances of Tuareg separatist groups and promote decentralization, governance and development in the affected regions. The accords emphasize dialogue, disarmament and the reintegration of former combatants to restore stability and foster national reconciliation.

¹⁴⁶ This was said during a focused group discussion with UN staff, including ex-MINUSMA personnel.

¹⁴⁷ Launch of the road map for the effective integration of the gender dimension into the electoral process and political and administrative reforms in Mali

¹⁴⁸ As part of Phase-2 of a UN Women project implemented by foundation "Folke Bernardotte Academy". Source: interview with a UN staff member.

The “noted” position of the Government of Mali in response to the Universal Periodic Review recommendations

FINDING 14. UN Women has been conservative in clearly programming its work against traditional practices that violate the rights of women. This posture was observed in a politically polarized context where efforts towards the adoption of legal reforms encountered strong pushbacks from religious pressure groups.

The UN Women personnel consulted lacked awareness of the purpose and scope of the Human Rights Council’s reviews. It is unclear whether UN Women, as the Entity overseeing gender coordination, considered past human rights review cycles when crafting its four-year strategy. As a result, critical themes such as the enactment of legislation to combat female genital mutilation, child marriage, trafficking of women, descent-based slavery¹⁴⁹ and forced labour are not explicitly addressed¹⁵⁰ either as planned outputs or activities in UN Women’s strategy documents nor as themes in the UN Gender Strategy or the UNSDCF result framework.¹⁵¹ In contrast, in its most recent strategic plan,¹⁵² the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children and Families clearly dedicates outputs and activities to most of these practices. This is certainly consistent with several Universal Periodic Review recommendations addressed to the Government of Mali.

However, not all Universal Periodic Review recommendations were accepted by the Government of Mali. Those with a “noted” mark suggested raising awareness among men and boys on changing social norms related to female genital mutilation.¹⁵³ They also included recommendations to promptly adopt overdue legislation that legally bans female genital mutilation and penalizes sexual and gender-based violence. Equally “noted” by Mali were recommendations to take effective measures to end child marriage,¹⁵⁴ including raising the minimum marriage age for girls to 18. Lastly, Mali issued a “noted” position on the suggestion to legislate against polygamy. It would be

unproductive and unrealistic to attempt any advocacy for legislation against polygamy, which is an already established social cultural practice that enjoys the support of the authorities and the majority of the population.¹⁵⁵

While the Mali delegation accepted the recommendation to raise awareness of the harmful effects of female genital mutilation, it stated it was “not in the best position to criminalize female genital mutilation at the moment”.¹⁵⁶ The absence of a clear-cut commitment on this topic is another example of the socio-cultural complexities that the UN must navigate in Mali and elsewhere in the Sahel region. In such a context, legal reforms appear lengthy, unproductive and sometimes polarizing. Both UNFPA and UN Women therefore chose to conduct advocacy work through traditional chiefs who are often the custodians of traditions and decentralized leaders.

On paper, UN Women is expected to support to civil society organizations in following up recommendations arising from the Universal Periodic Review. Since the Malian government came to power in 2021, it has emphasized several times its commitment to respecting human rights in accordance with international and national law. However, interviewed UN personnel believe it may not be advisable for the UN to be perceived as extending support to human rights activists during the current complex political context.¹⁵⁷ One must take into account public resistance against reform attempts initiated by the Government of Mali. For instance, the government’s recent

¹⁴⁹ To quote an interview respondent: “the ‘traditional lineage slavery’ really exists (in Kayes, Kita, Nara, etc.), although the issue is never considered. This is also true for what could be called “modern slavery”, such as in gold mining areas where women earn much less than men, as well as for child labour in mines and domestic work.”

¹⁵⁰ In its contextual section, the Strategic Note acknowledges “Awareness-raising campaigns on national television, community radio and through activists have not had a tangible effect on female genital mutilation practices, which have even increased in recent years.” However, further in the document, there is no programmatic reference to female genital mutilation, let alone any suggestion of alternative approaches.

