WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM UN WOMEN EVALUATIONS?

A meta-analysis of evaluations managed by UN Women in 2013

July 2014

UN WOMEN

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Meta-analysis Consultant
Joseph Barners – ImpactReady

Meta-analysis Task Managers
Marco Segone
Messay Tassew

Meta-analysis Review Committee
Inga Sniukaite
Shravanti Reddy
Florencia Tateossian
Isabel Suarez
Caspar Merkle
Laura Gonzalez
Mona Selim
Yumiko Kanemitsu

Editor: Margo Alderton
Layout: Services Concept

Cover Photo: UN Women/Chau Doan

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A META-ANALYSIS OF EVALUATIONS MANAGED BY UN WOMEN IN 2013
JULY 2014

ACRONYMS

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
GEEW	Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women
GERAAS	Global Evaluation Reports Assessment and Analysis System
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development—Development Assistance Committee
RBM	Results-based Management
SMART	Recommended characteristics for indicators: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timebound
UN	United Nations
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
VAW	Violence Against Women

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FOREWORD

Towards the end of 2013, the Independent Evaluation Office of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) introduced the Global Evaluation Reports Assessment and Analysis System to be able to: i) assess the quality of evaluations managed by UN Women; and ii) synthesize and aggregate key findings, conclusions and recommendations.

The purpose of this meta-analysis is to capture the key findings and recommendations from all 2013 evaluation reports rated as satisfactory or better quality by the 2013 meta-evaluation, with the final aim of providing UN Women senior management key insights to improve UN Women relevance, effectiveness and organizational efficiency.

The interventions evaluated were implemented in 2011-2012, during the consolidation period of UN Women. Therefore, the 21 findings, 9 conclusions and 6 recommendations of this meta-analysis should be read in the context of an organization being consolidated while implementing programmes.

In this context, UN Women has achieved important results while developing its own structure. Programmes were relevant to international and national priorities and achieved planned outputs despite constrained funding and complex political environments. However, UN Women should now make sure that identified challenges in the areas of organizational efficiencies are addressed.

UN Women performed well in relation to the Strategic Plan's operational priorities. The organization is developing a strong track record in convening partnerships, and it is recognized as being strong at coordinating United Nations entities at the global level. However, challenges remain at the country level. In addition, UN Women should strengthen its own results-based management system and should explore the opportunity to engage private sector as appropriate.

UN Women performed well in relation to its own principles and approaches as stated in the Strategic Plan. UN Women established a number of effective approaches for enhancing inclusiveness; capacity development and advocacy were recognized as major strategies; national ownership was strong; and important contributions to some specific areas of knowledge were produced. However, more needs to be done in strengthening knowledge management systems and involving men as active programme participants in changing social norms.

Overall, UN Women has demonstrated strong relevance and potential to fully achieve effectiveness and efficiency once the consolidation process is finalized.

This meta-analysis constitutes a qualitative baseline of the performance of UN Women. We hope it will be useful for UN Women management and Executive Board members to strengthen the overall capability of UN Women to achieve its own mandate.

Marco Segone
Director, UN Women Independent Evaluation Office

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose and role of evaluation in the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) is to contribute to learning on best ways to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, enhance UN Women accountability, and inform decision-making. By providing evidence-based information, evaluation contributes to the role of UN Women to generate knowledge on what works to advance gender equality and women's empowerment.

To address the organizational demands for ensuring good quality and credible evaluations, particularly at the decentralized level, the UN Women Independent Evaluation Office has designed a Global Evaluation Reports Assessment and Analysis System (GERAAS) driven by similar good practices enforced by other United Nations (UN) entities and consistent with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards.

This meta-analysis report accompanies the *2013 UN Women Global Evaluation Report Assessment and Analysis System (GERAAS)* Meta-Evaluation.[1] Whereas the meta-evaluation provides a rating of the quality of evaluation reports according to UN Women standards, this report synthesizes the key findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the body of evaluation reports that meet UN Women quality requirements.

The meta-synthesis process applied both a qualitative structured analysis and a quantitative analysis. The qualitative analysis considered the evaluation insights according to: i) standard UNEG evaluation criteria; ii) UN Women operational priorities in the Strategic Plan 2014-2017;[2] and iii) UN Women principles and approaches in the Strategic Plan 2014-2017.[3] The quantitative assessment was undertaken in accordance with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development—Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) methodological guidance for assessing development effectiveness. The results of the quantitative analysis were used to verify the issues that were identified in the qualitative analysis, while the findings from the qualitative analysis were used to help explain the implications of the quantitative data.

The qualitative analysis included 23 'Very Good', 'Good' and 'Satisfactory' reports. The quantitative development effectiveness analysis drew on 15 'Very Good' and 'Good' reports only (in line with OECD DAC specifications for the quantitative assessment).

The synthesis attempted to overcome the limitations inherent in making judgements about the relevance, context and veracity of insights through structured qualitative analysis, triangulation with quantitative analysis, and mapping the frequency with which different criteria appeared together. Nevertheless, the findings are drawn from a comparatively small sample of reports in some thematic areas and should be used with caution. This meta-analysis was not designed to be an evaluation within the norms and standards of evaluation in UN Women and UNEG.

Findings

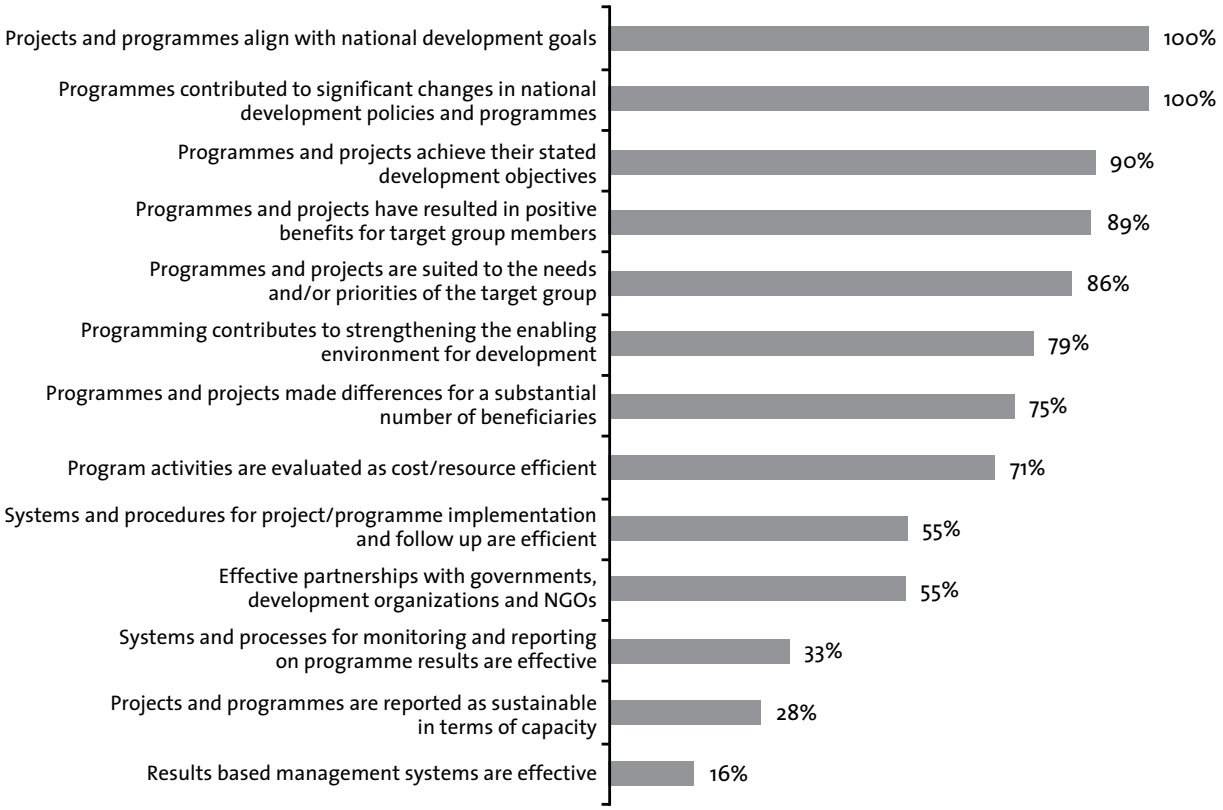
Finding 1: UN Women programmes tend to be nationally aligned, relevant to target groups, and effective in terms of their intended results. Operational systems—especially results-based management (RBM)—local capacity to sustain results, and maintaining effective partnerships represent the greatest challenges for UN Women.

Relevance

Finding 2: UN Women programming and normative work has been highly relevant to policy frameworks—particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women (CEDAW) and United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 1325 and 1820—and to the needs of women on the ground. However, it has tended to suffer from over optimism about capacity, both in the context of UN Women as an organization and underinvestment in the design stage.

1 Available online at: http://gate.unwomen.org.
2 UN Women Strategic Plan 2014-2017, page 8.
3 UN Women Strategic Plan 2014-2017, page 9.

Figure 1. Percentage of sub-criteria rated satisfactory using OECD DAC development effectiveness criteria



Effectiveness

Finding 3: UN Women programmes have largely been successful in delivering planned activities and outputs, despite very constrained funding and complex political environments. However, evaluations identify a need for better strategic positioning in countries and the limited reach of pilot projects.

Finding 4: The progression from outputs to higher-level results is not measurable in most UN Women programmes due to gaps in performance data and monitoring systems.

Finding 5: Programme design and strategy appears to play a key role in influencing programme effectiveness.

Efficiency

Finding 6: While none of the evaluations specifically assessed value-for-money, efficiency was reported as being quite mixed across the UN Women portfolio. Individual good examples of programme efficiency (results achieved despite constrained capacity) are set against a backdrop of fund disbursement delays, delays in appointing people to project-critical positions at field level, and gaps in knowledge management systems.

Impact

Finding 7: Given that UN Women was established in 2011, evaluations have generally taken place too early to assess programme impacts. While many interventions show promising signs of change, the systems are not in place to ensure that positive impacts are created or to capture those impacts when they do happen.

Sustainability

Finding 8: The political context, lack of financial resources, and capacity gaps in national institutions are

major threats to programme sustainability. Despite this, the dedication of individuals and substantial investment in participatory processes has resulted in some notable examples of locally owned initiatives.

Gender equality

Finding 9: Programmes and projects integrate gender equality into the fabric of their design and have achieved some significant gains but are hampered by low levels of national capacity in terms of gender-responsive skills and expertise.

Finding 10: UN Women is making strong contributions to enhancing global norms on gender. The main challenge is in translating this progress into effective operational work at the regional and country level.

Coordination and partnership

Finding 11: UN Women is developing a strong track record in convening coalitions and initiating partnerships.

Finding 12: Evaluations identify challenges in defining the coordinating role of UN Women among UN agencies at the country level, ensuring that coordination maintains a strong sense of common purpose, and working through the steep learning curves and high transaction costs that have been a feature of many joint gender programmes.

Culture of results

Finding 13: RBM is a systemic weakness in UN Women operations at every level. Despite some strong individual efforts, the majority of programmes lack explicit theories of change, measurable results frameworks or adequate monitoring. This is inhibiting accountability and learning, and means UN Women is not able to capture the full extent of its impacts.

Organizational effectiveness

Finding 14: Financing constraints and weak knowledge management—especially in terms of sharing lessons between country-level and global work—are issues that UN Women needs to address in order to enhance organizational effectiveness. Despite these weak areas, however, the dedication of staff and strong understanding of context are universally recognized as having enabled UN Women to effectively transition from its predecessor entities.

Capacity development

Finding 15: Capacity development features strongly as an approach across all UN Women work. This ranges in breadth and depth—embracing issues from basic documentation skills in self-help groups to nurturing national coalitions for social action. Data on the outcomes from capacity development is, however, rarely available. Most evaluations make the case for continued support, suggesting that there is a need to strengthen exit strategies from capacity development interventions.

Finding 16: Interventions to strengthen women's leadership and decision-making are focused primarily on the capacity development of local groups, with some evidence of contributions being made to enhancing the enabling environment.

Finding 17: UN Women is successfully strengthening the capacity of national institutions to implement gender mainstreaming.

National ownership

Finding 18: UN Women programmes are consistently strongly aligned with national policies and priorities. There is also strong national ownership among institutions that have been closely involved in programme design and implementation. The challenge faced by many programmes is strengthening ownership and gender-responsive capacity in national institutions that sit outside of the gender infrastructure.

