



Joint evaluation: UN Women/UNDP support to women's political participation in sub-Saharan Africa

Evaluation synthesis report
Commissioned by UN Women/UNDP

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Abbreviations¹

ABELO	Burundian Association of Local Representatives
APG	Advance Payment Guarantee
BINUB	United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi
CAFOB	Collective of Women's Associations and NGOs in Burundi
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CENI	Independent National Electoral Commission (Burundi)
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CNDD	National Council for the Defence of Democracy (Burundi)
CNDD-FDD	National Council for the Defence of Democracy-Front for Democracy Defence
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CO	Country Office
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DFID	Department for International Development
DGD	Democratic Governance for Development
EC	European Commission
FCAS	Fragile and Conflict-affected States
Frodebu	Front for Democracy in Burundi
GoSS	Government of South Sudan
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission (Nigeria)
IRI	International Republican Institute
JSBF	Joint Donor Basket Fund
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MP	Member of Parliament
ODA	Official Development Assistance
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
ONUB	United Nations Operation in Burundi
NEC	National Elections Commission (South Sudan)
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
PAC	Political Accountability Cycle
PARENA	Party for National Recovery (Burundi)
REFEL	Network of Locally Elected Women (Burundi)
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SARO	Southern African Regional Office
SP	Strategic Plan
SPLM/A	Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army
SPPDF	Partners' Synergy for Women's Rights Promotion (Burundi)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
Uprona	Union for National Progress (Burundi)

¹ This includes abbreviations for the case study field notes in Appendices 2-5

Executive summary

This paper presents findings for a Joint Evaluation of UN Women and UNDP programmes and intervention strategies in support of women's political participation in Sub-Saharan Africa. The evaluation draws its findings and recommendations from four case studies: Burundi, Sudan (with a focus on South Sudan), Nigeria and the sub-region of Southern Africa.

Key objectives of the evaluation were:

1. To analyse the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of UN Women/UNDP programmes and strategies on women's participation in political processes in Africa.
2. To assess programming in terms of achievements, gaps in reaching objectives against both agencies' strategic plans and the extent to which target groups were reached.
3. To provide forward-looking recommendations for programming in the area of women in political participation in Sub-Saharan Africa
4. To provide inputs for strategic reflection, sustained continuity and learning on the agencies' work in the region in support of political participation
5. To generate information for the development of knowledge products to be used in providing substantive policy advisory support to COs and national partners.

Theories of change

Fostering sustainable women's political participation and transforming this into tangible gains in the area of women's rights and gender equality is complex, and the impact of interventions needs to be assessed over time, and in connection to multiple and parallel processes of political, social and legal change. In using a theory-based approach, this evaluation sought to bring to the surface the implicit (or explicit) theory of change of each project or programme in the case studies that were conducted, and to establish the anticipated sequence of linkages from intervention inputs and activities to intended and unintended outcomes and impacts. Programme interventions were also assessed against an analysis of the wider context in each country case study.

Two levels of analysis were distinguished: (1) assessing the **relevance** and **sustainability** of programmes in relation to UN Women/ UNDP's strategic priorities and the broader changes intended in support of women's political participation; (2) looking at the **efficiency** and **effectiveness** of the individual programmes and projects, including against their own strategic objectives and plan of implementation.

Analytical framework

The analytical framework on which the evaluation was based identified three different but interrelated dimensions of change – **political**, **societal** and **legal** – which are relevant to producing an enabling environment to advance gender equality goals in relation to women's political voice and access to political power. It is against these levels of change that UN Women and UNDP interventions were evaluated

- **Societal change:** Society in general, and civil society in particular, are political spaces where women's agendas can be advanced through a range of strategies that challenge socio-cultural and socio-political constraints on the empowerment of women. Thus efforts to support the social accountability and leadership capabilities of women in society, can contribute to heightened political agency for women. Moreover women's political empowerment can be further nurtured through public policy in the social sphere to enhance human development, such as education policies and laws on inheritance and marriage, to enhance gender equality in economic life and social structures.
- **Legal change:** Changes in constitutions and law are important in providing an enabling environment for women's political participation. Particularly in the context of adverse societal norms, legal change that removes formal barriers to women's political participation

and that advances the presence of women in political and decision-making bodies is relevant. Getting women into public or elected office remains an important equality gain.

- *Political change:* Whilst achieving greater numbers of women in office is crucial, translating presence into actual influence for agenda setting and access to *real* decision-making processes remains a challenge. Moreover, women's presence in parliament does not ensure loyalty to a political agenda for gender equality. The need to go 'beyond numbers' is now well-established in UN Women and UNDP, but working to support women's engagement with the *real* rules of the game that shape political outcomes regarding the distribution of power and resources remains a challenge.

Thus, the evaluation used an expansive definition of 'political participation' to consider underlying structures of power, institutional realities (both formal and informal), socio-cultural conditions which shape constraints and opportunities for women's voice and political participation at these three levels. Additional cross cutting issues that were considered throughout included: the distinction between regional, national and sub-national levels; the distinction between formal and informal institutions and processes; the distinction between post-conflict states and more established political systems; the relevance of the socio-economic and socio-cultural environment.

Overall conclusions

- Gender equality agendas are political – and all the more so in relation to the objectives of supporting women's political empowerment. These are about improving access to political decision-making structures for women, and supporting women's ability to set political and policy agendas, including to advance gender equality objectives. The evaluation has found that in some cases UN Women and UNDP can and do contribute to enhancing the enabling environment to make these changes more likely in sub-Saharan Africa.
- At the global level, strategic thinking in UN Women and UNDP has evolved towards more nuanced thinking on what contributes to improving women's political participation. There is recognition that women's political agency depends on changes at multiple levels, including the social, legal and political spheres.
- Despite this more nuanced thinking regarding women's political participation among UN Women and UNDP staff, the evaluation found that translating this knowledge into context-relevant programming remains a challenge. UN Women and UNDP strategic documents stress the importance of country level situation analyses, but programming typically falls back on the usual entry points around electoral support, uncritical assumptions about political parties as drivers of change, and the value added of increased numbers of women in office.
- The evaluation found that programming is most relevant and effective when it is informed by deep understanding of context. Thus, better integrated and ongoing social and political analysis, including of political economy factors of power relations and incentive structures that need to change. This could support the identification of context-specific constraints and opportunities and the design of programmes in order to achieve a better fit between interventions with existing political realities.
- It was found that there is value-added in supporting leadership capabilities for women in society and women in political institutions, in order to enhance the quality of women's voice.
- Country offices which are able to identify, and support relevant stakeholders in, and strategic alliances across, society, state and government, do contribute to positive reform synergies.
- Ultimately, progress on effective political participation for women is also associated with the degree to which wider conditions of state-society relations move towards more

inclusive and accountable forms of governance. This means that a measure of realism is important, including regarding the role of the international community.

Recommendations

Key recommendations to emerge from this evaluation are:

- **Programming should be informed by theoretically robust strategic guidance at the global and regional levels, but COs need to adapt this guidance to context-specific realities.** The practitioner should be enabled to unpack general assumptions about what drives transformation *within their particular context*, and use this to identify realistic and plausible ways for UN Women to support positive change processes.
- **There is a need for structured analysis that integrates social and political analysis, including of the political economy of context-specific gender equality barriers to political participation, into programming and implementation.** UN Women and UNDP should focus resources on developing a diagnostics tool that country offices can use to identify both strategic and realistic entry points and the most effective forms of engagement.
- **Such an analysis should inform interventions throughout the life of programmes.** This analysis should involve going beyond the descriptive and static situation analysis, to be integrated into the implementation process during the life of programming. It should be a dynamic tool that can help operations adapt to changing conditions as these evolve.
- **In fragile settings it is important to incorporate flexibility into programming.** Longer term planning is not always possible given ongoing levels of volatility and uncertainty. Ad hoc approaches therefore are likely to be more effective in fragile settings. However, there is a need to carefully monitor support to ensure that it capitalises on moments of opportunity as they arise but does not do harm in the long-term.
- **UN Women country offices should be well equipped to differentiate between national and sub-national contexts.** Analysing within-country variations is important for all UN Women programmes, and is especially relevant in fragile settings where state institutions are weak and political power often operates through non-state channels.
- **There is a need to move beyond formal institutions to engage better with issues of power and agency by integrating better the social, political and legal spheres of change.** UN Women's de facto current emphasis at CO level on formal change through legal reform and institutional actors/processes risks remaining skin deep if it is not accompanied by support that enhances capabilities for effective political agency.
 - Focusing mostly on parties in some contexts where these are likely to remain captured by elite and patriarchal interests is not an effective strategy.
 - Working to support political agency in civil society in order to maintain a critical voice for social accountability and oversight of government policies and the conduct of elected/appointed officials (men and women) remains important.
 - Legal change should also include legislation that addresses discriminatory practices inhibiting political agency for women, or that contributes to improving human development, through improved access to services (health, education for women).
 - Support to build up networks of organisations and alliances at different levels, and across different types of actors can contribute to enhancing reinforcing reform synergies through iterative interaction between actors and process at the three levels. This in turn enables sustainability of reform efforts.

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- **UN Women should ensure country offices have the skills and resources they require to effectively plan and manage theory-driven, 'best fit' programmes in support of women's political participation.** Taking context seriously is not controversial but applying this mantra in practice remains a challenge. The following would improve the capacity of country offices in this respect:
 - Move away from the use of short-term staff contracts.
 - Capitalise on the ability of the UN to stay engaged over the long term.
 - Focus where possible on recruiting locally
 - Move away from the use of descriptive situation analyses. Provide staff with practical 'political intelligence' tools and train them on how to use them.
 - Build up management capabilities to improve funding flows.
 - **The new directions in UN Women and UNDP structures can be used to good effect to support more effective programming on women's political participation**
 - The move to grant country offices (for UN Women) greater levels of autonomy should create enabling conditions to integrate recommendations noted above.
 - UN Women is now better placed to play a leading role in coordinating gender equality agendas within the UN system at country level. Closer engagement with UNDP will enable better synergies to be realised in governance and democracy support.
 - UN Women and UNDP are well placed to support both government-level change, through advocacy for legal reform, and formal monitoring of alignment with sub-regional, regional or international commitments on CEDAW and gender rights more generally. This can be complemented with strategic support for shadow monitoring by independent CSOs.
 - It is important to manage expectations regarding new roles for UN Women, not least as the structural changes are not likely to be accompanied by increased resources.

1 Objectives of the evaluation

This evaluation reviews existing UN Women/UNDP programmes and overall intervention strategies as an input into ongoing efforts by the two agencies to better understand and improve their support to women's political participation in sub-Saharan Africa. It has two main aspects in line with the terms of reference:

1. Review the implementation of UN Women/UNDP programmes that aim to enhance the political participation of women; and
2. Assess the relationships between a range of intervention strategies and actual changes in both the number of women participating in politics and the quality of their participation.

The terms of reference outline five concrete objectives (see Box 1).

Box 1: Key objectives outlined in the terms of reference

1. To analyse the relevance, sustainability, effectiveness and efficiency of UN Women/UNDP programmes and strategies on women's participation in political processes in Africa;
2. To determine, assess and validate the results from the various programmes in terms of achievements, gaps in reaching objectives against both agencies' strategic plans and assess the extent to which beneficiaries and target groups have been reached;
3. To provide forward-looking recommendations and a relevant theory of change to strengthen programming in the area of women in decision making in Africa and contribute knowledge to organisations working in Africa on women in political processes;
4. To provide inputs for strategic reflection, sustained continuity and learning on work supporting the participation of women in politics and a regional strategy or programmes to promote women's political leadership; and
5. To generate information for the development of knowledge products to be used in providing substantive policy advisory support to country offices and national partners.

These objectives were to fall under two levels of analysis:

1. The first level was to consider the **effectiveness** and **efficiency** of the individual programmes and projects, including as assessed against their own strategic objectives and plan of implementation.
2. The second level was to assess the **relevance** and **sustainability** of programmes and projects in relation to UN Women/UNDP's strategic priorities and the broader changes they wish to promote in women's political participation.

Crucially, these two levels of analysis are interconnected, since the efficiency and effectiveness of individual programmes/projects are useful only to the degree that their underlying assumptions and strategic approach address challenges and opportunities in relation to the political participation of women in sustainable and relevant ways.

2 Description of the evaluation process

The evaluation was carried out by a team of researchers at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and the University of Witwatersrand. It had two main phases.

In the first phase, the team conducted a desk review of relevant UN Women/UNDP documents, supplemented by relevant grey and academic literature, and mapped the key strategic approaches to supporting women's political participation advocated by UN Women/UNDP at the

global and regional levels. An Inception Report set out the analysis and findings from this phase (Domingo et al., 2011) and also developed the methodology for the case study research and identified the key programmes/projects to be evaluated.

In the second phase, the team conducted four case studies based on fieldwork in three countries (Burundi, Nigeria and Sudan/South Sudan) and one sub-region (Southern Africa) between August and October 2011. Each field visit took one to two weeks and was followed by the drafting of notes to inform the final report (see Annexes 2-5 for the individual case studies).

This synthesis report sets out the key findings from both phases of the evaluation.

3 Evaluation approach

At the core of the evaluation is an analytical framework that identifies different dimensions of change – **societal**, **legal** and **political** – and situates these within a theory-based approach.

3.1 Engaging with different dimensions of change

The literature on the political participation of women in Africa (and other developing regions) points to several challenges to progress in this area, as well as sources of potential change.² It is possible to identify three analytical levels of change that shape the enabling environment for transformative improvements in women's political participation: social, legal and political. We identify and assess the theories of change underpinning UN Women/UNDP strategy and programming at the national, sub-regional and regional level against these three levels.

Level 1: societal change

Society in general, and civil society in particular, are political spaces where women's agendas can be advanced through a range of strategies that challenge socio-cultural and socio-political constraints to the empowerment of women. First, civil society has been an important space for women to advance political change from below through grassroots social mobilisation (Molyneux, 2003; Rai and Waylen, 2004). Efforts to enhance the awareness and associational capacities of women and gender advocates can support demand-side advocacy for legal change, women's rights and gender-responsive policymaking. Similarly, interventions that build up relevant social accountability capabilities can support vibrant social mobilisation to contest power relations, discriminatory institutions and practices and gender-based exclusion in state-society relations.

