

A photograph of an elderly woman with dark hair, wearing a red and green patterned shirt, carrying a large, cylindrical yellow object on her head. The background shows a blurred outdoor setting with trees and a building.

IN BRIEF

UN WOMEN COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION TIMOR-LESTE

Photo: ©UN Women/Guilherme Valle

This report presents the main evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Country Portfolio Evaluation (CPE) of the UN Women Timor-Leste Country Office conducted between January and September 2024. A CPE is a systematic assessment of the normative, coordination and operational aspects of UN Women's contribution to development results relating to gender equality and the empowerment of women at the country level.

PURPOSE

As a high-level strategic evaluation, the CPE is primarily intended to be a formative (forward-looking) evaluation to support the Country Office and national stakeholders' strategic learning and decision-making when developing a new Strategic Note. The evaluation is expected to have a secondary summative (retrospective) perspective, to support enhanced accountability for development effectiveness and learning from experience. The CPE provides an independent and systematic assessment of UN Women's contributions to development results with respect to gender equality at the country level, as well as an assessment of organizational efficiency, to feed into learning on what strategies work well and what needs strengthening. This evaluation focused on the current Strategic Note cycle (2021–2025) and will be used to design the new Strategic Note (2026–2030). The CPE was conducted in coordination with other UN agencies which are conducting country programme evaluations in 2024, including UNICEF, UNFPA and the Resident Coordinator's Office-led evaluation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF).

OBJECTIVES AND INTENDED AUDIENCE

The evaluation applied the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development/Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) evaluation criteria (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability) and also included a human rights and gender equality criterion. The evaluation had the following objectives:

1. Assess effectiveness and organizational efficiency in progressing towards the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women results in the country.
2. Assess the relevance and coherence of UN Women programmes, vis-a-vis the UN system; the added value of UN Women; and identify contributions to the Timor-Leste UNSDCF 2021–2025 outcomes.
3. Analyse how a human rights approach and gender equality principles are integrated in the design and implementation of UN Women's work in Timor-Leste and how they contribute to transformative change and the sustainability of efforts.
4. Provide lessons learned and actionable recommendations to support UN Women's strategic positioning.

INTENDED USERS

The primary intended users of this evaluation are the UN Women Timor-Leste Country Office and its key stakeholders, including the government, civil society organizations, development partners and other UN agencies, as well as the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, UN Women headquarters (including the Senior Management Team) and IES. The UN Country Team in Timor-Leste may also use the findings of this evaluation as key inputs to the new UNSDCF. The primary intended uses of this evaluation are to:

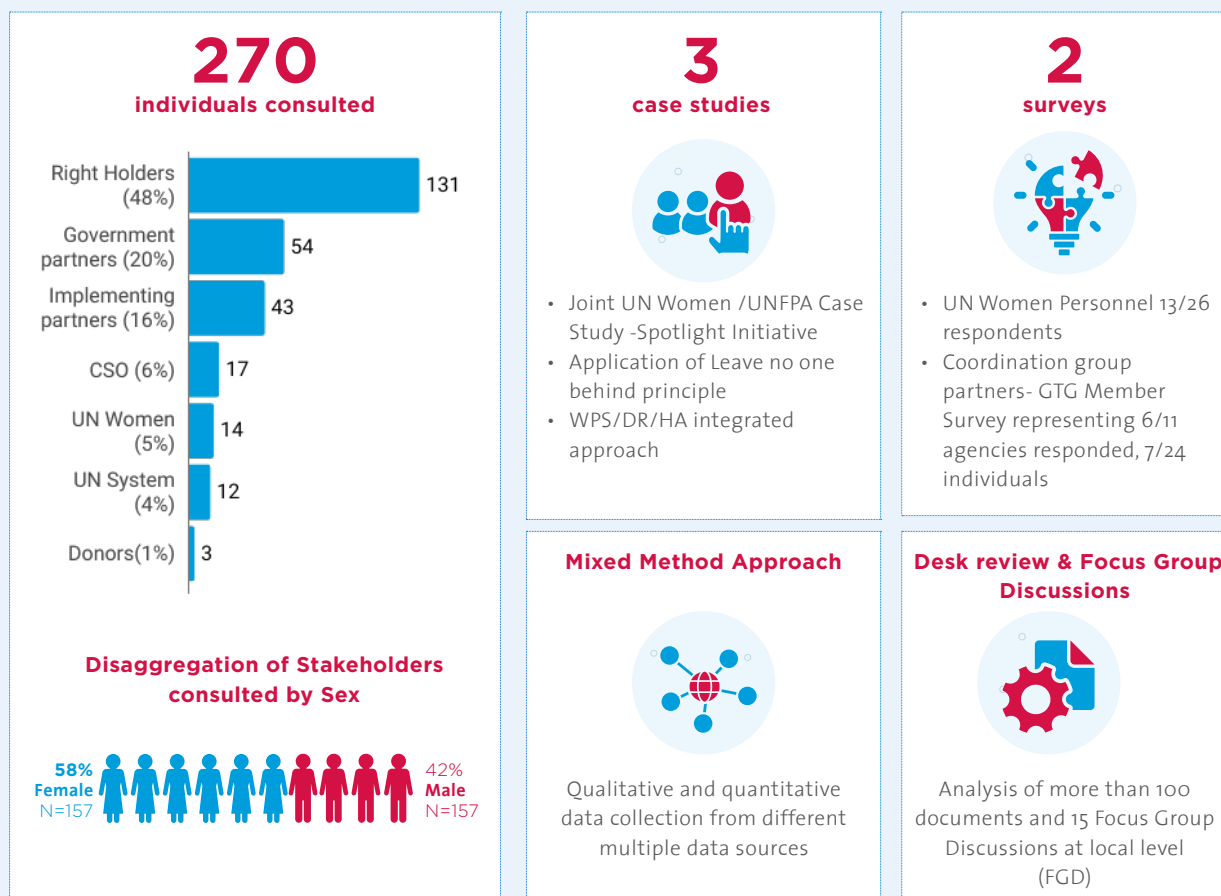
- Support decision-making regarding development of the next Country Office Strategic Note.
- Ensure accountability for the development effectiveness of the existing Strategic Note.
- Inform learning from effective, promising and innovative strategies and practices.
- Support capacity development and mobilization of national stakeholders to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women in the country.