Promoting inclusiveness

Finding 19: UN Women programmes have established a number of effective approaches and mechanisms for enhancing inclusiveness, especially in service provision to women and marginalized groups. Many evaluations find, however, that significant progress on realizing the rights and freedoms of women cannot be made without greater inclusion of men as active programme participants in changing social norms.

Advocacy

Finding 20: Advocacy for UN Women is generally approached from 'behind-the-scenes'—building up evidence, working with decision makers, and supporting local stakeholders to publicly advocate for positive

changes. This approach is found to be relevant and effective, although few evaluations are able to provide specific evidence of contributions beyond legislative or policy change.

Knowledge brokerage

Finding 21: UN Women is recognized for its strong contribution to some specific areas of knowledge at the global level. Evaluations highlight the importance of further decentralizing this capability and linking it to enhanced knowledge management systems.

Lessons learned

The following broad lessons have been compiled by bringing together and synthesizing all of the lessons learned that were included in evaluation reports.

Lesson 1: UN Women is well placed to create change, but its main objectives will take a long time to come to fruition.

Lesson 2: Some of the most effective mechanisms for change are based on community mobilization and self-help, but these require ongoing access to capacity support and formalization if they are to be sustained.

Lesson 3: Coalitions of local CSOs work best when they are not limited to gender-focused organizations and receive basic capacity development for RBM.

Lesson 4: National ownership is maximized where accountability is embedded in local institutions, starting with the design process. This requires both political will and capacity support to the gender infrastructure.

Lesson 5: Joint programmes require higher transaction costs and longer to realize than is often assumed. Working to develop shared understandings and commitment across agencies' leadership, enabling the capacity of the lead entity, and the role of the Resident Coordinator are all foundations of joint programmes.

Lesson 6: Programme design that is informed by better quality research and analysis is better able to include advanced risk management strategies, make market-appropriate project selection, and create sustained structural changes.

Conclusions

The reviewer has independently developed the following conclusions and recommendations based on the evidence presented in the findings.

Conclusion 1: UN Women programmes are considered highly relevant in terms of global norms, national frameworks and the needs of women.

Conclusion 2: Effectiveness appears to be achieved within the boundaries of outputs set by programmes, but evaluations and monitoring systems are insufficient to fully measure outcomes and impacts on women's lives.

Conclusion 3: The implicit design of programmes is efficient, but operational delays to fund disbursement and contracts that are not sensitive to the needs of local NGOs, as well as delays in recruitment of UN Women staff at the field level are barriers to effectiveness.

Conclusion 4: Innovative approaches are being developed that ensure the inclusion of women including the most marginalized, but greater attention is required on the inclusion of men if results are to be sustained.

Conclusion 5: Strong local ownership is being achieved within the gender-focused community and national gender institutions, but shifting the political will of non-committed power-holders remains a major challenge for gender equality advocates.

Conclusion 6: Capacity development is a major component of UN Women strategy in every thematic area, and more data is required on whether or not it is effective in delivering results.

Conclusion 7: UN Women has strong convening power for partnerships but limited engagement with the private sector at decentralized levels.

Conclusion 8: Coordination of the UN System at the country level is a significant ongoing challenge.

Conclusion 9: While UN Women is producing valued knowledge in some areas at the global level, this is not sufficiently connected to operational experience and lessons by way of a strong internal knowledge management system.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

Ensure that all programmes have in place a clear theory of change and a results framework and monitoring system that can hold the programme to account for higher-level results.

Most evaluations are not able to draw on a ready set of performance or monitoring data from programmes, projects and partnerships. This severely inhibits the ability of UN Women to demonstrate the impact that the organization is having. UN Women Headquarters needs to ensure that country offices prioritize the development of a clear results framework (with a minimum number of specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timebound [SMART] output, outcome and impact indicators) for every programme and project, and ensure that outcome-level data (changes in behaviours and institutions) is consistently captured. Special attention is required to ensure that the outcome-level effectiveness of coordination and capacity development (as well as service delivery) is captured and used for learning.

Recommendation 2:

Apply the level of creativity that is being focused on inclusiveness of women towards enhancing the role of men at all levels in supporting gender equality and empowerment of women (GEEW).

Decentralized evaluations of several programmes have found that, despite excellent progress, the non inclusion of men from the process can leave a barrier—or, at the minimum, strong inertia—to sustaining instrumental gains in GEEW and achieving intrinsic outcomes. A number of these evaluations have recommended that projects and programmes identify mechanisms for including men—in their roles as family, life-partners, peer-to-peer educators and power holders—in future work. Particular importance can be placed on recruiting advocates among men who occupy positions of political power outside of the national gender-infrastructure, such as government ministers, police commissioners and military commanders: winning and maintaining their support is critical for implementing gender-responsive policies.

Recommendation 3:

Improve organizational efficiency by deploying simplified disbursement protocols for local NGOs and civil society organizations that lack credit facilities and streamlined human resources recruitment mechanisms for time-sensitive posts.

One of the organizational comparative advantages identified in evaluations is mobilizing and supporting coalitions of local NGOs and civil society organizations. Maintaining and building on this strength would benefit from having an alternative set of disbursement protocols that allow UN Women country offices to advance grant funds to local implementing partners that do not have access to other sources of project finance. Such a review would also be an opportunity to explore other ways in which disbursements to local organizations can be simplified and streamlined within the required standards of accountability. Similarly, the timely initiation of projects, organizational responsiveness to strategic opportunities, and preservation of institutional knowledge would all benefit from streamlined human resources mechanisms for recruiting and retention of staff.

Recommendation 4:

Build upon good country-level experience in convening coalitions and building partnerships, including by engaging the private sector.

Country-level evaluations have highlighted a number of positive experiences in using the UN Women mandate and convening power to support the formation and growth of effective civil society coalitions and partnerships. Important ingredients include having clear and shared purpose, ensuring continuous engagement (including with members of the group being targeted by the partnership), and involving a diverse range of organizations (not just those with a gender focus). UN Women in countries evaluated is not yet engaging in partnerships with the private sector on a regular and systematic basis—despite the key role such partnerships have in the organization's strategic vision. While recognizing the different culture and needs of the private sector (compared to civil society), existing experience, coalitions and networks offer a good foundation for a renewed focus on public-private partnerships.

Recommendation 5:

Strengthen the UN coordination role of UN Women at the country level.

The role of UN Women, the mandate of which positions it—where conditions permit—as a logical technical and/or coordination lead, should be clarified and made explicit at the country level. This should include guidance on real-world resources, time, skills and strategies required to coordinate effectively, as well as clear and practical ways of assessing and communicating the value-addition for various UN entities and national stakeholders.

Recommendation 6:

Review the organizational knowledge management system, including how lessons are captured from operations and influence the technical capacity development of staff.

The UN Women mandate and strategy of working at the normative, coordinating and operational levels provides the organization with the possibility of both generating and using authoritative knowledge on GEEW. Maximizing this possibility requires an efficient and effective knowledge management system that draws on the experience of UN Women operational programmes, as well as informing their design with cutting-edge thinking. Evaluations identify that the present knowledge management system is resulting in missed opportunities and flag this as an important issue for resolution.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The purpose and role of evaluation in UN Women is to contribute to learning on best ways to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, enhance UN Women accountability, and inform decision-making. By providing evidence-based information, evaluation contributes to the role of UN Women to generate knowledge on what works to advance gender equality and women's empowerment.

The UN Women Independent Evaluation Office provides leadership for the evaluation function throughout the organization, leads the UN system on gender-responsive evaluation, and promotes accountability and evaluative evidence on UN gender equality results.

The UN Women Evaluation Policy came into effect in January 2013 and a new Strategic Plan 2014-2017 was endorsed in September 2013. A landmark System-wide Action Plan on gender equality and women's empowerment was also adopted that requires annual reporting against a performance indicator on gender-responsive evaluation.

Given the decentralized nature of the organization, the majority of the evaluations supported by UN Women are managed at a decentralized level. To address the organizational demands for ensuring good quality and credible evaluations, particularly at the decentralized level, the UN Women Independent Evaluation Office has designed a GERAAS driven by similar good practices enforced by other UN entities and consistent with the UNEG Norms and Standards.

The system is believed to increase the application of sound approaches and methods to continuously improve the quality and credibility of evaluation methods and reports within the organization.

An independent evaluator was appointed to undertake both a meta-evaluation and meta-analysis of 2013 evaluation reports submitted to GERAAS, including the UN-System-wide Action Plan scores. This report draws on the quality ratings of evaluation reports that are presented separately in the *Global Evaluation Reports Assessment and Analysis System, Meta Evaluation Report 2013*.[4]

1.2 Purpose, objectives and scope

The purpose of this meta-analysis is to capture the key insights from evaluation reports from a critical year of transition in the UN Women evaluation capability. As part of the Corporate Evaluation Plan, this is required to develop constructive lessons for future systemic strengthening of programming, organizational effectiveness and the evaluation function.

The GERAAS has four main objectives, including to promote learning and knowledge management.

This assessment considers all 27 reports submitted to the GERAAS system in 2013 that were assessed, according to UN Women standards, to be 'Satisfactory', 'Good' or 'Very Good' quality. It considers only clearly stated findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons presented in the evaluation report.[5] Insights from the evaluation process that were not documented are considered to be outside the scope of this analysis. It should be recognized, therefore, that this report only provides a partial answer to the question: *"What are evaluations telling us about UN Women?"*

1.3 Methodology

This report draws on the ratings of evaluations according to the GERAAS meta-evaluation 2013. The qualitative analysis included 23 'Very Good', 'Good' and 'Satisfactory' reports. Evaluation reports were read and the major findings, conclusions, lessons and recommendations were individually extracted. These were stored in an Excel database, with each statement linked to the evaluation report from which it was extracted and the labelling of that statement as a

4 Available on the UN Women GATE system online at: http://gate.unwomen.org.

5 Available on the UN Women GATE system online at: http://gate.unwomen.org.

'finding', 'conclusion', 'recommendation' or 'lesson'. This resulted in 525 individual statements.

Table 1. Reports included in synthesis

Report quality rating	Number of reports included
Very Good	7
Good	8
Satisfactory	8

The analysis classified each insight from a report according to 19 dimensions under 3 frameworks (UNEG evaluation criteria, UN Women organizational priorities, and UN Women operational principles—see Table 2). The organizational priorities and operational principles are based on the UN Women Strategic Plan 2014-2017.

Statements were then clustered under each classification and a qualitative analysis of the main issues was undertaken. Where feasible, an indication of the frequency of insights is given.

A quantitative assessment in Excel analysed the frequency with which evaluation findings referred to positive or negative performance in relation to various aspects of development effectiveness (see Table 3). In accordance with OECD DAC protocols, the effectiveness analysis included 15 'Very Good' and 'Good' reports only (see Annex 1) and rated each finding as satisfactory or not based on detailed qualitative guidance for each aspect of development effectiveness.

Finally, in accordance with one of the options for assessing contributory factors presented by OECD DAC, an analysis was conducted on 128 recommendations from 14 reports rated 'Good' or 'Very Good'. Issues were classified by the same criteria, regardless of whether or not they had a beneficial or a negative effect on outcomes (see Table 4). This allowed a second quantitative assessment (frequency analysis) to be undertaken of factors that most often contribute to or inhibit the effectiveness of UN Women programmes. The results reflect the most influential factors in terms of frequency of citation, but they do not connote these factors as having predominantly positive or negative effects. Nevertheless, this list of influential factors could be compared with the qualitative analysis to triangulate whether the same issues were being identified. The qualitative analysis was then used to help explain the implications of these findings.

