



# UNIFEM Strategic Plan 2008-2011 Evaluability Assessment Final Report: March 1st 2011

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## Acronyms

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CO	County Office
CS	Country Strategy
DAW	Department for the Advancement of Women
DRF	Development Results Framework
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
EVAW	Ending Violence Against Women
GEWE	Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment
GRB	Gender Responsive Budgeting
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
HQ	Headquarters
INSTRAW	International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women
IRF	Integrated Results Framework
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MRF	Management Results Framework
MYFF	Multi-Year Funding Framework
OSAGI	Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women
PAC	Project Approval Committee
PCM	Programme/Project Cycle Management
RBM	Results Based Management
RF	Results Framework
SP	Strategic Plan
SRO	Sub Regional Office
SRS	Sub Regional Strategy
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNIFEM	The United Nations Development Fund for Women

## Executive Summary

### 1. Study background and approach

This study, which was conducted from May 2010 to February 2011, is an analysis of the UNIFEM Strategic Plan (2008-2011), its associated Results Frameworks and institutional systems. It assesses UNIFEM's experience of implementing the Plan, with a view to informing the new strategic planning process of UN Women. It is aimed at all members of UN Women and relevant partners, at headquarters, sub-regional and country levels, plus any interested external partners.

The implementation of Resolution A/RES/64/289 in July 2010, which mandated the formation of the UN's new Gender Entity (subsequently UN Women) led to a decision to modify the study and a consequent two-month pause in its implementation. Rather than pursue a classic evaluability assessment (given that evaluation of UNIFEM's Strategic Plan was now unlikely), the revised Purpose of the study was:

*A qualitative analysis of the Strategic Plan's basic parameters and its monitoring and reporting systems...A formative and forward looking exercise aimed at capturing best practices, challenges and lessons learned from the UNIFEM Strategic Plan experience to date for reflection and learning*

The study comprised a range of methods: technical appraisal of corporate, thematic, regional, sub-regional and country Strategic Plan documents and results frameworks; review of a wide range of internal and external documentation, including workplans and annual reports; interviews with UNIFEM staff and external informants; workshops with and feedback from a Reference Group; Programme and country sampling and selection leading to in-depth analysis of selected Sub-regional (8) and country (8) offices and field visits to two sub-regional offices (Andean and Central & Eastern Europe) and two country offices (Colombia and Albania) conducted in November 2010.

Despite experiencing a number of challenges, set out in the full report, the study has identified some relevant and interesting lessons on the formulation of the UNIFEM Strategic Plan, its systems and the experience of its implementation. Consequently, it provides a useful body of evidence on how the learning from UNIFEM's Strategic Plan experience could be used to support any future institutional planning process of UN Women.

### 2. Key findings and conclusions

The key conclusions of the report are presented below in summary form, followed by lessons learned in section 3 and recommendations in section 4. The full report also contains five findings sections, which set out from there these conclusions have been derived.

#### Conclusion 1: The Strategic Plan (SP) and its technical robustness

The UNIFEM Strategic Plan and the understanding of change on which it is based provide a **relevant, appropriate and conceptually sound articulation** of UNIFEM's core mandate on the achievement of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. However, there are some **technical weaknesses** which constrain its effective implementation. These include:

There is **insufficient development of the understanding of change and results logic** within the **SP** and **inadequate recognition of potentially different pathways of change**

There is very **limited acknowledgment within the SP of the assumptions and risks**

that underlie the processes of change, such as the political factors that drive or hinder this

The **roles of key strategies** (e.g. Knowledge Management, Capacity Development) in linking outcomes and progressing change are **not sufficiently elaborated** within the Plan

Despite the considerable improvement from previous years, **specific results and neutral and measurable indicators/concrete targets** are not consistently applied within the SP framework, nor does it have a **baseline** to set a starting point

While the SP places emphasis on implementation at national level, the **primacy of country strategy planning** has been only a relatively recent departure within the strategic planning process.

### Conclusion 2: Accompanying systems and their role in supporting Strategic Plan delivery

The systems developed for Strategic Plan implementation represent a **major transformation** in the way UNIFEM has sought to introduce a results based culture and to collect and analyse data for performance monitoring. However, implementation has **not delivered the results oriented culture** envisaged. Specifically:

Guidance material to support sections and offices to develop linked strategies is **good practice but can be improved on** in terms of timeliness and comprehensiveness

The results tracking system has enabled **comprehensive results reporting** at global level but its main gearing towards (centralised) annual reporting has **constrained its potential utility** for more locally-relevant performance management and trend analysis

There is **limited analysis of trends/progress and downwards feedback loops**, which is constraining the flow and use of valuable information

There is need for a **to enable reporting beyond fixed and sometimes narrow global indicators** so that offices and sections can report on significant wider changes

Considerable progress has been made on results measurement but **systems are not yet geared to support comprehensive results management** (through the full programme cycle). In particular **monitoring is not well developed**, though significant progress has been made to move towards results-focused evaluation

### Conclusion 3: The experience of implementation: UNIFEM's take-up and use of the Strategic Plan and its systems

The Strategic Plan, its Results Frameworks and associated systems have provided a **clear organising frame** to make explicit UNIFEM's work and strategic focus to staff and partners. They have supported coherence and consistency across the organisation. However, their potential value is **not being fully realised** (especially at sub-regional and country levels):

The understanding of how change will be supported through the SP has **not been sufficiently tested and validated at local level**

The SP is providing a conceptual **umbrella for thematic and strategic coherence, rather than acting as a strategic driver for operations**

The Results Tracking System is **not adequately supporting local reporting and**

***decision-making***

UNIFEM’s ***status in the UN, inadequate staffing and insufficient predictability of resources*** are constraining effective implementation, and are out of sync with the aims of the Strategic Plan

The process of development of the Plan and related strategies (such as country strategies) took place rapidly, and ***without the time period required for full engagement and discussion*** with staff and partners.

**Conclusion 4: The role of the Strategic Plan in supporting the delivery of UNIFEM’s remit around normative / operational activity plus UN co-ordination processes**

Under the Strategic Plan a considerable volume of work is taking place to **address normative and operational linkages** and to support the **mainstreaming of Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment within UN Coordination processes** centrally and at field level. However, this is also not yet being conducted to its full potential:

While UNIFEM’s mandate is generally understood by partners, ***the SP document is not generally well known or communicated***

There is a need for ***clearer definition of the role of ‘driver’ within UN Country Teams***, a focus on ***impact as well as process*** in coordination work, ***corporate commitment*** to agreed arrangements secured (e.g. providing human and financial resources to carry out an agreed co-ordination role) and ***distillation and sharing of good/promising practice***

While the SP has facilitated staff to make explicit the connections between normative and operational work, ***further work is needed to strengthen these linkages***, including generation of an evidence base on what is working/not working

**Conclusion 5: The role of the Strategic Plan in delivering an information base to support any later evaluation**

The measures taken to provide evidence of Strategic Plan impact has enabled the generation of a **more focused and coherent evidence base for future evaluation** than was the case previously. In particular there is now up-to-date and aligned performance data which is aggregated from country to corporate level. However:

The lack of ***clarity on starting position*** (baseline); an ***absence of clear targets*** (in country strategies as well as corporate Strategic Plan) and ***inadequate monitoring systems and capacity***, severely limits robust and comprehensive performance measurement

The ***evaluation evidence base is gradually developing*** but lacks a) a systematic approach to generating evaluation information around areas of strategic institutional interest; b) feedback loops between evaluation reports and strategic planning and operations; and longitudinal studies

**3. Lessons Learned**

The study finds the following lessons learned which may have broader relevance beyond this process. More detail on each lesson is contained in the full report:

- a. An organisation-wide strategic plan results logic, which sets out the underlying belief in how change happens and the cause-effect rationale of the plan, needs to be **clear and articulated in appropriate detail**;
- b. However, it is important for a corporate strategic plan to provide a **strategic framework that gives direction to but does not constrain country level flexibility** to respond to context. This implies a broad framework at corporate level, including e.g. clear outcome statements and targets, but which allows countries to demonstrate through their own results frameworks how they will contribute to these changes.
- c. **Development and validation of a strategic plan through consultation and a comprehensive planning process helps build technical quality, ownership and institutional buy-in.** This implies a broad-based participatory process involving relevant staff across the organisation and which takes account of bottom-up and top-down planning
- d. **A strategic plan which includes high-level ambitions requires concomitant investment in resources – human and financial.** There need to be very clear and explicit links between a strategic plan and staffing, professional development, and elapsed time to conduct a participatory strategic planning process and to ensure assimilation across the institution.
- e. A key message is the **primacy of country-level for change.** Even with a strategic plan which is clear that the locus of change is at national level, successful implementation at country level requires a number of conditions related to structures, systems (planning, appraisal, monitoring & reporting, quality assurance and guidance and evaluation), capacities, the contextualisation of the strategic plan and theory of change, and human and financial resourcing.
- f. **The implementation of a strategic plan needs to be accompanied by an organisation-wide shift from results measurement/tracking to results planning and management.** This requires significant investment of time and resources. Elements include: clear feedback loops; investment in support/guidance, monitoring and evaluation systems (including at the country level); the recruitment and capacity development of dedicated staff and/or external expertise to support these systems; and to allow for reporting on gains beyond indicators, recognising the process-based nature of change, the fluidity of context specificity, and the need to aggregate up over time.
- g. **A strategic plan can provide staff with a valuable tool to promote the organisation's remit to strengthen normative-operational connections and to be 'a driver of gender equality' within the UN.** However, space and performance are dependent on a number of factors including: coordination mechanisms; strategies for engaging with these, and guidance provided; the status and capacities of staff and of offices within the UN system.
- h. **Building an evidence base to support results-based management and future evaluation is demanding and, realistically, needs to happen incrementally rather than all at once.** Key building blocks include the setting in place of an evaluation policy and strategy; a monitoring and reporting policy; lessons from experience to guide refinement of performance measurement; and the necessary feedback loops to support results management. For baselines, clear institutional demand and clarity of purpose and pragmatism are needed.

#### 4. Recommendations

Based on these conclusions, the report makes a number of **recommendations** to UN Women with the aim of helping to (a) improve any new plan as a results-based management tool and (b) support any new strategic planning process in order to strengthen both the plan and institutional buy-in.

The study also provides specific **proposals for how the recommendations might be operationalised**, with due regard for the current internal context i.e. the process of confirming the institutional arrangements of UN Women. These are contained in Section 5 of the full report.

#### 4.1 Summary recommendation

Based on the body of evidence, the study proposes the following headline recommendation to UN Women:

***Develop a corporate strategic plan based around a central framework, including corporate level outcomes and targets, but which allows countries and sections to flexibly identify their contributions to this.***

***Countries and sections should then develop context specific results frameworks with clear starting points (baseline); outcome and output targets (results) and the pathway (process and milestones) towards achieving this.***

#### 4.2 Supporting recommendations

To help implement this, the report makes the following supporting recommendations:

##### 1) ***Towards a robust Strategic Plan***

- a) **Build on, make more explicit and validate the results logic of any future strategic plan** through developing further the understanding of change, to take account of movement over time and to clarify relationships between corporate and country level results logic (including any in- between levels).
- b) **Further strengthen the goal, outcome and output statements in line with the results logic**, including a long-term goal that addresses the vision of gender equality and women's empowerment (to embed the longer-term goal of Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment into the Strategic Plan results planning and logic).
- c) **Require the development of baselines within one year of strategic plan development.** Development result baselines should be established principally at country level while a management results baseline needs to be developed corporately and at country level.

##### 2) ***The strategic planning process***

- a) **Recognise that the primacy of change is at the country level** – so merge bottom-up with top-down planning processes. Timing and sequencing of planning will need to take account of institutional demands for a UN Women strategic plan within a short time frame (a draft in April 2011 for June submission to the Executive Board)
- b) **Develop a communications strategy** to inform stakeholders at all levels on the UN Women mandate, strategic planning process and strategic plan including further clarification of the normative and operational linkages and role as a 'driver' of gender mainstreaming in UN Country Teams

##### 3) ***Systems to support implementation of the Strategic Plan***

- a) **Develop and strengthen the systems needed to support results management through the full programme/strategy cycle** (including evaluation), keeping the country as the primary unit of change – and set and uphold minimum standards for this.

- b) **Develop and refine the results tracking system to support local level monitoring** as well as systematic centralised results reporting
- c) Given the complexity of social transformation required for Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment, introduce **complementary approaches to results tracking that take account of non-linear change and the possibility of unplanned consequences** (positive and negative)

***4) Increasing readiness of any future Strategic Plan to be evaluated***

- a) **Retain the requirement for an evaluation plan in the Strategic Plan**, including country strategies, but base this on **strategic programme information needs**, rather than being dominated by project or donor requirements and require compliance

## 1. Introduction

This study, which was conducted during 2010, is an analysis of the UNIFEM Strategic Plan, its associated Results Frameworks and institutional systems. It reflects on UNIFEM's experience of implementing the Plan, with a view to informing the new strategic planning process of UN Women.

The study has been subject to a significant shift in its parameters during its design and implementation. This introduction sets out the original and final basis and rationale for the study, and explains the effects of the re-orientation on the resulting report.