¹⁵¹ In a conclusion, the UNSDCF evaluation suggests that the next UNSDCF should further prioritize gender by dedicating a specific Outcome to it. However, it acknowledges that violence against women is addressed under Outcome 3.1 of the UNSDCF, including genital mutilation, and early and forced marriages. The evaluation did not identify any mention of these harmful practices in the UNSDCF planned activities and results. In practice, however, the EU-funded Spotlight Initiative (a Joint Programme on Ending Violence Against Women) dedicates a number of activities to “reducing cases of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Child Marriages (CM) in the programme’s intervention areas”.

¹⁵² In line with ODD 5.3 (“Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child marriage, early or forced marriage, and female genital mutilation.”), Mali’s Strategic Plan (SP) on Gender 2016-2018 dedicates a number of activities to this topic. Excerpts from the SP result framework at p. 13 of the “Plan Stratégique” : 1.4.1. Increase efforts to eradicate and penalize female genital mutilation.1.4.2. Enact legislative measures to penalize acts of domestic and familial violence, as well as harassment in the workplace and school environment. (...) 5.2. Raise awareness and educate the population (women-men, girls-boys) for a change in mentality and behaviour to eliminate practices harmful to the health and physical and psychological integrity of women, notably combating female genital mutilation, (...)

¹⁵³ In June 2020, a report by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women denounced [Mali’s failure Mali: Failure to criminalise FGM a violation of women’s fundamental rights](#)

¹⁵⁴ Of note is the reported “ongoing implementation” of the recommendation to intensify awareness raising campaigns against child marriage. Mali presented this status of “under implementation” during the third Universal Periodic Review Cycle.

¹⁵⁵ From interviews conducted in Bamako, the prevailing opinion among respondents is that polygamy is not an inherently harmful practice. Future spouses are offered by law the choice between monogamy and polygamy. Given the existing legal framework and the socio-cultural and religious context, banning the practice is not currently feasible.

¹⁵⁶ Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Fifty-fourth session 11 September–6 October 2023, p.8

¹⁵⁷ In February 2023, the Head of MINUSMA’s Human Rights Section was asked to leave Mali after he was accused of ignoring national authorities and institutions and having bias towards civil society from which he selectively identified representatives.

withdrawal of a dedicated gender-based violence law, under pressure from religious groups, highlights the significant obstacles these groups pose to gender activists. Malian society's reaction to campaigns for legal reforms has compelled national decision makers to reconsider their plans. As a result, the government has responded to feminist activists by either paying lip service to normative change, while maintaining traditional practices, or selectively implementing global commitments while openly rejecting others.

A dominant reason for rejecting the human rights and gender equality agenda is the suspicion that proposed legal and policy changes could westernize Mali's culture and norms. For instance, the evaluation team was frequently advised that using the term "gender equity" rather than "gender equality" is more prudent, as the equalitarian discourse is perceived as foreign to Mali's cultural context.

The weight of gender norms against reform proposals is a crucial factor that needs to be considered in strategic planning for each of UN Women's impact areas. An interviewee involved in supporting the MCA mentioned that the presence of women at peace negotiations was seen by "high authorities" as a concession after repeated requests from international partners. Traditionally, it is not part of Malian cultural practices for women to formally discuss matters of peace between states with men. Another area of norm disagreement is the practice of female genital mutilation which, while harmful and causes lifelong

consequences, is grounded in centuries-old traditions that shame those who have not undergone the procedure.

Challenging long-established unequal power structures comes with risks, making support from the UN and the donor community vital. Non-governmental organization participants shared their appreciation of the role played by MINUSMA, UN Women and key Malian officials in supporting gender norm change. Mali is home to a vibrant women's movement, active since the 1990s and 2000s, advocating for legal reforms in family relations and electoral processes. While international review mechanisms can be suspected of serving a supposedly hegemonic Western agenda, cultural norms are fluid and can evolve locally or through the influence of individuals moving between cultural settings. Local gender activists play a crucial interface role between non-Malian and indigenous norms, driven by aspirations for non-violent and equitable gender relations.