Table 2. Analytical dimensions

UNEG criteria	UN Women operational effectiveness and efficiency priorities[a]	UN Women principles and approaches[b]
• Effectiveness • Efficiency • Relevance • Sustainability • Impact • Gender equality	• Coordination and partnership • Culture of results • Organizational effectiveness	• Capacity development • National ownership • Promoting inclusiveness • Advocacy • Knowledge brokerage

[a] UN Women Strategic Plan 2014-2017, page 8

[b] UN Women Strategic Plan 2014-2017, page 9

Table 3. Common development effectiveness assessment criteria (OECD DAC)

1. Achieving development objectives and expected results
1.1 Programmes and projects achieve their stated development objectives and attain expected results
1.2 Programmes and projects have resulted in positive benefits for target group members
1.3 Programmes and projects made differences for a substantial number of beneficiaries and, where appropriate, contributed to national development goals
1.4 Programmes contributed to significant changes in national development policies and programmes including for disaster preparedness, emergency response and rehabilitation (policy impacts), and/or to needed system reforms
2. Cross-cutting themes—inclusive development that is sustainable
2.1 Extent to which multilateral organization supported activities effectively address the cross-cutting issue of gender equality
2.2 Extent to which changes are environmentally sustainable
3. Sustainability of results and benefits
3.1 Benefits continuing or likely to continue after project or programme completion or there are effective measures to link the humanitarian relief operations to rehabilitation, reconstruction and, eventually, longer-term development results
3.2 Projects and programmes are reported as sustainable in terms of institutional and/or community capacity
3.3 Programming contributes to strengthening the enabling environment for development
4. Relevance of interventions
4.1 Programmes and projects are suited to the needs and/or priorities of the target group
4.2 Projects and programmes align with national development goals
4.3 Effective partnerships with governments, bilateral and multilateral development and humanitarian organizations and NGOs for planning, coordination and implementation of support to development and/or emergency preparedness, humanitarian relief and rehabilitation efforts
5. Efficiency
5.1 Program activities are evaluated as cost/resource efficient
5.2 Implementation and objectives achieved on time (given the context, in the case of humanitarian programming)
5.3 Systems and procedures for project/programme implementation and follow up are efficient (including systems for engaging staff, procuring project inputs, disbursing payment, logistical arrangements etc.)
6. Using evaluation and monitoring to improve development effectiveness
6.1 Systems and processes for evaluation are effective
6.2 Systems and processes for monitoring and reporting on programme results are effective
6.3 RBM systems are effective
6.4 Evaluation is used to improve development effectiveness

Table 4. Factors contributing to or inhibiting effectiveness (OECD DAC)

Program or project design	Human resource issues
Financial resource issues	Objectives (realism, clarity, etc.)
Implementation challenges	Organizational or programme strategy
Oversight/governance	Risk management
Policy-related (gender equality, poverty alleviation, environment, etc.)	Coordination (added)
Results framework or monitoring and evaluation (edited)	

1.4 Limitations

This synthesis relies on the efficacy of the GERAAS quality ratings in order to identify good quality evaluation reports (see limitations on this noted in the Meta Evaluation Report 2013).[6]

The qualitative synthesis process attempted to apply structured analysis by classifying all individual statements from reports. Nevertheless, the process, by its nature, requires judgements to be made on: i) what the main findings are in a report; ii) how to interpret these findings and their implications; and iii) what combinations of findings from different reports represent a reliable pattern. In recognition of these judgements, the report attempts to be transparent about the prevalence of particular issues and identifies where there is a higher or lower degree of certainty in the findings.

Overall, this synthesis draws on a comparably small number of evaluation reports in particular areas, and thus there are limitations on the potential to generalize. The meta-analysis originally intended to synthesize findings according to the six strategic goals of UN Women, but in practice, the evidence was found to be too limited to draw robust conclusions using this framework.

In recognition of the limited sample frame, the report attempted to triangulate the qualitative findings using a basic iteration of the OECD DAC Development Effectiveness Assessment (a quantitative method). Nevertheless, the findings should be used with caution and compared with other sources of evidence where possible.

6 Available on the UN Women GATE system online at: http://gate.unwomen.org.

2. FINDINGS

The findings section presents qualitative and quantitative analysis of evaluation report findings and lessons learned.

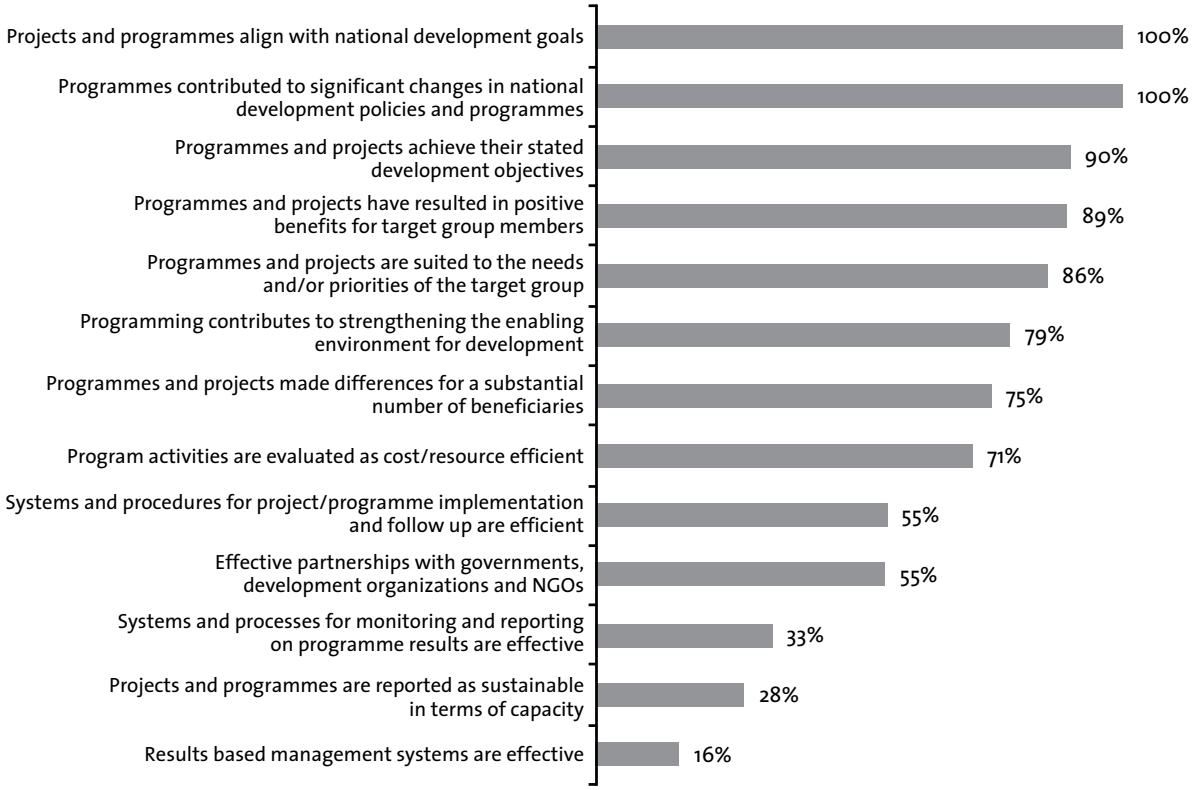
Finding 1: UN Women programmes tend to be nationally aligned, relevant to target groups, and effective in terms of their intended results. Operational systems (especially RBM), local capacity to sustain results, and maintaining effective partnerships represent the greatest challenges for UN Women.

Of the 19 OECD DAC suggested common sub-criteria, the analysis identified 3 sub-criteria for which strong evidence of development effectiveness was available, 10 with moderate evidence and 6 with a weak evidence base.[7]

Considering only those criteria for which a moderate or strong evidence base is available, Figure 2 reveals that findings are most positive about UN Women alignment and contribution to national development priorities, and the achievement of stated objectives that were relevant to the needs of target groups.

The areas of fewest satisfactory findings are in relation to RBM, monitoring and implementation systems (including financial resources), local capacity for sustainability, and maintaining effective partnerships. These findings are explored in later sections of the report.

Figure 2. Percentage of sub-criteria rated satisfactory



7 Strong: n=11-14; moderate: n=7-10; weak: n=less than 7. N = number of evaluations addressing the given sub-criterion.

2.1 UNEG evaluation criteria

Relevance

Finding 2: UN Women programming and normative work has been highly relevant to policy frameworks—particularly CEDAW, UNSCR 1325 and UNSCR 1820—and to the needs of women on the ground. However, it has tended to suffer from over optimism about capacity—both in the context and of UN Women as an organization—and underinvestment in the design stage.

Evaluation reports find that UN Women is working in a highly dynamic set of global, regional and national contexts, and is affected by multiple political, cultural and institutional factors.

All the evaluations found that programme design was aligned to UN Women strategic priorities, international commitments and national policies. Some issues—such as violence against women (VAW) and peace and security—tended to be grounded more in international frameworks (particularly UNSCRs), whereas issues of economic empowerment and gender-responsive budgeting tended to be framed more by national policy priorities.

Reports also noted that programmes largely remained relevant to the needs of women on the ground (see Table 5). This was especially the case where programmes combined policy-level work and capacity development at the national level with delivery of interventions for women at the community level.

Capacity gaps in the national gender infrastructure are a significant challenge to delivering relevant programming. The speed with which these capacity gaps can be overcome by local implementing partners and the UN system is frequently overestimated. This problem is particularly acute for (but not limited to) joint gender programmes, leading to steep learning curves for UN Women and its partners during implementation.

Thirty three per cent of evaluations found that there was systematic overestimating of programme ambition. This was traced to underinvestment in the design phase, often due to limited resources. Programmes need greater attention placed on their analytical underpinnings, especially in terms of systematic application of the human rights-based approach, risk analysis, and understanding the drivers of gender related problems.

The price of underinvestment in the design phase is recorded by three reports as: i) spreading available resources too thin; ii) flaws in the intervention logic; and iii) targeting areas based on supply rather than demand (e.g., working where other UN agencies are working rather than based on needs of women).

Despite these difficulties, evaluation reports praised the technical competence and personal dedication of the UN Women teams. In most cases, management

Table 5. Quantitative analysis of evidence on relevance

Criteria and sub-criteria	n[a]	Coverage[b]	Percentage of findings satisfactory[c]
4.1 Programmes and projects are suited to the needs and/or priorities of the target group	10	Moderate	86%
4.2 Projects and programmes align with national development goals	10	Moderate	100%
4.3 Effective partnerships with governments, development organizations and NGOs	10	Moderate	55%

[a] n = number of evaluations addressing the given sub-criterion
[b] Strong: n=11-14; moderate: n= 7-10; weak: n = less than 7
[c] Satisfactory ratings include 'satisfactory' and 'highly satisfactory'

structures and approaches used by UN Women were found to be appropriate—although with a tendency to be overly bureaucratic depending on the demands of the donor agency.

A lesson for national programming that was repeated in reports from both country and corporate levels was the need for a clear strategic rationale to be established when selecting modalities, rather than to default to politically popular arrangements (such as joint programmes).

Reports also noted that the most successful programmes were associated with flexible designs and coordination at the community level as well as policy level. They recommended that more examples of joint government-community initiatives be sought and that special attention be paid to male inclusiveness as a mechanism for women's empowerment.

Examples of where UN Women programmes have used relevant community-level structures include legal clinics, self-help groups, and community-based paralegals. Programmes are seen to be most relevant where they have found effective channels for an inclusive and participatory approach and developed outputs that are demand-driven (responding directly to the needs and priorities articulated by women).

It was also noted several times, however, that community approaches ultimately depend on continued high-level political support beyond the government department that holds the gender portfolio. Changes in the political context thus demand continuous adaption in order for programmes and partnerships to remain relevant.

Adaptation was also found to be an important feature of ensuring that strategic partnerships remain relevant, add value and develop synergies. Indeed, evaluations of both broad gender equality programmes and specific interventions—especially gender-responsive budgeting and economic empowerment—highlight a need to enhance synergies across UN Women strategic areas and to find a coherent approach to managing the different components of gender equality programmes.

Several reports noted that UN Women had missed opportunities to draw on its operational experiences to inform organizational learning at the global level and that a more systematic approach to this is needed to ensure that global normative work remains relevant. This is especially the case since the three corporate evaluations that were reviewed have all found that UN Women is in a strategic position to influence global policy, is producing an authoritative knowledge base, and is seen as a leading actor on gender equality.

Effectiveness

Finding 3: UN Women programmes have largely been successful in delivering planned activities and outputs, despite very constrained funding and complex political environments. However, evaluations identify a need for better strategic positioning in countries and the limited reach of pilot projects.

At the global level, evaluations have found that UN Women has contributed to shaping global policy and norms to advance women's leadership and participation in peace and security. While the organization's strategic presence and positioning varies from country to country, UN Women has played a pioneering role in bringing UNSCR 1325 to realization and enhancing other global-level normative frameworks. A key challenge for the future will be developing strategies for the domestication of regional and international gender equality commitments, such as CEDAW and the Southern African Development Community Gender Protocol.

Programmes have also led to direct changes in women's lives in some countries and across some thematic areas. This has included an increase in women's leadership and participation in peace and security; important changes in laws relating to housing, property and citizenship; and legal counsel to thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and conflict-affected communities. Approaches such as 'one-stop shops' have been adapted to effectively identify, document and address the gaps in existing legislation based on real life experiences.