### 1.1 The Strategic Plan, its Results Frameworks and associated Systems

The UNIFEM's Strategic Plan (SP) constituted the corporate programmatic framework for the period 2008-2011 (later extended to 2013) following the Multi-Year Funding Framework 2004-2007. It was aligned with the strategic plans of UNDP and UNFPA, and was intended to *'provide strategic policy and management direction for UNIFEM to increase its development effectiveness, strengthen strategic partnerships and mobilize resources in the four year period.'*<sup>1</sup>

The Strategic Plan is built on UNIFEM's dual mandate to (i) provide innovative and catalytic programming and financial support to countries to achieve gender equality in line with national priorities; and (ii) to mainstream gender equality across the UN system. Its development was informed by an evaluation of the prior Multi-Year Funding Framework (MYFF) 2004-2007; and by stakeholder consultations (Member States, UN organisations and key partners), as well as regional and country analysis. The SP identifies a number of key aspects towards fulfilment of the mandate which include presence at country and regional levels; strategic partnerships; adequate and dedicated resources; identifying what works and building capacities. It prioritises three thematic areas for UNIFEM's work: Women's Economic Security and Rights; Prevalence of Violence against Women and HIV&AIDS; and Gender Justice.

The SP constitutes the main mechanisms for UNIFEM programming, reporting and accountability to the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board. It is premised on the basis that a holistic approach to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) requires supporting change at macro, meso and micro levels. It includes a goal, purpose and 8 intended outcomes, with a supporting Intervention Logic setting out the anticipated results areas. To support implementation and to monitor progress, a development results framework (DRF), a management results framework (MRF) and an integrated resources framework (IRF) were developed, in line with Results Based Management principles.

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<sup>1</sup> Evaluability Assessment Terms of Reference version 1 (December 2009)

An online Results Tracking system facilitates progress reporting; this requires field offices and divisions at headquarters to report on annual progress against indicators via the central mechanism. The UNIFEM evaluations system also requires the alignment of evaluations with SP outcomes.

## 1.2 Original remit of the study

In April 2010, UNIFEM's Evaluation Unit commissioned an Evaluability Assessment of the organisation's Strategic Plan (SP) 2008-2013. An Evaluability Assessment is defined as '*A qualitative analysis of a project, programme or plan to determine whether it meets the preconditions for its evaluation and, if so, how the evaluation should be designed to ensure maximum utility*'.<sup>2</sup>

Specifically, this study was originally commissioned as a '*qualitative analysis of [the SP's] basic parameters to ascertain whether a meaningful evaluation of SP is feasible and will provide useful information at a later stage both in terms of the results of the plan, as well as the processes that lead to these results*'.<sup>3</sup>

As originally intended, the study aimed to provide information on 'fitness' of the SP for its future evaluation. Consequently, its components included: the technical robustness and internal / external coherence of the strategy and the understanding of change on which it was based; the systems and resources set in place for its implementation; the extent, nature and location of data to support a future evaluation; gaps evident; and any actions required in preparation for carrying out the evaluation committed to in the strategy; and the parameters for any future final evaluation.

The study commenced in May 2010 based on these parameters. However as plans for development of the new gender entity evolved, and in particular during follow-up to Resolution A/RES/64/289 (July 2010), it became clearer that UNIFEM's SP was likely to be overtaken by a future strategic plan for the new gender entity in 2011. Consequently, the current SP would be unlikely to be evaluated. In late July 2010, the study was paused for two months, in order to re-orient it to the new institutional context.

## 1.3 Re-orientation

Once the future direction of the study was clear, a revised Terms of Reference was developed. This included a changed purpose, as follows:

*A qualitative analysis of the SP's basic parameters and its monitoring and reporting systems...A **formative and forward looking exercise** aimed at capturing best practices, challenges and lessons learned from the UNIFEM SP experience to date for reflection and learning*

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<sup>2</sup> Rossi et al (2004)

<sup>3</sup> Terms of Reference version 1 (December 2009)

The re-oriented study therefore has more in common with an evaluation of a *strategy*, in its focus on systems, its emphasis on the information needs of evaluation users and its intended relevance to decision-makers – an area where evaluation is just starting to be tested.<sup>4</sup>

For the revised study, the following objectives were identified:

- To assess the Strategic Plan Theory of Change<sup>5</sup> and its Results Frameworks (RFs) and identify strengths, weaknesses, challenges and lessons learned in regards to formulation of results and indicators and provide recommendations for strengthening it.

*A theory of change describes the understanding of how change happens. It underpins any intervention to bring about change, even if it is not explicit. Experience indicates however that being explicit helps to test understanding and to improve the likelihood of bringing about the desired change.*

- To assess the utility of the SP as a guiding framework for the development of thematic, regional, sub-regional, country strategies and programmes and provide recommendations for enhanced utility.
- To assess the data collection and information systems for tracking SP results in terms of their relevance, effectiveness and coherence and the ability to aggregate results from country to corporate level and over time and provide recommendation on how they can be improved.
- To assess the extent to which the results and indicators in the SP and its RFs contribute to enhanced monitoring, reporting and learning about UN system-wide coordination and accountability for results on gender equality and women’s empowerment, particularly at the country level and through MRF Output 2, and provide recommendations on how to strengthen this aspect
- To assess the SP and its RFs in terms of how it enhances and clarifies linkages between normative and operational areas of work and provide recommendations on how to improve this aspect.
- To assess the extent to which the SP would allow for meaningful final evaluation that would provide useful information in terms of the achievement of results or lack thereof, as well as the processes that have led to the achievement/ non-achievement of results; provide recommendations on how to strengthen the SP’s evaluability.

<sup>4</sup> See Quinn Patton, M. and Patrizi, P. A. (2010), Strategy as the focus for evaluation. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 2010: 5–28. doi: 10.1002/ev.343

<sup>5</sup> A theory of change describes the understanding of how change happens. It underpins any intervention to bring about change, even if it is not explicit. Experience indicates that it is best to be explicit as this helps to test understanding and improve the likelihood of bringing about the desired change.

- To assess how learning to date on the SP and its RFs, data collection and information systems can contribute to future UN WOMEN strategic planning processes and provide recommendations to this effect.

The full Terms of Reference are available at Annex 1.

The study is therefore much more **formative** than originally intended (though the focus on requirements for future SP evaluation has been retained). The scope of work is also much more strongly grounded in understanding the experience of the SP and its systems at sub-regional and country levels, with a requirement for two field studies at sub-regional and two at country level.

## 2. Approach and methodology of the study including re-orientation

### 2.1 Elements of the methodology

The study was conducted by a two-person team, from May 2010 to February 2011. Following the approach advocated by Patton and Quinn in relation to the evaluation of strategy, a **broad mix of methods**, was adopted, including comprehensive documentary analysis and interviews, review of the online tracking systems, two field trips and a validation visit. Sampling and analytical frameworks were developed for data gathering / analysis, including the field trips, and were shared with Evaluation Unit and the study's cross-institutional Reference Group. There was a strong focus on the eventual users of the study. Essentially, the main elements of the methodology were:

- An **inception phase**, including a briefing meeting with Evaluation Unit in New York plus a workshop and interviews with a cross section of UNIFEM staff (centre and regionally-based)
- Two **analytical frameworks** to guide research – one for the overall conceptual approach to study as a whole, and a more specific one to guide document analysis
- A **sampling framework** agreed with Evaluation Unit for the range of documentation<sup>6</sup> and systems for data capture including the on-line tracking system, the intranet and internet sites for assessment.
- A **technical appraisal** of the Strategic Plan document, the underlying theory of change/understanding of how change happens (ToC) and its results frameworks (RF), especially the Development Results and Management Results Frameworks (DRF and MRF).
- A **sampling methodology** for the selection of regional, sub-regional and country offices for study (subsequently amended on the guidance of Evaluation Unit and the Reference Group on the basis of information availability and the practicalities of field visit scheduling.)
- **Documentary review and phone interviews** to assess the experience of 8 Sub Regional Offices (SROs) and 8 Country Offices (COs), covering all regions (see following page for sample).
- **Site visits** (1 week each) to SRO-CO groupings of CEE / Albania and Andean / Colombia, guided by the Briefing Note

Interim outputs included an Emerging Findings presentation and notes (December 2010) which elicited feedback from the Reference Group, followed by a Discussion Paper and Validation meeting in January 2011 which elicited feedback on findings and proposed future directions. This draft report will be followed by a final report taking account of comments received by end of February 2011.

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<sup>6</sup> A data base of programme documents covering regions, countries and themes was developed to support sampling which was linked to the identification of

## 2.2 Sample Base

A full list of documentation surveyed and persons consulted is available at Annexes 5 and 6. In addition to a wide range of institutional and systems information (results tracking, evaluation processes, ATLAS tracking and codes), plus external documentation such as donor institutional and thematic reviews, the main sample frame for the study is below:

	Areas Addressed			
<b>Thematic</b>  (Thematic strategies plus associated section / individual work plans)	Gender Responsive Budgeting		Ending Violence Against Women	
	Governance, Peace and Security		Economic Security and Rights	
<b>Funds</b>	Eliminating Violence Against Women		Gender Equality Fund	
<b>Regional</b>  (Regional Strategies; 1 programme per region plus individual work plans)	Africa	Latin America and the Caribbean	Asia, Pacific and Arab States	CEE / CIS Geo-section
<b>Sub-regional</b>  (Sub Regional Strategies, 2 programmes per SRO, office and individual work plans)	West Africa	Andean	South Asia	CEE
	East and Horn of Africa	Caribbean	Arab States	CIS
<b>Country</b>  (Country Strategies / equivalent, 2 programmes per CO plus office / individual work plan; relevant UNDAFs)	Liberia	Colombia	Pakistan	Albania
	Sudan	Haiti	Palestine	Moldova
<b>FIELD VISITS</b>  (As above plus range of additional programming and strategic documentation per office)		Andean SRO  Colombia CO		CEE SRO  Albania CO

Additionally, key informants from each office or section were interviewed by telephone or skype: as well as a range of interviews being conducted during visits to headquarters at e.g. inception stage.

## 2.3 Limitations

The study experienced a number of limitations during its implementation. These included: the loss of momentum due to the need to pause and re-orient the study, which meant the development of new analytical frameworks (and the re-analysing of some data) plus the initial loss of some institutional

traction; the design of the sampling frame for SRO and CO selection, which was constrained by competing demands around information availability and feasibility of visits; data constraints around programme documents in particular - much effort was required to identify and source relevant information (plus documentation from programmes designed after the 2008 Strategic Plan was limited); and finally, the limited scope for exploration of the external context, due to the state of flux in the institutional context – consequently external perspectives on UNIFEM’s SP were gleaned mostly from secondary documented sources or from interviews during field visits.

## 2.4 Current institutional relevance

Despite these challenges, the body of evidence developed provides some very significant insights into UNIFEM’s experience with the Strategic Plan 2008-2011. Some relevant and interesting lessons have emerged on the SP itself, the systems associated with it, and the experience of its implementation. The study has been able to identify what has worked well, what less well – and what more is needed for UNIFEM and its successor UN Women to more effectively monitor performance, track results and be able to report on organisational achievements.

The study does not aim to provide detailed recommendations on precisely what any new SP, Theory of Change, outcomes / outputs / indicators, institutional systems etc should consist of under UN Women. Firstly, this is because the learning presented here is based on UNIFEM’s experience only. Secondly, at the time of writing, UN Women’s own new institutional structure is not yet in its final form. Consequently, the study focuses on highlighting ***how the learning from this experience can be used to support the strategic planning process of UN Women***, in particular through highlighting lessons learned, good practice and providing technical advice for future improvements. In particular, it aims to firmly ground the experience of the SP and its systems in the ***country context***, in order that going forward, UN Women’s revised plans and systems can be designed on the terra firma of lessons learned and evidence from real experience.

## 2.5 Structure and audience

The report is structured along the following axes (which also correspond to the questions of the ToR):

- **5.1 Technical robustness:** How do the Strategic Plan and its Results Frameworks function as instruments for strategic planning?
- **5.2 Accompanying systems;** what is their role in supporting Strategic Plan delivery?
- **5.3 The experience of implementation:** What has been the reality of taking up and using the Strategic Plan and its systems?
- **5.4 The UNIFEM mandate:** how has the Strategic Plan supported the delivery of UNIFEM’s remit around normative / operational activity plus UN co-ordination processes?
- **5.5 The information base:** To what extent has the SP delivered an information base to support any later evaluation?

The report is aimed at all members of UN Women and relevant partners, including the former UNIFEM, DAW, OSAGI and INSTRAW, at headquarters, sub-regional and country levels. It may also be relevant to external partners and funders.

### 3. Key findings

Section 3 outlines the main findings of the study. Each section summarises these in terms of: organisational progress, challenges identified and summary messages. Conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations follow in Sections 4 and 5.

#### 3.1 Technical robustness: How do the Strategic Plan and its Results Frameworks function as instruments for strategic planning?