Second, under certain conditions, legal mobilisation around women's rights has proven to be an effective strategy, such as using redress mechanisms under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to give visibility to ongoing situations of discrimination and inequity. In some cases, where domestic constitutions are progressive, social movements are able to use a combination of grassroots mobilisation and legal strategies to challenge discrimination.

Third, policies that increase agency, through improved access to education, and enable economic empowerment for women, through changes in land and inheritance laws, have been critical in supporting women's political participation, both as voters and as potential public/elected officials.

At the same time, there is growing evidence and concern that donor approaches have sometimes relied on simplistic assumptions about, and thus expectations of, demand-side advocacy and accountability. This includes a failure to recognise the complex incentives and power dynamics within civil society and the importance of strategic alliances and concrete channels between state and society for transformative change to occur (Centre for the Future

2. See, for instance, Cornwall and Goetz (2005), Goetz (2009), Goetz and Hassim (2002), Molyneux (2003) and Molyneux and Razavi (2005).

State, 2010; Rocha Menocal and Sharma, 2008). Moreover, the demand-/supply-side dichotomy has tended not to pick up adequately on the deeper socio-cultural barriers to change.

Level 2: legal change

Changes in legislation and regulatory frameworks are often important because they provide an enabling environment for women's political participation. Particularly in the context of adverse social norms, some level of state protection of women's civil and political rights is required to enable women to participate in and influence political and public decision-making processes (as voters and public officials). For example, the introduction of quota systems in legislatures, party lists, cabinet positions, bureaucracies and the civil service may increase the presence of women in political and decision-making bodies. Getting women into public office in itself constitutes an equality gain, and legal change that facilitates this is therefore important.

Addressing constitutional content and legal frameworks, and building up formal accountability mechanisms that promote and protect women's rights and eliminate gender inequality, was a core strategic outcome in UN Women's Strategic Plan (SP) 2008–11 (UN Women, 2007), and remains so in the UN Women SP 2011–13 (UN Women, 2011). Removing legal barriers is likely to be a primary strategy in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS), where the onus is on (re)building state institutions and there is therefore an opportunity to use a gender equality perspective to support state-building processes from the outset. However, in addition to the challenges arising as a result of gaps in legal content, women may also experience forms of vulnerability in FCAS that are more difficult to address through legal change. Reasons for this include the often weak presence of the state throughout much of the state's territory and its inability to enforce the law; the adverse political conditions predatory states present; and the existence of entrenched political resistance at the top to enabling women-friendly laws.

There will therefore continue to be an emphasis on legal change in UN Women strategies (UN Women, 2011). However, it is notable that a key lesson to emerge from assessment of the Multi-Year Funding Framework 2004–07 – that UN country offices need to build on past successes in this area by shifting attention to the degree to which legal entitlements are implemented and enforced in practice – was present in the SP 2008–11 (UN Women, 2007; 2008) but is implied rather than explicit in the new strategy (UN Women, 2011).

Level 3: political change

A legal framework that protects civil and political rights is a critical foundation to furthering women's political participation, as is a degree of *de facto* democratisation. Moreover, increasing the presence of women in public or elected office is itself a gender equality gain, and therefore a legitimate objective. Generally, an increase in the number of women in public office will over time contribute positively to reforming public attitudes, towards a greater acceptance of women's presence in this area. However, some caveats should be noted. First, it is not the legal framework on its own but the translation of law into practice that matters. Second, the presence of women within various political fora (formal and informal, and at national and local levels) does not guarantee actual influence within political processes or a qualitative change in political society. Third, women who hold elected or public office may not support or forward a political agenda for gender equality (Goetz, 2009; Hassim, 2009; International IDEA, 2005).

UN Women's strategic documents reflect this more nuanced and politically layered analysis of the relationship between women's presence in political office and gender equality outcomes (UN Women, 2007; 2008; 2010a). As such, the need to go 'beyond numbers' is now well established in UN Women's narratives of political transformation. Despite this, interventions in this area still tend to focus on increasing women's participation in formal political organisations and processes. Narrowing the gap between global strategy and actual programming will require more attention to the underlying power dynamics that condition opportunities for furthering gender equality. Operational planning and design will therefore need to be better anchored in an understanding of the specific political economy of extant power relations,

institutional realities, socio-cultural attitudes and socio-structural barriers at the national and sub-national levels.

Finally, the particularities of the formal political system also shape the possibility of political voice (and not only for women). For instance, factors such as regime type and electoral or political party system, as well as the degree of institutional stability or democratic consolidation, influence the distribution of power and the incentive structures that affect the behaviour of political actors. The impact of these context-specific systemic differences on women's political participation, both current and potential, should therefore be factored into strategic and operational planning at country level.

Drawing on the three dimensions outlined above, this evaluation uses an expansive definition of political participation that goes beyond the number of women elected to include the quality of women's political voice, agency and participation. In recognising the significance of underlying and *de facto* structures of power, the analytical framework allows for a consideration of how to identify context-specific constraints and maximise opportunities for supporting women's political participation at different levels in order to achieve positive change (Goetz, 2009; International IDEA, 2005). Moreover, the three dimensions of change are deeply interconnected. Where possible, we identify potential crossover between them, such as where interventions targeting societal change are feeding into changes in political society, and vice versa.

Transformative processes are enabled or constrained by a wide range of context-specific socio-structural and political-historical features, such as particular histories of state formation or decolonisation. For this evaluation, we also considered the following four crosscutting issues during the course of the fieldwork and desk analysis, in line with the terms of reference:

- **The distinction between national and sub-national or local levels:** We examined women's political participation at national and local levels to understand the implications for different incentives and dynamics. For example, where appropriate, we explored whether decentralisation had presented different opportunities to processes at national level (Beall, 2005; 2007; Goetz, 2009).
- **The distinction between formal and informal institutions and processes:** Much governance and democracy support, including in relation to supporting women's role in politics, has focused on formal aspects of governance and political systems. However, in many contexts, political power is brokered outside formal political institutions. Informal institutions include a wide range of non-state or uncodified rule systems, such as the 'big man' and patronage-based politics or 'traditional' local leadership, such as through chiefs or religious figures. These present different sets of challenges and opportunities to formal institutions and will have context-specific dynamics that need careful consideration.
- **The distinction between post-conflict states and more established polities:** While this is not a hard-and-fast distinction, the dilemmas and challenges facing a post-conflict state will be of a different order to those found in more stable polities, and intervention strategies need to be adapted accordingly. Recent research also suggests that the post-conflict moment of political change can create special opportunities for women to embed new rules about gender equality in state-building processes (Castillejo, 2011).
- **The relevance of the socio-economic and socio-cultural environment:** Women's political agency is also shaped by the socio-economic and socio-cultural environment. In a given country context, this translates into varying sets of constraints and opportunities that inhibit or enable the development of capabilities for political agency. An integrated approach to empowerment demands that rules about, and attitudes towards, women's access or rights to education, property ownership and employment ultimately also need to change because they all limit or enable political voice for women significantly. Thus, in the medium and long term, support for political participation

needs to concern itself with enhancing the prospects for public policy choices (by both men and women in office) to create socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions that are more conducive to gender equity, such as education policies or inheritance laws (and their effective application).

3.2 The theory of change approach

As the above three dimensions and four crosscutting issues indicate, fostering sustainable women's political participation and transforming it into tangible gains in the area of women's rights and gender equality is a complex, long-term and non-linear project. This complexity suggests that impact, particularly beyond the intermediate level, emerges over time in response to multiple interventions and the interaction between these and their environment. It also indicates that the robustness of the particular (explicit or implicit) theory of change guiding the choice of interventions, modalities and partners is an important determinant of their potential impact. Finally, the primacy of domestic factors and the long-term nature of women's empowerment demand that external actors be realistic about how much they can contribute to transformative change in practice and over what timescales.

This evaluation addresses the theories of change that underpin programming strategy and operations. However, it is important to differentiate the notion of a theory of change, as used for the purposes of this evaluation, from broader understandings of social theory that establish causal connections over time. Three levels should be distinguished here.

First, at a meta-theory level, social theory about women and empowerment considers the achievement over time of transformative processes in gender relations caused by long-term changes in economic and social structures and evolving patterns of political change. These include the range of political and social processes that result in a redefinition of power relations, of institutional contexts and legal frameworks. However, such processes are inevitably complex, multi-tiered, mostly non-linear and susceptible to reversal, making a simple model for achieving gender parity in political life not possible.

Second, a more modest type of causal investigation seeks to identify shorter-term (policy-related) factors that increase the likelihood of women gaining access to political power. These typically include policies to improve access to education for women, remove legal restrictions to gender equality and access to political participation, and reduce political and cultural restrictions to gender equality.

Third, at a strategy and programme level, a theory of change refers to the underlying assumptions about the factors thought to contribute to transformative change and which inform strategy and programme design. Typically, these assumptions are inspired by the first and second variety of causal explanations noted above, which are used to identify entry points and form the basis for programme inputs or activities. In turn, it is assumed that these activities will contribute to changes (or outcomes) that further women's political participation in some way.

At this programmatic level, and making the case for realistic evaluation, Pawson and Tilley (1997) argue that theory-based evaluation helps to highlight the reality that programme implementation necessarily involves a theory about what might cause change, even if that theory is not explicit. Making such a theory explicit helps to test programming assumptions as to what contributes to change. By using a theory-based approach, this evaluation sought to bring to the surface the (implicit or explicit) theory of change of each project or programme and to establish the anticipated sequence of linkages from inputs and activities to intended and unintended outcomes and impacts (known as the 'logic' or the 'results chain'). To take this approach further, we focused on unpacking the concrete nature of programme activities and impact and assessed this against the wider context of each case study country.

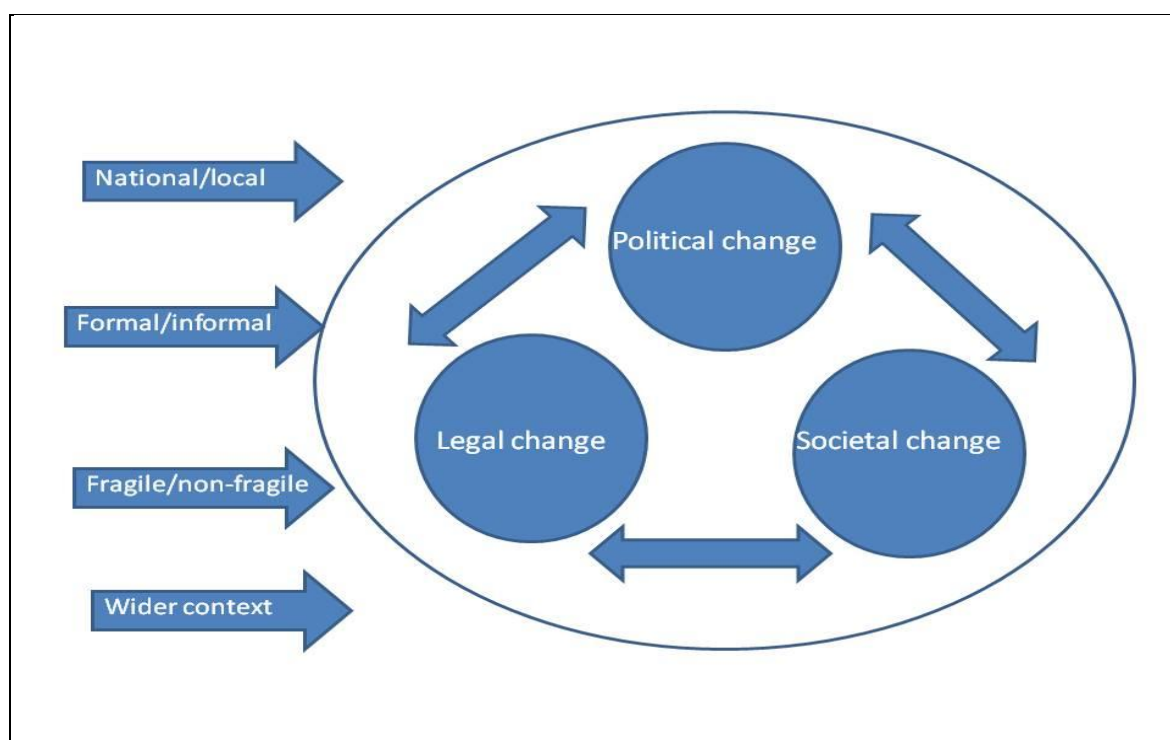
At the level of concrete projects or programmes, a theory-based approach does not mean there is a single or unified theory of social change. Rather, it refers to the fact that each intervention is motivated by a set of beliefs and assumptions about *how x affects y and with*

what intended or unintended effects. Uncovering these assumptions is necessary to understand how interventions are intended to contribute to change in a given context and to assess their strengths and weaknesses.³

Thus, the underlying theories of change that inform programming reflect assumptions about the causal factors likely to result in the political empowerment of women within and/or across the dimensions of change noted above (societal, legal and political). Programming decisions about which interventions are most likely to contribute to the desired change are derived from these assumptions. During the fieldwork, we considered how programmes had built in causal assumptions about the three dimensions of change. A key question for the evaluation was whether programme staff had taken causal assumptions about women’s political participation at face value or whether they had instead considered them in relation to context-specific conditions and adapted projects accordingly.

Figure 1 summarises the three intersecting dimensions of change and the four crosscutting issues presented in Section 3.1 and considered during the evaluation.

Figure 1: Core dimensions of analysis



4 Evaluation methodology

The analytical concepts set out above were used to undertake a theory-based form of evaluation. In addition, the evaluation took into account the following principles:

- **Flexibility:** The evaluation assessed different types of intervention in support of women’s political participation in different country contexts in sub-Saharan Africa. Although the main objective was to look at region-specific interventions, the findings are intended to inform the overall strategic approach to supporting women’s political participation taken by UN Women/UNDP. Therefore, the various components of the evaluation framework should be seen as flexible and adaptable to the specific circumstances of a given context (that is, the country, political landscape, level, type of intervention and so on).