It is important to recognize that global norms are received differently by different women. The women's movement in Mali has been led predominantly by elite, middle-class, French-speaking women in urban areas, while most rural women may not be aware of the intended changes. Additionally, intersectional factors such as age and ethnicity mean that young gender activists and older women may share similar ambitions but differ in their approaches to cultural norm change. Women from ethnic minorities will also have unique perspectives and approaches.

Disability integration and applying the leave no one behind principle

FINDING 15. The Country Office's commitment to leaving no one behind is limited both conceptually and in programme implementation.

The evaluation was not able to grasp how those left behind were targeted by UN Women programmes in Mali. It is not clear from the Strategic Note how the Country Office planned to apply the leave no one behind principle and reach those who are furthest behind. This applies to the category of persons living with disability and women subjected to forced labour.

The Government of Mali responded with a "Supported" position to all disability-related recommendations¹⁵⁸ of the recent Universal Periodic Review. This provides UN Women with an institutional opportunity to advocate for disability mainstreaming in development programmes. However, it also implies that the Country Office's own Strategic Note should explicitly target disabled persons in its Development Result Framework.

Disability does not figure in the Country Office's key strategic planning documents. Interviewed participants, including those active in human rights work, were not aware of UN Women raising any issues about disability. The following extract is a quote from a focused group session during field visits to

illustrate several accounts on the absence of disability programming:

"The disabled were not deliberately considered in the projects. There is no disability component in UN Women programmes. It is not really mentioned. However, UN Women could have used our experience in this matter. We have ongoing programmes with other funding partners where disabled people are targeted. We attended UN Women's Strategic Note development sessions, there was no discussion on this category of vulnerable people."

The Government of Mali responded with a "Supported" position to all recommendations on decent work¹⁵⁹ from the recent Universal Periodic Review. This provides UN Women with an institutional opportunity to advocate for the criminalization of descent-based slavery and people trafficking. This could be achieved through joint initiatives with the International Labour Organization and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

¹⁵⁸ Recommendations 135.265; 135.266; 135.267; 135.268; 135.269.

¹⁵⁹ Universal Periodic Review recommendations 135.114-126.



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SECTION 6. LESSONS LEARNED

This section presents key lessons drawn from the evaluation of UN Women Mali's interventions, reflecting on both challenges and opportunities. The lessons learned underscore the critical need for systematic monitoring and evidence-based decision-making to better assess programme impacts and successes. They also highlight the

importance of addressing cultural barriers and resource constraints in advancing gender equality through sustained advocacy and capacity-building. Finally, fostering interaction and cohesion between women and men is identified as a pivotal factor in promoting peace, security and human rights in Mali.

Lesson 1: Challenges stemming from entrenched gender norms, resource constraints and institutional barriers underscore the need for ongoing advocacy, capacity-building and collaboration to effectively advance gender equality.

UN Women Mali's capacity to bring diverse actors together has not been fully leveraged to engage various stakeholders in the follow-up of human rights bodies' recommendations related to the human rights of women. This limited engagement on human rights appears to be in contrast with the Entity's work at corporate level and particularly its increased visibility in the plenary sessions of human rights bodies. A possible explanation for the Country Office's cautious approach lies in part in the backlash against feminist-inspired equalitarian reforms as highlighted during the controversy surrounding the proposed gender-responsive reforms to laws and policies within the context of Mali's prevailing instability. The Universal Periodic Review-based analysis of UN Women's contribution to implementing promised governmental changes can be tempered in light of the political and cultural context. The postponement of elections scheduled for February 2024; the ensuing tensions with key African and Western multilateral organizations and diplomatic representations; Mali's decision to withdraw from the Economic Community of West African States; and the government's denunciation of the Algiers Declaration on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali are key contextual factors in the complex task of advocating for human rights in Mali.

Lesson 2: When the Country Office has established systematic data collection, validation and follow-up of results across all interventions, its ability to assess the true impact of its programmes and make informed strategic decisions will significantly increase.

For instance, direct engagement with women leaders involved in the National Transition Council would have provided deeper insights into their contributions and the challenges they faced. Similarly, targeted efforts to measure the outcomes of training activities aimed at enhancing electoral mediation capacities would allow for the substantiation of reported successes.