The study has considered first the **technical robustness** of the SP and its associated Results Frameworks (particularly the DRF and MRF) as a tool for strategic planning. This includes:

- The use of a **clear mapping of how change happens** (internal and external coherence)
- The use of **relevant, clear and valid objectives (goal, outcomes, outputs) and indicators** to measure results (relevance, clarity and validity)
- The **feasibility** of the objectives to be attained and the **plausibility** of the intended change to occur (feasibility and plausibility)
- The inclusion of clear and explicit **normative-operational linkages** to support the achievement of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

A full technical appraisal of the understanding/Theory of Change (ToC) and of the SP and the DRF, MRF and IRF are contained in Annexes 3 and 4. The information below summarises these findings.

##### 3.1a) Organisational progress

The study has found that the Strategic Plan and its associated Results Frameworks are **relevant and appropriate** to the core UNIFEM mandate and subsequent operations. This is evidenced through:

**An understanding of change** (theory of change) which provides:

- **A conceptually sound and valid (though limited) analysis** of what is needed to achieve Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and of the UNIFEM response to this need. Emphasis is on the need for change to happen at the level of macro (normative framework); the meso (institutional framework and practices); and the micro (voice and influence of women and women's groups and community-level attitudes and practice). Outcomes build on this understanding to indicate what change needs to happen (Annex 6 of the SP - The intervention logic).
- **A degree of flexibility and responsiveness** (i.e. not wholly prescriptive). The SP allows scope for prioritization of outcomes and for selection of strategies.
- **Relevance for thematic and field level operations** (regional, sub-regional and country) - no diverging descriptions of how change happens (theories of change) have been identified across a comprehensive documentation analysis. Some offices e.g. South Asia

regional office, have emphasized the utility of the SP description of change in helping communicate UNIFEM’s rationale for action across teams and with partners.

- **Strong internal coherence**, with e.g. SP themes fitting well with the understanding of change and outcomes. The CIS office, for example, has found the description of change very useful in helping to increase staff understanding on how the different SP outcomes are linked together e.g. DRF 5-6-7 (capacity building of stakeholders) supporting results in DRF 1-4 (the normative framework).
- An **explicit connection between the normative and operational** aspects of work to achieve GEWE plus clear and operationalisable micro-meso-macro links (see section 3.4).

Within the SP and its Results Frameworks, **a Goal, outcomes and outputs** which provide:

- A single goal which – while low in ambition - is **germane to the UNIFEM core mandate** and which relates to a level of change that UNIFEM feels comfortable to address. By contrast, the UNDP and UNFPA Strategic Plans (developed at the same time and using similar approaches) have, respectively, four and three development goals in interlinked focus areas.
- **Consistency and alignment of outcomes** with the description of change (internal coherence), and a clear focus on the national level – as aligned with the Paris Declaration /Managing for Development Results agendas.
- **Clear and explicit output statements** at DRF and MRF levels, with some targets in place particularly at outcome level (see Annex 4).
- A recognition of a **process approach** to delivering on the core mandate at output level (e.g. through the emphasis on generating a body of evidence, effective policy dialogue mechanisms; improving skills/capacities and services/systems)

**Indicators** which support the process through:

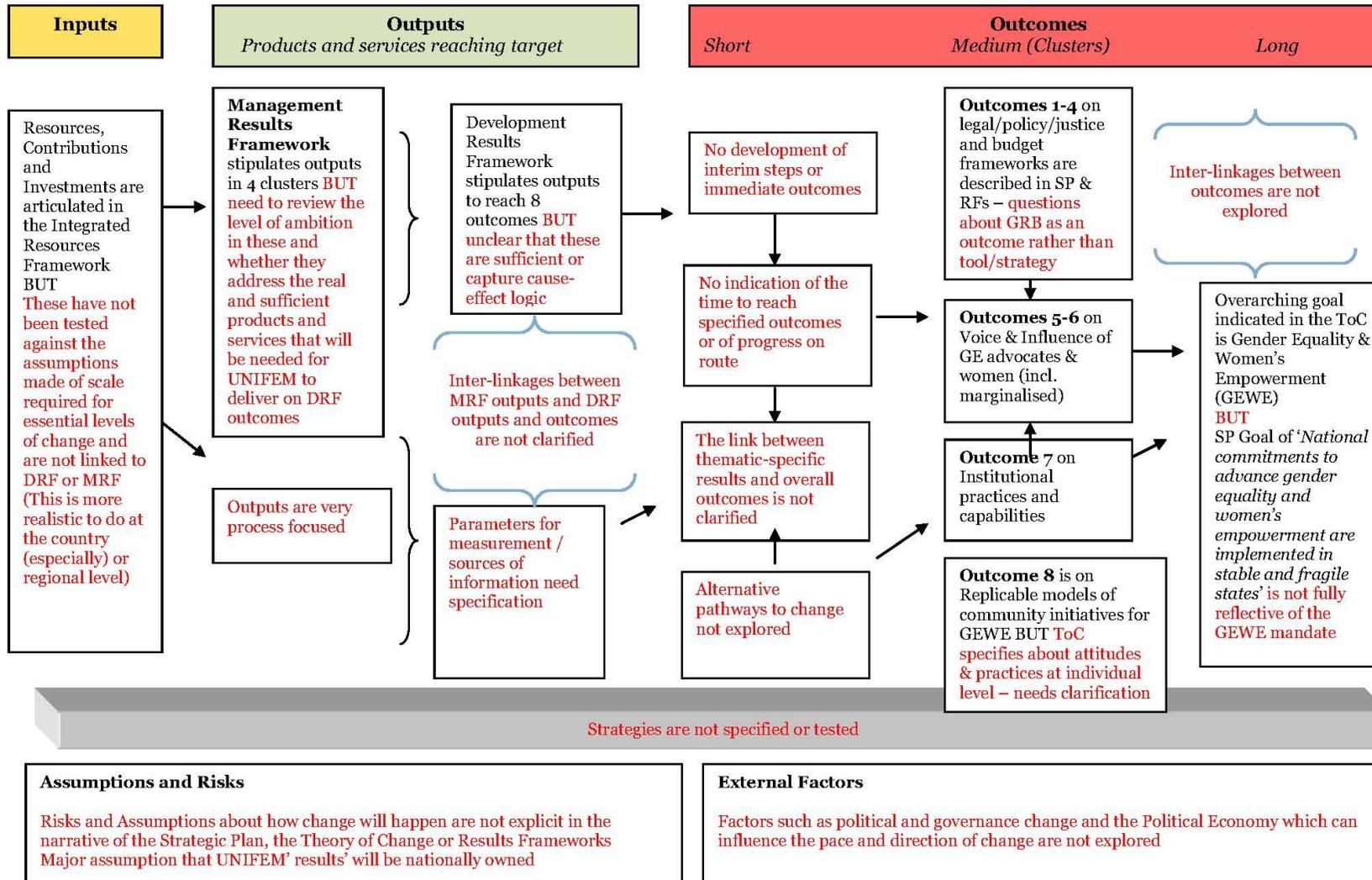
- A helpful shift from the previously quantitative focus to ensure the **recognition of qualitative approaches** to delivering results. While changing indicators is always problematic, the revised indicators were felt to be clearer to report against, for example replacing ‘*Number of new incentive structures introduced to enhance action on gender equality (i.e. gender sensitive performance measures)*’ with ‘*Extent to which key policy and service delivery institutions have increased budgets for promoting gender equality and women’s human rights*’ (new 7b).
- **Clarity and explicitness at Goal level, with** full inter-linkage to the three SP themes (though there is scope for an additional indicator to measure ‘gender justice’).
- Adequate breadth and scope at DRF & MRF level to allow for **appropriate contextualization** –even if this is not always maximised.

### 3.1b) Challenges identified

However, in terms of its technical robustness, the SP and the Results Frameworks have **a number of shortcomings** which would need to be addressed in any future planning process. Figure 1 provides a summary overview of what is present and what is absent from a more developed model and Annex 3 and 4 provide more detail.

**Schematic: Analysis of the Theory of Change in UNIFEM Strategic Plan 2008-2011: what is present and what is absent from a more developed model**

*Note: Script in black depicts what is present in the Theory of Change, the Strategic Plan document and the Results Frameworks; script in red indicates shortcomings/what is missing*



The mapping of how change happens (theory of change) as it stands is **very compressed and needs greater explication**, as follows:

- **The Goal is currently inadequate to reflect UNIFEM’s objectives.** Its emphasis on realizing national commitments to GEWE is not a sufficient reflection of UNIFEM’s aim of achieving this, and it contains a number of assumptions about the role of the State. The Goal also stops short of the end of the results chain (reduced inequality) and is very process-oriented; it does not yet spell out the changes envisaged for women and men through UNIFEM’s interventions. Going forward, the new entity would need to consider developing a long-term Goal statement which reflects the ambitions to which UN Women will aim to contribute over time.
- The expectation of how change will happen contains a number of **assumptions and risks** that may well affect causality but which are not made explicit, such as the assumption that a conducive environment will lead to tangible change.
- The **drivers of change** – conditions, motivations, incentives in the internal and external environment - are all factors in generating, shaping and intensifying or blocking change, but are not elaborated in the document.
- There is no attention within the description of how change happens (the Theory of Change) to possible **alternative explanations / pathways** for achieving results – a number of which were indicated by UNIFEM staff (see section 3.3).
- The Theory of Change assumes that the **role of UNIFEM as a catalyst** is central to achieving the desired results. It does not explore or challenge this (e.g. through considering the assumptions within it).
- The SP indicates that UNIFEM results will be ‘owned’ nationally but there is no explanation around **specific strategies** for this other than via undefined ‘strategic partnerships’ – leaving questions around accountability.
- There is a generalised assumption that the barriers and challenges to GEWE rest heavily in **technical capacity and capability**. The role of the wider political environment and the function of the political economy are not explored – yet very often these determine the policy making environment.

Outcomes and outputs are **basically robust but limited**, particularly in terms of upwards connections, articulation of the starting point (baseline) and targets:

- There is a lack of clarity within the SP around the **strategies envisaged** for achieving the objectives (goal, outcomes and outputs), particularly at DRF level. A notable absence relates to the role of men in bringing about GEWE<sup>7</sup> and a lack of developed strategies in the SP and

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<sup>7</sup> While the authors recognise the many differing models and strategies for addressing the role of men within GEWE, we contend that this role needs to be at least recognised and acknowledged within the SP and the Theory of Change, if not defined in detail (to allow for flexibility in context)

related programme documents relative to this. Non-discussion of strategies in the SP may be deliberate in order to enable these to be determined in context, but there still needs to be some testing of key approaches (e.g. Partnership; Knowledge Management) relative to how change is expected to happen (as now exists in the Capacity Development Strategy 2010). Discussion of strategies is also absent from SP guidance materials

- The DRF and MRF are **inadequately linked together** - for example Outcomes 3, 5, 6, 8 are ‘functionality’ outcomes (they reflect how well systems are operating), but these are not carried through to the MRF beyond consideration of “culture and values” around results-based management
- There is a lack of articulation around the **inter-linkages between outcomes and outputs** (which has implications for reporting – see 4.2 below). One office stated an original intention to focus on four outcomes – but when operationalising this, ended up actually working on seven. Many staff relayed the challenges and inappropriateness of dissecting activity – of ‘splicing and dicing’ in a manner that is not obviously cogent or reflective of real activity on the ground.
- **Targets are not always specified**, and there is insufficient articulation of **results over time** (meaning challenges for capturing the process and pace of change). Not specifying output targets at the corporate strategy level is appropriate as it allows flexibility – however, with some exceptions (see below), context-specific output targets have not been elaborated in sub-regional and country strategies – thus making measurement of progress challenging.
- **The outcomes** – while they relate to the national level as above – are currently framed as steps in the process towards outcomes, rather than standing as outcome-level statements themselves, which would reflect actual changes and benefits anticipated for women and men
- At output level, it is not clear that **the identified outputs, if realised, will lead to the expected outcomes**. Some outcomes have only two outputs and the SP does not include discussion of other requirements to realise the expected outcome. In Outcome 6, for example, the outcome is really just the sum of the parts of three outputs, rather than representing the next level of change (see Annex 4). Once outputs are identified they need to be sufficient to reasonably deduce that they will lead to the intended outcome. Outcomes resulting from outputs also need to reflect the next/higher level of change.
- It is also unclear in the corporate SP **what UNIFEM will actually contribute to DRF output achievement** beyond forming strategic partnerships and, in some cases, carrying out activities which are identified in the text.

#### Indicators are **narrow at times and potentially difficult to measure**

- The revised indicators, while more qualitative, are also **less tangible** and consequently more challenging to measure. Examples include: 1a; 1b, 3a. While 1a has a target it is unclear how this will be measured - i.e. how successful ‘incorporation of gender’ would be defined), and while 3a also has a numerical target, it is unclear if this refers to number of reforms or number of countries with reforms
- There are some instances of **disconnect** between expected results (outcome/output) and associated indicators. An example includes indicator 5.3a (the single indicator for this output) - ‘Mainstream policy making forums in which UNIFEM has secured increased influence for GE advocates’. Alone, this will not effectively measure output 5.3: ‘Governmental and non-governmental GE advocates participate effectively in mainstreaming integrating gender equality into policy processes’ – nor is it, on its own, a useful proxy indicator.