3. Booth and Evans (2006); Lawson and Booth (2004); Weiss (1998); White (2005).

- **Theory-based:** In line with a theory-driven approach to evaluation, the components of the evaluation framework were framed to bring out the implicit programme logic of UN Women/UNDP interventions, with a view to better delineating the assumptions, choices and theories underpinning these. This approach allowed for a more realistic assessment of results and outcomes, including the reasons why objectives were being met or not.
- **Results- and outcome-focused:** The different components of the framework were used to define and assess outputs and direct and intermediate outcomes, as well as pathways to impact and long-term change.
- **Consistency with Development Assistance Committee (DAC) evaluation criteria:** As discussed above, the evaluation worked at two levels: 1) the results of individual programmes/projects; and 2) more broadly, the strategies adopted by UN Women/UNDP. In accordance with the terms of reference, across these levels, the evaluation considered the criteria of relevance, sustainability, effectiveness and efficiency.

The research was informed principally by qualitative methods. Quantitative measures were also examined where possible and available. Throughout the evaluation, information from different sources was triangulated and iterative contact with key agency staff was prioritised to validate findings. We also took care to ensure an appropriate selection of informants and to avoid positive bias.

5 Findings

5.1 Global, regional and sub-regional strategic guidelines

The evaluation reviewed relevant UN global, regional and sub-regional strategic documents.

Global strategy

At the global level, there has been an evolution in the strategic thinking guiding UN Women and UNDP's work in support of women's political participation. Some of the strategic documentation reviewed below reflects the three dimensions of analysis noted above (societal, legal and political change).

UN Women Strategic Plan 2008–11:⁴ The SP 2008–11 (UN Women, 2007) outlines UN Women's focal areas, reflecting assumptions about the types of actions that will enable the agency to act as a catalyst for women's empowerment and improvements in gender equality. These areas also provide insights into UN Women's implicit, overarching theory of change (see Box 2).

Box 2: Three focal areas in UN Women's SP 2008-11

1. Aligning laws and policies to create a conducive environment for the empowerment of women and human rights;
2. Strengthening institutions and organisations in work processes, resources and capacities required to fulfil obligations to the Convention/other normative agreements; and
3. Supporting community-level initiatives that demonstrate how changes in practice and attitudes can be achieved to permit the implementation of commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment.

Source: UN Women (2007).

4. The most recent UN Women Strategic Plan (2011–13) was issued after the inception phase of this evaluation. Therefore, although this synthesis report considers its contents, case study findings are based on the SP 2008–11, which is the strategy that informed the completed and ongoing programmes examined during the evaluation.

The SP 2008–11 also identifies eight outcomes that should result from support in these focal areas. The underlying assumption of the SP seems to be that, combined, these eight outcomes will achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment in both stable and fragile states. The evaluation focused mostly on projects and programmes under Outcomes 5 and 7 as the main areas informing country office support to women’s political participation. The electoral reform component of Outcome 2 was also relevant to the evaluation (see Box 3).

Box 3: SP 2008-11 outcomes most relevant to women’s political participation

- **Outcome 2:** Increase in the number of constitutions, legal frameworks and processes, particularly those related to economic security and rights, women’s care work, property and inheritance rights, trade, migration, ending violence against women and electoral and security sector reforms, that promote and protect women’s human rights and eliminate gender inequality;
- **Outcome 5:** Gender equality experts, advocates and their organisations or networks effectively demand the implementation of gender equality dimensions in national laws, policies and strategies;
- **Outcome 7:** Key policy, service delivery and media institutions create enabling institutional environments to promote and protect women’s human rights in line with global, regional and national agreements.

Source: UN Women (2007).

Political Accountability Cycle: UN Women’s conceptual and analytical thinking about political participation is further developed in the Political Accountability Cycle (PAC) framework (UN Women, 2010a), which was developed in the Progress of the World’s Women 2008/09 Report: *Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability* (UN Women, 2008). The PAC describes how change at different levels interacts to build accountability dynamics that can amount to transformative change in women’s political participation. It is acknowledged that more evidence is needed on the conditions that might enhance the political effectiveness of gender equality agendas, and it is stressed that increasing the numbers of elected women representatives is a necessary but not sufficient condition for transformative change. Thus, the Progress of the World’s Women Report and subsequent thinking on accountability for political empowerment (UN Women, 2010a) reflect an analytical evolution in UN Women’s reasoning, taking further (but still in keeping with) the broader theories of change that guide the SP 2008–11. A question that emerged during the evaluation was the degree to which country office programming had been informed by this more nuanced analytical thinking.

The five components or stages of the accountability chain set out in the PAC – mobilisation, representation, legislation and policy, implementation and transforming politics – represent levels of change that interact to enhance the possibility of improving accountability towards women (see Box 4). The chain involves a reiterative process of change that can advance the quality and levels of women’s political participation. Of note is the circularity of the PAC: it is essentially concerned with both increasing the presence of women in public office and improving the effectiveness of gender equality and women’s rights through improved political leadership at different stages of the cycle. Thus, the underlying assumption about how transformational change occurs is that change processes will be reinforced progressively through the iterative interaction of the five stages of the PAC.

Box 4: Five stages of the PAC

1. Mobilisation

The key to women’s political effectiveness is constituency building. This involves women and their allies identifying and mobilising around an issue of common concern to voice their interests, create organisational strength and develop some leverage in politics so that they become a constituency that politicians care about. [...] UN Women’s work in this area aims to strengthen the size and effectiveness of constituencies supportive of gender equality and women’s rights.

2. Representation

Women's participation in elections as voters and as candidates is the decisive political moment in which they can try to put their issues onto the agendas of political parties and decision makers. Women's numerical presence in public office has received increased attention over the past 10 years. [...] UN Women's work in this area aims to help reach the 30% minimum target.

3. Legislation and policy

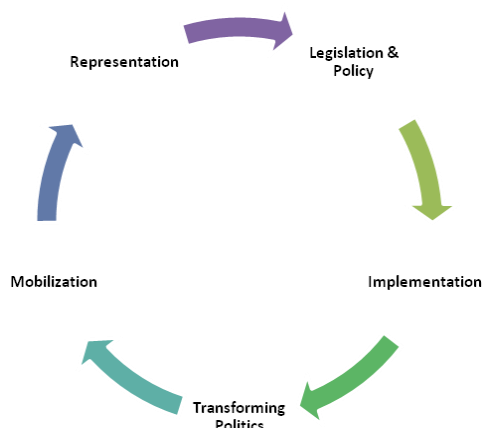
Women's presence may not be enough to change public policy and resource allocation patterns. Other institutional and informal mechanisms are needed to build skills and leverage behind a gender equality agenda. These include women's caucuses that reach across party lines, parliamentary committees on gender equality, support from the ruling party and coordination among different government departments. UN Women's work in this area aims to build the capacities of women and their male allies in public office to advance legislation and policy on women's rights.

4. Implementation

The test of political accountability to women is whether laws and policies are put into practice and make a difference to women's lives. [...] Implementation involves the translation of policies into directives, procedures, doctrine, budget allocations, recruitment patterns, incentive systems, reporting, monitoring and finally oversight systems. UN Women's work in this area falls largely under programming under 'Gender and Democratic Governance'.

5. Transforming politics

When implementation is effective, political accountability comes full circle because it feeds into more effective and broader mobilisation on the part of women because effective public policy will have improved women's condition and empowered them to engage more effectively in public politics.



Source: Adapted from UN Women (2010a).

This analysis reflects a richer unpacking of the SP outcomes, one that speaks to the three analytical levels distinguished in our framework above, namely, the intersection between the societal, legal and political spheres of change. By recognising the circularity of change processes between these spheres, involving iterative interactions between actors operating within and across these levels to produce outcomes that contribute incrementally to UN Women's objectives, the analysis adds value to the strategic thinking of UN Women on support to political participation. However, the case study evidence discussed below demonstrates that it cannot be taken for granted that this strategic thinking will be translated into country-level programming approaches on the ground. This is particularly the case given that some of the nuance captured by the PAC is less explicit in the SP 2011–13.

UNDP Gender Equality Strategy 2008–11: UNDP supports gender equality in political participation through its democratic governance programmes, as outlined in the Gender Equality Strategy 2008–11 (under Democratic Governance) (UNDP, 2008). The strategy emphasises fostering inclusive political participation within decision-making bodies (executive and legislative branch) and political parties and at sub-national level; strengthening

accountable governing institutions, oversight for better service delivery to relevant groups and protection against gender-based violence; ensuring that democratic governance is grounded in international principles of gender equality; and working effectively in coordination with partners such as UN Women.

Annex 1 presents a mapping of the causal relations that can be derived from these global UN Women and UNDP documents.

Regional strategy

Regional documentation on sub-Saharan Africa, notably the 'Africa Regional Strategic Plan' (UN Women, 2010b), describes the main programming areas in the region but does not represent a formal strategic plan as such. It indicates that programmes to increase women's participation in political processes have been premised on the argument that achieving more seats for women in national legislatures is an indicator of progress towards greater gender equality and women's empowerment as in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and will pay dividends by ensuring gender-responsive policies and practices.

The regional strategy identifies a wide range of activities intended to support political participation, including capacity development; awareness raising and community mobilisation; media and communication; policy advocacy and legal reform; strengthening women's networks; and election monitoring. In general terms, these activities are consistent with global strategic thinking. It also considers recurrent issues in the sub-Saharan African context, such as how to deal with legacies of conflict and related sexual violence against women and the need to take into account sub-national levels of political interaction.

Sub-regional strategies

Sub-regional offices are important administrative hubs within the UN regional structure, with responsibility for managing financial flows, monitoring reports from country offices and using this information to account for progress at the sub-regional level against strategic objectives. Sub-regional offices also develop sub-regional strategic plans and in principle have a coordinating role in terms of overseeing country office activities against these.

The four relevant sub-regional SPs 2008–11 (Central Africa, East and Horn of Africa, Southern Africa and West Africa) are more elaborate than the sub-Saharan African regional strategy in their framing of goals and objectives. They tend to identify challenges specific to the sub-region as a whole, notwithstanding the variation in country context within these. However, the three country case studies (Burundi, Nigeria and South Sudan) found that the relevant sub-regional strategy did not appear to have informed country-level strategic thinking or planning significantly.

In the desk review phase of the evaluation, it was noted also that the relationship between sub-regional offices and country-level programming was quite varied. For instance, in the case of Sudan, most engagement between the country office and the East and Horn of Africa sub-regional office was found to focus on Khartoum; in South Sudan, partly because of the *ad hoc* nature of programming, there is no reference in the programme documentation to the sub-regional strategy (see notes from the fieldwork below). By contrast, sub-regional documentation for Somalia suggests a more hands-on approach by the sub-regional office, although this evaluation exercise did not observe or verify this. The experiences of Kenya are similarly well documented.

In Burundi, programming documentation makes almost no reference to the Central Africa sub-regional strategy, instead giving the impression that the sub-regional office plays an administrative role in terms of coordinating sub-regional funding, making decisions about country-level allocations and keeping track of country office interventions. In Nigeria, there seems to be a disconnect between the dynamics of the West Africa sub-regional office programming and that of the country office.

In Southern Africa, by contrast, some programming is coordinated at the sub-regional level. The sub-regional office appears to have adopted this role because there are few country-level

UN Women officers in Southern Africa. This strategy has also added value because the office is well placed to support cross-country networks related to concrete themes and programming objectives (such as political mobilisation, use of media for advocacy and monitoring progress against commitments to reduce violence against women). At the same time, the Southern African experience illustrates the risk that attempting to develop comparable strategies in such a diverse region will reduce complex political processes to the lowest common denominator.

Sub-regional offices also monitor achievements at country level against formally established logic chains, but the documents reviewed indicate that they may do this only at a general level. For instance, the East Africa sub-regional strategy often tracks activities (through country office reporting) using numerical indicators, such as numbers of capacity development sessions held, numbers of political party programmes that include commitments to gender equality agendas and concrete legal changes, such as reforms to electoral laws or constitutional reforms. As noted in the Southern Africa case study (see below), these indicators have limited value in terms of showing whether substantive levels of transformation have been achieved. By contrast, tools such as the indicator to measure progress towards ending violence against women in Southern Africa with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Gender Unit are an example of potentially effective measures of sub-regional level activities.

Mostly, country programming appears to have been guided by global strategic thinking, reflected primarily in global strategic plans (UN Women, 2007; and now 2011), rather than sub-regional strategies.

Turning strategy into action: an unresolved challenge

At a general level, assumptions about what institutional and legal frameworks are supportive of change found in the global narrative, and echoed in the sub-Saharan Africa regional and sub-regional strategies, are not fundamentally problematic. How this narrative and its underlying assumptions can be used to plan concrete interventions in specific country contexts is much less evident, however. An area that therefore needs attention is the translation of overarching strategic objectives into practical guidance for concrete programming at country level. This is a challenge for all donors seeking to support domestic political processes or work in a more politically informed fashion across all programming areas (Wild and Foresti, 2011).

In the UN Women strategic documents, development results frameworks provide general guidance on appropriate outputs and associated indicators for each outcome. Moreover, consultations at global and regional level, including workshops and meetings at the sub-regional level, and learning from annual reporting have led to efforts to refine outputs and strengthen results frameworks in order to capture results more efficiently and accurately. Nevertheless, although there is recognition of the need to move away from using only numerical output indicators (such as numbers of workshops held and numbers of individuals attending), which demonstrate little about the achievement of transformative outcomes, the programming documents reviewed indicate that country offices continue to fall back on these. The main drawback of results monitoring based primarily on numerical output indicators is that it does not help on its own to address the principal challenge of ensuring a good or realistic fit between global strategies and objectives, on the one hand, and local contexts, opportunities and entry points, on the other.