In regions such as Ségou and Bla, tracking and verifying the results of facilitated communication between women and local authorities would help determine whether these exchanges led to meaningful changes. Additionally, monitoring local-level interventions to prevent harmful practices, such as child marriage, through standardized frameworks would clarify the scale and sustainability of these efforts.

By embedding robust and consistent monitoring frameworks, the Country Office can transform anecdotal evidence into validated data, enabling stronger evidence-based programming and more effective learning for future initiatives.

Lesson 3: Despite the initial scepticism from male counterparts, women's participation in peace processes can strengthen mechanisms to foster a peaceful environment that respects human rights and cultural traditions.

UN Women Mali and MINUSMA successfully advocated for women's representation in peace mechanisms, such as the Monitoring Committee of the Algiers Agreements, where women's participation grew from 0 to 38 per cent. Women's roles also expanded in community-level conflict resolution, particularly in regions such as Mopti and Gao. As men and women engaged in capacity-building workshops, mutual understanding grew, breaking down barriers and fostering collaboration. Women's involvement not only enhanced the effectiveness of peace mechanisms but also enriched discussions, particularly on issues such as education, health and security.



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SECTION 7. CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation findings across various areas of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and human rights highlight the Country Office's ongoing commitment to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment, particularly in a complex socio-political and security environment. The Country Office's portfolio is aligned with national and international frameworks, particularly in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. The Country Office has effectively adapted its strategies to navigate Mali's complex political and security landscape, demonstrating its capacity to maintain its relevance even in challenging contexts. Across its interventions, progress is evident in areas such as women's political participation, prevention of gender-based violence and gender mainstreaming within national policy frameworks. UN Women has also shown a commitment to strengthening internal and external coherence, working closely with partners to reduce duplication and enhance collaboration.

While successes are notable, there are areas for enhancement, such as the need for more robust long-term planning to ensure the sustainability of outcomes and greater attention to economic empowerment initiatives, particularly in terms of digital access and entrepreneurship. While resource management and operational processes have improved, further efforts are needed to address lingering challenges related to procurement and recruitment efficiency. Throughout the portfolio, there are opportunities to deepen impact by addressing marginalized groups more inclusively and expanding efforts to combat harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and early marriage. Looking ahead, UN Women's continued commitment to strategic partnerships, participatory approaches and sustainability planning will be essential to maintain momentum and ensure long-lasting, transformative change for women and girls in Mali.

Conclusion 1: (Linked to Finding 1, Finding 13, Finding 15): UN Women Mali's strategic alignment with national and international frameworks demonstrates its relevance, with opportunities for deeper integration of human rights recommendations.

The Country Office's Strategic Note is aligned with key national policies, such as the CREDD, and international frameworks, including the UNSDCF. This alignment reflects a strong commitment to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. However, there are further opportunities to expand UN Women's impact by addressing specific human rights recommendations. Enhanced efforts to combat practices such as female genital mutilation and early marriage would strengthen UN Women's role in supporting Mali's national commitments to human rights.¹⁶⁰ By deepening its work

in these areas, the Country Office can solidify its position as a key actor in driving transformative change for women and girls in Mali.

Conclusion 2: (Linked to Finding 2, Finding 3, Finding 8): UN Women Mali has demonstrated resilience and adaptability in a complex political and security environment, ensuring its ongoing relevance.

Despite Mali's volatile political and security landscape, the Country Office has successfully adjusted its strategies to remain effective and relevant. This adaptability is evident in the support to women's political participation, addressing gender-based violence and advocating for a gender-responsive constitution. The ability to pivot in response to political changes has preserved the Country Office's role as a key player in advancing gender equality in the country. As the political environment continues to evolve, refining long-term strategies will be crucial to ensure the sustainability of results, particularly in the areas of women's economic empowerment and participation in peace and security processes.

Conclusion 3: (Linked to Finding 4): Coherence was enhanced through reduced duplications and strategic coordination, with room for further strengthening of gender coordination mechanisms.