- As they are currently formulated, indicators may **limit reporting against process-type change** such as qualitative change in relationships or how issues are discussed and talked about (see section 3.3 on the experience of implementation).
- Overall the level of SMART<sup>8</sup>ness is varied, with the biggest challenges being **measurability** and extent to which indicators are **time-bound**. Not all indicators are currently neutral measures (e.g. 3.3a which specifies 'increase' rather than change, which would allow for movement in either direction).
- The standards and parameters for achievement are not defined and **sources are not specified** beyond, in many cases, 'UNIFEM annual reports'.
- The **absence of baselines** and the **limited number of targets** make the use of indicators to measure achievement problematic
- Some **MRF output indicators are currently limited**. They appear to measure what is instrumental and controllable, rather than set adequate challenges for change. Clearer definition is needed, plus a reflection of the key significant issues. Examples would include, for MRF 4, which does not measure progress in delegated authority to country offices and for MRF1 which does not measure evaluation impact on decision-makers

### 3.1c) Summary messages

While the SP and its Theory of Change and Results Frameworks provide a **relevant, appropriate and conceptually sound** articulation of UNIFEM's core mandate around the achievement of GEWE, it has **some technical weaknesses** which would require correction under the UN Women strategic planning process. These include:

- The inherent **results logic of the SP is not adequately developed**, lacking for example, analysis of assumptions and risk and adequate specification of intervention logic to demonstrate the relevance and adequacy of the outcomes towards achieving GEWE over time
- **Results chains lack sufficient explication** to show anticipated causal progression and the envisaged UNIFEM contribution and do not provide a comprehensive picture of the starting point (baselines); expected end point (targets) or interim steps (milestones)
- **There is not currently sufficient recognition of potentially different pathways of change, to** allow for innovation and flexibility at country or sub-regional level, and to take account of unintended (positive and negative) consequences

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<sup>8</sup> Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound

- **Despite improvements to SP indicators, some remain narrow** and do not support comprehensive results tracking and many are difficult to measure
- In terms of their sequencing, the corporate SP and the planning process have not adequately allowed for **the primacy of country strategy planning** and the setting of specific objectives and outputs in context. The development of country strategies was a new departure for UNIFEM: those resulting – plus Sub-Regional strategies - have therefore benefited from the corporate strategic framework the SP provides, but have broadly accepted the underlying understanding of change and outcomes; without testing and validating these in context (beyond some prioritisation at outcome level).
- **The role of key UNIFEM strategies** (e.g. Capacity Development, Knowledge Management; Networking and Coordination) in linking outcomes and progressing change is not sufficiently elaborated in the SP, nor is the SP specific on the role of and targets for global and intergovernmental processes.
- **The necessary links between the MRF and DRF** are not made explicit.

### 3.2 Accompanying systems: what is their role in supporting Strategic Plan delivery?

Effective results based management requires a **fundamental orientation of systems and processes** to make results central to the full programme cycle. It was beyond the remit of this study to undertake a comprehensive systems audit of UNIFEM.

However, the study has reviewed the **systems and processes** in place to support the delivery of the SP and its objectives, in particular guidance material, the Results Tracking System and monitoring and evaluation systems. With a view to informing any future systems, it has focused on their utility and relevance, particularly at country / sub-regional office level.

#### 3.2a) Organisational progress

**Guidance material:** A set of guidance notes (1-7) were developed in 2008 to accompany the SP with further guidance on extension of regional (RS), sub-regional (SRS) and thematic (TS) strategies provided in 2009 and on country strategies (CS) in January 2010. Most attention in this material is focused on supporting the development of SRSs with emphasis on alignment with the corporate SP. In terms of a quality source of support for SP implementation:

- There is emphasis throughout on the need for **context analysis and justification** supported by data and reference (though little discussion on potential sources)
- The guidance is clear that all strategies should indicate their **evaluation plan**, supported by guidance from Evaluation Unit. The need for results based evaluations to support and provide evidence of SP implementation is emphasised
- The early 2010 Country Strategy Guidance recognises the necessity of **monitoring and reporting at this level** for the future evaluation of the SP (i.e. to be able to demonstrate achievements and UNIFEM contribution)

The **Results Tracking System** is relatively recently implemented (results were uploaded electronically for the first time in 2009). The system represented a **step-change** for the organisation in the way that it collects and uses data for performance management. The study finds that the Results Tracking system has delivered some **highly significant benefits** for the organisation:

- It has supported an institutional emphasis on **results reporting** which recognizes the importance of results and the specific objectives of UNIFEM under the SP
- It has enabled far more **systematic reporting** (using, in particular, project and programme data at field level) against specified results, which has in turn enabled the **centralized collation, synthesis and management** of data as reflected in the Annual Report and in reports to the Consultative Committee and Executive Board
- It has generated much greater **institutional coherence** for results reporting, in terms of thematic sections, geo-sections and field level reporting into a single system
- It has provided much greater **clarity for SROs** on reporting requirements
- It has enabled the upwards (SRO-HQ) **aggregation** of results towards an aligned set of objectives.
- The use of the ATLAS system for coding expenditure on outcome areas has allowed for **some recording of financial allocation** to work areas

**Monitoring and Evaluation:** Evaluation systems and mechanisms appear to have made more progress than those for monitoring, in aligning with the SP and with results:

- Examples of **evaluation planning system alignment** (at HQ and field level) include: the Evaluation Strategy (2008)'s very specific reference to the DRF Goal and MRF Outputs 1.1, 1.4 and 1.5; the explicit statement of UNIFEM's theory of change within key documents (such as the Meta-Evaluation 2009); the development of evaluation plans and reports within SRSs and CSs;
- A **draft Monitoring and Reporting Policy** was developed in May 2010 ) in response to the SP's identification of results and rights based monitoring and reporting as a challenge (though this appears to be at quite an early stage of development / dissemination

### 3.2b) Challenges identified

Perhaps inevitably, however, a number of challenges have emerged around the Results Tracking and other performance monitoring systems. This is particularly evident at field level.

For **guidance material:**

- **Little guidance is available** on indicators – related to the overall limited planning guidance provided; this omission reflects a lack of emphasis on indicators as the centre of effective results measurement. In particular, there is a gap in guidance at field level to support the shift from the generic headline indicators of the SP to context specific indicators for SRS and CS (and to some extent Thematic Strategies), which can still be aggregated.
- There are **few references to baselines** and no definitions / clarifications of their content / function / rationale, beyond an annex to Guidance 4 requiring a table summarising national level information. If produced, this would help populate a baseline on national development planning and frameworks on GEWE (such as CEDAW, national laws and policies etc.)
- Occasional reference is made to human rights and to CEDAW, but overall there is **little or no guidance or tools within the SP to support the integration of a rights based approach** – perhaps relying on the use of separate resources for this. (This point was also made in the 2009 Meta-Evaluation, which highlighted this as a gap in programme design.)

- **No specific reference is made to the UNIFEM theory of change** in any of the Guidance materials. The most widely known reference (apart from the SP narrative) appears to be in the Capacity Development Strategy March 2010 (Section 3.1). Staff familiar with this material did emphasise the relevance and utility of the visual and account, but overall few were familiar with it (some being introduced during site visits for this study.)

For **results reporting**: The results tracking system is **heavily geared** towards the production of the (centrally-generated) Annual Report. Consequently, the system is **not being used – either centrally or by staff in field offices - to its full capability for performance monitoring, progress tracking or trend analysis**. Since feedback loops are heavily upwards at this stage, information which could inform planning and decision-making at field level is not being generated or fed downwards.

Specific examples of these limitations include:

- The emphasis on reporting to (sometimes narrow) SP indicators is constraining the capacity – particularly within countries - to report against **wider results and changes / processes generated**, such as cultural / political / attitudinal change. Some very clear examples of this were provided through consultations / field studies. These include: the generation of partnerships and dialogue for a more coherent approach to GEWE in-country; the stimulation of multi-stakeholder debate on ‘models’ of gender in new political contexts; the improvement of local policy environments through more consensus-based decision-making; attitudinal change; and the development of local-level GEWE policy and action plans. Often these changes could be – and were – reported through more narrative donor reports.
- The system is unable to reflect the often rapid **contextual changes** which occur at country level, such as political or governance shifts. This constrains both the types of results being aimed for at local level, as well as their reporting.
- The system has a **lack of capability to generate reports tailored** to the SRO / programmatic level. Consequently, some sections / offices (including Andean SRO and Violence Against Women thematic section) are developing their own internal management information and progress reporting systems – representing in effect a duplication of resources.
- While there is some capability for upwards tracking at aggregate level, the system as it stands does not yet allow **progress over time** to be reported. Country and sub-regional offices find their reporting to be focused on achievements, with the dynamics of progress (or lack of) rarely monitored. Alongside the absence of baselines, targets and milestones or benchmarks at these levels, this makes it difficult to fully assess performance / distil and apply learning.
- There is no evidence of **trend analysis / feedback on trends** corporately beyond the annual report review and central reports such as those to the Secretary General and Executive Board. Examples of the former might include analysis against progress in particular thematic areas, or interim reports on gaps being identified. Several sections and offices commented on the lack of downwards feedback, and field visits found no evidence at all of any such information being either generated or provided to support operational or strategic planning, or to give a sense of the ‘state of play’ of wider progress.
- There are only **fragmented systems** in place to support progress tracking against indicators and there is no use of traffic light or other mechanisms to highlight progression.

- As reported in more detail in section 3.3 below, the coding of financial allocations under the ATLAS system is very dependent on individual interpretation; meaning that the data held is unlikely to be fully robust.

On feedback loops specifically: while there is some evidence that annual report reviews and evaluation feedback loops are starting to inform programmatic / strategic activity, these are at an early stage of development, and, in the case of evaluation are as yet unsystematic. Feedback links between normative and operational activity are not supported by the results tracking system, which does not actively seek to make these connections or to provide incentives to address these. There are clear instances of efforts to generate such linkages at design stage (evident for example in the case of the Violence Against Women Fund active in the Colombia country office, where specific links have been made into relevant dialogue fora), but the Results Tracking system does not allow for comprehensive monitoring or evaluation of their progress in building these links.

#### For **monitoring and evaluation**,

- While the introduction of an evaluation management response tool represents good progress, there is a need for **greater buy-in to the process** (many felt that the response time was too long) and for a clearer and broader understanding of its purpose and role. Increased compliance with the evaluation policy is necessary to ensure that a clear connection is made between evaluation findings and strategic decision-making (not only within projects).
- The first biannual SRS evaluation plans were developed before the corporate Evaluation Policy (2009, though the Strategy was developed in 2008) and thus **ongoing guidance and capacity development** will be needed to implement results-focused evaluations and to use findings effectively.
- The draft Monitoring and Reporting Policy (May 2010) provides a start, but evidence has highlighted the **generalised absence of a monitoring – as opposed to reporting - culture** and associated mechanisms, capacity and dedicated staff with the remit and time to monitor results. This is a key challenge for the SP and a recurring theme in field visits and consultations (see section 3.3).

#### For **Results Based Management (RBM) systems overall**

- The current Programme/Project Cycle Management (PCM) system underpinning the SP is **not yet fully aligned to effective results-based management**. The management mechanisms to ensure that results performance is being tracked and informing decision-making at all levels are not currently system-wide or adequate. For example, work plans are largely activity based and support compliance with deliverables rather than progress to results (apart from a headline result, work plans typically focus on activities such as training, study tours, analysis etc. rather than the resultant change expected from these actions. Field staff interviewed indicate that they typically report against completion of activities, rather than progress to change/results); and the time, resources and mechanisms to undertake the

necessary reflection and adjustments across a country/sub-regional programme (as opposed to distinct projects) are not sufficient. Capacities are often limited, with several of the offices visited and consulted indicating that they have had very little orientation to RBM but expressing an appetite for it – an issue previously highlighted in the Gender Responsive Budgeting evaluation<sup>9</sup>.

- Quality assurance** for the SP and related strategies rests primarily with Geographic sections (Guidance Note 4, Annex 1), while approval rests with the Project Approval Committee (PAC). Good practice at headquarters, such as the review of Sub-Regional Strategies, is hampered by the length of time taken for the review and its findings to be disseminated. A repeated theme from interviews is the need for a more systematic approach to quality assurance and more sustained on-going support in the form of guidance, training and technical assistance. The following box provides a short stocktake of RBM systems as viewed from the country perspective.