Thus, while important for improving monitoring and evaluation, these efforts to improve results frameworks do not resolve the principal challenge of how to design interventions that take forward strategic plans, and their underlying theories of change, in a manner that is appropriate to context and which therefore has a greater likelihood of success. As the case studies show, country office programming would benefit from more structured political and social analysis of context that is integrated into strategic planning and implementation, including beyond the design phase of programming.

For staff to be able to plan and design politically informed interventions, they need a deep understanding of the social and political history and structural legacies, and the political economy issues that influence power and interest structures, of the country in which they work. They also need to be able not only to identify and respond to opportunities as they arise

but also to recognise fundamental constraints that limit the sphere of action for external actors. These opportunities and constraints could include existing power structures and institutional incentives (both formal and informal), the positioning of different stakeholders in relation to these, the manifestation of resistance to reform and how all these factors shape blockages to progress or present opportunities for interventions.

However, the case studies found that, beyond the standard, mostly descriptive and static, context analysis that features in programming and project documents, country offices had insufficient guidance on the analytical steps they needed to take to identify context-specific needs, constraints and opportunities for engagement – including throughout the life of programmes. In all four case studies, there was no clear sense that a structured analysis of prevailing social and political conditions had been used to consider the political economy of context-specific gender equality barriers in relation to political participation. This constitutes a gap in how UN Women approaches support country office planning and implementation, especially in relation to UN Women and UNDP goals of advancing accountable and equitable governance institutions.

In sum

The key messages from the review of strategic and programme documents for this evaluation are as follows:

- UN Women and UNDP strategic thinking, as reflected in global-level documents, has evolved towards a more nuanced view of what constitutes effective political participation for women. This view includes the need to think 'beyond numbers' and engage with different levels of change, which involves connecting the legal with the societal and political spheres of change.
- There continues to be room for more dynamic strategic thinking about women's political participation – and for ensuring that any new thinking reaches country offices. For example, the analysis developed in the PAC framework seems not to have achieved a high enough level of visibility to inform country programming.
- Despite important developments at the strategic level towards a more integrated and nuanced analysis of what improving political participation for women involves, this has not been translated sufficiently into context-appropriate planning, design and implementation at country level. There appear to be insufficient tools and guidance – including applied political economy and social analysis frameworks – to help country offices to turn strategy into practice.

5.2 Case study summaries

This section summarises the theories of change that inform interventions in the case study countries, describing the underlying assumptions that guide activities towards intended outcomes and noting findings relating to the evaluation criteria of relevance, sustainability, effectiveness and efficiency. Findings are based on a review of programme documents and informant interviews. In some cases, programming is still ongoing.

More detailed findings are presented in the individual case study notes (see Annexes 2-5). These include further consideration of the assumptions made in the case study country programmes about what drives change leading to improved gender equality in political participation and better prospects for gender-sensitive policy. They also include discussion about how these assumptions have been translated into concrete interventions.

As noted in Section 4, global documents give guidance on intended outcomes and indicative outputs. Regional and sub-regional strategies provide further guidance on the types of activities most likely to result in intended outcomes and identify region-specific challenges. However, a question remains as to whether underlying assumptions regarding the chain of causality of intended actions/interventions have been tested sufficiently in relation to context-specific conditions.

It is important to note that, while the summaries in this section aim to uncover the general sequence of reasoning that shapes theories of change underlying programmes in different countries, these are not always outlined explicitly in programming or strategic documents (notably so in South Sudan). It is certainly the case that *ad hoc* and responsive operations may be required in FCAS, where there are high levels of unpredictability in the wider context and where country offices need to be able to develop rapid response strategies in order to adapt to changing circumstances. However, it is important to recognise that such a flexible and responsive strategy would be strengthened, not undermined, by a theory of change rooted in a good understanding of both specific country conditions *and* what is feasible in highly volatile environments. In the case of Burundi, for example, programming has benefited from the presence of individual country staff (in both UN Women and UNDP) with the capacity to navigate the national political landscape effectively through flexible and agile adaptation to what remains a fluid situation and through the use of informal networking with key actors in government, as well as champions for change.

Finally, theory of change reasoning is presented here linearly. In practice (albeit to different degrees), linearity should not be assumed. In addition, approaches focus on a range of levels and issues supporting women's political participation, most evident in the case studies on Burundi and Southern Africa.

Burundi case study

Fieldwork in Burundi focused on two programmes (one UN Women and one UNDP), both concerning activities surrounding the 2010 elections (pre, during and after). UN Women's programming (still ongoing) focuses on achieving enhanced capabilities for political participation over three years. UNDP's support emphasised electoral support for women's political participation in the 2010 elections under a UNDP-led basket fund.

The theory of change implicit in this programming involves the following assumptions, activities, outputs and outcomes:

Assumptions

- Increasing the number of women in office and in political parties through legal change makes pro-gender equality policies more likely.
- Improving the political capabilities of women in political society, civil society organisations (CSOs) and the media leads to a better voice for pro-gender equality.
- Working to support networks and alliances between stakeholders within society and between society and government, and at the national and sub-national levels, enhances the chances of uptake of gender equality agendas and can support improved conflict mediation.
- Women are well positioned to contribute to conflict mediation at sub-national levels.

Activities

- Capacity development at sub-national and national levels for CSOs and political candidates;
- Support to political mobilisation for campaigns and networking and dialogue activities;
- Support to legal and constitutional reform in relation to the electoral system, and related advocacy activities;
- Funding infrastructure and process requirements (e.g. issuing of identity cards);
- Capacity development for conflict resolution at sub-national levels;
- Support to political parties to include gender equality issues in party programmes; and
- Capacity development for conflict mediation at sub-national level.

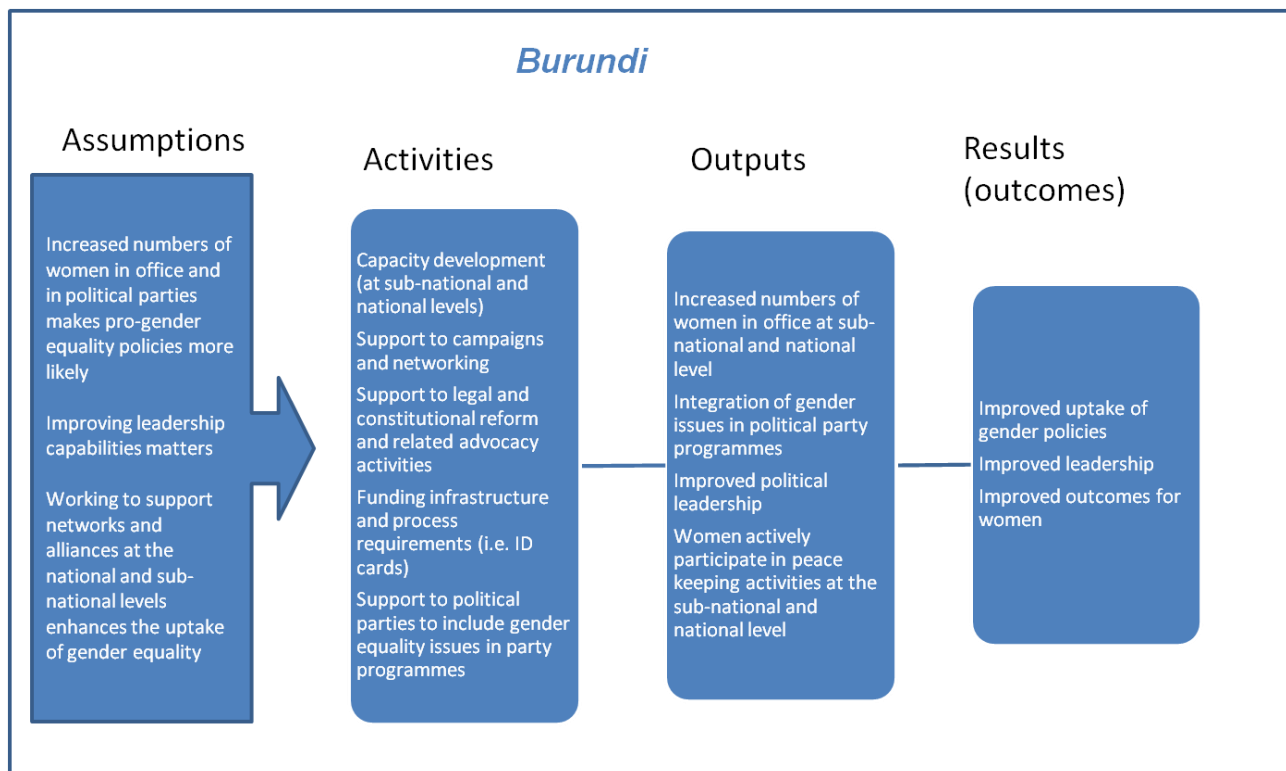
Outputs

- Increased numbers of women in office at sub-national and national levels;
- Integration of gender issues in political party programmes;
- Improved political leadership;
- Women actively participating in peacekeeping activities at the sub-national and national level; and
- Legal change for gender equality in political participation.

Outcomes

- Improved uptake of gender policies and improved outcomes for women; and
- Improved conflict resolution through peaceful means at the sub-national level.

Figure 2: A generalised theory of change for Burundi



In Burundi, both explicit and implicit chains of reasoning supporting programming decisions are apparent, and together these amount to different theories of change with varying levels of **relevance** to context. In some cases, interventions have been the product of *ad hoc* programming, especially in the lead-up to the 2010 elections. In others, both in short-term projects, as exemplified by UNDP's electoral support activities, and in UN Women's longer-term strategy to support women's political participation (UN Women Burundi, 2009), there are several levels of intended change that build on previous work. Informants believed that this constituted a cumulative body of support, one which simultaneously targets different levels and has an iterative impact on several different aspects of women's political empowerment. This *de facto* multi-pronged approach to UN Women and UNDP support in Burundi has the merit of addressing the societal, legal and political levels of change and encompassing both national and sub-national levels of institutions and actors.

In terms of legal change, there has been effective lobbying and advocacy to ensure quotas. At the same time, other areas of legal change relating to women's economic empowerment – which informants noted were essential to sustaining women's political voice and agency in decision making – remain frozen (notably in relation to changing the inheritance law). In terms of political change, capacity development, training and awareness-raising activities at the grassroots and national levels for women in both CSOs and political parties were seen to have contributed to strengthening the political capabilities of women. There is a concern, however, that these capabilities have not been reflected in the actual conduct of women in political parties and in government, that is, women politicians have not actively engaged in pushing a gender equality agenda within government. By contrast, work with grassroots organisations, including in relation to conflict mediation, combined with the effects of peace building, has contributed to new sub-national narratives about changed gender roles in public life and political empowerment for women.

Despite the good results noted by different stakeholders, the underlying assumptions about intended causation are not sufficiently unpacked in Burundi. Context analysis is carried out alongside programming but does not involve a detailed political economy analysis of existing power relations and institutional realities, which is needed to identify the nature of Burundi-specific incentive and interest structures and concrete constraints arising from its configuration of power. For instance, much of the focus is on working with political parties, taking it at face value that this will produce good results. In reality, the nature of parties in Burundi is highly problematic: they are weak and poorly institutionalised, and the dynamics of dominant party rule weaken the possibility of enhanced accountability mechanisms between elected representatives and constituencies of voters.

At the same time, though, the process of programme implementation, particularly how opportunities are identified and used at the operations level, shows that UN Women staff's deep knowledge and understanding of the country's political dynamics and power structures enhances the relevance of concrete interventions, and indeed leads to concrete results.

Examples include a realisation that the costs of obtaining identity cards, necessary for electoral and candidacy registration, were a major obstacle to ensuring electoral participation and meeting the legal quotas for women's representation. The decision to fund identity cards was therefore immediately relevant and effective in terms of obtaining the intended results of boosting voter and candidacy participation numbers for women.

In addition, deep knowledge of relevant stakeholders has enabled support for networks of women's organisations, which are leading on much of women's political participation work, to produce good results. Sensitisation and advocacy activities have led to concrete legal change, such as the passing of the 2009 Electoral Code, which ensures that the quota system also applies to local elections, and the reform of the Criminal Code, which now takes on board UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on sexual violence.

Nevertheless, informants noted that a number of structural and political barriers were continuing to limit women's political empowerment and that these needed to feature more prominently on the political empowerment agendas of the donor community. Assumptions as to whether and how formal changes, such as the introduction of quota systems, will translate into pro-women policies need to be questioned, given the context of dominant party rule and the socio-cultural conditions of gender relations. For instance, obstacles to the economic empowerment of women were noted as being a severe constraint to the possibility of women's political agency. Strong political resistance to reforming restrictive inheritance laws, including among women Members of Parliament (MPs), reflects entrenched and discriminatory attitudes towards women's political and social role. It also highlights that improved prospects for reform of the inheritance law have not emerged in Burundi, despite the country having the highest percentage of women in elected office in sub-Saharan Africa.

The **sustainability** of programmes is problematic in Burundi. Limited resources and unpredictable levels of funding have led to a reliance on *ad hoc* interventions rather than long-term strategic planning. Moreover, high levels of aid dependency risk undermining the

vibrancy of civil society activism: it is a real concern that the critical capacity of CSOs and their ability to lead transformative agendas will become diminished as they adapt to donor-driven narratives of change in their competition for scarce resources. This threat is somewhat offset by endeavours to support networks of organisations and engage in frequent consultation exercises with local partners. However, ultimately, sustainability of efforts is also dependent on political developments in the wider political and institutional setting – which is currently at risk of renewed conflict.

Programme **effectiveness** has not always been the result of activities bearing out against explicit log-frame planning or explicit political economy analysis of existing political realities, but instead has arisen as a consequence of the ability of country office staff to use their deep understanding of context at the national and sub-national level to identify opportunities as these have emerged. This understanding of context, combined with outreach capabilities, has enabled the country office to identify what they consider to be effective partners at the national and sub-national levels. This is an interesting example of how programming has been informed by intuition rather than a formally integrated political economy analysis, and in spite of a potentially constraining formal theory of change implied in programming documents. In the end, activities on the ground have led cumulatively to the establishment of CSO networks that play an important role in giving visibility to the gender equality agenda and also connect to government actors and international partners (including donors and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs)).