UN Women Mali has made significant progress in fostering internal coherence by reducing duplications across its programmes and promoting synergies. This has resulted in more streamlined gender equality efforts within the UN system, particularly revitalization of the Gender Theme Group. UN Women's active role in UN coordination mechanisms, such as joint programming, has contributed to this improvement. Nonetheless, there are still opportunities to further strengthen gender coordination by addressing the issues identified in the UNCT Gender Scorecard which could improve efforts across UN agencies to provide support to Mali's work for gender equality guided by an updated National Gender Policy.

Conclusion 4: (linked to Finding 5, Finding 6, Finding 7): Significant advances in women's political participation and violence prevention highlight effectiveness, with opportunities to further enhance economic empowerment initiatives.

UN Women Mali has made considerable strides in promoting women's political participation and preventing gender-based violence. The Country Office's support for women candidates and its push for legislative changes have contributed to key successes in these areas. However, there are opportunities for greater impact in the realm of economic empowerment, particularly in the digital economy and entrepreneurship. By expanding efforts in these sectors, the Country Office can build on its

¹⁶⁰ UN Women Mali's limited engagement on human rights appears to be in contrast with the Entity's work at corporate level and particularly its increased visibility in the plenary sessions of human rights bodies. According to a review of the 55th session of the Human Rights Council, UN Women delivered a relatively high number of statements during the session (15 statements including 3 jointly prepared with UNFPA, UNICEF and/or UNDP). Source: UN Women – Geneva, Human Rights and Development, Internal Report, April 2024.

achievements and further enhance the overall effectiveness of its portfolio in advancing gender equality.

Conclusion 5: (Finding 9, Finding 10, Finding 11): Operational improvements have enhanced efficiency, but ongoing challenges in procurement, recruitment and M&E need to be addressed to improve resource utilization and effectiveness. The absence of outcome-level data across all programme areas hindered the evaluation's ability to assess effectiveness.

UN Women Mali has taken meaningful steps to improve resource management, particularly through targeted recruitment and programme management support. These efforts have contributed to enhanced efficiency; however, challenges in procurement and recruitment persist, affecting timely implementation. The evaluation also highlighted gaps in M&E, including the lack of systematic data updates and standardized monitoring frameworks. This hinders the ability to validate achievements and impacts, such as the effectiveness of interventions in empowering women and preventing harmful practices. Strengthening M&E systems and addressing operational challenges are crucial for improving resource use and informing future programmes with robust evidence.

Conclusion 6: (linked to Finding 12, Finding 5): Commitment to sustainability is evident through strong community engagement and partnerships, but reinforcement of long-term planning is needed to safeguard results.

The Country Office has demonstrated a strong commitment to sustainability, as seen through its participatory approach that engages local communities and partners. This approach has contributed to durable changes, particularly through capacity-building and strong partnerships with institutional actors. However, reinforcement of long-term planning, including integrating exit strategies earlier in the project cycle, is essential to safeguard the sustainability of results. These efforts are necessary to ensure that gains in gender equality are preserved, even in the face of political instability and short-term funding cycles.

Conclusion 7: (Finding 15, Finding 16, Finding 6): Human rights and inclusion efforts show potential, with opportunities to expand focus on marginalized groups and engage men and boys in gender equality.

UN Women Mali's portfolio has strong potential to address key gender and human rights issues. However, there is room to expand the focus on marginalized groups, such as those affected by disability, to ensure that interventions reach the most vulnerable. Additionally, the Country Office has the opportunity to enhance its impact by engaging men and boys in gender equality efforts.¹⁶¹ This could involve leveraging gender-equitable interpretations of

religious texts to challenge harmful practices, such as early marriage and female genital mutilation, which would contribute to a more inclusive and transformative approach to gender equality. A more proactive stance on these issues would enhance the inclusivity and overall impact of the portfolio.

¹⁶¹ The MenEngage Alliance (<https://menengage.org>) provides useful tips.



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SECTION 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations presented below are the result of a comprehensive consultative process aimed at addressing existing gaps and capitalizing on emerging opportunities. This process began during the data collection phase, where preliminary findings were discussed with key stakeholders. A presentation on these findings was held with the Evaluation Reference Group in January 2024, and their insights helped shape the final recommendations. The recommendations were also drafted in consultation with Country Office management and personnel, further refining the direction outlined here. These recommendations were reviewed by both the Evaluation Management and Reference Groups, and subsequent revisions were incorporated as appropriate.