METHODOLOGY

This CPE employed a non-experimental, theory-based, gender-responsive approach. In consultation with the Country Office, a reconstructed theory of change was developed and used as the basis for contribution analysis. Evaluation questions were developed using the theory of change and assessed against the OECD/DAC criteria, comprising relevance, coherence, effectiveness, sustainability, gender equality and human rights, and organizational efficiency. UN Women evaluations are gender-responsive and apply key principles of a human rights-based approach: they are inclusive, participatory and transparent; ensure fair power relations; and analyse the underlying structural barriers and social norms that impede the realization of women's rights. Multiple sources of data were obtained, and 270 stakeholders from across stakeholder groups were consulted (157 women and 113 men).

The CPE followed UN Women's procedures to ensure high-quality evaluation processes and products and ethical conduct as outlined in the UN Women Evaluation Policy and Evaluation Handbook. All evaluation products were subject to quality review by IES management, a peer reviewer, the Evaluation Reference Group and the Evaluation Management Group.

DATA COLLECTED FOR THE EVALUATION



BACKGROUND: UN WOMEN IN TIMOR-LESTE

Timor-Leste, Asia's youngest democracy, gained independence in 2002 and has made significant progress in advancing gender equality. However, despite these advancements, challenges persist. Violence against women and girls remains a critical issue with gaps in prevention and response services. Economic inequalities are significant, with women experiencing low labour force participation, limited access to decent employment and a pronounced gender pay gap. Women's underrepresentation in leadership and decision-making roles further emphasizes the need for more effective measures to address these ongoing issues. Timor-Leste is also highly vulnerable to natural disasters and climate change, which disproportionately impact women, further complicating the nation's post-conflict recovery and development efforts.

The predecessor organization to UN Women, UNIFEM, had been present in Timor-Leste since 2001. At the country level, the Strategic Note is the main planning tool for UN Women's support to normative, coordination and operational work in Timor-Leste. The Strategic Note aims to ensure that women and girls in Timor-Leste, including the most marginalized, fully enjoy their rights and realize their potential in a fair, prosperous and gender equal society. The Strategic Note also aims to contribute to accelerating implementation of key normative frameworks, including the Beijing Platform for Action, and is aligned with the UNSDCF 2021–2025. UN Women's work in Timor-Leste during the current Strategic Note (2021–2025) focuses on the following areas: Global Norms and Standards, Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG), Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE). Leveraging its coordination and normative mandate, the Country Office sought to support gender mainstreaming across all six UNSDCF outcome areas, and UNSDCF efforts to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with particular emphasis on SDGs 1, 4, 5, 8 and 16. The Country Office engaged in co-chairing key coordination mechanisms to advance gender equality and women's empowerment within the UN system.

UN Women's work in Timor-Leste is focused on responding to the Entity's three core mandates:

1. **Normative work:** to support the formulation of policies, global standards and norms.
2. **Operational work:** to support Member States in implementing international standards and to forge effective partnerships with civil society.