The particular skills of individual members of staff have also enhanced **efficiency** for effective programming. As noted, key UN Women staff possess deep country knowledge, not least because they are from Burundi, and longstanding connections to gender equality agendas. This is combined with the ability, also present in UNDP, to navigate the political context effectively, including through informal networks. The role of the Special Gender Advisor in UNDP has also been important in facilitating liaison between UN Women and UNDP and in galvanising buy-in and support both from key government actors and other donors. Efficiency in achieving results also reflects the fact that UN agencies have leverage because Burundi is an aid-dependent country. At the same time, there is a sense that UN Women is at a turning point: there are expectations that it will – and should – be able to take a more visible leadership role in coordinating the gender equality agenda among international development partners. Despite good results given Burundi's starting point, donor coordination around the gender equality agenda was poor until quite recently.

Burundi shows that using country office staff skills, contextual knowledge and relationships with relevant stakeholders to inform programming is likely to enable the selection of activities that are appropriate to context and produce results. In this case, however, this approach is the outcome more of intuitive decision making among country-level staff than of a structured analysis of the political economy realities of state–society relations.

Nigeria case study

UN Women's activities to support women's political participation in Nigeria are conducted within the Democratic Governance for Development (DGD) project. DGD is administered by UNDP, in partnership with UN Women (under DGD's gender pillar, which is one of six). It is a joint donor basket fund to support the electoral cycle in Nigeria, involving partnerships with CSOs, the media and political parties. During its first phase, the project focused on increasing the numbers of women elected in the 2011 elections. The second phase, which was due to begin in January 2012, will develop a focus on elected women and providing training to help them deliver better representation.

The theory of change implicit in this programming involves the following assumptions, activities, outputs and outcomes:

Assumptions

- Increasing the number of women in office and in political parties makes pro-gender equality policies more likely.

- Improving the political capabilities of women in political society, CSOs and the media will lead to better voice for pro-gender equality.

Activities

- Funding CSOs to carry out advocacy, capacity development and sensitisation around women's political participation;
- Working with female members of political parties (e.g. workshops, training); and
- Planned work with the media to improve coverage of women candidates and women's issues around elections.

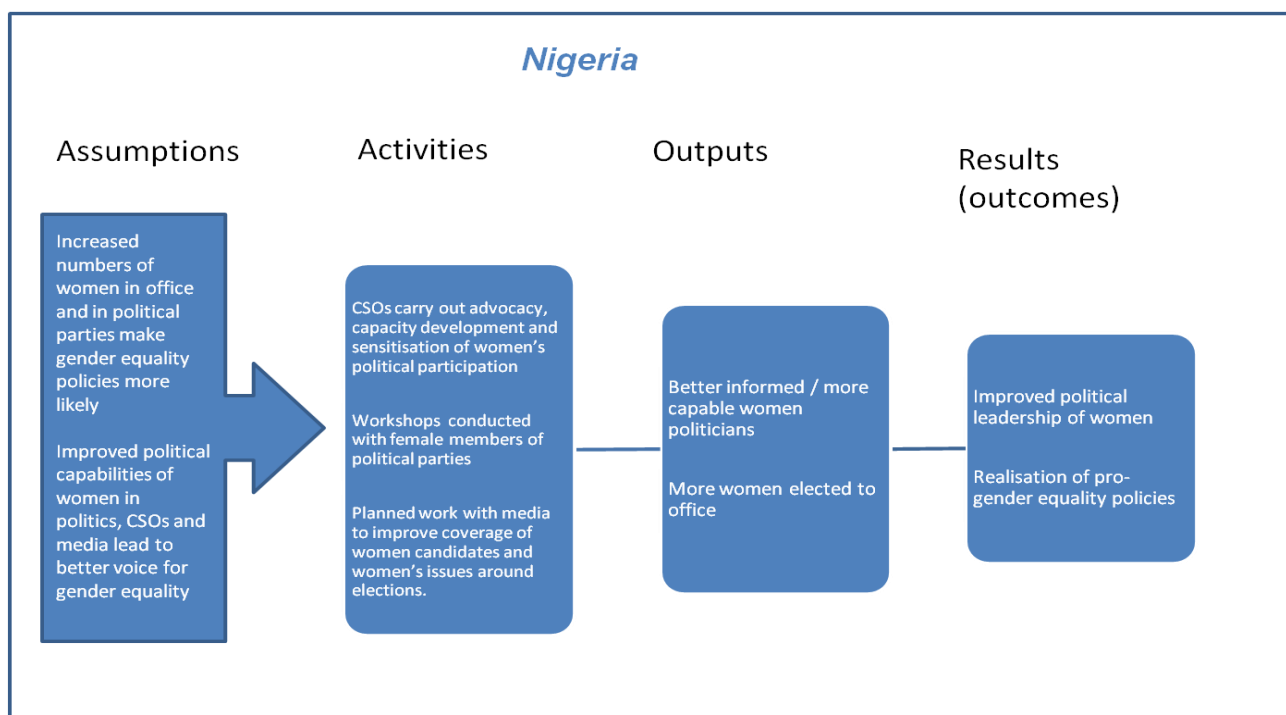
Outputs

- More women in office; and
- Better-informed/more capable women politicians.

Outcomes

- Improved political leadership of elected women; and
- Realisation of pro-gender equality policies.

Figure 3: A generalised theory of change for Nigeria



Turning first to assessments of **relevance**, projects under DGD seek to support political participation for women, with an emphasis on the number of women elected and formal electoral processes. However, UN Women staff recognised the shortcomings of quotas and of focusing solely on numbers of women elected, which have led to the adoption of a two-pronged approach to increase numbers and improve the quality of women's political participation. Underlying this approach is the core assumption that women politicians will advocate for policies that support women's development. However, fieldwork analysis cast doubt on these assumptions.

First, women politicians in Nigeria often represent elite or identity interests rather than those of the most marginalised or of women in general. Second, political parties are patronage-based

and reflect deep ethnic and regional tensions, which shapes the agendas they pursue and opportunities for promoting women's concerns. In addition, a deeper analysis of the regional variations and differential implications for women's political participation experiences seems insufficiently developed. This means that the automatic link made between more women in politics and more visibility for women's issues needs to be questioned further. The DGD office seemed aware of the need to vary its approach in different parts of Nigeria in order to take into account the differences between regions, including in relation to how women politicians relate to gender equality agendas, but it remains to be seen whether this insight will be incorporated effectively into programming.

While concerns for quality have been included in an attempt to address these issues, they have not received as much emphasis in programming as activities to boost the number of women elected. There has also been insufficient consideration of what quality entails, and how it is achieved and best supported. Moreover, interviews revealed a perception that the current approach neglects engagement with male politicians, who could potentially help to represent the interests of their female constituents (although there has been some engagement with male community leaders).

In terms of **sustainability**, interviews suggested a need for a longer-term strategic approach, which is currently lacking. Instead of supporting a particular vision of change, projects were viewed as reactive, *ad hoc* and focused on particular election moments rather than engagement throughout the electoral cycle. In addition, there is little evidence of engagement with the wide range of social, economic and legal obstacles to women's political participation. Programming initially focused almost entirely on the political level, and on electoral issues within this. Almost no programming has addressed economic obstacles – a particularly striking oversight given that informants suggested that the financial cost of standing for election was a major barrier to potential women candidates and (the absence of) economic empowerment for women was therefore a key factor shaping the possibility of political agency.

These shortcomings have clear implications for programme **effectiveness**. The evaluation suggests that UN Women has limited ability to act responsively or dynamically within Nigerian conditions, despite a fluid context that demands this. Doing so would likely entail a shift away from the current focus on political leaders and elites towards more issues-based engagement. Informants also referred to the need to build more constructive engagement with the Nigerian government, suggesting that government officials generally had little awareness of the work of UN agencies in this area.

Finally, a number of themes emerged in relation to **efficiency**. First, there are ongoing problems with UN Women being unable to secure initially anticipated funding, with knock-on effects for partners. Second, DGD reportedly also faces challenges in financing partners, in part because of grant ceilings which restrict funding levels and the use of financial checks that are perceived to be time-consuming and costly for partners. The use of funding tranches and payment on performance were also cited as a challenge, because partners have to make substantial investments upfront. Third, issues relating to how UN Women and UNDP collaborate were raised, in particular confusion over reporting and information flows. Finally, staffing gaps were cited as an ongoing issue for the UN Women office in particular, with several positions vacant over a prolonged period of time.

Sudan case study

The Sudan analysis focused on South Sudan, reflecting a range of logistical and practical concerns. The main interventions examined were UNDP/UN Women's support to women's participation in the 2010 elections and UN Women's support to women's participation in the referendum. These projects focused on improving the participation of women voters in elections and building the capacity and skills of women candidates (particularly in light of election quota commitments).

The theory of change implicit in this programming involves the following assumptions, activities, outputs and outcomes:

Assumptions

- Increasing the number of women in office and in political parties makes pro-gender equality policies more likely.
- Improving political capabilities of women in political society, CSOs and the media will lead to better voice for pro-gender equality.
- Increasing the number of women voters will lead to greater support for female candidates.

Activities

- Support to voter registration and the mobilisation of women voters, including to vote for women candidates, and support to the security and safety of women voters;
- Gender-sensitive civic education;
- Training of women candidates and capacity building for national women leaders;
- Media training; and
- Technical assistance, for example supporting a gender and governance expert advisor to work with the National Elections Commission (NEC).

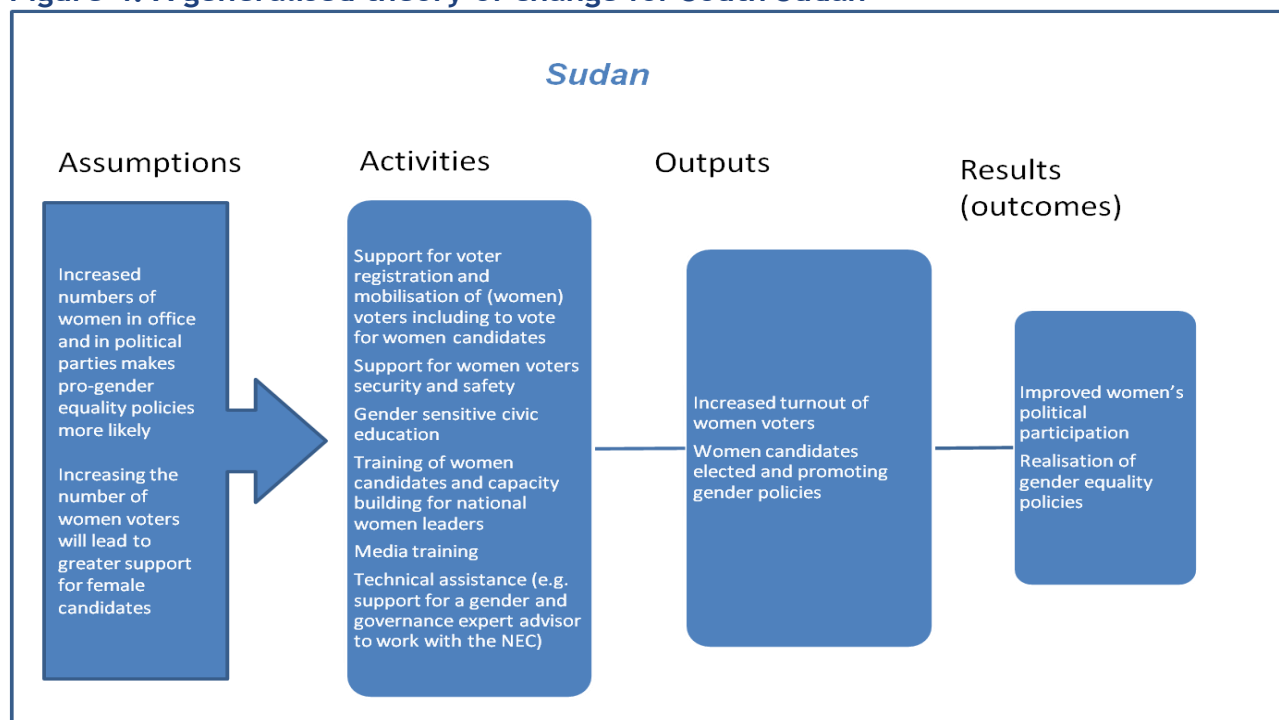
Outputs

- High turnout of women voters; and
- Women candidates elected and promoting gender policies.

Outcomes

- Improved political participation of women; and
- Realisation of gender equality policies.

Figure 4: A generalised theory of change for South Sudan



A key finding about the **relevance** of programmes in South Sudan is that there is not much evidence of an explicit theory of change in use or of a longer-term strategy for engagement on

women's political participation. In contrast to the other country cases, it was challenging to understand what the theory of change was for much of the programmes in South Sudan. In part, this reflects the wider context: governance structures in South Sudan have been in flux and conflict risks remain high. This has manifested itself in largely short-term and *ad hoc* approaches, focused mostly on a particular electoral moment (i.e. the elections and the referendum). While this may have been appropriate given wider uncertainties, post-independence opportunities for longer-term and more strategic engagement have not yet been realised, and at the time of the evaluation, had not been identified in a meaningful way.

Moreover, informants cast doubt on the validity of some of the claims and assumptions underlying support in this area. The predominant view seemed to be that both the elections and the referendum would see high turnout (of both men and women), in part because of the wider political stakes for the future of South Sudan. This made it difficult to attribute high levels of women's registration and turnout in these elections to UN Women programming, and respondents questioned whether this focus was useful in light of limited resources and other critical needs.

More significantly, focus groups discussion during the evaluation suggested that there were no, or only weak, links between political elites (including female politicians) and women at the grassroots. The majority of women in South Sudan face tremendous difficulties but do not see their concerns and experiences reflected in the political agenda. This is partly because of poor infrastructure, which makes travel and face-to-face engagement very difficult. This undermines both politicians' abilities to interact with the communities they should represent and opportunities for communities themselves to participate and provide oversight in governance processes. But it also points to a lack of attention being paid to the core concerns of grassroots women and the need to build much greater links between these and policy agendas (by politicians of all genders). The assumed link between women politicians and the realisation of women's issues (set out in the theory of change above) is therefore problematic. Challenging the validity of this assumption also calls into question the overriding focus on supporting formal political participation at the expense of greater engagement with other levels of change, including the societal and legal levels.