Ultimately, these recommendations are to be implemented by the Country Office, in collaboration with and through consultation with relevant national stakeholders in Mali, ensuring that the actions taken are aligned with local priorities and contexts.

Recommendation 1 is based on Conclusion 1 and Conclusion 3

UN Women should support the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children and Families to update the National Gender Policy and align it with the new Strategic Note while focusing on strengthening existing structures for greater ownership and sustainability.

Priority: High

Difficulty: Medium

Time frame: Q4 2025

To be led by: Management and Programme personnel

Suggested actions

- Assist in the revision and update of the National Gender Policy to reflect current challenges and opportunities.
- Develop partnerships with national and international actors, avoiding the creation of new structures where existing structures can be strengthened.
- Intensify efforts to combat harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and early marriage by embedding human rights commitments within national frameworks.
- Ensure alignment with both national priorities and international gender equality standards.

What would follow if the recommendation were implemented (or not)

If implemented: The National Gender Policy will reflect recent developments in Mali and reaffirm the country's commitment to gender equality, providing a relevant framework for all stakeholders.

If not implemented: The outdated policy will continue to hinder progress, leaving gender activists, non-governmental organizations and the UN without a common reference point for promoting gender equality, leading to fragmented efforts in promoting gender equality as existing structures may weaken.

Recommendation 2 is based on Conclusion 3

UN Women should strengthen its coordination role to advocate for legal reforms on women's rights, building strategic alliances with civil society and religious leaders to challenge harmful practices.

Priority: Medium

Difficulty: Medium

Time frame: Q1 2025

To be led by: Management and Programme personnel

Suggested actions

- Leverage UN Women's mandate to drive advocacy for legal reforms in collaboration with governmental and non-governmental actors.
- Form alliances with grassroots movements, religious leaders and civil society organizations to promote gender-sensitive reforms.
- Implement culturally adaptive advocacy strategies that respect local norms while pushing for progressive gender equality standards.
- Empower local champions and use religious narratives that support women's rights to counter resistance from conservative political parties, groups or influencers.
- To correct the underfunding of women's leadership programmes, consider developing a strategy for sustained investment beyond election periods.

What would follow if the recommendation were implemented (or not)

If implemented: Strategic alliances with civil society and religious leaders will drive forward critical legal reforms, reducing harmful practices and enhancing women's rights in the country.

If not implemented: Harmful practices will persist, and opportunities to reform discriminatory laws will be missed, further entrenching gender inequalities.

Recommendation 3 is based on Conclusion 1 and Conclusion 7

UN Women should foster normative change by deepening its understanding of local cultural contexts and building alliances with gender activists, religious leaders and civil society to drive transformative gender equality initiatives.

Priority: High

Difficulty: High

Time frame: Q4 2025

To be led by: Management and Programme personnel

Suggested actions

- Dedicate resources to studying and mapping cultural interactions between global norms and local practices.
- Collaborate with local gender activists and religious leaders to localize global gender norms into practices that resonate with the Malian context.
- Strengthen alliances with religious actors in favour of gender equality agendas to provide a strong counternarrative to harmful traditional practices.
- Engage regularly with civil society to ensure that gender equality initiatives are inclusive and contextually relevant.
- Target marginalized groups and reflect disability in strategic documents with adequate funding.
- Create accountability structures for integration of the leave no one behind principle within the Country Office and inter-agency programming across the country.

What would follow if the recommendation were implemented (or not)

If implemented: Deeper engagement with cultural contexts and local alliances will foster transformative gender equality initiatives that resonate with local practices and sustain long-term change.

If not implemented: Gender equality initiatives will struggle to gain traction at the local level, and global norms may fail to translate into meaningful, context-specific change.

Recommendation 4 is based on Conclusion 3

UN Women should enhance gender coordination mechanisms by addressing gaps in the UNCT Gender Score Card and strengthening evaluation oversight across its portfolio.