One evaluation found that UN Women has "played a significant role in centre-staging women migrant workers' concerns in the mainstream development discourse and processes and given voice and agency

Table 6. Quantitative analysis of evidence on effectiveness

Criteria and sub-criteria	n[a]	Coverage[b]	Percentage of findings satisfactory[c]
1.1 Programmes and projects achieve their stated development objectives	13	Strong	90%
1.2 Programmes and projects have resulted in positive benefits for target group members	11	Strong	89%
1.3 Programmes and projects made differences for a substantial number of beneficiaries	7	Moderate	75%
1.4 Programmes contributed to significant changes in national development policies and programmes	7	Moderate	100%

[a] n = number of evaluations addressing the given sub-criterion
[b] Strong: n=11-14; moderate: n= 7-10; weak: n = less than 7
[c] Satisfactory ratings include 'satisfactory' and 'highly satisfactory'

to the women migrant workers".[8] Another reports that "UN Trust Fund grantees have also made substantial and innovative contributions in preventing VAW, expanding survivor access to services and creating an institutional response to VAW at the country level".[9]

The two main factors identified by evaluation reports as making a positive contribution to achieving results were both internal:

i) the dedication, professional capacity, technical skills, and responsiveness of UN Women experts; and

ii) implementing projects using participatory, inclusive and empowering processes. Good examples of this included developing National Action Plans for UNSCR 1325, one-stop shops for ending VAW, and multi-stakeholder approaches to creating safe spaces for survivors of sexual and gender based violence.

By comparison, the two main factors that challenged effectiveness were largely external (and therefore requiring UN Women to have the capacity to respond appropriately):

i) a political, cultural, and socioeconomic environment that is resistant to concepts of, or the prioritization of, gender equality and women's empowerment. This manifests itself in terms of lack of high-level champions, low levels of ownership, poor levels of security for advocates (especially in Afghanistan), and continuous changes in leadership of gender initiatives; and

ii) highly constrained levels of funding, significant delays in releasing funds, and poor budgeting capacity in governments and local partners.

It is reported by at least 33 per cent of evaluations that UN Women strategic planning and positioning could have been enhanced to better address these challenges to effectiveness. In particular, it was recommended that practices be enhanced in terms of strategic adaptation and clear and timely decision-making on when to adjust strategies that are not working.

Another area of concern was the limited scale of many pilot projects, which remained confined to the original target areas and lacked realistic planning for being scaled up. For example, women's political watch groups were found to be highly successful in Nepal, especially

8 Final Evaluation of the Programme on Sustaining the Gains of Foreign Labour Migration through the Protection of Migrant Workers Rights, UN Women, Nepal, 2013.

9 Thematic Evaluation on the Contribution of UN Women to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls and Expand Access to Services, UN Women, New York, NY, 2013.

with regard to capacity development and awareness raising, but were limited during the elections to only 3 out of 75 districts. In other cases, the importance of context—such as for a successful peace and security pilot programme in Georgia—means that attempts to replicate the same intervention in other countries are likely to lead to a very different experience and outcomes.

Partnerships with government, civil society organizations and UN agencies, especially around integrated approaches, were frequently recommended as a means to enhanced effectiveness. However, both corporate and decentralized evaluations found that "most joint gender programmes experienced difficulties with coherence... and have not delivered results which comprise 'more than the sum of their parts"[10]. Different stakeholders emphasizing different components of gender programmes are partly the cause of this, although it was also found that coordination of joint programmes significantly improves as they progress.

It was noted by a number of evaluations that UN Women is an organization that is still in the process of defining its niche relative to other organizations. This makes it harder to target the development of an effective evidence base and to best use the organization's capacity in mobilizing other key actors. In some areas—particularly humanitarian response and ending VAW—there is widespread demand for support from UN Women but limited capacity to respond to this.

Capacity development was also recommended for many UN Women partners, with particular emphasis placed on the importance of coaching, social mobilization strategies and developing good quality project proposals. Current contributions to capacity development were found to be numerous but varied in their reach, depth and likely sustainability. Successful approaches included mobilizing a critical mass of support through community self-help groups and engaging media organizations to help promote and educate their audience about peer-to-peer support.

Varying levels of commitment from members of community groups compounds the challenge of effective capacity development. At least three projects reported that services provided through local centres lacked utilization or that the buildings were primarily used as Internet cafés rather than for the intended purpose of ending VAW. Lessons were also learned in terms of the effective use of microgrants—with better results for community assets than as means for individual economic empowerment (small amounts are unlikely to make for tangible durable livelihood solutions).

Finding 4: The progression from outputs to higher-level results is not measurable in most UN Women programmes due to gaps in performance data and monitoring systems.

Every report found that the programme being evaluated has fully or partly achieved all of the planned outputs—or at least all of the planned activities (some objectives were found to be over ambitious in design). The majority of evaluations also found that there was a degree of evidence suggesting that contribution has been made to planned outcomes, although none found that UN Women had collected monitoring data to validate this. If one is to assume that the theories underpinning UN Women programme designs are always correct, then the achievement of most outputs would suggest that UN Women is having an impact on the lives of women. However, evaluations indicate that there is a systemic gap in the production of evidence to verify this.

Operationally, evaluation reports recommend that UN Women's knowledge management systems need to go "beyond information technology, document management, and building information"[11]. Achievements were found to be higher where the results and indicators were most clearly articulated, measurable and achievable. The more successful outputs were also those where programme management and leadership were strong including regular monitoring.

10 Thematic Evaluation of the Joint Evaluation of Joint Programmes on Gender Equality in the United Nations System, UN Women, MDGIF, UNDP, UNFPA, and UNICEF, New York, NY, 2013.

11 UN Joint Programme on Gender Equality (UNJPGE) – UN Women, Uganda, 2013.

Finding 5: Programme design and strategy appear to play a key role in influencing programme effectiveness.

The findings from the quantitative analysis reveal that programme design and strategy are the most frequently cited factors affecting organizational effectiveness. It should be noted, however, that a broad set of issues fall under both of these categories. Results-based management, coordination and human resources (predominantly skill sets and numbers of people) were also mentioned in many evaluation reports as important factors. The issues least frequently identified as causal factors included programme governance, policy barriers or issues with the determination of objectives.

While these findings broadly tally with the qualitative analysis, they do differ in certain important regards. For example, weaknesses in RBM came across more strongly in the qualitative assessment than the panoply of different programme design issues. It may, therefore, be the case that there are simply more types of programme design factors than RBM factors (all of which would be counted equally regardless of the 'intensity' of the contributory effect). Similarly, financial constraints and over-ambitious objectives came out more strongly in the qualitative analysis than would be suggested by Figure 3.

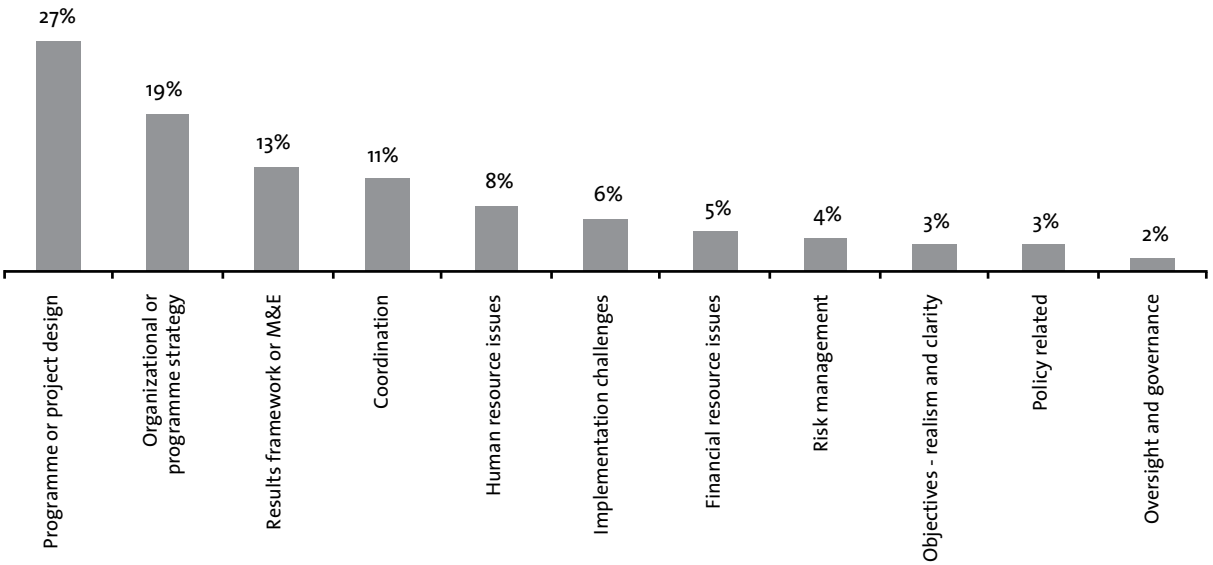
Efficiency

Finding 6: While none of the evaluations specifically assessed value-for-money, efficiency was reported as being quite mixed across the UN Women portfolio. Individual good examples of programme efficiency (results achieved despite constrained capacity) are set against a backdrop of fund disbursement delays, delays in appointing people to project-critical positions at field level, and gaps in knowledge management systems.

One of three corporate evaluations[12] undertaken found that the thematic organization of UN Women has enabled a more focused approach to achieving results, although human and financial resources remain inadequate to fulfil the expectations placed on the organization. The other evaluations did not comment on this.

At the country level, there is a mixed view of the strategic use of the limited resources that are available, with a tendency for global evaluations to question the quality of strategic planning at the country level, while decentralized evaluations find that individual programmes and projects used resources strategically and effectively. However, at least 16 per cent of decentralized

Figure 3. Quantitative analysis of contributing factors to effectiveness



12 Evaluation of UN Women's Work to Increase Women's Work to Increase Leadership on Peace, Security and Humanitarian Responses.

evaluations did observe that programme funds were generally not being shifted from poor performing components to high performing components over the course of implementation.

A greater number of decentralized evaluation reports—42 per cent—noted that delays and bureaucratic procedures in fund release were a major barrier to efficiency. In most cases this was the result of multi-layered management systems imposed by donors, national protocols and joint programmes. However, it also highlights a major challenge in the design of processes and programme agreements (see Table 7).

Where UN Women managed programmes directly, evaluation reports found that both teams and systems were generally appropriate and that successful collaboration was achieved with key stakeholders. However, despite the strong commitment of project staff, the extra efficiency gained by direct execution came at the price of excessive administration for overburdened UN Women management teams. In few cases, human resources systems were also found to be slow in appointing and maintaining key staffing positions at critical phases of projects at the field level.

While joint UN programmes are intended to help overcome these constraints, evaluations suggest that generally: i) the implications of the joint modality on ways of working are not well understood; and ii) the costs of coordination have been both unanticipated and high. As a result, the Joint Evaluation on Joint Programmes on Gender recommends, "the optimal number of United Nations agencies participating in a joint gender programme is no more than four or five".

Joint programmes were found to be most efficient where there was a clear mechanism for making well-judged decisions in response to implementation challenges. It was also found that the use of pooled funding mechanisms in Zimbabwe and Afghanistan allowed for better coordination of funding for the gender sector and reduced transaction costs overall.

Programmatically, evaluations found that legal clinics and one-stop shops were both effective mechanisms for targeting and channelling integrated services to beneficiaries—enhancing overall efficiency in terms of project outcomes. The main challenges to efficiency at this level were insufficient targeting of beneficiaries, limited coverage of some of the services delivered, and frequent changes in government officials.

The problem of turnover of people (and loss of institutional memory) in government institutions, partners and UN Women underpins a recommendation by several decentralized evaluations to strengthen management information systems, including results-based monitoring. Currently, projects are struggling to reconcile ways of delivering flexible and timely approaches while identifying and monitoring high quality indicators.

Knowledge management and communication is also a central theme of recommendations from corporate and regional evaluations. Future work to strengthen

Table 7. Quantitative analysis of evidence on efficiency

Criteria and sub-criteria	n[a]	Coverage[b]	Percentage of findings satisfactory[c]
5.1 Programme activities are evaluated as cost/resource efficient	8	Moderate	71%
5.2 Implementation and objectives achieved on time	4	Weak	-
5.3 Systems and procedures for project/programme implementation and follow up are efficient	12	Strong	55%

[a] n = number of evaluations addressing the given sub-criterion
[b] Strong: n=11-14; moderate: n= 7-10; weak: n = less than 7
[c] Satisfactory ratings include 'satisfactory' and 'highly satisfactory'

knowledge management and learning systems between Headquarters and country offices is identified as being a major step towards improving coherence between policy, programmes and lessons on how to achieve change.