The bias towards support to formal political participation has implications for **sustainability** too. Most of the support analysed took the form of short-term grants which ended following the election period, with partners reporting a lack of follow-up once projects were completed. Opportunities to adopt a more 'electoral cycle' approach (as set out in the PAC), with greater follow-up and engagement in the post-election period, were therefore missed. Again, this reflects in part the dynamic and uncertain process underway in South Sudan; however, with independence, new approaches will be needed, and there is as yet no evidence of these.

At the level of **effectiveness**, positive practices are evident: pragmatic approaches to addressing significant capacity and infrastructure gaps have been adopted, including the use of local partners to access some of the most isolated and rural areas (on motorbikes and on foot). However, the challenges were identified in terms of the choice of activities: informants reported that high numbers of one-off workshops and training events were insufficient to address extremely low levels of capacity (and were likely ineffective where there were low levels of literacy and education). Some respondents saw UN Women/UNDP's choice of partners as potentially politicised. There was a perception from some respondents that these partners were drawn from a narrow pool of connected individuals and organisation, with little wider awareness of the criteria for partner selection. Ongoing efforts by the UN Women office to assess NGOs and develop greater criteria for partner selection were therefore welcomed as a useful way of ensuring openness and transparency in selection processes. This could potentially serve as an example for other offices once it has been completed.

Financial management was highlighted as a significant challenge to **efficiency**, particularly in cases of low capacity of local partners. Partners found it challenging to realise some of the more stringent requirements, for example around reporting. However, they also pointed to the constraining impact of delays in receiving funds (with some partners reporting that they had yet to receive the final instalment of funds for reference support). There were also reports that

the relationship between UN Women and UNDP was challenging in this respect, with funding delays from one to the other having knock-on effects for partners. Concerns were also raised in terms of the relationship between the country office and the regional office, which was sometimes seen as more of a hindrance than a help.

Southern Africa sub-regional case study

Two projects were analysed for Southern Africa. The first assists members of SADC to implement member governments' plans to end gender-based violence in their respective countries. Activities include working with the SADC Gender Unit to develop a standard set of indicators for measuring progress on ending gender-based violence; monitoring and evaluating the implementation of national plans; and education and dissemination to popularise the campaign to end violence. The second project seeks to strengthen the capacity of female politicians to engage in advocacy and 'transformative leadership'. The main aim of this project is to achieve higher visibility for women candidates and gender platforms in elections, and to improve the capacity of women to participate in politics.

The theory of change implicit in this programming involves the following assumptions, activities, outputs and outcomes:

Assumptions

- Tackling gender-based violence requires greater sensitisation and media attention.
- Facilitating women's access to government enhances gender equality.
- Women in politics would benefit from building certain personal skills.

Activities

- Development of indicators and measurement of progress;
- Support to SADC education and sensitisation programmes to end gender-based violence; and
- Training and capacity development for female politicians.

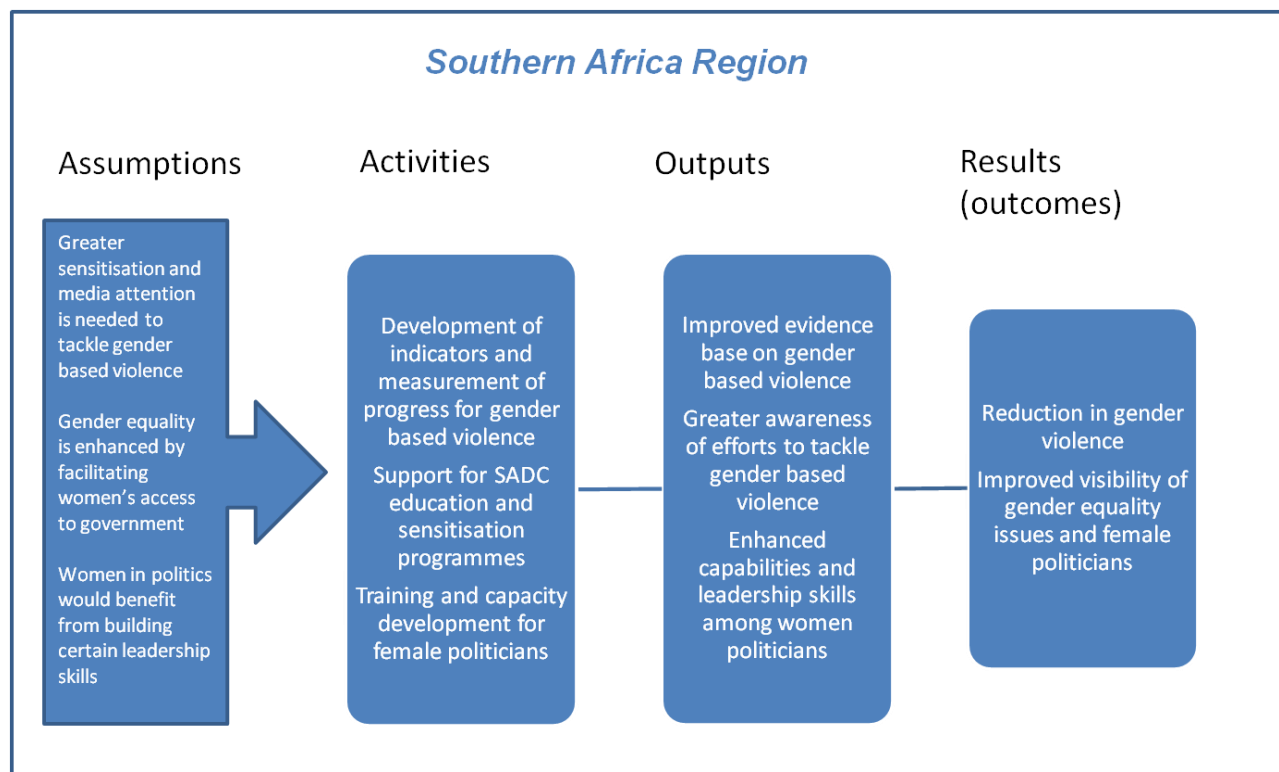
Outputs

- Improved evidence base on gender-based violence;
- Greater awareness of efforts to tackle gender-based violence; and
- Enhanced capabilities and leadership skills among women politicians.

Outcomes

- A reduction in gender violence;
- Improved visibility of gender equality issues; and
- Improved support by female politicians to gender equality.

Figure 5: A generalised theory of change for Southern Africa



In terms of **relevance**, the projects analysed are well located within a broad definition of support to women in politics, with a general recognition of the need to go 'beyond numbers' in the overall framing of support. However, a key finding is that a multi-country focus can be problematic because the translation of broad aims into local contexts can lead to more simplistic understandings of the problems being addressed. In practice, this often means that, at the implementation stage, the emphasis ends up being on measuring how many women are in different positions of office. A key problem in programming is a lack of attention to the patterns of causality. There is no clear evidence linking the nature of the training and personal skills interventions to increases in the numbers of women in office. This problem of attribution is important to unpack when programming. In terms of the theory of change discussed above, it is difficult to assess whether the types of skills interventions, for example, are appropriate for particular contexts or indeed if they lead to more effective participation of women on committees and in legislatures

More generally, within the region, UN Women (in common with other UN agencies) is seen as being closer than other donors to government ministries and departments, rather than as a funder or ally of civil society (one notable exception lies in the soliciting of shadow reports for CEDAW by CSOs). In practice, this has meant that grassroots engagement and support to UN programming have been weak. Addressing this would involve a shift from a focus on 'getting women into office' to one on 'getting more women into politics', with a greater emphasis on women's capacity to self-organise, articulate their needs and interests and use processes to advance those interests.

Turning to **sustainability**, there are a number of implications for programming. For example, a closer look at how to democratise and reform political parties in terms of women's access and participation has to date been absent from support. Evidence on the use of quotas in South Africa suggests that women can be accommodated on party lists fairly easily, but at the price of their affiliation to particular factions within political parties. This highlights ongoing challenges in terms of developing sustainable structures within political parties to support fair and non-violent contestation for positions on party lists. Moreover, particular attention needs

to be paid to ethnically based and religious parties that may act as barriers to gender equality. Another key area important for sustainability is the need to develop the capacity of women's organisations to use democratic processes more effectively. This includes not only mobilising women candidates in elections but also much a broader investment in information dissemination regarding how laws are made, how to use public participation processes and how to articulate needs in policy terms.

Crucially, analysis for this sub-region indicates a need to question assumptions around evidence-based policymaking, which seem to have undermined programme **effectiveness**. In South Africa, for example, it has reportedly been relatively easy to push the government to commit to eradicating gender-based violence, but it has proven much more difficult to translate this commitment into actual procedures and institutions responsive to women affected by violence. Bridging this gap between promises and practice would entail moving beyond a focus on statistics to emphasising, for instance, the documentation of weaknesses in the judicial system or addressing police attitudes towards women and so on. Doing so would require recognition that it is incapacity and unwillingness within various arms of the state (and at lower levels) to address these issues that are the key obstacles, rather than a lack of awareness of such issues.

For both projects examined, **efficiency** has reportedly been hampered by delays in transferring funds from UN Women to partners, making it difficult for the latter to carry out activities. In part, this seems to reflect a number of changes in personnel in the UN Southern Africa Regional Office (SARO), which have undermined consistent and proactive planning. The requirements of administrative reporting also pose challenges for partners, particularly for smaller organisations.

5.3 Overall analysis and conclusions

This section summarises the key conclusions from an analysis of the case study findings. They are organised around the main evaluation criteria of relevance, sustainability, effectiveness and efficiency.

Relevance

Some general key factors were found to contribute to more relevant and successful interventions in the country case studies. First, where country office staff hold a deep understanding of context and the ability to apply and utilise this within their work, this makes a difference in the quality of programming and implementation. In the case of Burundi, it seems to help that country staff are mostly nationals and that some have a long history of engagement with gender equality issues in the country.

Second, and related to this, when country office staff are able to identify the needs of women engaging in politics and opportunities for interventions at *both* the sub-national and the national levels, it has positive impact, including in terms of ensuring outreach to remoter parts of the population. Of course, this also depends on staff having knowledge of country context and access to different (and relevant) sets of stakeholders at the grassroots and sub-national, as well as national and international, levels.

Third, it is helpful when country office staff are able to manoeuvre the political context strategically to build effective alliances and networks between and among CSOs, key actors in government and donors. This was found to be the case in Burundi, where the UN Women's country office (which has outreach capacity) and the UNDP Senior Gender Advisor have worked together to galvanise action across a range of government and civil society actors to achieve results regarding women's access to electoral registration, both as voters and as candidates.

Additional findings on relevance include the following:

Challenging assumptions and measuring change

First, it was found that the theories of change that underpin programming at country level (and in SARO) tend to assume chains of causality that remain largely unchallenged during the

programming cycle and that in some cases do not necessarily match the realities of local contexts. This is so even in cases where programming follows the expected script and lays out a logic chain that identifies activities, outputs and expected outcomes, which are often presented as uncontroversial. However, because initial assumptions are not questioned in terms of their relevance to the context (such as whether focusing on electoral participation should be the main focus of programming), results tend to be disappointing. This was found to be the case in Nigeria.

Moreover, measuring progress towards outcomes of transformative change through quantitative output-level indicators, such as numbers of workshops held, is problematic because it cannot capture quality of training, relevance to context or suitability of the targeted audience. Finding more appropriate indicators remains a challenge given the current focus in the aid environment on easily measurable results.

In some cases, identification of concrete outputs that *realistically* match intended outcomes is useful. For instance, the indicator developed by SARO with the SADC Gender Unit to measure progress towards ending violence against women is expected to become a useful tool (and is currently unique) in Africa, and could be used in other parts of the region.

Some important differences between the case study countries in relation to their underlying theories of change and how these have informed programming should be noted. In some cases, the wrong assumptions were made at the outset. For example, in Nigeria and South Sudan, it was wrongly assumed that women politicians would champion gender issues. By contrast, in Burundi, much programming is premised formally on some of these assumptions but *actual* interventions and implementation of UN Women (and UNDP) activities have achieved a much better fit with the realities of the local context and strategies. Operational practice has been characterised by an ability to identify key players, moments of opportunity and relevant entry points, which in turn reflects staff capacity to work with the real constraints presented by the existing power structures and institutional context (both formal and informal) of post-conflict Burundi.

More politically informed analysis would help to challenge unfounded assumptions and ensure consistency with local realities. However, while context analysis is present at a general level in most the programming documents reviewed, the case studies found that this does not go deep enough to probe into the power dynamics that shape the political, institutional and socio-cultural context and that in turn are the object of transformation to advance on gender equality gains for political participation.

In Southern Africa, it was found that the problem lay less in the assumptions informing the theory of change and more in the activities selected to achieve political change, for example the decision to focus on the measurement of gender violence rather than on the actual pockets of resistance to improvements in gender outcomes.

Assessing the relevance of programming at the three levels of change identified for the evaluation is important in terms of analysing the extent to which country office programming is both informed by global strategic thinking and relevant to the context.

(a) Societal change

First, if agency and empowerment are to be advanced, it is important to ensure that political participation is understood as encompassing women outside the formal sphere of politics, including at grassroots level. As the SARO case study pointed out, a question for programming should relate to 'how to get more women into office', not just 'how to get more women into politics'. As already noted, this shifts the emphasis in our understanding of politics from the formal processes (say, of elections) to the real spheres of decision making and the capacity to articulate (women's) needs and interests.

In practice, recognising the need to work beyond the formal sphere reaffirms the value of supporting women at the grassroots, at both the national and the sub-national levels, and not only around fixed events, like elections, but also in relation to political battles about resource allocation and access to services, for example. This need was evident in the case of South

Sudan, with informants suggesting that efforts to support women's political voice might be more relevant if they were directed more towards grassroots actors and processes and less towards supporting women in the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), where voice is more likely to be co-opted and where there is a less immediate understanding of the real needs of rural communities far removed from Juba.