**Box 1: Rapid Stocktake of Systems at country level to support results**

*Country offices are highly varied: There are a wide variety of country offices, some very small (e.g. Moldova), some very large (e.g. Pakistan, Colombia, Afghanistan). Some, such as South Sudan, operate at a largely humanitarian level while others e.g. in CEE are based in middle income countries. Corporate SP guidance at present is not adequate to take account of these variations.*

*Country strategy development has not been central: In the present SP, CSs were developed after the corporate and sub-regional strategies. Some offices report that they followed as comprehensive an approach to CS development as possible, while for others it was no more than ‘a cut and paste exercise to fulfil a corporate requirement’ (a respondent). The SP has recognised that effecting changes in people’s lives is largely dependent on country-level interventions but this is not yet reflected in the strategic planning process.*

*The structure and processes of the office needs to reflect a results focus: in reality teams, designations and responsibilities are more project/thematic than outcome/results determined. This is despite UNIFEM’s stated commitment to a programme approach, and efforts to move from multiple small projects to larger programmes. Office work plans, deliverables and quarterly/annual review mechanisms are not sufficiently aligned to key SRS/CS results to help teams in measuring progress towards results – thus limiting their use for planning and decision-making.*

*Resources need to be linked to results: There are problems with human resources (such as reliance on short term contracts and lack of expertise in key areas such as monitoring and RBM); and financial resources (predictability of core and non-core and duration of support) which negatively impact on results effectiveness. Allied with this are bureaucratic requirements and the slow pace of*

<sup>9</sup> Social Development Direct (August 2009) Corporate Evaluation of the Programme Portfolio: UNIFEM’s work on Gender-Responsive Budgeting Stage 2 Synthesis Report UNIFEM Evaluation Unit

*decentralisation e.g. related to delegated authority and approval limits which hampers a results focus (an issue for all offices in field studies);*

*Clarity of roles and responsibilities, including linkages, channels and support mechanisms, between countries, sub-regional offices, Geographic, Thematic and other HQ sections is needed. At present these are highly variable, there appears to be over-reliance on personal contacts and individual interpretations, and a demand for standards and clarity. There is a lack of clarity around responsibility for monitoring. All staff need encouragement and opportunity to network appropriately, but not all staff currently see or seize opportunities to do so.*

*Concern for results needs to inform dialogue and relationships with partners (Government, Civil Society, UNCT and donors) – not in a mechanistic way but to retain the focus on benefits for people. While the overall UNIFEM mandate appears to be understood and respected, there is scope for clearer communication on the results being sought and consultation on strategies.*

### 3.2c) Summary messages

In summary, the systems implemented represent **a major transformation** in the way UNIFEM has sought to both create a results-based culture, and to collect and analyse data for performance monitoring. Key messages from the experience of implementation are as follows:

- The **provision of guidance material** to support sections and offices in translating the SP into a related set of strategies constitutes good practice. However, currently available guidance does not always provide sufficiently timely or comprehensive information to staff for planning, managing and reporting on their work.
- While the results tracking system has enabled comprehensive results reporting at global level, its gearing towards (centralised) annual reporting has meant that its **relevance and utility for ongoing performance management and trend analysis** has been constrained. At present, there is over reliance on reporting on achievements alone and insufficient attention to tracking progress for trend analysis, to enable adjustment and decision making e.g. through the generation of locally-relevant reports on performance against specific areas.
- Currently, limited analysis of trends / progress and downwards feedback loops is **constraining the use of valuable information**. To support RBM, there is urgent need for such loops to be formed, and for relevant information to be fed through them to support local decision-making.
- Indicators and evaluation planning have much potential to support results reporting. However, the system currently chiefly supports results reporting **related to fixed and sometimes narrow global indicators**. While this is important, it is not sufficient, and current systems do not currently adequately recognise or support (a) a more narrative form of reporting beyond specified indicators (and text boxes) or (b) the possibility of different pathways of change to achieving outcomes and goal (allowing for flexibility and innovation within the context).
- While significant progress towards **results measurement** has been made, present systems are not yet geared to support comprehensive **results management (through the full cycle)**. There are particular shortcomings in monitoring, including lack of dedicated staff and systems (though evidence exists that progress can be made when this expertise is available e.g. Andean SRO); and absence of aligned planning and review processes that support comprehensive performance tracking. Good progress has been made to strengthen results in the Evaluation Policy and Strategy but further work remains to embed a focus on results.

### 3.3 The experience of implementation: What has been the reality of taking up and using the Strategic Plan and its systems?

The two previous sections (3.1 and 3.2) have shown that, despite the very significant institutional improvements in results management and reporting which the SP and its Results Frameworks, plus their associated systems, have generated, there remain some technical and process weaknesses. These weaknesses have constrained the ability of the SP (plus its systems) to provide a basis for institution-wide, multi-level, systematic results management.

This section of the report reflects on the **real experience of implementing the SP and its results frameworks** at regional, sub-regional, country and thematic level. It looks at the ways the main aspects of the SP and its associated systems - the theory of change, the DRF, MRF and IRF, the results reporting process and evaluations systems – have actually been taken up and used by UNIFEM at its different levels of operation, including country and sub-regional level. Consequently, it identifies some strengths, some weaknesses, and some things that can be taken forward into UN Women planning processes, as well as some things that could be changed or abandoned.

#### 3.3a) Organisational progress

Both the corporate Strategic Plan itself and the underlying understanding of change have clear **relevance and utility** at thematic, regional, sub-regional and country levels. There is strong coherence in results planning across these spheres of work. **Institutional traction** for the SP – and particularly its understanding of change – is generally strong where there are staff who know and understand it e.g. where they have been involved in the process of its development. The SP was described by one office as a ‘quantum leap’ for generating institutional coherence and consistency in planning and operations.

Specifically:

- At field level, offices do consider the Theory of Change **relevant and useful**,<sup>10</sup> both in terms of internal conceptualisation of their work and as a means of dialogue with partners, e.g. explaining the UNIFEM remit and operations to civil society or government stakeholders (Andean Regional office) and / or negotiating the strategic objectives of joint programming with donors (South Asia Regional Office). This is despite the lack of reference in both the SP document and its associated guidance to the theory of change, or any training / advice on how to apply it.
- The SP understanding of change has clearly **strong resonance** with (if not explicit linkage to) planning at the different levels of UNIFEM operations. This is particularly evident at country / sub-regional level, where some very good examples of localised theories of change are evident (e.g. West Africa SRO and Pakistan CO), though not all these were produced with

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<sup>10</sup> All offices consulted for this study agreed on the relevance and utility of the Theory of Change, though several staff members – mainly at country level - were actually introduced to it through the process of the study itself.

reference to the global theory. Overall, no diverging theories of change across any areas of activity – thematic, sub-regional or country - have been identified. The two Funds have their own strategic rationales, but the breadth and generality of the global theory of change enable them to broadly cohere with it.

- Excepting the two Funds (the UN Trust Fund is notably non-aligned, though field studies indicated efforts at sub-regional and country level to ensure linkage; while the Fund for Gender Equality has made recent efforts to align its M&E Framework to the UNIFEM SP<sup>11</sup>) there is strong **internal and external coherence** across strategic planning documentation at all levels with the SP. None of the sample of 24 strategic plans reviewed (thematic, regional, sub-regional and country) showed any aspects of non-coherence (bar a justified selective application in the South Sudan case due to the very specific geo-political context). In contrast, there are some good examples of management action to ensure coherence including comprehensive **alignment exercises** at sub-regional and country level to ensure this coherence, such as the major effort carried out by the Andean SRO and Colombia country office, and the use in Pakistan country office of laminated cards of the DRF and MRF outputs to guide staff in their daily work.
- The SP has resulted in **more aligned outcomes and outputs** at all levels, at least in terms of narrative and documentation. Virtually all<sup>12</sup> strategic and programmatic documentation reviewed - plus evidence from the field visits - showed a major institutional effort at coherence with the DRF and MRF. Examples include the alignment exercise in the Andean region described above, which lasted around three months and involved reformulating programmatic and strategic results to fit with the global frameworks. The same is true at thematic level, where all programmatic and strategic frameworks reviewed reflected in their documentation at least coherence with the DRF and MRF outcomes and outputs, and of the sample evaluations reviewed.
- The SP has to some extent influenced the **setting of targets** at sub-regional and country level – in most cases, these were not in place before the SP and alignment exercises were implemented (the 2009 Meta Evaluation highlighted the problem of judgement of performance from this information without baselines on starting points and clarity on expected targets). Examples include the monitoring frameworks sub-regional / country strategies from the Andean SRO and Colombia offices, which establish clear targets (though see below regarding the actual implementation of these frameworks).
- In some (though very few, and tending to be newer) offices, there is evidence of the SP **influencing programme strategies**. Moldova Country Office in the design of their Women's Economic Empowerment programme, used the UNIFEM understanding of how change happens to think through several essential programme components on i) policy and laws; ii) institutional capacity; iii) the work of advocates; and iv) women target groups
- In terms of **human rights based approaches**, evaluation strategic planning documentation emphasises this, and makes an explicit linkage to the SP (referencing

<sup>11</sup> Fund for Gender Equality: Monitoring and Evaluation Framework 2010-2013

<sup>12</sup> Note that South Sudan's country strategy explicitly states that the MRF on coordination has not been incorporated into the country strategy as a result of Sudan's geo-political fragmentation.

UNIFEM's commitment to an active role within UNEG to promote gender equality and human rights sensitive evaluations). At field level, and particularly within country strategies, strategic planning documentation does systematically refer to human rights and gender equity (none of the surveyed documentation did *not* mention rights) – but this appears to be occurring largely as a response to context rather than as a reaction to the SP in itself.

Most of the external stakeholders consulted were unaware of the SP document, reflecting the sense described below of its limitations as a communications tool. However, all those interviewed – government, donor partners and civil society - during field visits reflected a perspective on UNIFEM aims and activity coherent with the SP's aims and objectives, the theory of change and UNIFEM's innovative and catalytic mandate. There were no exceptions.

### 3.3b) Challenges identified

Notwithstanding the 'quantum leap' described of the SP's role in generating clear aims and objectives for UNIFEM, and a basis of institutional coherence to address them, it was evident from interviews and field visits conducted that a **number of challenges** have arisen in the SP's actual implementation. Many of these arise from the technical and process issues identified in 4.1 and 4.2 above; they are perhaps related to the recency of the process, plus resource constraints. They provide some valuable learning for UN Women going forward.

**Coherence of strategic planning:** Despite the strong narrative coherence outlined above, there remain a number of **gaps around interlinkages**. These include:

- Limited explicit linkages from **country and sub-regional strategies up to regional strategies**, for example Europe and South Asia.
- Limited explicit lateral linkages between **thematic and sub-regional / country strategies** for example a number of country strategies refer to actions to tackle Violence Against Women but do not explicitly or implicitly refer to the UNIFEM Ending Violence Against Women strategy of 2008-2011.<sup>13</sup>
- With some exceptions, there was generally limited contextualisation of SP outputs and indicators in sub-regional and country strategies or a simple transfer of the global ones to the sub-regional or country strategy (e.g. Caribbean SRO though South Asia / Andean / West Africa SROs and associated country offices were exceptions). See Box 2 for examples.

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<sup>13</sup> A Life Free of Violence: Unleashing the Power of Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality (UNIFEM 2008)

**Box 2: Illustrations of SRS contextualisation of SP Indicators**

Corporate Strategic Plan Output Indicator	Sub-Regional Strategy equivalent indicator(s)
7.1a Capacity assessment and surveys indicating increase in knowledge and skills in mainstreaming GEWE in policy, service delivery or media institutions	<p><b>Contextualised Sub Regional Strategy Indicators (West Africa)</b></p> <p><b>7.1 a):</b> Number of countries applying GRB</p> <p><b>7.1 b)</b> Budget of the Ministry of agriculture in Senegal indicates increased allocation for rural women</p> <p><b>7.1 c)</b> Evidence of enforcement of women’s human rights by the policy, customs, correction and courts in post conflict countries</p> <p><b>7.1 d)</b> Evidence of broad media coverage on gender equality and WR</p> <p><b>7.1. e)</b> Extent to which gender is included into the training curricula of ENSEA in Côte d’Ivoire</p>
2.1 a Evidence of how UNIFEM partners/others used knowledge products/tools/processes that were made accessible by UNIFEM in relation to engendering of constitutions/laws/legal frameworks/policies/strategies	<p><b>Limited Contextualised Sub Regional Strategy indicators</b></p> <p>2.1 a) Number of knowledge products/tools that UNIFEM has made accessible.</p> <p>2.1 b) Evidence of how UNIFEM partners/others used knowledge products/tools that were made accessible</p>

However, despite the strong narrative coherence across programmatic and strategic documentation with the SP and the theory of change, the **actual level of influence of the SP on operational planning at field level is questionable**. Most alignment takes place around the results frameworks, and there is some clear evidence of retro-fitting. According to Norad in its assessment of UNIFEM Afghanistan *‘The Strategic Plan is based on UNIFEM’s global strategy and the outcomes and log frames have been adopted without much adjustment to the national context or actual activities’*<sup>14</sup>.

While the interactions between the SP and programmatic activity are expected to be iterative – in that the Theory of Change both aims to shape programmatic design and to be informed by this – currently, **there is little evidence of these loops being tested and enacted in practice**. The only evidence of the SP shaping programmatic engagement occurs in newer offices - perhaps because of the breadth and generality of the theory of change and outcomes, as well as the history and imperative of donor funded programmes. Exceptions include Moldova country office, where a programme design – though not actual programme selection – took place in accordance with the SP, and West Africa SRO,

<sup>14</sup> Norad (2009) Assessment of UNIFEM Afghanistan Discussion Report 21/2009 page 10

where the SRS draws its priority countries in line with the SP. The Review of UNIFEM SRS 2008-09 concluded that, generally speaking, SROs in the sub-regions seem to be working in the planned countries but that the lack of country-level planning and budgeting in the SRS made it difficult to assess the extent of this<sup>15</sup>. It also highlights the absence of corporate guidance clarifying SRO flexibility to react to changes in regional contexts over time.