Impact

Finding 7: Given that UN Women was established in 2011, evaluations have generally taken place too early to assess programme impacts. While many interventions show promising signs of change, the systems are not in place to ensure that positive impacts are created or to capture those impacts when they do happen.

All of the reports included in this synthesis determined that the timing of the evaluative process was too early to assess impacts on the lives of women. At the very most, programmes that were considered had only been running for three to four years, although some built on previous work undertaken by UNIFEM. Many of the types of changes being sought—via gender mainstreaming, legislative change, labour market reform, advocacy and security—may take many years to manifest.

The types of intervention that appeared closest to measurable impacts were related to economic empowerment. However, even these programmes were found to be showing only very early results. Every report included in the synthesis recommended that continued funding is needed to the evaluated activities in order to realize the expected outcomes.

Despite this recommendation to continue support, it was also noted in a number of reports that better processes are required for decision-making so that adaptations to programme designs can be made as early as possible. In one case[13], it was noted that technocrats in implementing partners require greater guidance from political decision makers, especially when considering changes that have far reaching implications for programme impacts. This is particularly the case for interventions that are highly reliant on structural changes in the political system or the long-term maintenance of political will.

13 Evaluation of the Joint Programme on Gender Equality, UN Women, Uganda, 2013.

Indeed, 33 per cent of decentralized evaluations found that the selected interventions were not well geared to creating long-term changes. Short-term micro-grants, small numbers of project participants, and three-year projects were all noted as falling short in developing the critical mass, or momentum, needed for impact. This is partly rooted in tendency for theories of change to be unclear (or missing), affecting both programmes and strategic partnerships. At least 50 per cent of evaluation reports had to reconstruct implicit theories of change or programme logics.

Furthermore, the gap in theories of change is also reflected in weaknesses in programme and partnership monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems. Very few reports had clear baseline data to work with (although one report submitted from India that was not included in the review was, in fact, a highly detailed baseline assessment). In numerous cases there were also no indicators or tracked data available for the intended higher-level outcomes.

Sustainability

Finding 8: The political context, lack of financial resources, and capacity gaps in national institutions are major threats to programme sustainability. Despite this, the dedication of individuals and substantial investment in participatory processes has resulted in some notable examples of locally owned initiatives.

Half (50 per cent) of the decentralized evaluations found that high-level political support was a major influence on the future sustainability of programmes, without any significant means to influence this factor. Most often, political will exists in ministries and agencies that hold the gender portfolio, but it is dependent on the granting of support from elsewhere in the political system. Examples were given of gender focal person training and peer-to-peer diplomacy that were established but unable to materialize changes because of external political influence.

Despite this challenge, numerous examples are cited of reforms that have been achieved through nationally owned—and led—processes. The pilot National Action Plan for UNSCR 1325, for example, was viewed as a nationally owned document. The Joint Gender Programme in Ethiopia did not have an

exit strategy, but had *de facto* achieved this through integrating programme components and processes in government institutions. Indeed, 75 per cent of decentralized evaluations indicate that national capacity building and linking accountability to the national context have enhanced sustainability.

At the same time, according to many reports, UN Women is faced with having insufficient financial resources to provide continuous and reliable support to community-level groups at the scale and for the duration required to ensure sustainability. Particular examples that were given include women's political watch groups and community alert groups (both in Nepal). This resulted in projects focusing on maintaining successful models rather than improvement or scaling up.

Such budget constraints lead local partners to over-rely on the individual motivation, skills and tacit knowledge of their frontline service staff. This results in a pattern of high burnout and exceptionally high stress levels among overburdened service providers, with a particular example being the legal clinic lawyers tasked with providing support to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

It was also found in 42 per cent of decentralized evaluations that local-level groups (including indigenous NGOs, community based organizations and self-help groups) lack many proposal writing, documentation and formal organizational skills. While "mini-groups of self-empowered and capacitated local activists offer a very effective and efficient mechanism for grassroots voice mobilization"[14], the gap in formalized organizational arrangements and capacity to prepare competitive proposals is viewed as undermining their long-term sustainability.

A successful strategy for enhancing sustainability across all strategic areas (identified by 25 per cent of decentralized evaluations) is establishing and maintaining networks and coalitions of NGOs—especially when links are built between these platforms and national government institutions. Similarly, one evaluation[15] warned of the danger of undermining long-term NGO coalitions where programmes choose to work only with a small group of NGO partners.

Major reported recommendations for sustainability include: i) maintaining regular outreach visits to communities; ii) proactively reviewing and renewing strategic partnerships; iii) ensuring

Table 8. Quantitative analysis of evidence on sustainability

Criteria and sub-criteria	n[a]	Coverage[b]	Percentage of findings satisfactory[c]
3.1 Benefits continuing or likely to continue after project or programme completion	6	Weak	-
3.2 Projects and programmes are reported as sustainable in terms of capacity	10	Moderate	28%
3.3 Programming contributes to strengthening the enabling environment for development	9	Moderate	79%

[a] n = number of evaluations addressing the given sub-criterion
[b] Strong: n=11-14; moderate: n= 7-10; weak: n = less than 7
[c] Satisfactory ratings include 'satisfactory' and 'highly satisfactory'

14 Final Evaluation of Women for Equality, Peace and Development, UN Women, Georgia, 2013
15 Ibid.

common understandings of joint programmes among all stakeholders; and iv) being alert to building levels of ownership of gender among UN agencies in addition to national stakeholders.

Specific approaches to sustainability that were found to work well as part of programme design included: i) building in risk management strategies; ii) ensuring reliable and affordable access for women to financial services; and iii) capacitating communities to interrogate their values, beliefs and practices regarding gender relations.

Gender equality

Finding 9: Programmes and projects integrate gender equality into the fabric of their design and have achieved some significant gains but are hampered by low levels of national capacity in terms of gender-responsive skills and expertise.

Evaluations found programmes to be normatively aligned with gender equality policies and to be using human-rights based approaches in terms of empowerment, participation, non-discrimination and prioritization of vulnerable groups. Some programmes were found by both global and decentralized evaluations to have contributed to significant national effects, including changes in laws and policies of member states, improved accountability environment and political attention.

Where it was assessed, programmes were also found to have integrated gender equality into practical action. In Georgia, for example, "injustice became more visible and identifiable by IDP women, even beyond the scope of the project. Women organizations learned, by practice, that there is a place... for activism; something they didn't know about from before."[16]

Gender-responsive programming strategies that were found to have worked well included: i) documentation of women's oral histories; ii) the involvement of media (social and traditional) to increase gender-responsive media coverage; and iii) legal clinics as a platform for wider gender mainstreaming. It was noted that in many cases, training government and partners on gender-responsive budgeting, documentation and monitoring is a prerequisite for the delivery of gender equality programming.

At least 33 per cent of decentralized evaluations found that local human resources capacity for gender programming was highly constrained. For example, the Joint Programme in Ethiopia was unable to fully staff all components due to a lack of gender-responsive skills and attitudes among non-gender government departments. Several implementing partners were found to lack capacity in gender analysis and human rights programming. In Uganda this capacity gap was partially addressed through participatory gender audits and targeted institution building.

While UN Women was generally found to have a strong comparative advantage in terms of expertise, knowledge and skills, this appeared to vary across thematic areas. UN Women human resources capacity was highly praised in terms of gender-responsive budgeting, for example, but more questions were asked regarding decentralized technical capabilities in the area of peace and security. One particular area of note was targeting, with several recommendations related to enhancing transparent and inclusive poverty-based targeting.

One innovative recommendation was to address capacity gaps in peace and security through developing a cadre of regional women peace negotiators and to lobby other UN agencies to use their resource people.

In most cases, evaluations assessed contexts where UN Women does work in partnership. This approach appeared to hold several challenges for integrating gender equality, including disparities in the way that gender equality, human rights and results-based approaches are understood and applied by different partners. This has particular consequences when relying on one or two implementing partners—whose unchallenged confirmation-bias can skew a whole project or programme.

Finally, at least 25 per cent of decentralized evaluations reported evidence of gender equality being more instrumental than intrinsic—for example, men being happy to accept the increased earning power of their wives but with very little evidence of changes in gender

16 Final Evaluation of Women for Equality, Peace and Development, UN Women, Georgia, 2013.

norms. Indeed, there were even reports of backlashes against women and self-selecting targeting that was reinforcing dynamics of exclusion. Addressing these findings is a priority if the positive examples described above are to be continued and extended.

Finding 10: UN Women is making strong contributions to enhancing global norms on gender. The main challenge is in translating this progress into effective operational work at the regional and country level.

The contribution of UN Women to shaping global norms on gender has been the object of two corporate evaluations, focusing on women's leadership and participation in peace and security, and ending violence against women. Both evaluations found that the organization has positively contributed to enhancing global-level normative frameworks.

It was also found by these evaluations that UN Women technical strengths are higher in some areas—for example, ending violence against women—than in others. This differential appears to have some implications for knowledge management within the agency, and credible authority outside the agency, as part of UN Women work on influencing global norms.

A main recommendation from both corporate evaluations centred on providing more guidance at the regional and country level on how to translate normative work into operational work. It was noted in an evaluation from Eastern and Southern Africa Region that UN Women offices face a context characterized by increasing numbers of regional initiatives focusing on gender. Strengthening links between UN Women normative work, regional partnerships and operational work was thus found to be an important part of ensuring continued renewal of strategic niches and specific added value.

2.2 UN Women organizational priorities

The Strategic Plan 2014-2017 states that UN-Women operational priorities are: i) drive more effective and efficient strategic partnerships and UN system coordination; ii) institutionalize a strong culture of results-based management, reporting, knowledge management and evaluation; and iii) enhance organizational effectiveness. The meta-analysis draws findings against each of these operational priorities.

Coordination and partnership

Finding 11: UN Women is developing a strong track record in convening coalitions and initiating partnerships.

Outside of the UN system, evaluations at both the regional and country level found that UN Women is strong in terms of building and coordinating coalitions of civil society and national institutions—even if the capacity of these is sometimes overestimated. Capacity strengthening NGOs, community-based organizations and self-help groups was found to be an important contributing factor to the effectiveness of this coordination.

Formal partnerships were found to be more difficult. For example, a regional partnership in the Great Lakes found that little had been done to renew or revitalize the partnership despite the UN Women partner experiencing lack of motivation, strategic engagement or capacity. Within country-level projects, a number of evaluations found that the contractual requirement to withhold from implementing partners (including local NGOs) a percentage of funds until the end of each project as a performance bond is having a significant detrimental effect on expenditure-rates, performance and efficiency—especially as local NGOs have no sources from which to borrow finance.

The absence of clearly agreed upon and commonly understood theories of change was reported in a number of evaluations, hampering the effectiveness of partnerships where these relied on organizations working towards common goals with a common rationale. The development of partnership frameworks describing the partnership rationale, scope, objectives, theory of change, strategies, coordination and modalities is a recommendation in at least three evaluations.

Partnership with the private sector received very little attention in the evaluations under review, with only Ethiopia and Zimbabwe considering private-sector involvement at the project level.

Finding 12: Evaluations identify challenges in defining the coordinating role of UN Women among UN agencies at the country level, ensuring that coordination maintains a strong sense of common purpose and working through the steep learning curves—and high

transaction costs—that have been a feature of many joint gender programmes.

While UN Women is recognized in corporate and decentralized evaluations as being strong at convening UN stakeholders, the clarity and performance of its coordinating role appears to vary—especially at the country level.

Generally, coordination at the global level—in some issues, particularly women's leadership—appears to be strongest. Coordination of UN agencies at the country level, including in joint gender programmes, was found to be less well defined and dependent on context. Coordination in humanitarian emergencies was found to need skills and capabilities that UN Women is still at the early stages of building.

The corporate evaluations noted that progress in improved UN coordination at the country level is slow and reliant on other factors, particularly 'Delivering as One' status. Meanwhile, the improvement in strategic relationships with key stakeholders, particularly within the UN system, and inter-agency coordination at the global level has been more rapid.

Another frequent finding was that joint programmes have gone through rapid learning curves. The Joint Evaluation on Joint Gender Programmes found that, because of the coordination costs of joint working, the optimum number of entities should be limited to no more than four or five. An evaluation of such a programme in Liberia also recommended that a comprehensive mapping of the gender sector should be a pre-requisite for joint working. Recommendations from elsewhere include the "value of an extended design process, and the associated common visioning and partnership for gender"[17].

A number of evaluations, including corporate evaluations, suggest that the coordinating role of UN Women will improve further as it more clearly defines its niches at global, regional and country levels—including defining its approaches. Furthermore, enhancing the accountability of the coordination mandate is a major recommendation of the corporate evaluation on ending violence against women. Securing adequate and predictable financing was found to be a major institutional barrier to delivering this need.