Second, the fieldwork uncovered the fact that political agency for women can also be built through strategic support to *relevant* networks and alliances of stakeholders who support gender equality agendas within society – at the sub-national and national level, at sub-regional and global levels and, crucially, *between* societal and state actors. For instance, informants in Burundi and Southern Africa noted that such networks supported by UN Women had enabled constructive synergies between demand- and supply-side efforts to support women's political empowerment.

Third, the need to build up capabilities for political agency among women has led to support to capacity development for women leaders at different levels of political and social mobilisation (sometimes with good results, as noted in the SARO and Burundi case studies). At the same time, societal change is also about altering embedded socio-cultural attitudes about women and politics. The Nigeria study signals the need to build into programming a deeper understanding of sub-national dynamics of politics and socio-cultural structures that act to inhibit women's political voice. Without this, interventions risk remaining at the surface of formal politics and advocacy about legal change. Therefore, increasing sensitisation through gender equality campaigns is an important strategy, including through engagement with traditional (male) leaders or elders at the sub-national level to build potential alliances for change.

(b) Legal change

Legal change remains crucial for removing formal barriers to women's political participation at the national and sub-national levels, and creating an enabling legal and constitutional framework for gender equity. For women to achieve greater presence in public and elected office is itself a gender equality gain; therefore, support to quotas remains a relevant objective. However, the expectation that a greater number of women in public office will contribute in a straightforward way to other gender equality objectives needs to be downplayed. This realisation is already present in UN Women's strategic thinking, and the fieldwork found that across cases country office staff were well aware of the imperative to go 'beyond numbers'. But translating this knowledge into strategic interventions in support of legal change that is suited to country conditions and which thus support women's political empowerment effectively is a challenge.

The fieldwork indicates that the value of legal change for the political empowerment of women would be enhanced if it were connected to a wider range of relevant institutional reforms. Taking a more sophisticated view of related laws is one issue. For instance, as noted above, country offices' concern with electoral legislation needs to go beyond quotas and include a deeper understanding of the incentive structures created by other aspects of electoral law that have consequences for the political voice of women *and* men, such as proportionality and rules about how candidates are selected. Informants in women's organisations in Burundi and Nigeria noted that legal change in support of access to politics for women needed to be complemented by legal change that eliminated obstacles to economic empowerment, such as changes to inheritance laws that increase women's access to economic assets. Insufficient economic empowerment, a number of informants claimed, undermines women's capabilities for political engagement.

Moreover, legal change cannot be assumed to be progressive. It may even be regressive from a gender equality perspective in some cases (as was found in North Sudan). Second, in post-conflict contexts, there is a trend towards the formalisation of customary norms but also a concern, as expressed by women's groups in South Sudan, that codifying norms of customary justice uncritically will entrench gender inequalities at the sub-national level.

The Burundi, SARO and South Sudan case studies also found that formal legal change in favour of gender equality often does not go hand-in-hand with a sincere commitment to implementing laws on the part of rulers. The SARO study found that it should not be assumed that signatory governments to the SADC Protocol are necessarily keen to meet the obligations this imposes on them. For example, informants from women's organisations suggested that, beyond resorting to indicators on existing legal obligations and statistical indicators (important as these are for tracking levels of violence against women), there was a need for a more integrated approach to addressing political, systemic, structural and cultural obstacles to the effective implementation of legal change. Such an approach would help in the identification of relevant context-specific entry points.

Finally, the implementation of legal change depends not only on a wider conducive political process of change but also on prevailing social attitudes on gender relations. Thus, international support for legal change is important, but this needs to take into account the broader socio-political context in which legal reform processes are embedded.

(c) Political change

First, there is a tendency to operate with formal categories of political actors and political institutions. For instance, in almost all cases, support to political parties, as the gatekeepers to formal political participation, is assumed to be necessary, but the particular features of the political party system and the political parties themselves are not problematised. There is little or no critical reflection on how parties themselves may need to be 'democratised', or what the logic of accountability between political actors and state and society is. In some cases (Burundi, South Sudan) where parties formally embrace gender equality goals at a general level, programming takes parties at face value without sufficiently examining either informal party structures or prevalent attitudes and practices within parties, which in reality remain discriminatory towards women. Programme design also fails to acknowledge or address the logic of dominant party rule, which not only reduces the space for women MPs to go against the grain of executive branch interests but also diminishes the space for oppositional voice generally. Women MPs in these dominant parties are unlikely to be able to challenge the ruling party line, as was borne out in South Sudan or Burundi.

Second, working only with formal structures does not address the challenge of entrenched (informal) patrimonial hierarchies in parties (as in Nigeria), where the political logic of mediating regional, ethnic and religious cleavages outweighs demands for more effective democratisation within parties. In such circumstances, agendas for gender equality are likely to be subordinated to dominant narratives about power and resource distribution that may be inimical to these social justice goals.

Third, even where working with formal categories is relevant, more sophisticated institutional analysis of incentives and interest structures would help in identifying relevant entry points. The SARO case study noted that efforts to support women's access to political parties would benefit from a better understanding of how electoral and political systems differed in the sub-region; this is currently missing from strategic planning. The concrete details of electoral systems shape the space for voice that individual politicians have within their parties and in relation to decision-making processes, as well as the logic of accountability towards constituents. Thus it is important to engage with issues such as how elected officials (men and women) relate to their constituencies or their party structures, whether the electoral system is first-past-the-post or one of proportional representation or whether quota objectives are obtained through reserved seat systems. Electoral systems are also likely to affect how parties select women. In Burundi, for instance, women's grassroots organisations view elected women as 'flowers' because they are handpicked by male-dominated party leaderships, rather than being selected from the ranks of women activists, and therefore are expected to toe the line set by the party leadership.

Thus, the extent to which women politicians can set agendas and be accountable to constituencies for these depends not only on their political commitment to gender equality (not to be taken for granted) but also on the nature of the (formal and informal) institutional settings and the national and sub-national levels they operate at. The nature of political

parties, their openness and responsiveness to constituencies rather than elite interests, the nature of electoral rules and the degree of political pluralism, as well as the nature of informal rules and social norms that shape decision-making processes (such as patrimonialism): all of these are critical determinants of political outcomes and thus shape the real policy space for change. Use of this type of deep institutional analysis to inform underlying theories of change and strategic choices at country level is underdeveloped in the cases reviewed.

A number of cases highlighted the desirability of using UN programmes to enhance accountability mechanisms, on the basis that accountability gains could motivate women in office to work with and for constituencies of women and that male politicians would also be made answerable to women voters. For this to play out in practice, however, depends on wider changes in the dynamics of accountability in state–society relations more generally. As indicated by the connections outlined in the PAC framework, iterative and incremental shifts at different levels of political and social engagement can cumulatively alter gender relations over time and build narratives and systems of accountability conducive to realising gender equality agendas. There is a role, through medium- and long-term programming informed by strategic political and social analysis, for UN agencies to contribute to such an enabling environment through appropriate interventions at specific political and reform junctures. But it is also evident that theories of change in programming need to be much more modest about the impact and role of UN agencies and other international actors in such processes.

Nevertheless, the evaluation did find that additional strategic actions to support women’s participation in the political sphere can include interventions aimed at building up the capabilities of women politicians to engage in advocacy and ‘transformative leadership’ (as cited in the case of SARO). These activities were identified as being important in enabling effective voice and agency once women reach positions of elected office. For instance, the SARO case study found that women politicians who benefited from such training were able to work more effectively with the media to raise the visibility of women’s needs in their reporting. In Burundi, this strategy was at the core of pre-electoral support to capacity development activities at the sub-national level in the run-up to the local elections of 2011.

Adapting to the needs and challenges of fragile states

Peace-building processes present unique opportunities for change and can result in reforms that give the impression of speedy progress in some important respects (e.g. where peace agreements and new constitutions make concentrated bursts of legal change possible). Such legal change is laudable. In the case of Burundi, the incorporation of quota systems in the new constitution, and later in the electoral code for sub-national office, has accelerated the process of getting more women into public office. In itself, this has created a sense of change, which national CSOs and grassroots organisations, as well as women in the villages, thought important. At the same time, there is a risk that complacency about the potential impact of greater numbers of elected women will lead to a slowing-down of change efforts, as the routinisation of politics allows more entrenched social and cultural attitudes of gender discrimination to surface and shape the *real* dynamics of the distribution of political power. If this occurs, it is likely that women will continue to be excluded from key decision-making positions. This risk is exacerbated by the logic of political realities that are recurrent in FCAS, such as the concentration of power in the executive branch or dominant party rule which effectively diminishes the accountability powers of parliament (and thus of women MPs).

In addition, FCAS present the challenge of high levels of volatility and uncertainty. While it is certainly the case that UN Women and UNDP staff need to be able to work flexibly and to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances, it is also important to recognise the importance of monitoring rapidly evolving situations carefully. This is not only to ensure that interventions do no harm (e.g. do not exacerbate conflict) but also to identify windows of opportunities as they arise. In the case of South Sudan, for example, more strategic engagement by UN Women might improve its ability to seize the opportunities that post-independence processes can offer, especially in relation to going beyond the short-termism of electoral cycles and rooting women’s political participation in newly emerging state institutions.

Sustainability

The following factors were found to have influenced the sustainability of programming and/or projects.

Sustainability of resources and capabilities

At one level, a long-term commitment by country offices may be required to sustain the impact of support. Some measures, such as training of trainers in CSOs or NGOs, can be effective at building capabilities that become self-sustaining over time. For example, women's organisations in Burundi noted this as critically important. However, unless capacity development programmes are integrated into broader strategies for change, they risk producing only short-term and small-scale results. In addition, the skills that individual women acquire may fail to take root and have an impact at grassroots level, which is often the intended locus of change. For instance, women activists who receive training may subsequently leave the grassroots to join political parties, or indeed international development organisations, taking their skills with them and depleting the grassroots of the intended new capabilities. This may be occurring in South Sudan, as peace-building processes have enabled activist women to join government. In small countries, by recruiting locally, UN Women and UNDP also risk depleting national organisations (in society or government) of human capital. Given the findings on relevance regarding country office staff skills and knowledge above, the scarcity of indigenous human resources presents real dilemmas about where and how to target capacity development, and makes integrating capacity building with broader strategies for change a key priority.

Partner selection

Working with *relevant* and *representative* partners at the national and sub-national level is essential to sustainability. Country offices that do not have a presence at the sub-national level, directly or through partners, risk working only with elite groups in urban centres. This was found to be the case in Khartoum, with the result that UN Women is not perceived as accessible by grassroots CSOs. At the same time, as illustrated by the South Sudan case study, weak infrastructure (including roads, transportation and communication) can make outreach beyond the capital difficult. By contrast, in Burundi, UN Women seems especially well placed to work at the grassroots level, partly because the country office has made efforts to build up internal capabilities to support peace-building activities, such as conflict mediation, at the sub-national level and in the hills. In the Nigerian case, there were concerns about ensuring sufficient outreach and an appropriate choice of partners given the nature of federalism and the country's regional diversity. In SARO, work seems to be concentrated on regional NGOs and SADC structures, which are by their nature removed somewhat from grassroots CSOs. Furthermore, uneven levels of women's access to office in some countries in the region leads to programming that 'crowds out' questions of long-term effectiveness of women's participation in relation to equality outcomes.

Therefore, working strategically to build up networks of organisations at different levels and across different types of actors can contribute to sustainability. First, it reduces the resource costs involved in working in silos with different stakeholders and enhances collaboration (rather than competition) between pro-reform actors. Second, joining forces improves collaborative impact and enables the connection of different areas of activity through the sharing of experiences and lessons learnt. Third, it contributes to the forging of sustained alliances that constitute a more effective front in pushing for gender equality outcomes and in obtaining further resources from other funders, which is important for sustainability.

Coalition building and long-term strategies

Achieving sustainable improvements in women's political participation requires long-term engagement, and UN Women should plan for this. Support should include working with different stakeholders to strengthen participatory processes in governments and parliaments and build better accountability relations between state and society. This can include helping CSOs to use and expand avenues for commenting on policies and put forward alternative evidence, such as shadow reporting for CEDAW. In government, this long-term strategy involves identifying champions of change who are committed to making political parties work

in more inclusive ways. Social accountability dynamics through different forms of mobilisation, including around rights, are also important. In the long term, however, gender equality depends on political change that leads to more accountable and responsive state–society relations.

Effectiveness

If relevance is about identifying the particular area of support that is most likely to be effective in furthering defined objectives at a specific point in a country's political and socio-cultural history, then effectiveness speaks to the challenges of selecting concrete activities that are most likely to contribute to intended goals. Any assessment of effectiveness needs to take into consideration caveats related to attributing change to concrete donor interventions.

To select appropriate activities, country offices must determine what interventions are realistic and feasible while retaining sight of broader strategic objectives. However, as the evaluation demonstrates, there is a real danger of UN Women offices choosing activities that are easy to measure but unlikely to produce the best results. For example, in the case of Burundi, it was noted that many women MPs showed up for only the last session of training courses so that they could either sign the attendance sheet and collect their cheque (intended as an incentive to attend) or report back as having been trained. Turning MPs away for late attendance is politically difficult for workshop coordinators but the activity objective has clearly not been met effectively, despite the fact that the formal number of attendees might indicate that a large number of MPs have been trained. In SARO, attendance at workshops is often seen as a 'break' from work and a chance to collect a *per diem*.

Partner selection is also critical for effectiveness and requires strategic decisions about which part of government to focus on and how best to work with both government and CSOs. In South Sudan, for example, it was felt that working mostly with the Ministry of Gender was not an effective way to increase the visibility of gender equality goals, and that working through other line ministries might diminish the risk of ghettoisation of gender equality objectives. As noted, facilitating links between government and CSOs in order to support constructive synergies between demand- and supply-side change over time may be the most effective way to connect the political and societal dimensions in ways that contribute to sustainable, iterative exchanges and outcomes.