**Institutional traction and ownership:** Full ownership of the SP has been constrained by a lack of **broad institutional engagement** in the development/validation process of the document itself, as follows:

- Several countries and SROs interviewed referred to a very unclear finalisation process, with some under the impression that they were still working to a draft document. At country level, this lack of engagement has played out in the lack of a **comprehensive analytical and consultation process** underlying country strategy development, perhaps due to the tight timeframe set for developing these. Some countries reported seeing this as a **mechanistic and artificial process**, driven by HQ, which did not allow sufficient time for planners to engage in dialogue with local partners or to embed planning in concurrent items such as UNDAF or national strategic development processes.
- While others did report a major effort to ensure country-led strategies (e.g. some CIS countries, some in Arab States and (in common UN approaches) those countries where a Delivering As One initiative is underway), overall this has resulted in a **missed opportunity** to test, validate and contextualise UNIFEM's understanding of change at country level.
- Linked to this is a clear weakness around the **institutionalisation of the theory of change**, including the Goal. Despite a range of communication channels, including bi-annual global and regional Strategic Planning Workshops, very few of the offices consulted (beyond exceptions such as West Africa, South Asia and Andean SROs) had good knowledge / understanding of the theory (including the Goal), its role and function and why / how it can support operational planning, beyond those involved in their development. Those who had come across it had often done so via other routes, such as through a chance reference by a colleague, or via discussions around the Capacity Development strategy. While this may be due to the lack of explicit reference to the theory of change in the SP document itself, plus any associated guidance, these communication channels are clearly not as yet enabling a systematic dialogue across the organisation about how UNIFEM understands change, and the testing of this at field level. One SRO commented that the real test was the relevance of the ToC within projects.
- Reflecting the concern in 3.1 above, many staff felt that the current Goal was **not sufficiently motivational or reflective** of the work they do and why. Field visits also indicated a clear disconnect between the narrative alignment seen in documents (as reported on above in 4.1 and 4.2) and the actual level of awareness and buy-in of operational staff. Many – even where they were aware of them – stated that they saw the Strategic Plan / Theory of Change / Goal as relatively remote from their day to day project and programme work in very fluid and challenging contexts.

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<sup>15</sup> Review of UNIFEM Sub-Regional Strategies (2008-2009) Synthesis Report, Revised Draft Report, Alison King, 30 September 2010

**Results Tracking:** The Results Tracking system has presented a **number of challenges** for country and sub-regional offices, as well as for thematic and geo-sections – despite the recognition that it does allow offices to report their contribution to global aims directly to Headquarters. Specifically:

- For field offices, the **heavy focus on SP indicators** as the single form of results measurement has presented a major challenge. Country and sub-regional offices are not able under the current Results Tracking system to present a broader picture of the changes being generated (or the different sorts of partnerships / interventions required) which, as reported above, often consist of valuable (often process-oriented) shifts (see examples in section 3.2 above). While there is no evidence of country offices changing or constraining activity to fit with results tracking requirements, there is widespread evidence of the converse: country offices reporting in only a limited way centrally on changes being generated because of the limitations of the current system.
- The **indicators** themselves are a sticking point: institutional buy-in to them has not been helped by an ongoing process of redefining and refinement which – though essential in itself - has proven confusing for country and sub-regional offices. The fact that much progress can be (and is) ‘diced and spliced’ to fit a number of different indicators and outcome areas does not serve wider results reporting well. The lack of guidance on developing contextualised versions of indicators has also been a constraint, since the fixed and often narrow nature of the indicators does not reflect the sorts of rapid responses needed in quickly-changing contexts (cited by Colombia, Haiti, Pakistan and Palestine). Overall, the lack of scope for broader results reporting is constraining the shift towards a **culture of managing for results**.
- The system’s inability to generate **locally-relevant reports** is a significant constraint for field offices. It has been a key factor in the lack of perceived relevance and utility of the system (there is a strong perception that the system exists primarily for the use of Headquarters and for the purposes of the Annual Report). All of those offices visited for field studies, and all of those interviewed, cited the lack of analysis available to them through the system as a constraint – and, at the time of consultation (November / December 2010), all were engaged in collating / submitting information for the Annual Report (none were engaged in uploading information on an ongoing basis throughout the year).
- Another shortcoming of reporting is the absence of a **ready-account of thematic and outcome/output linkages**. In their sub-regional strategy, CIS includes a matrix highlighting these connections through to country level, but respondents in this study frequently commented on the challenge of allocating achievements across themes and outcome/output areas.
- The requirement for offices around the submission of evidence for the achievement of results, while recognised as necessary in itself, has proven a **significant burden**. All those offices consulted found it challenging to identify the specific, up-loadable piece of evidence to ‘prove’ any given result (and are not always clear on the requirements for, and use of, this material, despite some current guidance). The Review of SRS also commented on the disproportionate

time spent on this exercise, in view of its uncertain value (lack of clarity on extent to which documents uploaded are being assessed and used by other parts of the organisation).<sup>16</sup>

**Financial reporting:** While the SP aimed to create a clear link between programmatic operations and expenditure, the evidence is that these intentions **have not delivered as planned**. Specifically:

- Staff in field offices cited the lack of a link between programmatic and financial data as a drawback to planning and reporting. **Allocation of resources against ATLAS codes is highly variable**, depending on individual interpretation of each code, and staff responsible in sub-regional offices agreed that the allocation and entry process is a largely intuitive one. Accordingly, the data that is held at central level on expenditure against outputs and outcomes is **very unlikely to be robust**, and the results-based management-desirable goal of a single performance report, which meaningfully combines programme and financial information, has not yet been achieved.
- There is also need to clarify – and reflect in the IRF format – whether Ending Violence Against Women and HIV&AIDS are being treated as one combined or two separate themes for planning and reporting purposes.

**Information flows:** While the results reporting systems aims to generate both upwards and downwards information flows, it is currently **not being utilised to its full potential**. Information flows are largely upwards, contributing to the perceived lack of utility of the system at field level. Specifically:

- Information flows from country through to sub-regional offices are largely **upwards**, with some linkage to geo-sections and some lesser connections to thematic divisions. **No clear cases of downward feedback flows and loops** were reported, with staff commenting explicitly on the absence of these, and there has been no trend and performance analysis conveyed back to country and sub-regional offices thus far.
- Staff indicated that the contact that takes place e.g. from country through to thematic or regional level is largely based on interaction between colleagues as development professionals sharing technical experience and expertise, and often rooted in existing relationships. It is **not systematically linked to results reporting**. There is also evidence **of a lack of aligned programming**, with one office citing the example of country level programmes being initiated from HQ without contact being made with the SRO.
- Staff at field level cited instances of **seeking information or clarification** around results tracking issues from headquarters, with no response received.
- For providing information to partners, the SP document itself is not perceived by staff as a useful tool – it is too dense for easy communication. The need for **a ‘communications’ version** was cited on several occasions.

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<sup>16</sup> Op cit page 8

**Structural issues:** In addition to the tools and systems issues above, the **realisation of the change logic (theory of change)** - and consequently the Strategic Plan - at sub-regional and country level has also been impeded by three structural issues in UNIFEM operations:

- Firstly, the **legal status of the UNIFEM office** at country level. Where UNIFEM does not, in several cases, have a direct legal basis for action at normative level and consequent accountability to e.g. national governments, this means that the UNIFEM office does not always have the legal or political space to directly engage in the way that the SP understanding of change implies. Two cases were cited where UNDP is the legal entity in the country; the respective UNIFEM country representative was heavily involved in discussions around the new UNDAF but could not formally sign the UNDAF on behalf of UNIFEM due to the lack of legal standing. All offices where this is the case cited major delays and bureaucracy for procurement as a result of this constraint.
- Secondly, there is a **clear mismatch** between the availability of resources – both human and financial – and the requirements for the realisation of the SP and the Theory of Change. There are a number of factors at play here:
  - Given the breadth and ambition of the aims of the SP, **the level of resources requested in the SP** appears inadequate to attain this. Beyond the SP and IRF, this is evidenced in the funding and human resource frameworks of SRO / country offices and their aims and ambitions as evidenced in strategic plans (SRS / CS).
  - The **insufficiency of core resources** is actively constraining the flexibility of operations, particularly at country level, e.g. in the option to engage in strategic partnerships – cited by at least one country office (Colombia). Countries in CEE face particular challenges as donors channel their support into cross-European structures.
  - Due to UN procurement difficulties, the use of **annual contracts** for the delivery of core UNIFEM business (the majority of the staff in most offices) means a high level of insecurity and turnover, with consequent implications for stakeholder relationships / office capacity (this was a repeated theme within the field studies)
  - There is an extremely high volume of time spent on **bureaucratic tasks** (administration, logistics, with 70% upwards of advisory time being cited in at least two country offices), which in many cases stems from the role of the SRO in financial control and UNDP's role as legal entity
  - In common with other UN agencies, there is a culture which appears **overly focused on compliance rather than results** (sustained in some instances by separate annual work planning milestones and project and individual work plans which are activity focused rather than being linked to substantive results frameworks)
  - There has been an **insufficient investment in monitoring expertise and results based training** for staff who are expected to implement the Strategic Plan – no staff consulted in field visits had experienced significant training in either area.

### 3.3c) Summary messages

Experience to date shows that while the SP, its Results Frameworks and associated systems have proven both a powerful tool, and a valuable process, for UNIFEM on its journey towards a results based management orientation, **some significant limitations remain.** Key messages include:

- The SP and its systems have provided a **clear organising frame** to make explicit UNIFEM's work to its staff and partners, to set clear aims and objectives and to assess progress towards these. Perhaps most significantly it has helped to generate institutional

coherence and consistency across the organisation in its efforts to meet the challenges of its mandate. It has also enabled more effective communication of UNIFEM's work to partners (though the SP itself is not a useful communications tool).

- However, the **potential value of the Theory of Change is not being currently maximized**. It is accepted as conceptually valid but has not been contextually validated - that is, there does not exist adequate internalisation and buy-in at country or sub-regional level. The SP Goal is considered **inadequate** and to lack relevance for the range of activities that need to happen on the path towards the realisation of the UNIFEM mandate in countries.
- The SP appears to be largely providing a **conceptual umbrella for thematic and strategic coherence, rather than acting as a strategic driver for operations**. The breadth and generality of the UNIFEM's theory of change and its outcomes mean that most UNIFEM activity fits within these, evidenced by the successful retro-fitting of alignment exercises. While there is potential in newer offices to be guided by the theory of change, its breadth means that virtually any activity aimed at contributing to GEWE would fit within it.
- The Results Tracking system **lacks adequate institutional buy-in** at field level, and is **constraining reporting** (as well as in some instances programming) on changes generated and progress made. A lack of analysis flowing downwards contributes to a widespread perception of inadequate flexibility and lack of utility at country level. Guidance on its use has been inadequate. Financial reporting against output areas is unlikely to be robust.
- Critically, UNIFEM resources – human and financial - appear **out of sync** with the aims and ambitions of the SP. There is inadequate coherence between the two aspects (IRF-DRF centrally; CS / SRS and resource plans / staffing allocation and contract basis at field level).
- Broadly to date, attention to **planning and management for results** has been dominated by an emphasis on results measurement instead. Consequently, information flows are largely upwards; reporting against indicators has taken precedence over intensive analysis on the types of change intended and the most effective ways of achieving and demonstrating this; and the sorts of process shifts required to generate long-term sustainable change on the pathway towards GEWE are not currently being either emphasised or recognised.
- A number of these short-comings stem from the **gap between** the SP's recognition of development change happening at the national level, and currently top-down planning processes, whereby country strategies were developed after the corporate, regional and sub-regional strategies, and sometimes purely as a formality.

### 3.4 The UNIFEM mandate: how has the Strategic Plan supported the delivery of UNIFEM's remit around normative / operational activity plus UN co-ordination processes?

Within the analysis above around technical / systems / implementation issues, the study was asked to consider the specific questions of: the role of the SP and its Results Frameworks in helping UNIFEM realise both its normative and operational mandate, plus its commitment to supporting UN co-ordination for the realisation of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. These questions have been considered both from a technical analysis and a 'reality of implementation' point of view.

#### 3.4a) Organisational progress

In terms of the SP's role in supporting UNIFEM's normative-operational mandate, the study has found some **significant progress**. Specifically:

- An **explicit connection** within the SP and its understanding of change between the normative and the operational levels of work, plus a clear emphasis on micro-meso-macro links.
- The Goal and all of the outcomes of the DRF with **clear potential to drive and demonstrate** normative-operational linkages.
- Offices (whether consciously or unconsciously) working to **generate normative and operational links**, and to **maximize micro-meso-macro connections**, as follows:
  - **Key normative frameworks** (CEDAW, Beijing, 1325 and HRBAs), as well as national and regional frameworks (e.g. EU Accession and Progress Reports by CEE and Belen do Para and the Brasilia Consensus by LAC), explicitly cited and used by offices to inform operational as well as normative work. References to CEDAW and HRBA, in particular, are prominent in programme documents across the regions and were cited by all staff consulted as the main framework for guiding their work.
  - A growing awareness at field level of the need to **bridge the gaps between the normative and operational levels**, plus some programmatic evidence of strategies to address these (mostly implicit).
  - A clear understanding of the **importance of the upwards linkages**, plus an increasing drive to work at normative level especially in field sites. Examples of UNIFEM influencing more widely on this include the Moldova CO's development of a paper for UNCT on entry points showing links to CEDAW and MDGs.