Culture of results

Finding 13: Results-based management is a systemic weakness in UN Women operations at every level. Despite some strong individual efforts, the majority of programmes lack explicit theories of change, measurable results frameworks or adequate monitoring. This is inhibiting accountability and learning and means UN Women is not able to capture the full extent of its impacts.

One corporate evaluation[18] and one decentralized evaluation[19] found that some programmes have "made strong individual efforts to build a culture and practice of accountability". There is, however, a great deal of consensus across all evaluations that the current systems, tools and practices for RBM do not sufficiently meet UN Development Group and UN Women policy commitments.

A crucial issue found in more than half of the evaluations was the lack of an explicit theory of change, results chain or logical framework for programmes. Most theories of change that are used are implicit—known only to staff members and undocumented. This leads to gaps in programme logic remaining unchallenged and difficulty in measurement of impact at the end of a programme.

Compounding this weakness is inadequate provision for M&E systems that was found by all evaluations (see Table 9). This has significant consequences for UN Women, including: i) limiting the ability to demonstrate results and learn lessons from experience; ii) hampering the ability of project staff to fully capture all of their achievements; and iii) not knowing the long-term effects of interventions on women's lives.

Decentralized evaluations conclude that these M&E needs have led to programmes tending to be managed by activities and outputs rather for longer term results.

17 Joint Evaluation of Joint Programmes on Gender Equality in the United Nations System UN Women, MDGIF, UNDP, UNFPA, and UNICEF, New York, NY, 2013.

18 Joint Evaluation of Joint Programmes on Gender Equality in the United Nations System UN Women, MDGIF, UNDP, UNFPA, and UNICEF, New York, NY, 2013..

19 Evaluation of JP for Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment, UN Women, Liberia, 2013.

Corporately, the Joint Evaluation on Joint Gender Programmes concluded that current M&E practices of joint gender programmes implement upwards accountability to donors, rather than mutual accountability with national institutions or downwards accountability to women. Both issues are manifested, in some cases, in terms of unknown data about the number and/or quality of available services or their actual use by and benefits for women.

Specific day-to-day challenges identified in evaluation reports include: i) setting timely baselines; ii) identifying relevant indicators; and iii) utilizing indicators in monitoring reports. In some cases, it was noted that the flexibility required by strategic partnerships, and the iterative approach needed for some issues, makes indicators particularly difficult to develop. Nevertheless, a Liberia evaluation found that "achievements were higher where the results and indicators were clearly articulated, measurable and achievable"[20].

Beyond developing relevant indicators, evaluations recommend establishing strategies for accountability at the programme design stage, including: systematic monitoring, embedding risk assessments, tracing actual expenditures and establishing clear accountability mechanisms.

It was found that "ownership and sustainability are maximized where accountability is grounded within the national context and understood as truly mutual"[21]. Thus, the approach recommended by evaluations for enhancing M&E is one of national capacity development, combining support with demand for accountability, and allocating the necessary staff and budgetary resources. In addition to RBM training, specific recommended activities include developing management information systems and supporting generating national-level sex disaggregated data.

Two decentralized evaluations also discussed the importance of results indicators to long-term exit strategies, recommending that specific benchmark indicators should be developed that identify minimum preconditions for sustainability (and thus the possibility of a project's exit).

Table 9. Quantitative analysis of evidence on using monitoring and evaluation to improve development effectiveness

Criteria and sub-criteria	n[a]	Coverage[b]	Percentage of findings satisfactory[c]
6.1 Systems and process for evaluation are effective	5	Weak	-
6.2 Systems and processes for monitoring and reporting on programme results are effective	7	Moderate	33%
6.3 RBM systems are effective	9	Moderate	16%
6.4 Evaluation is used to improve humanitarian and development effectiveness	4	Weak	-

[a] n = number of evaluations addressing the given sub-criterion
[b] Strong: n=11-14; moderate: n= 7-10; weak: n = less than 7
[c] Satisfactory ratings include 'satisfactory' and 'highly satisfactory'

20 Evaluation of the Joint Programme on Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment (JP-GEWEE), UN Women, Liberia, 2013.

21 Joint Evaluation of Joint Programmes on Gender Equality in the United Nations System UN Women, MDGIF, UNDP, UNFPA, and UNICEF, New York, NY, 2013.

Organizational effectiveness

Finding 14: Financing constraints and weak knowledge management—especially in terms of sharing lessons between country-level and global work—are issues that UN Women needs to address in order to enhance organizational effectiveness. Despite these weak areas, however, the dedication of staff and strong understanding of context are universally recognized as having enabled UN Women to effectively transition from its predecessor entities.

The synthesis identified 15 per cent of findings, conclusions and recommendations that were relevant to operational effectiveness. Many of these related to the transition to UN Women and the implications of this change. Both corporate and decentralized evaluations (mostly of joint gender programmes) found that:

i) UN Women is facing many of the challenges of new organizations, especially in terms of clarifying role and mandate, and developing synergies across components;

ii) nevertheless, the transition has increased the strategic presence and credibility of UN Women, which is effectively expanding the work of its predecessor entities; and

iii) this enhanced visibility has brought with it high expectations that are proving to be a challenge for the organization to meet, especially at country level.

At the centre of these issues are two factors that are repeatedly highlighted by evaluations: knowledge management and financing.

The issue of knowledge management is reflected in reports that are all rated 'Very Good', providing a high level of confidence. These found that more is required in terms of connecting global policy and normative engagements with country programmes and operations. This covered a range of issues, including ending VAW, women's leadership in fragile contexts, and women economic empowerment. Inadequate knowledge management systems were identified as leading to missed opportunities for UN Women to draw upon project experiences to inform organizational learning and policy work at the global level.

The second issue, finance, is found to be a challenge for UN Women at all levels. Availability of funds is a constraint to effectiveness that is identified in many (but not all) corporate and decentralized evaluations. This is exacerbated by delays in disbursement at the programme-level and designs that are "marked by high levels of ambition in efforts to tackle systemic and deep-rooted gender inequalities within short time frames". Evaluations recommend that UN Women diversify its resourcing base and "develop creative ways of tapping into the resources of other partners so that there is a systemic approach to resourcing"[22].

Despite these challenges, UN Women is found by a range of evaluations to have dedicated staff, a strong reputation and good understanding of local contexts. These mean that projects and programmes have been effective but leave the organization reliant on the performance of individual staff and vulnerable to changes in operational teams. This is particularly the case because evaluations found that national gender infrastructure is generally weak and subject to constraints relating to limited gender-sensitive knowledge, skills and attitudes.

The technical competence of UN Women staff in most strategic areas was found to be strong, with some professional development needs in relation to fragility and humanitarian response. Management structures were also found to be largely appropriate, although the timeliness of having project management staff in place was identified as an important contributing factor to effectiveness. A corporate evaluation found the effectiveness of UN Women at the country level is highly influenced by how staff members engage with stakeholders and that greater discipline needs to be practiced in documenting these processes.

Priority recommendations for UN Women include enhancing strategic planning at the country level, developing a coherent approach to managing global components (e.g. funds, programmes, initiatives) in order to enhance synergies, and designing risk management strategies for operations (particularly in fragile or conflict-affected situations). One idea tabled in relation to

22 Joint Evaluation of Joint Programmes on Gender Equality in the United Nations System UN Women, MDGIF, UNDP, UNFPA, and UNICEF, New York, NY, 2013.

ending VAW—but potentially relevant to other areas—is to publish a guidance document, for both internal and external use, outlining the thematic mandate of UN Women and key priorities and approaches.

2.3 UN Women operational principles

The Strategic Plan 2014-2017 states that UN-Women employs the following principles and approaches: i) supporting capacity development as the foundation strategy for effective and sustainable development; ii) being demand-driven, responding to requests for support from Member States and other stakeholders, aligning support with national development plans and strategies and reaffirming the centrality of national ownership and leadership; iii) promoting inclusiveness, highlighting the crucial role of men and boys, and focusing, where appropriate, on the poorest and most excluded groups; iv) advocating for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment; and v) acting as a global broker of knowledge and experience. The meta-analysis draws findings against each of these principles and approaches.

Capacity development

Finding 15: Capacity development features strongly as an approach across all UN Women work. This ranges in breadth and depth—embracing issues from basic documentation skills in self-help groups to nurturing national coalitions for social action. Data on the outcomes from capacity development is, however, rarely available. Most evaluations make the case for continued support, suggesting that there is a need to strengthen exit strategies from capacity development interventions.

UN Women has had a corporate *Capacity Development Framework and Guidance Note* in place since 2010 (formerly under UNIFEM). Capacity development is a feature of all projects, programmes and strategies that were evaluated. This ranged from substantial intensive investment in policy makers and high government officials, to supporting the documentation skills of self-help groups. Most evaluations found that considerable contributions had been made to the individual and organizational capacities of UN Women partners, increased political will, or changed perspectives and understanding of gender issues.

Capacity development appears to have been largely in terms of finance, technical assistance and training. Several evaluations considered coalitions that had been built up over the course of projects and found these represent a capacity that should be maintained after an intervention finished.

The effectiveness of capacity development was found to vary in terms of depth, reach and sustainability across programmes and projects. Most interventions were found to have had limited success in institutionalizing capacity, raising questions about sustainability and leading to recommendations for following-on support. The need to consolidate achievements and develop a clear exit strategy was a repeated recommendation.

A number of reports gave particular attention to the need to invest in basic organizational capacities for community-based organizations and self-help groups. These include proposal writing, coordination and management skills, documentation, and training in RBM. It was noted by at least three evaluations that mini-groups of self-empowered and capacitated local activists are very effective but suffer from high burn out, exceptionally high stress levels, a tendency to be temporary, and a lack of human resources and time. The design of programme grant-making processes and current RBM systems were found to be inappropriate to these capacity gaps in several cases. This suggests that capacity development needs to be considered in the design of UN Women systems and partnership arrangements, in addition to being an activity.

Other recommendations included having a greater focus on capacity development at the institutional level, with future interventions mentoring and supporting a 'learning-by-doing' approach or including joint advocacy strategies with partners to enhance their impact. Furthermore, an evaluation from Nepal proposed developing a comprehensive capacity development framework with clear baselines and targets to track changes and strengthen the documentation of all UN Women capacity development work.

Finding 16: Interventions to strengthen women's leadership and decision-making are focused primarily on the capacity development of local groups, with some evidence of contributions being made to enhancing the enabling environment.

Corporately, evaluations found that country-level activities have contributed to creating enabling conditions for women's leadership and participation, particularly in peace and security. The main recommendation that emerges is to prioritize long-term capacity development as the best means for supporting leadership and participation interventions.

The existing experience with capacity development for leadership is mostly related to the formation and growth of local groups. Specific examples include women's political watch groups, community alert groups, and gender education movement clubs. These were all found to be relevant to the social and political context, increasing opportunities for women's and girl's participation.

There is limited evidence in the evaluations regarding women's leadership and participation at the national or international level. One report[23] explores the importance of mobilizing a critical mass of representations, specifically in relationship to effective advocacy. However, most other findings focus on other strategic areas, such as women's economic empowerment or ending violence against women, rather than on women's leadership as an outcome in its own right.

Finding 17: UN Women is successfully strengthening the capacity of national institutions to implement gender mainstreaming.

Capacity development is a component of all the relevant programmes that were evaluated. Recommendations made by reports included: i) considering gender-responsive budgeting training for senior local government officers and parliamentarians as a prerequisite to institutionalizing services; ii) focusing on mentoring and supporting a 'learning-by-doing' approach; and iii) expanding the range of stakeholders to include bodies such as election commissions.

At least 25 per cent of decentralized evaluations found that programmes and projects had achieved results in terms of strengthening gender equality within national governance systems. This fits with the Joint Evaluation on Joint Gender Programmes, which "found examples of gender being raised on the political and policy agenda; legislative and governance reforms being stimulated; and contributions to an improved accountability environment." In Zimbabwe, UN Women successfully advocated for provisions that remove Section 23(3) of the Constitution, which allowed gender discrimination in matters of personal law.

In Uganda, gender equality assessments were undertaken in seven sectors and used to presenent gender-responsive budgeting and gender equality and women empowerment issues to the government. Evaluations elsewhere reported similar outputs but noted that, while government institutions are now more convinced about using a gender perspective in strategic planning and budgeting processes, outcomes and impacts will take a long time to be realized.