3. **Coordination work:** entails both work to promote the accountability of the UN system on gender equality and empowerment of women, including regular monitoring of system-wide progress, and more broadly mobilizing and convening key stakeholders to ensure greater coherence and gender mainstreaming across the UN.

KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation found that UN Women has made key contributions to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in Timor-Leste across its triple mandate. The Strategic Note has been relevant and aligned with key national and international priorities for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. Moving forward, the Country Office must translate normative progress into sustainable results for women and girls in all their diversity to maintain credibility and relevance. While the focus on Women, Peace and Security and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls, with growing emphasis on Women's Economic Empowerment, has been relevant, the next Strategic Note should address emerging priorities for Timor-Leste. Systematic engagement with civil society at the project design phase will enhance accountability and support UN Women's added value within the UN system.

The evaluation concluded that UN Women's coordination mandate is critical for operating at scale in the country but must be leveraged strategically to maximize influence. The Country Office has taken on leadership roles in key coordination platforms on gender equality and the empowerment of women in Timor-Leste, such as the Gender Theme Group and the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Coordination Group. However, the effectiveness of these platforms has been hindered by infrequent meetings and a lack of strategic focus. Moving forward, the Country Office needs to consolidate sharing of gender equality and empowerment of women efforts across partners, enhance knowledge-sharing and become the "go-to" knowledge resource for gender equality in Timor-Leste.

The Country Office's focus on advancing UN Women's normative mandate has resulted in key gains and established an enabling environment for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in the country. However, programmatic strategies have been too varied in terms of target groups and geographic spread. A systematic capacity-building approach, including refresher training, mentoring, reflection and knowledge-sharing, must be embedded in the Country Office's strategy to ensure transformative change beyond the individual level.

The Country Office needs to work closely with partners to embed strong results tracking to measure the effectiveness of models and work towards scaling or adjusting programmes as appropriate in the next Strategic Note.

The Country Office has made efforts to design its portfolio in line with human rights and “leave no one behind” principles, including engagement with groups representing persons with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ persons. Deepening and systematizing approaches for inclusive programming and intersectional analyses will facilitate national ownership, concrete results and the sustainability of programming efforts. Additionally, there is a need to deepen engagement with key power brokers, such as the church, to address harmful social norms and stigma surrounding LGBTIQ+ individuals.

The Country Office has experienced significant growth since 2019 through successful joint programme resource mobilization efforts, but the outlook for the future remains uncertain. Developing a comprehensive resource mobilization strategy and seeking dedicated support for resource mobilization will be imperative for the next Strategic Note. Implementation of the Strategic Note has demonstrated the need for funding that permits flexible programming. In an environment of diminishing resources and increasing demands for evidence, it is critical that the Country Office prioritize strengthening its ability to design and implement strong learning and oversight systems. The Country Office should also enhance and systematize its approaches to monitoring and reporting beyond the activity level. This will build credibility and confidence among funding partners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1:

In line with UN Women’s shift to a programmatic approach, the Country Office should clarify its vision, strategies and resources for achieving outcome-level change within UN Women’s triple mandate and emerging priorities of Timor-Leste – prioritizing the translation of policies and frameworks into action.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

The Country Office should prioritize its coordination mandate in Timor-Leste by establishing a strategy, in consultation with the UNCT, to enhance coherence through coordination; ensure it fulfills its role as a knowledge hub and connector for gender equality and women’s empowerment; and ensure the coordination strategy is resourced accordingly.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

To translate normative gains into tangible results, the Country Office should pivot from awareness campaigns to incubating models with partners, including the government and civil society. These models must align with UN Women’s triple mandate, Gender Equality Accelerators and the broader development ecosystem and should include strong capacity-building methods and clear progress indicators to monitor progress and inform decisions on scaling or adjusting the models.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

The Country Office should adopt a comprehensive strategy for designing and implementing its initiatives through an intersectional perspective, acknowledging the varied priorities and needs of the most marginalized stakeholder groups, especially rural women, women with disabilities and individuals of diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC). This approach should guarantee meaningful involvement, empowerment and representation for these groups.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

In consultation with civil society partners, the Country Office should establish a strategy to more systematically engage civil society, ensuring the most marginalized people are benefitting from UN Women’s efforts in Timor-Leste.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

The Country Office should establish a resource mobilization and partnerships strategy in consultation with the Regional Office; seek dedicated support; and proactively engage donors in discussions to build a programme strategy.

RECOMMENDATION 7:

Strengthen the Country Office’s results based management approach to enhance overall programme oversight and feed into enhanced learning and decision-making.