In terms of the SP and its Results Frameworks supporting UN co-ordination for greater realisation of GEWE, the following gains are evident:

- **Prominent integration of MRF output 2** on UN coordination into strategic planning at global, regional, sub-regional, country and thematic levels. The South Asia SRO team indicated a 'mind set change' which has been facilitated by this output in terms of their approach to working with UNCTs. The Institutional Development Team at HQ engages significantly on this output and also coordinates the work done across UNIFEM on MRF2. At corporate level, the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) is the main pillar through which UNIFEM operates and influences and is very engaged in a number of working groups (e.g. HRBA in Evaluation; RBM; UNDAF Guidelines, UN Accountability on GE).
- Evidence of **considerable respect by partners** for UNIFEM's technical expertise in mainstreaming GEWE at normative levels, and good examples of tangible outcomes in achieving this. These include a stronger presence of GEWE across the work of themed aid co-ordination groups such as in Liberia; stronger gender indicators in UNCT monitoring frameworks as in Ecuador; and UNIFEM work in Albania in development of a Gender Framework for the UNCT as part of the Common Country Programme Development (2012-2016). Partners consulted during site visits were highly positive about the sensitive and strategic approach that UNIFEM staff were adopting to work with other UN agencies on GEWE, acknowledging others' comparative advantage and entry points and being willing to work from behind the scenes.
- At field level, offices playing a strong and often critical role in **mainstreaming gender across UNDAFs and other co-ordination processes** such as Delivering As One (often via mechanisms such as inter-agency working groups, or stakeholder platforms). UNIFEM currently leads on 53 Gender Theme Groups (out of 100 countries) and technical advice is also provided from headquarters.

- Opportunities appear greater where UN coordination is promoted through e.g. Delivering as One pilots. There is clear evidence of UNIFEM **operating strategically to maximise and utilise this space** to advance GEWE. In the process, some offices have also gained respect for their expertise in humanitarian, peace and conflict resolution situations e.g. Sudan, Palestine and Pakistan.

### 3.4b) Challenges identified

Notwithstanding these gains, some learning has emerged for any future strategic planning process. Overall, while a considerable volume of work around UN co-ordination and carrying out the normative / operational mandate is taking place, this is **not necessarily being driven by the SP** (though the SP does provide legitimisation if required). In specific terms:

- The **legal status of the local office** is a major determinant in the extent and nature of engagement at normative level directly and, as regards coordination. Examples were cited of UNIFEM country programmes playing a major role in UNDAF development and in the mainstreaming of GEWE across this, but UNIFEM representatives then being unable to formally sign the UNDAF on its finalisation (e.g. the Colombia office)
- UNIFEM leadership and role in both normative work and UN coordination is heavily dependent on the local office **communicating and strategically deploying its mandate** – which appears to happen by varying degrees. In the field sites, a clear disjunct was evident between recognition of the UNIFEM mandate and expertise for GEWE and the actual SP document. Several offices and some non-UN partners interviewed during site visits as well as some documentation reviewed<sup>17</sup> point out that acceptance within the UNCT of UNIFEM’s role as a driver of GEWE is not automatic. If UNIFEM staff are unclear about the role of ‘driver’ - which is stated but not explored in the SP - then other UN agencies will be even less clear. Broader challenges to UN coordination, such as status/hierarchy, territorialism and actual/perceived competition for resources, also affect this relationship. Some country offices report stormy times steering a course, while others report that they are now in a good situation following several years of effort.
- Whilst MRF2 is reported on via the Results Tracking system, there is little evidence of it **functioning as a driver** for the role of UNIFEM within UN co-ordination. Rather, this appears to be happening primarily as a response to context, and to be driven by the technical and strategic capabilities plus the status (i.e. their grade / contract status) of in-country staff. Links still need to be made between this MRF output and the DRF.
- Field visits and interviews indicated much evidence of **UNIFEM being active in UNCTs** (e.g. CIS, Pakistan, Colombia, Andean SRO) and of actively supporting attention to gender mainstreaming in UNDAFs (Albania, Andean SRO) and the evaluation of UNDAFs (Moldova). There are also several instances where UNIFEM was unable to play an active role, even when invited (e.g. Syria), due to a lack of presence/resource constraints. The CIS Regional Office, has succeeded in establishing five posts of Gender Advisor to support UNCTs in a number of

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<sup>17</sup> Norad (2009) Assessment of UNIFEM Afghanistan Discussion Report 21/2009 and Social Development Direct (2010) Light Touch Review of UNIFEM Progress against 2008-2011 Strategic Plan (report for DFID)

countries. Staff in country point out the challenges of taking on a lead/coordinating role when presence is slim – perhaps just one person; while previously such a role might have been played by UNFPA with considerably greater human resources to undertake the task. An Action Learning Project is underway in three countries over two years and should provide useful – and much needed – information on good practice. The current level of investment in UN Coordination has not been assessed from a value for money basis – which might be a worthwhile study to undertake.

- Whilst normative-operational links are being worked on programmatically, there are very few **explicit or concrete rationales / strategies** identified within regional, sub-regional and country strategies for strengthening the linkages between these (though some regional / sub-regional strategies, such as that for Africa and the East and Horn of Africa SRS, do at least recognize the need for more attention to the generation of these linkages.) The rationale for the different levels of work (micro, meso, and macro) is also only rarely explicit in SRSs and CSs, and while evidence points to work taking place at these different levels, the thinking articulation of strategies is unclear.
- **Feedback loops from the normative to the operational are constrained** - there are some instances of normative work informing operational planning and activity (e.g. through partnerships with state actors on regional-level programming or support to networks), but few of operational work informing normative activity other than the feeding in of good practice e.g. experience with Outcome 8 operational activities informing policy dialogue.
- There appears at field level to be little reference to e.g. **ECOSOC normative frameworks** or to **Security Council resolutions** (beyond 1325).
- The emphasis of the Results Tracking system on specific indicators means that **the longer-term processes** which lead to stronger normative-operational links are not always being captured in results reporting. Outcome 8 in particular provides an opportunity, but consultations indicated that reporting on this result area has been hampered by differences in its interpretation i.e. about a) attitudinal change e.g. around HIV and GBV or b) models and south-south exchange. There is demand for some illustrations of good practice related to this outcome and how to support the linkages.

### 3.4c) Summary messages

A considerable volume of work is taking place to address normative and operational linkages, and to support the mainstreaming of GEWE within UN Co-ordination processes, at headquarters and field levels. The SP (as the framework for the delivery of UNIFEM's mandate) has provided **legitimation and a platform for discourse** with partners on these issues. However, it has not **acted as a driver for strategic or operational activity**:

- The current SP **does highlight the normative-operational linkages and the role of UNIFEM in UN co-ordination** for the realization of the GEWE mandate. However strategies and mechanisms for operationalising these commitments; guidance and, particularly, dissemination of examples of good/promising practice do not adequately support this work.
- While UNIFEM's mandate appears to be **well understood by partners**, including other UN agencies, the SP is more of an internal planning document and is therefore not generally well known. There is currently no strategy or guidance on communicating this.
- UNIFEM's role as a **driver of GEWE within UNCTs** is not always understood or accepted by other agencies. There is scope for clarifying this (and the consequences in terms of resource allocation) as well as reviewing value for money from current levels of investment in coordination fora.

### 3.5 The information base: To what extent has the SP delivered an information base to support any later evaluation?

This section of the report considers the information base generated through the SP and its Results Frameworks which would facilitate later evaluation. It finds that overall, the implementation of the SP and its Results Frameworks has delivered a ***partial – though far from comprehensive – evidence base*** to support any subsequent evaluation. This evidence base is comprised of: up to date performance information on the SP results and process areas; very limited baseline information; and some (though still fragmented) evaluation and research evidence.

#### 3.5a) Organisational progress

The corporate effort devoted to embedding the Results Tracking system has resulted in a **step change** for the organisation in generating a coherent evidence base to support later evaluation. The main ingredients of this are:

- The ***availability of recent and fully aligned performance information*** on the key result and process areas of the SP. Through the online tracking system, data for 2008 and 2009 are present; that for 2010 for most sampled offices had not been uploaded at the time of writing.
- Performance information which includes the ***aggregation of data*** from country to corporate level via sub-regional offices and regional divisions, reflected in the production of the Annual Report and reports to the Consultative Committee and Executive Board.
- The emergence of ***some baseline data***, particularly supporting Outcomes 1,2 and 4 on the normative frame – for example all of the SRSs reviewed contain some normative baseline material - and evidence of some strong country examples of baselines, such as the Colombia country office Monitoring Matrix – though this has not been generally taken up and used across the office. There is widespread recognition of the importance of baselines and a desire to establish them, though coverage is generally more systematic at project level, often in response to donor demand. There is a question over whether a clear rationale exists for baselines at SRO level; one office felt that resources would be more usefully deployed into generating programme and country-level baselines.
- Some instances of ***high quality context analyses***, which provide a narrative form of baseline information, such as the Caribbean SRS and the Ending Violence Against Women strategy plus e.g. Albania office, which has undertaken a number of country studies and statistical reviews to support country planning (though not yet pulled these together into

baseline form). A number of offices e.g. Afghanistan support the production of national baseline information on gender, which should inform country strategy baselines<sup>18</sup>.

- A **Meta-evaluation (2009)**: which covers 2004-07 plus 2008 of the current SP, was designed to be SP aligned and to integrate human rights and gender equity in evaluation design. This draws out a good deal of synthesis from the reports reviewed; since this reviewed work took place in 2008 or earlier, the report could, therefore, arguably be considered as relevant to the SP baseline (for both DRF and MRF).
- Generally more **systematic baseline coverage at project level**, due in large part to donor demand. Clear examples were provided from the field visits, such as the two Funds operating in Colombia (Eliminating Violence Against Women and the Gender Equality Fund), which employ clear baselines and targets. Informants from both Funds indicate that baselines are a requirement and their efforts on this score are illustrative – see Box 3.
- Due to the strong alignment of the evaluations system with the SP, **detailed and relevant monitoring and evaluation plans** at SRO / thematic level e.g. that produced by Andean SRO, and the emergence of some evaluations which cohere with the SP result areas.

Additionally, the systems progress made so far has enabled central-level reporting – a factor which in itself would support later corporate SP evaluation.

### Box 3: Experience of EVAW UN Trust Fund and Gender Fund with baselines

For the longer established UN EVAW Trust Fund, the quality of baselines is found by staff to vary considerably, as do capacities of organisations to develop them. Staff now encourage the development of country baselines using academic and NGO expertise, which can largely provide the information needed for individual grantee project/programme baselines.

The Fund for Gender Equality is at the point of requesting baselines to be produced, having allowed time for baseline studies and data collection. External technical expertise was provided to grantees in developing logframes, including work on indicators and baselines.

While neither Fund has attempted to create a centralised baseline, both are investing in overall assessment of achievements. The UN Trust Fund (with 83 active grants in 72 countries) is currently looking at outcomes achieved using an outcome mapping and verification approach that includes looking at baselines. The Gender Fund is currently working with 40 grantees to agree cross cutting indicators and align grantee logframes with the overall Fund M&E Framework.

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<sup>18</sup> MOWA (2008) Women and Men in Afghanistan: Baseline Statistics on Gender

### 3.5b) Challenges identified:

Despite these gains, a **number of challenges remain** to the evidence base which would need to be addressed in positioning UN Women comfortably in relation to the production of its evidence base for later performance assessment. These include:

Overall, the performance information available under Outcomes 5-8 to date is less comprehensive. Factors include:

- The **challenges of uploading evidence of progress** in these areas, which are often less tangible and require office-level decisions on what constitutes progress against indicators (see critique in Annex 4)
- The **definition challenges** around Outcome 3, which is an area of weakness (see Annex 4)
- The **lack of analysis feeding down** to SROs and COs beyond e.g. PACs and the Strategic Planning Workshops, which acts as a disincentive for identifying areas of weakness and intensifying efforts accordingly.

Secondly, the current system does not allow for the **aggregation of data over time** – that is, while aggregation up from country to corporate level is possible, reporting against any particular outcome over e.g. a three or five-year period is not currently feasible. Such reporting is essential to demonstrate aggregate progress over strategic planning and funding periods, and is particularly relevant at country and corporate levels.