The importance of network-building and mobilization were highlighted by evaluations in bringing about important changes in laws. So too was the need for strategies towards the domestication of regional and international gender equality commitments (such as CEDAW and the Southern African Development Community Gender Protocol). Key tools in these efforts were identified as targeted research studies, facilitating dialogue among key actors, involvement of civil society organizations, and including political representatives in marshalling evidence.

Most evaluations cite the staff and skills of UN Women as a major contributing factor to programme success. The relevance of UN Women in supporting national governance was found to come from the organization's capacity to convene actors, facilitate sharing of knowledge and experiences, draw on accumulated global expertise, provide quality technical assistance, and maintain an in-depth understanding about national priorities and needs.

National ownership

Finding 18: UN Women programmes are consistently strongly aligned with national policies and priorities. There is also strong national ownership among institutions that have been closely involved in programme design and implementation. The challenge faced by many programmes is strengthening ownership and gender-responsive capacity in national institutions that sit outside of the gender infrastructure.

23 Final Evaluation of Women for Equality Peace and Development in Georgia.

All evaluations except one found that programmes, including joint programmes, are well aligned with national priorities on gender equality and owned by national institutions (the exception was in a context of delayed post-conflict elections). The same was reported of partnerships and national action plans.

The capacity of UN Women to engage and influence high-level national stakeholders appears to vary according to thematic area and the approach in-country. Significant progress was reported largely in relation to institutionalizing gender-responsive budgeting or issues relating to economic empowerment.

Common barriers to national ownership of gender initiatives were identified in reports. These include: i) a resistance among political parties to practice gender and social inclusion policies; ii) weak engagement and lack of high-level support in ministries other than the one that holds the gender portfolio; iii) frequent transfer of government staff; and iv) lack of specific government budget lines for gender.

In Ethiopia, for example, key federal government stakeholders and UN agencies participated in the design of a joint gender programme, helping to ensure ownership at the central level. However, limited participation of sector ministries and local levels in the planning process limited any wider sense of ownership.

Lessons from evaluations highlight the importance of involving government in the planning structures and implementation of programmes in order to develop a reciprocal link with policy development. Ownership and sustainability was found to be strongest where accountability is grounded within the national context and understood as mutual. However, in many cases this requires capacity strengthening and technical support of government and civil society organizations. Across most programmes it was found "capacity development has not been explicitly framed under the broader principle of ownership"[24].

Promoting inclusiveness

Finding 19: UN Women programmes have established a number of effective approaches and mechanisms for enhancing inclusiveness, especially in service provision to women and marginalized groups. Many evaluations find, however, that significant progress on realizing the rights and freedoms of women cannot be made without greater inclusion of men as active programme participants in changing social norms.

Not all evaluation reports considered the experiences of different social groups. Nevertheless, a number did discuss the extent to which programme designs promoted inclusiveness. Findings were largely positive, with the UNSCR 1325 National Action Plan development process in Georgia "testified by all to have been one of the most participatory, inclusive and empowering national endeavours"[25].

Mechanisms within UN Women programmes that were credited with enhancing inclusiveness were the one-stop shop approach to providing IDP services and the '*Pourakhi*'[26] in Nepal. Adopting a theory of change based on social mobilization was found by one evaluation[27] to have ensured that community-based organizations were able to represent large parts of respective communities even if they were gender-based. More such mechanisms were recommended by evaluations to engage and capture voices of beneficiaries of programmes.

Among these strong examples, some evaluations of joint gender programmes found that they remained largely high-level and focused towards the political centre. Two evaluations also indicated that specific groups, including youth and migrant workers, required greater integration in the design of programmes.

The most commonly underrepresented group, found in at least 50 per cent of evaluations, was men. Outside of specific programmes to address men, such as Grenada's 'Man-to-Man Batterer' initiative, male participation was found to be low. This limited the coverage, effectiveness and impact of programmes—a finding that was frequently vocalized by women's community-based organizations and representatives.

24 Thematic Evaluation of the Contribution of UN-Women to Prevent Violence Against Women and Expand Access to Services, UN Women,, NY, New York, 2013

25 Final Evaluation of Women for Equality, Peace and Development, UN Women, Georgia, 2013.

26 Organizations of women migrant workers

27 Evaluation of UN Women Partnership with the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), UN Women, East and Southern Africa, 2013.

Evaluations concluded that increased male inclusion is required for achieving broader community-level social change and that the role of men needs to be clearly defined. Evidence from Liberia suggested that men supported increased earning power among women, but this was not leading to shifting unequal gender norms. A recommendation in several evaluations is to include explicit efforts to address and advance men's values towards gender equality in parallel to supporting women.

Advocacy

Finding 20: Advocacy for UN Women is generally approached from 'behind-the-scenes'—building up evidence, working with decision makers, and supporting local stakeholders to publicly advocate for positive changes. This approach is found to be relevant and effective, although few evaluations are able to provide specific evidence of contributions beyond legislative or policy change.

Two corporate evaluations and at least 33 per cent of decentralized evaluations found that UN Women have contributed to shaping policy and norms at the global, regional and national levels through advocacy. This has included collecting data, generating evidence, bringing it to the attention of decision makers, and successfully contributing to changes in legislation or policy. Importance was placed on encouraging national stakeholders to champion relevant laws and providing them with tools to do so, rather than direct public advocacy by UN Women.

While specific evidence on advocacy was limited, one evaluation[28] found that lack of analysis into the determinants of gender-related problems at the design stage significantly limited the effectiveness of a programme's advocacy strategies and VAW prevention initiatives.

Decentralized evaluations found that broader involvement of civil society organizations (not only women's groups) in advocacy is important to developing a common grassroots cause that avoids 'side-lining' gender issues. It was also found that the media are an enabling partner in terms of connecting stakeholders, as well as broadcasting messages. It was recommended that more systematic monitoring of changes in the attitudes of people is, however, required in UN Women work with media.

Knowledge brokerage

Finding 21: UN Women is recognized for its strong contribution to some specific areas of knowledge at the global level. Evaluations highlight the importance of further decentralizing this capability and linking it to enhanced knowledge management systems.

While the knowledge management system within UN Women is subject to some barriers, evaluations found that external knowledge production is "rich and authoritative, particularly at the global level"[29]. Decentralized evaluations proposed that production and distribution of substantive guidance on good practices and standards, and the development of evidence bases, could be further strengthened. They recommend systematically drawing upon lessons and insights from country and regional projects to inform organizational learning and theory building at the corporate level.

Examples of positive practice in knowledge brokering at the local level were identified as the one-stop shop approach to providing integrated services for IDP women, multi-country approaches to developing programmes and projects, and building in opportunities for exchange of knowledge, lessons and best practice among programme partners, stakeholders and women beneficiaries. Country-level evaluations emphasized the importance of supporting the development of strategic knowledge products, including model policies, position papers and guidance notes.

Requests for additional research were identified in three evaluations. These included: i) assessing determinants of success and sustainability for self-help groups; ii) studying the impact of remittances on women and their families; and iii) understanding the socioeconomic impact of foreign employment on women and their families.

28 Evaluation of the Joint Programme on Gender Equality, UN Women, Uganda, 2013.

29 Thematic evaluation on the contribution of UN-Women to increasing women's leadership and participation in peace and security and humanitarian response, UN Women, NY, New York, 2013.

2.4 Lessons identified in evaluation reports

The following broad lessons have been compiled by bringing together and synthesizing all of the lessons learned that were included in evaluation reports.

Lesson 1: UN Women is well placed to create change, but its main objectives will take a long time to come to fruition.

UN Women has established credibility within its strategic areas. However, change in these domains will take many years to come to fruition. Many of the ingredients for change—such as gender mainstreaming or gender-responsive budgeting—are already present in countries, and programmes that patiently build on these while maintaining a clear long-term vision offer the best overall prospect for effectiveness.

Lesson 2: Some of the most effective mechanisms for change are based on community mobilization and self-help, but these require ongoing access to capacity support and formalization if they are to be sustained.

Mini-groups of self-empowered and capacitated local activists offer an effective and efficient mechanism for grassroots voice and action. Sustaining the continuous interest of participants, capacitating communities to interrogate their practices regarding gender relations, and defining locally manageable development objectives are important components of sustainability. In addition to capacity development support, this has worked best where multiple small groups have been convened, amalgamated, formalized and linked to professional service providers.

Lesson 3: Coalitions of local CSOs work best when they are not limited to gender-focused organizations and receive basic capacity development for RBM.

While working with smaller groups of NGOs is tempting from an administrative perspective, it risks side-lining and weakening effective long-term civil society coalitions. Coalitions have shown the greatest promise where they have been broad-based, inclusive (not just orientated to women), and supported with RBM capacity strengthening.

Lesson 4: National ownership is maximized where accountability is embedded in local institutions, starting with the design process. This requires both political will and capacity support.

Ownership has been generated by projects if key stakeholders are involved in all aspects of the design and implementation. This involvement strengthens accountability by embedding it in local infrastructure, although it requires ongoing political will and capacity development to convert local accountability into effectiveness. In many cases, for example, even where political will exists, required technical expertise in gender is frequently sporadic or missing from important national institutions.

Lesson 5: Joint programmes require higher transaction costs and longer to realize than is often assumed. Working to develop shared understandings and commitment across agencies' leadership, enabling the capacity of the lead entity, and the role of the Resident Coordinator are all foundations of joint programmes.

'Delivering as One' environments generally provide the most conducive setting for joint gender programmes and UN coordination. United Nations entities operate a multitude of different systems and operational arrangements, demanding realism in setting the targets for joint programmes. Potential for coherence is maximized where the capacity, capability and empowerment of the lead entity, Resident Coordinator, and any existing gender theme group are supported.

Lesson 6: Programme design that is informed by better quality research and analysis is better able to include advanced risk management strategies, make market-appropriate project selection, and create sustained structural changes.

The robustness of the analytical basis, inclusiveness of programme design processes, and designing-in of risk management strategies were associated with the most successful experiences of implementation. Within areas such as economic empowerment, thorough market research provides the basis for projects with high potential for growth, sustainability and long-term structural impacts.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The reviewer has independently developed the following conclusions and recommendations based on the evidence presented in the findings.

3.1 Conclusions

Conclusion 1: UN Women programmes are considered highly relevant in terms of global norms, national frameworks and the needs of women.

Evaluations across all thematic areas find the design and objectives of programmes to be firmly in line with global norms, up-to-date thinking and relevant national frameworks. They also view programmes as relevant to the needs of target groups, although the infrequent use of power or human rights analyses in evaluation designs, and the common reference to 'women' as a single stakeholding group, leaves some of these assertions open to being challenged.

Conclusion 2: Effectiveness is achieved within the boundaries of outputs set by programmes, but evaluations and monitoring systems are insufficient to fully measure outcomes and impacts on women's lives.

UN Women programmes are found to be delivering strongly on outputs. The measurement of outcomes is, however, far less frequent and the designs that are generally adopted for evaluations are insufficient to assess impact. The tendency for evaluations to avoid commenting on development effectiveness where the monitoring evidence is not available—other than to hypothesize contributions to higher level outcomes—risks giving 'false positives' under the OECD DAC development effectiveness measures. This highlights an urgent need to improve RBM, including: ensuring that all programmes have a clear theory of change, measurable (SMART) indicators at least at output and outcome levels, and systematic monitoring and review processes.

Conclusion 3: The implicit design of programmes is efficient, but operational delays to fund disbursement and contracts that are not sensitive to the needs of local NGOs, as well as delays in recruitment of UN Women staff at the field level, are barriers to effectiveness.

Evaluations do not include full value-for-money or cost-benefit analyses. However, they generally present evidence that the design of programmes (in terms of the target group and intervention) can be considered as efficient. This is most often based on the finding that UN Women country staff have a strong contextual understanding of the environment in which they are operating. The implementation of these designs, however, is less efficient—due largely to delayed disbursements and contract conditions that are difficult for local NGOs to work under. While the majority of disbursement delays were linked to the slow release of funds by donors, there does appear to be scope for UN Women to develop an alternative set of disbursement protocols that allow country offices to advance grant funds to local implementing partners that do not have access to other sources of project finance. In particular, several evaluations expressed a need to enable adequate funding to be released on time to these implementing partners within the required standards of accountability.

Conclusion 4: Innovative approaches are being developed that ensure the inclusion of women including the most marginalized, but greater attention is required on the inclusion of men if results are to be sustained.

Evaluations found positive evidence of participation and empowerment among women and women's groups in relation to a range of thematic areas, including (but not limited to) economic empowerment, women's leadership, peace and security, and freedom from violence. Several programmes have supported the development of innovative models for enhancing inclusion—such as one-stop shops for services within

IDP communities. Within this success story, however, many evaluations question whether achievements can be sustained or impacts extended without greater focus on including men (especially as advocates for GEEW and peer-to-peer educators of other men).