Realities of capacity constraints and the need for 'best fit' approaches

Informants also identified practices that contribute to effectiveness. For example, some country offices have adopted a pragmatic approach in order to work around significant capacity or infrastructural constraints, such as where the absence of roads makes access difficult. In South Sudan, for instance, a heavy emphasis was placed on using partners to provide support around the elections and referendum in rural and other isolated areas. These activities were a high priority for the country office, and huge efforts were expended on using motorbikes or encouraging people to walk long distances to ensure outreach.

Increasingly, however, there is recognition that supporting women's political empowerment effectively not only means going beyond elections but also may require linking governance and sector work to, for example, increase women's access to education or economic resources. As noted in interviews in South Sudan and Burundi, achieving peace, security and the protection of girls and women is recognised as crucial to building capabilities and the possibility of agency in FCAS.

The Burundi case study showed that country offices can effectively apply a 'best fit' approach to programme design and implementation when they have staff with the requisite skills, networks and country knowledge. The most notable success story in Burundi is UN Women's support to networks and partnerships across a range of actors, which has contributed to bridging CSOs, government and international partners, while also connecting sub-national and national dynamics. This has resulted in concrete outcomes. For instance, it seems to have helped to enable legal change such as reforms of the electoral law and the criminal code in favour of women.

The value added of UN Women and UNDP

UN Women and UNDP's appreciation of their potential leverage needs to be grounded in a more realistic assessment of what can be achieved given their own capacity and resource constraints and the particular context in which they are operating. A basic consideration is the scope of influence and impact that UN agencies have in different types of countries. Countries like Burundi (e.g. aid-dependent, undergoing post-conflict reconstruction) are much more likely to be susceptible to donor influence than those like Nigeria.

There are expectations that recent changes to the status of UN Women within the UN system will enable it to take a more strategic approach to supporting women's political participation at the country level. For example, UN Women will now have a seat at the table of political negotiations at the country level. Such changes will create opportunities for UN Women to develop a more strategic relationship with UNDP and to champion gender equality agendas within UN agencies more effectively and monitor these to ensure they are not undermined by other priorities.

The Burundi case study in particular demonstrates that a strategic relationship between UN Women and, in this case, the Senior Gender Advisor in UNDP can help in establishing a sustained alliance between UN agencies at country level and improve the visibility of the gender equality agenda in relation to women's political participation. The synergies between UN Women and UNDP's specialist concerns and knowledge make greater collaboration in this area potentially productive: UNDP can spearhead the governance agenda across a range of democratisation issues and UN Women can lead on the gender equality agenda and bring its conceptual and technical knowledge about mainstreaming challenges to activities in different sectors, including governance.

Changes at the global level are also creating expectations that UN Women will lead on the gender equality agenda in the UN and beyond. Indeed, the change from UNIFEM to UN Women generates important opportunities in this respect, including because UN Women will now have a seat at the political table and so can ensure greater visibility for gender issues. In practice, this offers the chance to set in motion new synergies between the agency and other parts of the UN system. While the partnership with UNDP will remain critical, the expectation is that more opportunities to collaborate with new actors (including outside the UN system) at global and national level will emerge.

Interviews noted that UN Women might act as an 'information broker', providing tools and information to a wide variety of organisations working on women's issues. Such a role could also facilitate south-south exchange, through sharing experiences and lessons learnt within and across regions.

Efficiency

The role of country offices and programmes is also expected to expand as a result of changes to the mandate of UN Women. For instance, at country level, there is an expectation that country offices are likely to have greater autonomy, including in defining strategic priorities. Country offices will need to have the appropriate staff skills and resources to take on such strategic responsibilities, and it is not evident that financial resources will be increased substantially. Still, there is much that could be done to strengthen human resources through more strategic thinking about staff skills and to optimise the use of scarce resources through more effective networking at the national level.

Therefore, staffing and skills issues are critical to maximising the efficiency of programming in the context of limited financial resources. As has been noted, of particular importance is the recruitment of staff with a deep understanding of the country and sub-national context in order to optimise the potential for more strategic thinking and more effective identification of entry points. All the case studies point to the fact that ensuring that country office staff have the capability to engage analytically with the political economy of the country is a key starting point for putting in place more politically informed programmes underpinned by more realistic theories of change.

A further concern regarding staffing issues, which emerged from discussions in South Sudan, is that UN Women's increased reliance on short-term advisors and consultants, rather than on longer-term posts, leads to short-termism and undermines the institutional memory and capabilities of country offices. By contrast, in Burundi, there are strategic plans and processes underway to increase the number of country office staff.

Problems with funding flows and resource management were a recurrent issue in the case studies. In the SARO case, the efficiency of both projects has been hampered by delays in transferring funds from UN Women to NGOs, with partners therefore less able to get projects off the ground in a number of countries. High staff turnover and heavy administrative reporting requirements were identified as likely sources of the problem. While larger NGOs can cope with such challenges, smaller women's organisations may find themselves in a position where they cannot sustain programmes because donor requirements take up too much energy.

Delays and funding uncertainties were also evident in the basket funds (Burundi and Nigeria). In the case of Nigeria, some DGD funds in support of the elections were not released until *after* the elections.

As has been noted, UN Women is now better placed to monitor the visibility of the gender equality agenda, and this signals potentially improved synergies with UNDP. However, the evaluation also found that the UN Women/UNDP relationship had been problematic in some instances, mainly in relation to bureaucratic challenges around reporting and funding flows. In South Sudan, for example, funding from UNDP to cover UN Women expenses for support to elections was late; in Nigeria, reporting and flows were less than clear, both between UN Women and UNDP and in relation to other donors in the DGD basket fund. Closer working could also lead to territorial battles over resources and, potentially, over agenda setting.

Summary of findings

- Gender equality agendas are political – and all the more so in relation to the objectives of supporting women's political empowerment. Ultimately, women's political empowerment is about access to political decision-making structures and women's ability to set the political and policy agenda in way that furthers gender equality objectives. The intended consequences involve a redistribution of power and resources in ways that improve equality between genders. The evaluation found that, in some cases, UN Women and UNDP can and do contribute to enhancing the enabling environment in ways that make these changes more likely.
- At the global level, strategic thinking in UN Women and UNDP has evolved towards more nuanced thinking on what contributes to improving women's political participation. There is a recognition that women's political agency depends on changes at multiple levels. This includes: first, changes in the social sphere to enhance mobilisation and social accountability capabilities for women and which challenge social norms that undermine gender equality; legal change to remove formal barriers for gender equality for political participation; and improved space for women's access to and voice in the *real* spheres and institutions of political decision-making.
- Despite this more nuanced thinking regarding women's political participation among UN Women and UNDP staff, the evaluation found that translating this knowledge into context-relevant programming remains a challenge. UN Women and UNDP strategic documents stress the importance of country level situation analyses, but programming typically falls back on the usual entry points around electoral support, uncritical assumptions about political parties as drivers of change, and the value added of increased numbers of women in office.
- The evaluation found that programming is most relevant and effective when it is informed by deep understanding of context. From this it was concluded that better integrated and

ongoing social and political analysis, including of political economy factors of power relations and incentive structures that need to change. This could support the identification of context-specific constraints and opportunities and the design of programmes in order to achieve a better fit between interventions with existing political realities.

- It was found that there is value-added in supporting leadership capabilities for women in society and women in political institutions, in order to enhance the quality of women's voice.
- It was also found that country offices which are able to identify, and support relevant stakeholders in, and strategic alliances across, society, state and government, do contribute to positive reform synergies. Over time, such networks can work to motivate and enable appropriate legal reforms and public policy choices, and contribute to attitudinal change regarding women's political voice.
- Ultimately, progress on effective political participation for women is also associated with the degree to which wider conditions of state-society relations move towards more inclusive and accountable forms of democratic governance. This means that a measure of realism is important, including regarding the role of the international community.

6 Recommendations

In the area of support to women's political participation, at the global level UN Women and UNDP have moved away from linear models of causality that focus mostly on increasing numbers of women in office. However, the evaluation shows that 1) the latest global strategic thinking is not always applied to country level; and 2) the strategic thinking that is applied is not well tailored to context. This is true not just for UN Women and UNDP in this region: increased recognition of the importance of context-specific programming has made this a challenge for all donors.

The key recommendations to emerge from this evaluation are as follows:

- **Programming should be informed by theoretically robust strategic guidance at the global and regional levels, but COs need to adapt this guidance to context realities.** The practitioner should be enabled to unpack general assumptions about what drives transformation *within their particular context*, and use this to identify realistic and plausible ways for UN Women to support positive change processes. Thus, there can be no overarching theory of change, but COs can develop their own theories of change, informed by overall strategic objectives (which should be theoretically robust), and principally guided by what is plausible and realistic at the country level to inform programming.
- **There is a need for structured analysis that integrates social and political analysis, including of the political economy of context-specific gender equality barriers to political participation, into programming and implementation.** UN Women and UNDP should focus resources on developing a diagnostics tool that country offices can use to identify both strategic and realistic entry points and the most effective forms of engagement. Issues that such a tool needs to consider include: context-specific power structures and institutional incentives (both formal and informal); social-political and socio-cultural conditions that shape gender relations; how different actors stakeholders are positioned in relation to these; how resistance to reform is manifested, how these factors shape blockages for progress or present opportunities for change.
- **Such an analysis should inform interventions throughout the life of programmes.** This analysis should involve going beyond the descriptive and static situation analysis, to be integrated into the implementation process during the life of programming. This should be a dynamic tool that can help operations adapt to changing conditions as these evolve.

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- **In fragile settings it is important to incorporate flexibility into programming.** Longer term planning is not always possible given ongoing levels of volatility and uncertainty and, in some cases, extreme limitations in terms of resources, capabilities and basic infrastructure. Ad hoc approaches are therefore likely to prevail and be more effective in FCAS. However, there is a need to carefully monitor support to ensure that it capitalises on moments of opportunity as they arise but does not do harm in the medium- to long-term.
 - **UN Women country offices should be well equipped to differentiate between national and sub-national contexts.** Analysing within-country variations is important for all UN Women; however, it is particularly crucial in FCAS where state institutions are especially weak and where political power operates through non-state channels (with varying degrees of formalisation). Under these conditions, support to political agency requires heightened sensitivity to sub-national power relations, socio-cultural values and institutions.
 - **There is a need to move beyond formal institutions to engage better with issues of power and agency by integrating better the social, political and legal spheres of change.** UN Women's de facto current emphasis at CO level on formal change through legal reform and institutional actors/processes risks remaining skin deep if it is not accompanied by support that enhances capabilities for effective political agency. Even in more stable polities it cannot be assumed that once formal institutions of democracy and principles of equality are legally in place implementation will follow. The complicated politics of policy, the resistance of bureaucracies to change and the interventions of localised interests need to be considered in programming. Thus, more effective forms of engagement involve adapting programming to context in ways that tap into different levels and processes of political, social and legal change, beyond the formal.
 - Focusing mostly on parties in some contexts where these are likely to remain captured by elite and patriarchal interests is not an effective strategy.
 - Working to support political agency in civil society in order to maintain a critical voice for social accountability and oversight of government policies and the conduct of elected/appointed officials (men and women) remains important.
 - Legal reforms, such as electoral laws that enhance women's access to political office, significantly create space for political engagement. Political empowerment depends on a wider set of capabilities and working through formal change should therefore also include addressing legislation and customary practices that inhibit agency for women (such as laws or customary practices that discriminate against women in relation to inheritance) or that contributes to improving human development, through improved access to services (health, education for women).
 - Support which bridges the three levels of change, by facilitating strategic alliances and networks, can contribute to enhancing reinforcing synergies that can build-up incremental change through iterative interaction between actors and process at the three levels. For this reason working strategically to build up networks of organisations at different levels, and across different types of actors can contribute to sustainability.
 - Strategic coalitions and networks are important because networking reduces resource costs of working in silos with different stakeholders. This in turn enhances competition rather than collaboration between pro-reform actors. It also connects the different areas of activities through lessons learned, sharing experiences, and enhances collaborative impact through the effect of joining forces. Finally strategic networks contributes to forging sustained alliances that can constitute a more effective front pushing for gender equality outcomes – and also obtaining other resources for other funders to support sustainability.

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- Differences and interactions between the global, national and sub-national need to be more strategically addressed. The dynamics, tempo and logic of change are likely to be different at the national and sub-national levels.

 - **UN Women should ensure country offices have the skills and resources they require to effectively plan and manage theory-driven, 'best fit' programmes in support of women's political participation.** Taking context seriously is not controversial but applying this mantra in practice remains a challenge. The following would improve the capacity of country offices in this respect:
 - Move away from the use of short-term staff contracts.
 - Capitalise on the ability of the UN to stay engaged over the long term and build institutional memory and knowledge.
 - Focus where possible on recruiting locally – but bear in mind the risks of drawing away scarce human resources from national government or CSO bodies.
 - Move away from the use of descriptive situation analyses. Provide staff with practical 'political intelligence' tools and train them on how to use them.
 - Build up management capabilities to improve funding flows.

 - **The new directions in UN Women and UNDP structures can be used to good effect to support more effective programming on women's political participation**
 - The move to grant country offices (for UN Women) greater levels of autonomy should create enabling conditions to integrate recommendations noted above. This is not only true for sub-Saharan Africa.
 - UN Women is now better placed to play a leading role in coordinating gender equality agendas within the UN system at country level. Closer engagement with UNDP will enable better synergies to be realised in governance and democracy support intended to building up inclusive, accountability state society relations.
 - UN Women and UNDP are well placed to support both government-level change, through advocacy for legal reform, and formal monitoring of alignment with sub-regional, regional or international commitments on CEDAW and gender rights more generally. This can be complemented with strategic support for shadow monitoring by independent CSOs.
 - It is important to manage expectations regarding new roles for UN Women, not least as the structural changes are not likely to be accompanied by increased resources.

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Annex 1

Annex 1.
Results chain for greater gender quality underlying broader theory of change for greater gender quality in political participation

Note: underlined text corresponds to 5 stages of the PAC