Priority: Medium

Difficulty: Low

Time frame: Q3 2025

To be led by: Management and Programme personnel

Suggested actions

- Regularly reassess UNCT-SWAP Gender Scorecard indicators to ensure consistent performance improvements.
- Collaborate with the Resident Coordinator's Office and the Gender Theme Group to ensure utilization of evaluations and the Gender Scorecard.
- Improve internal coordination across UN agencies to streamline gender efforts and reduce duplication.
- Establish clearer accountability for gender outcomes within the Country Office and across inter-agency programming.

What would follow if the recommendation were implemented (or not)

If implemented: Enhanced gender coordination mechanisms and stronger evaluation oversight will ensure consistent improvements in gender outcomes across the UN system in Mali.

If not implemented: Gaps in coordination and oversight will persist, leading to inefficiencies, duplication of efforts and missed opportunities for improving gender equality outcomes.

Recommendation 5 is based on Conclusion 5

UN Women should resolve operational challenges and strengthen its monitoring and evaluation function to enhance programmatic effectiveness and ensure evidence-based decision-making and strategic use of resources.

Priority: High

Difficulty: High

Time frame: Q2 2025

To be led by: Operations, Programme and M&E personnel

Suggested actions

- Strengthen the one-person PMSU by redeploying or reassigning Operations personnel to address the persistent issue of outstanding partner advances.
- Address operational challenges in procurement and recruitment by streamlining processes and enhancing accountability.
- Implement a robust M&E framework that systematically tracks and documents programmatic results across all sectors.
- Ensure that monitoring data is regularly updated and used to substantiate the successes and impact of interventions.
- Clarify the division of labour between the M&E Unit and programme managers for reporting by identifying ambiguities and overlaps in roles and responsibilities.

What would follow if the recommendation were implemented (or not)

If implemented: Strengthened M&E and resource management systems will lead to more effective programming, data-driven decision-making and better use of resources.

If not implemented: Programmatic effectiveness will remain compromised, with weak monitoring leading to missed opportunities for learning and adapting interventions.

Recommendation 6 is based on Conclusion 6

UN Women should reinforce long-term planning and integrate exit strategies from the outset to ensure sustainability and resilience in the face of political and funding fluctuations.

Priority: Medium

Difficulty: Low

Time frame: Q3 2025

To be led by: Management, Programme and M&E personnel

Suggested actions

- Develop comprehensive long-term strategies that include sustainability plans and exit strategies for all major projects.
- Engage with national stakeholders and communities to build local capacity, ensuring continued gender equality progress even after project closure.
- Ensure that sustainability plans account for political instability and short-term funding cycles, protecting gender equality gains.
- Integrate sustainability as a key element in project planning, ensuring that results endure beyond the immediate intervention period.

What would follow if the recommendation were implemented (or not)

If implemented: Long-term planning and exit strategies will ensure that gender equality gains are sustained even in the face of political and funding uncertainties.

If not implemented: Impact of short-term projects will be vulnerable to political shifts and funding cuts, risking the loss of progress made in gender equality efforts.

Recommendation 7 is based on Conclusion 7

UN Women should proactively engage men and boys in gender equality efforts, leveraging gender-equitable interpretations of religious texts to challenge harmful practices and promote inclusive norms.

Priority: Medium

Difficulty: High

Time frame: Q3 2025

To be led by: Management and Programme personnel

Suggested actions

- Develop initiatives that specifically target men and boys to shift harmful gender norms and engage them as allies in gender equality efforts.
- Leverage gender-equitable interpretations of religious texts to counter practices such as early marriage and female genital mutilation.
- Create programmes that encourage male participation in preventing gender-based violence and promoting women's economic and political participation.
- Foster partnerships with community and religious leaders to deliver messages that promote gender-inclusive norms across Mali.

What would follow if the recommendation were implemented (or not)

If implemented: Proactive engagement of men and boys will help shift harmful gender norms and foster inclusive communities where gender equality is more broadly accepted.

If not implemented: Harmful practices will continue to be perpetuated, with men and boys remaining disengaged from efforts to promote gender equality.