Conclusion 5: Strong local ownership is being achieved within the gender-focused community and national gender institutions, but shifting the political will of non-committed power holders remains a major challenge for gender equality advocates.

Evaluations found that the institutions and civil society organizations that constitute the national gender infrastructure most often have a strong sense of ownership of, and participate in, UN Women programmes. Outside of these gender-focused organizations, effectiveness (especially in policy reform and sustained service delivery) relies on securing the political will of power holders. Winning over these 'gatekeepers'—especially in sensitive areas such as freedom from violence—remains a continuous challenge for many programmes.

Conclusion 6: Capacity development is a major component of UN Women strategy in every thematic area and more data is required on whether or not it is being effective in delivering results.

Capacity development is a pervasive feature of the programmes that have been evaluated, including local groups, civil society, government, and even UN Women itself. Capacity development activities sit at the heart of UN Women efforts in terms of both effectiveness and sustainability. While evaluations are able to collect data on the completion of activities, there is little evidence available on the contribution of capacity development to higher level outcomes, nor analysis of whether or not the right target groups and capacity gaps are being addressed. This needs to be addressed in terms of how the monitoring of capacity development is conceived and implemented.

Conclusion 7: UN Women has strong convening power for partnerships but limited engagement with private sector at decentralized levels.

Evaluations find that UN Women has strong recognition as a normative authority at both the international and national levels. This provides it with strong convening power, which is evidenced in a number of coalitions and regional partnerships that feature in evaluation reports. Despite this convening power, evaluations found little evidence of engagement with the private sector as advocates or direct agents of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Conclusion 8: Coordination of the United Nations at the country level is a significant ongoing challenge.

While UN Women is recognized as being strong at convening UN stakeholders, the clarity and performance of its coordinating role appears to vary—especially at the country level. Coordination of UN agencies at the country level was found to be less well defined and dependent on context. Coordination in humanitarian emergencies was found to need skills and capabilities that UN Women is still at the early stages of building.

Despite the mandate and influence of UN Women, the complexity and resources required to effectively coordinate joint responses remain both sizable and frequently underestimated. Evaluations indicate that UN Women needs to be realistic in assessing the costs—as well as potential gains—from joint programmes and focus joint programmes in terms of both the number of partners and the programmatic scope. Furthermore, as the purpose and scope of evaluations is primarily linked to specific programmes, there is a gap in the evaluative evidence being generated about UN Women wider coordination work at country level.

Conclusion 9: While UN Women is producing valued knowledge in some areas at the global level, this is not sufficiently connected to operational experience and lessons by way of a strong internal knowledge management system.

UN Women is acknowledged and valued for the knowledge base it is establishing in some thematic areas at the international level. However, a significant proportion of evaluations indicate that the internal knowledge management systems of the organization need strengthening. They highlight in particular the missed opportunities to share lessons learned between programmes and for operational experiences to help guide normative and policy work at the international level.

3.2 Recommendations

The following priority recommendations have been developed based on the conclusions and findings. They have not been subject to a participatory validation process with UN Women stakeholders.

Recommendation 1:

Ensure that all programmes have in place a clear theory of change and a results framework and monitoring system that can hold the programme to account for higher-level results.

Based on conclusions 2, 6

Most evaluations are not able to draw on a ready set of performance or monitoring data from programmes, projects and partnerships. This severely inhibits the ability of UN Women to demonstrate the impact that the organization is having. UN Women Headquarters needs to ensure that country offices prioritize the development of a clear results framework (with a minimum number of SMART output, outcome and impact indicators) for every project, and ensure that outcome-level data (changes in behaviours and institutions) is consistently captured. Special attention is required to ensure that the outcome-level effectiveness of coordination and capacity development (as well as service delivery) is captured and used for learning.

Recommendation 2:

Apply the level of creativity that is being focused on inclusiveness of women towards enhancing the role of men at all levels in supporting GEEW.

Based on conclusions 4, 5

Decentralized evaluations of several programmes have found that, despite excellent progress, the non inclusion of men from the process can leave a barrier—or, at the minimum, strong inertia—to sustaining instrumental gains in GEEW and achieving intrinsic outcomes. A number of these evaluations have recommended that projects and programmes identify mechanisms for including men—in their roles as family, life-partners, peer-to-peer educators and power holders—in future work. Particular importance can be placed on recruiting advocates among men who occupy positions of political power outside of the national gender-infrastructure, such as government ministers, police commissioners, and military commanders. Winning and maintaining their support is critical for implementing gender-responsive policies.

Recommendation 3:

Improve organizational efficiency by deploying simplified disbursement protocols for local NGOs and civil society organizations that lack credit facilities and streamlined human resources recruitment mechanisms for time-sensitive posts.

Based on conclusion 3

One of the organizational comparative advantages identified in evaluations is mobilizing and supporting coalitions of local NGOs and civil society organizations. Maintaining and building on this strength would benefit from having an improved disbursement protocol to local implementing partners within the required standards of accountability. Similarly, the timely initiation of projects, organizational responsiveness to strategic opportunities, and preservation of institutional knowledge would all benefit from streamlined human resources mechanisms for recruiting and retention of staff.

Recommendation 4:

Build upon good country-level experience in convening coalitions and building partnerships, including by engaging the private sector.

Based on conclusion 7

Country-level evaluations have highlighted a number of positive experiences in using the UN Women mandate and convening power to support the formation and growth of effective civil society coalitions and partnerships. Important ingredients include having clear and shared purpose, ensuring continuous engagement (including with members of the group being targeted by the partnership) and involving a diverse range of organizations (not just those with a gender focus). UN Women in countries evaluated is not yet engaging in partnerships with the private sector on regular and systematic basis—despite the key role such partnerships have in the organization's strategic vision. While recognizing the different culture and needs of the private sector (compared to civil society), existing experience, coalitions and networks offer a good foundation for a renewed focus on public-private partnerships.

Recommendation 5:

Strengthen the UN coordination role of UN Women at the country level.

Based on conclusion 8

The role of UN Women, the mandate of which positions it, where conditions permit, as a logical technical and/or coordination lead, should be clarified and made explicit at the country level. This should include guidance on real-world resources, time, skills and strategies required to coordinate effectively, as well as clear and practical ways of assessing and communicating the value-addition for various UN entities and national stakeholders.

Recommendation 6:

Review the organizational knowledge management system, including how lessons are captured from operations and influence the technical capacity development of staff.

Based on conclusion 9

The mandate and strategy of UN Women—working at the normative, coordinating and operational levels—provides the organization with the possibility of both generating and using authoritative knowledge on GEEW. Maximizing this possibility requires an efficient and effective knowledge management system that draws on the experience of UN Women operational programmes, as well as informing their design with cutting-edge thinking. Evaluations identify that the present knowledge management system is resulting in missed opportunities and flag this as an important issue for resolution.

Annex 1. 2013 evaluations analysed in this meta-analysis

Corporate/ decentralized	Title of evaluation	Country	Evaluation type	Report quality
Corporate	Thematic evaluation on the contribution of UN-Women to preventing violence against women and girls and expanding access to services	Global	Thematic	Very good
	Thematic evaluation on the contribution of UN-Women to increasing women's leadership and participation in peace and security and humanitarian response	Global	Thematic	Very good
	Joint evaluation of joint programmes on gender equality in the United Nations system	Global	Joint evaluation	Very good
Arab States	Final evaluation of the Mehwar Center for the protection and empowerment of women and their families	Country office for Palestine	Programme evaluation	Satisfactory
Asia and the Pacific	Final evaluation of the support to the Government of Afghanistan through the commission on the elimination of violence against women to implement the law on eliminating violence against women and assistance to women victims	Country office for Afghanistan	Project evaluation	Good
	Final evaluation of the programme on sustaining the gains of foreign labour migration through the protection of migrant workers' rights	Country office for Nepal	Programme evaluation	Good
	Final evaluation of project on "making politics work with women" in Nepal	Country office for Nepal	Project evaluation	Good
Europe and Central Asia	Final external formative evaluation of the project on women for equality, peace and development in Georgia	Country office for Georgia	Programme evaluation	Very good
	Final evaluation of "Women connect across conflicts: building accountability for implementation of Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009) and 1889 (2009)"	Multi-country office for Central Asia (Kazakhstan)	Programme evaluation	Good
	Final evaluation of the project on promoting gender-responsive budgeting in South-Eastern Europe	Multi-country office for Bosnia and Herzegovina	Project evaluation	Very good
	Final evaluation of the project on advancing women's economic and social rights in Montenegro and Serbia	Multi-country office for Bosnia and Herzegovina	Project evaluation	Very good
	Final evaluation of the project on advancing the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) in the western Balkans	Multi-country office for Bosnia and Herzegovina	Programme evaluation	Satisfactory

Corporate/ decentralized	Title of evaluation	Country	Evaluation type	Report quality
Eastern and Southern Africa	Evaluation of the joint programme on gender equality and women's empowerment	Country office for Ethiopia	Programme evaluation	Good
	Final evaluation of gender and governance programme	Country office for Kenya	Programme evaluation	Satisfactory
	Evaluation of action taken by UN-Women concerning the prevention and elimination of violence against women, with a focus on the awareness-raising campaign "UNiTE to End Violence against Women"	Country office for Mozambique	Project evaluation	Satisfactory
	Final evaluation of Isange one-stop centres	Country office for Rwanda	Programme evaluation	Satisfactory
	Evaluation of joint programme on gender equality	Country office for Uganda	Country-level evaluation	Good
	Final evaluation of the gender support programme	Country office for Zimbabwe	Programme evaluation	Good
	Evaluation of UN-Women support to the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region	Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa	Project evaluation	Very good
Americas and the Caribbean	Final evaluation of the "Young Women Citizens" programme	Country office for Brazil	Programme evaluation	Satisfactory
	Final evaluation of the "Safe Cities" programme	Country office for Guatemala	Programme evaluation	Satisfactory
	Longitudinal evaluation of Grenada's "Man-to-man batterer intervention" programme	Multi-country office for the Caribbean (Barbados)	Pilot evaluation	Satisfactory
West and Central Africa	Evaluation of joint programme on gender equality and women's economic empowerment	Country office for Liberia	Programme evaluation	Good

Annex 2. Full results of quantitative analysis of evidence on development effectiveness

Criteria and sub-criteria	n[a]	Coverage[b]	Percentage of findings satisfactory[c]
Achieving development objectives and expected results			
1.1 Programmes and projects achieve their stated development objectives	13	Strong	90%
1.2 Programmes and projects have resulted in positive benefits for target group members	11	Strong	89%
1.3 Programmes and projects made differences for a substantial number of beneficiaries	7	Moderate	75%
1.4 Programmes contributed to significant changes in national development policies and programmes	7	Moderate	100%
Cross-cutting themes—inclusive development that is sustainable			
2.1 Extent to which supported activities effectively address gender equality	6	Weak	-
2.2 Extent to which changes are environmentally sustainable	0	Weak	-
Sustainability of results/benefits			
3.1 Benefits continuing or likely to continue after project or programme completion	6	Weak	-
3.2 Projects and programmes are reported as sustainable in terms of capacity	10	Moderate	28%
3.3 Programming contributes to strengthening the enabling environment for development	9	Moderate	79%
Relevance of interventions			
4.1 Programmes and projects are suited to the needs and/or priorities of the target group	10	Moderate	86%
4.2 Projects and programmes align with national development goals	10	Moderate	100%
4.3 Effective partnerships with governments, development organizations and NGOs	10	Moderate	55%
Efficiency			
5.1 Program activities are evaluated as cost/resource efficient	8	Moderate	71%
5.2 Implementation and objectives achieved on time	4	Weak	-

Criteria and sub-criteria	n[a]	Coverage[b]	Percentage of findings satisfactory[c]
5.3 Systems and procedures for project/programme implementation and follow up are efficient	12	Strong	55%
Using evaluation and monitoring to improve development effectiveness			
6.1 Systems and process for evaluation are effective	5	Weak	-
6.2 Systems and processes for monitoring and reporting on programme results are effective	7	Moderate	33%
6.3 RBM systems are effective	9	Moderate	16%
6.4 Evaluation is used to improve humanitarian and development effectiveness	4	Weak	-

[a] n = number of evaluations addressing the given sub-criterion

[b] Strong: n=11-14; moderate: n= 7-10; weak: n = less than 7

[c] Satisfactory ratings includes 'satisfactory' and 'highly satisfactory'

Note

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