



# WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM UN WOMEN EVALUATIONS?

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

July 2014



The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) undertook a meta-analysis of corporate and decentralized evaluations managed by UN Women in 2013. The meta-analysis synthesizes and aggregates the key findings, conclusions and recommendations of the 23 evaluation reports that met UN Women quality requirements.

This brief provides an overview of the meta-analysis. The interventions evaluated were implemented in 2011-2012, during the transition and consolidation period of UN Women. In this context, the overarching conclusion of the meta-analysis is that UN Women has achieved important results while developing its own structure.

Programmes are relevant to international and national priorities, and achieved planned outputs despite constrained funding and complex political environments. However, UN Women should address areas of organizational efficiency where challenges have been identified.

UN Women performed well in relation to the Strategic Plan's operational priorities, principles and approaches. The organization is developing a strong track record in convening partnerships and it is recognized as being strong at coordinating UN entities at the global level. UN Women has established a number of effective approaches for enhancing inclusiveness; capacity development and advocacy are recognized as major strategies; national ownership is strong; and important contributions to some specific areas of knowledge have been made.

Nevertheless, UN Women programming needs to become more effective across the spectrum from designing programmes, to implementing, monitoring and evaluating them. Results-based Management needs to be strengthened at all levels to systematically guide decision-making and to fully measure outcomes and impacts on women's lives. In terms of programming approach, more needs to be done to involve men as active programme participants in changing social norms and in strengthening knowledge management systems. In addition, UN Women should strengthen its coordination role at the country level, and explore the opportunity to engage the private sector as appropriate.



## Main Conclusions

1. UN Women programmes are considered highly relevant in terms of global norms, national frameworks and the needs of women.
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.
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 field level, are barriers to effectiveness.
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.
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.
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.
7. UN Women has strong convening power for partnerships but limited engagement with the private sector at decentralized levels.
8. Coordination of the United Nations at the country level is a significant ongoing challenge.

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.

## Lessons Learned

1. UN Women is well placed to create change, but its main objectives will take a long time to come to fruition.
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.
3. Coalitions of local CSOs work best when they are not limited to gender-focused organizations and receive basic capacity development for RBM.
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.
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.
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.

## Key Recommendations

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.
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.
3. Improve organizational efficiency by deploying simplified disbursement protocols for local non-governmental organizations and CSOs that lack credit facilities, as well as streamlined human resources recruitment mechanisms for time-sensitive posts.
4. Build upon good country-level experience in convening coalitions and building partnerships, including by engaging the private sector.
5. Strengthen the UN coordination role of UN Women at the country level.
6. Review the organizational knowledge management system, including how lessons are captured from operations and influence the technical capacity development of staff.

**UN Women** is the UN entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide. UN Women supports UN member states as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.

The **UN Women Independent Evaluation Office** main purpose is to enhance accountability, inform decision-making and contribute to learning on the best ways to achieve women's empowerment and gender equality through normative, operational and coordination work. UN Women Independent Evaluation Office also strengthens capacities for gender-responsive evaluation within UN entities, governments and civil society organizations.

Director:

Marco Segone  
marco.segone@unwomen.org

Meta-analysis manager:

Messay Tassew  
messay.tassew@unwomen.org

Website: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/evaluation>

Disclaimer: The text of this brief does not necessarily reflect the views of UN Women, its Executive Board or the United Nations Member States. The text has not been edited to official publication standards and UN Women accepts no responsibility for error.