Thirdly, **baseline development has been an area of very limited progress** – there is:

- **No clear starting position on results** (with targets) to be achieved over the SP period (though the MYFF evaluation as indicated could present a useful starting point).
- **No clear rationale for, or statement of,** what constitutes, a ‘baseline’; a factor that has constrained SROs and COs in their efforts. Clear distinctions emerged from the field visits between conceptualisations e.g. some offices considered a narrative baseline adequate while others emphasised the use of statistical data particularly against the normative frame
- A general lack of **corporate demand / comprehensive drive** for baselines from within the organisation, including a lack of centrally-issued guidance – none of the offices surveyed reported requests for baseline information from HQ
- No systematic attempt **to extract baseline information** to underpin the MRF and DRF from e.g. the MYFF evaluation

Finally, there is **no comprehensive picture as yet of evaluation evidence** on the SP change processes:

- Research and evaluations are still largely **project / thematically focused** and heavily driven by donors. Efforts are being made to plan and map evaluations e.g. at sub-regional level (and particularly where regionally-based Evaluation Unit staff are in place, such as in Andean SRO), but the body of evaluation evidence so far is mainly constructed around these parameters.
- While the strategies and plans around evaluation are strong and coherent with the SP and relevant Results Frameworks (mainly the DRF), **the implementation of the process** is

often weaker in terms of the utilisation of evaluation findings / the extraction of lesson-learning to support strategic and programmatic planning (beyond the PAC process). There is no evidence yet of a comprehensive lesson-learning process from evaluations within offices, sections or globally, and the study found instances in offices where colleagues were not aware of evaluations conducted by projects / programmes in areas of work beyond their own.

### 3.5c) Summary messages

In summary: Overall, the progress made to date in setting parameters for the evidence base, and partially populating this, has positioned UNIFEM **somewhat closer** towards possessing the information needed to assess progress in any later evaluation – though **gaps remain**. Specifically:

- The systems and processes set in place by the Strategic Planning process have enabled the generation of a far **more focused and coherent evidence base** to support later evaluation than was previously the case under the MYFF. At the very least, recent and aligned performance data is in place, which is aggregated up from country to corporate level.
- However, this base is **not yet comprehensive** and, as it stands, would only **partially allow for assessment of progress**. The system does not allow for aggregation of information over time (e.g. progress against a particular outcome at country or central level). There is no **clear starting position** centrally on anticipated results including clear targets and the timeframe within which they will be achieved, and no **clear guidance** centrally on baselines, including expectations, tools and reporting requirements.
- **Baselines are a notable area of weakness** for both DRF and MRF, beyond information on the normative frame supporting outcomes 1-4 and project and programme baseline data (though the latter is far from comprehensive and largely driven by donors).
- An evaluation evidence base which is **starting to produce results** but which currently lacks a systematic approach to a) generating evaluation information around areas of strategic institutional interest and b) joining up the **feedback loops** between evaluation reports and strategic planning and operations.
- An (as yet) **absence of longitudinal studies** or clarity on specific studies to generate information to meet the needs of strategy evaluation

## 4. Overall Conclusions and Lessons Learned

This section brings together the **main conclusions** from the findings outlined in Section 3, where more detail can be found in summary messages at the end of each sub-section. It then identifies **lessons learned** around the SP, the strategic planning process and systems for implementation which have arisen from the findings and conclusions above. These lessons have been extrapolated to have broader relevance, and in particular with the aim of generating a clear evidence base for UN Women strategic planning going forward.

### 4.1 Overall Conclusions

1. The Strategic Plan (2008-2011) and the understanding of change on which it is based provide a **relevant, appropriate and conceptually sound articulation** of UNIFEM's core mandate on achievement of GEWE. However, there are some **technical weaknesses** which constrain its effective implementation. These include:
  - a. There is **insufficient development of the understanding of change and results logic**
  - b. There is **inadequate recognition of potentially different pathways of change** e.g. those within conflict/post-conflict situations and in middle income contexts
  - c. There is very **limited acknowledgement within the SP of the assumptions and risks** that underlie the processes of change, such as the political factors that drive or hinder this
  - d. The **roles of key strategies** (e.g. Knowledge Management, Capacity Development) in linking outcomes and progressing change are **not sufficiently elaborated**
  - e. Despite the considerable improvement from the MYFF, **specific results and neutral and measurable indicators / concrete targets are not consistently applied within the SP** framework, **nor does it have a baseline** to set a starting point
  - f. The **primacy of country strategy planning** has been a relatively recent departure within the strategic planning process.

The systems developed for SP implementation represent a **major transformation** in the way UNIFEM has sought to introduce a results based culture and to collect and analyse data for performance monitoring – though implementation has **not delivered the results oriented culture** envisaged. Specifically:

- a. SP guidance material to support sections and offices to develop linked strategies is **good practice but can be improved on in terms of timeliness and comprehensiveness**
- b. The results tracking system has enabled **comprehensive results reporting** at global level but its main gearing towards (centralised) annual reporting has **constrained its potential utility for more locally-relevant performance management and trend analysis**
- c. **Limited analysis of trends/progress and downwards feedback loops** is constraining the flow and use of valuable information
- d. There is need for **to complement reporting on fixed and sometimes narrow global indicators** to enable offices and sections to report on significant wider changes
- e. Considerable progress has been made on results measurement but **present systems are not yet geared to support comprehensive results management** (through

the full programme cycle). In particular **monitoring is not well developed**, though significant progress has been made to move towards results-focused evaluation

2. The SP, its Results Frameworks and associated systems have provided a **clear organising frame** to make explicit UNIFEM's work and strategic focus to its staff and partners. They have supported coherence and consistency across the organisation. However, their potential value is **not being fully realised** (especially at sub-regional and country levels):
  - a. The understanding of how change will be supported through the SP has **not been sufficiently tested and validated at local level**
  - b. The SP is providing a conceptual **umbrella for thematic and strategic coherence, rather than acting as a strategic driver for operations**
  - c. The Results Tracking System is **not adequately supporting local reporting and decision-making**
  - d. UNIFEM's **status in the UN, inadequate staffing and insufficient predictability of resources** constrain effective implementation, and are out of sync with the aims of the SP
  - e. The process of development of the SP and related strategies (such as country strategies) took place rapidly, and **without the time period required for full engagement and discussion** with staff and partners.
  
3. Under the SP a considerable volume of work is taking place to **address normative and operational linkages** and to support the **mainstreaming of GEWE within UN Coordination processes centrally** and at field level. However, this is also not yet being conducted to its full potential:
  - a. While UNIFEM's mandate is generally understood by partners, **the SP document is not generally well known or communicated**
  - b. There is a need for **clearer definition of the role of 'driver' within UNCTs**, a focus on **impact as well as process** in coordination work, **corporate commitment** to agreed arrangements secured (e.g. providing human and financial resources to carry out an agreed co-ordination role) and the **distillation and sharing of good/promising practice**
  - c. While the SP has facilitated staff to make explicit the connections between normative and operational work, **further work is needed to strengthen these linkages**, including generation of an evidence base on what is working/not working
  
4. The measures taken to provide evidence of SP impact has enabled the generation of a **more focused and coherent evidence base for future evaluation** than was the case under MYFF. In particular there is now up-to-date and aligned performance data which is aggregated from country to corporate level. However:
  - a. The lack of **clarity on starting position** (baseline); an **absence of clear targets** (in country strategies as well as corporate SP) and **inadequate monitoring systems and capacity**, severely limits robust and comprehensive performance measurement
  - b. The **evaluation evidence base is gradually developing** but lacks a) a systematic approach to generating evaluation information around areas of strategic institutional interest; b) feedback loops between evaluation reports and strategic planning and operations; and longitudinal studies

## 4.2 Lessons Learned

The following lessons have been extrapolated from the findings and conclusions as having wider relevance (including the UN Women strategic planning process):

1. **An organisation-wide strategic plan results logic, whereby the underlying belief in how change happens and the cause-effect rationale of the plan, needs to be clear and articulated in appropriate detail;** this includes the identification of a long-term goal that captures the whole of the organisation's mandate (even if the time-bound strategic plan-specific goal is set earlier in the change process); clarity in results statements and their inter-linkages (DRF and MRF); and indicators that enable aggregate tracking but which also support performance measurement in context.
2. However, it is important for a corporate SP to provide a **strategic framework that gives direction to but does not constrain country level flexibility** to respond to context. This implies a broad framework at corporate level, including e.g. clear outcome statements and targets, but which allows countries to demonstrate through their own results frameworks how they will contribute to these changes.
3. **Development and validation of a strategic plan through consultation and a comprehensive planning process helps build technical quality, ownership and institutional buy-in.** Understanding and use of tools such as the corporate strategic plan and any results frameworks, including a clear theory of change, and alignment with associated systems (such as work planning and monitoring) is predicated on this, and are largely determined by staff involvement in the process of their development. This implies that a broad-based participatory process involving relevant staff across the organisation and which takes account of bottom-up and top-down planning, is essential for any successful strategic plan development process.
4. **A strategic plan which includes high-level ambitions requires concomitant investment in resources – human and financial.** Despite significant financial investment and increased funding over the period under review in UNIFEM, performance based budgeting or human resource planning is not yet fully in place. There need to be very clear and explicit links between a strategic plan and staffing, professional development, and elapsed time to conduct a participatory strategic planning process and to ensure assimilation across the institution.
5. A key message is the **primacy of country-level for change.** Even with a strategic plan which is clear that the locus of change is at national level, successful implementation at country level requires a number of conditions related to structures, systems (planning, appraisal, monitoring & reporting, quality assurance and guidance and evaluation), capacities, the contextualisation of the strategic plan and theory of change, and human and financial resourcing. (These messages are not new to UN Women, but their implications need to be considered any new strategic plan)
6. **The implementation of a strategic plan needs to be accompanied by an organisation-wide shift from results measurement/tracking to results planning and management.** This requires significant investment of time and resources. Over and above accountability needs, there is a need to ensure that any system's contribution towards a broader culture of results management supports effective use of information to guide and accelerate progress. Elements include: clear feedback loops; investment in support/guidance, monitoring and evaluation systems (including at the country level); the recruitment and capacity development of dedicated staff and/or external expertise to support these systems. Any such system also needs to allow for reporting on gains beyond indicators, recognising the process-based nature of change, the fluidity of context specificity, and the need to aggregate up over time.
7. **A strategic plan can provide staff with a valuable tool to promote the organisation's remit to strengthen normative-operational connections and to be 'a driver of gender equality' within the UN.** While such a tool enables staff in many contexts to act strategically in leveraging this mandate, space and performance are dependent on a number of factors including: coordination mechanisms; strategies for engaging with these, and guidance provided; the status and capacities of staff and of offices within the UN system.

8. ***Building an evidence base to support results-based management and future evaluation is demanding and, realistically, needs to happen incrementally rather than all at once.*** Key building blocks include the setting in place of an evaluation policy and strategy; a monitoring and reporting policy; lessons from experience to guide refinement of performance measurement; and the necessary feedback loops to support results management. For baselines, clear institutional demand and clarity of purpose and pragmatism are needed.

## 5 Recommendations

Based on the above conclusions and lessons, the **following recommendations** are made to UN Women which may help (a) improve any new plan as a results-based management tool and (b) support any new strategic planning process in order to strengthen both the plan and institutional buy-in.

The recommendations are supported by **proposals for how they might be operationalised**, with due regard for the current internal context i.e. the process of confirming the institutional arrangements of UN Women. The proposals for operationalisation presented are, at this stage, options to be considered only. They cannot be more definitive given limited engagement by the consultants with the new entity.

In developing these recommendations, the consultants were clear that the **main benefit of this study will be that of feeding into UN Women's new institutional context**, including its future strategic plan and the use of results based tools and systems to implement its mandate. The recommendations have benefited from engagement with staff through the Reference Group comments on an emerging findings paper, and from comments in writing and in person on a later discussion paper which supported a workshop in January 2011.

Table of Recommendations

Theme/Issue	Recommendation	Proposals for Operationalisation
<b>Overarching recommendation</b>	<b>Develop a corporate strategic plan based around a central framework, including corporate level outcomes and targets, but which allows countries and sections to flexibly identify their contributions to this. Countries and sections should then develop context specific results frameworks with clear starting points (baseline); outcome and output targets (results) and the pathway (process and interim steps) towards achieving this.</b>	
<b>Towards a Robust Strategic Plan</b>	<p><b>1. Build on, make more explicit and validate the results logic of any future strategic plan</b> through elaborating further the understanding of change to take account of movement over time and to clarify relationships between corporate and country level results logic (including any in- between levels).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Develop a logic model (building on e.g. the results logic in Annex 6 of the SP or around the schematic in Section 2) that is clear but sufficiently flexible to allow for different pathways of change for countries, thematic sections, major strategies. Included in this process should be the articulation of assumptions and risks and of external factors and thematic and outcome connects.</li> <li>b. Additionally, develop and apply a broad-based Performance Measurement Framework (which identifies outcome level results; core indicators, sources and responsibilities for tracking) to allow for capturing corporate level strategic plan results.</li> <li>c. Develop more specific and tailored results frameworks at country / thematic level, allowing for outputs, year on year progress milestones/results and how these feed into higher level outcomes (with explicit targets and context-specific plus core indicators).</li> <li>d. Agree and disseminate a glossary of definitions (for example the RBM Terminology used in UN Country Programming and contained in the UNDG RBM Handbook (Sept 2010);</li> <li>e. Have regular, mandatory orientation of new staff that focuses on the SP and its corporate-level results</li> </ul>
	<p><b>2. Further strengthen the goal, outcome and output statements in line with the results logic</b>, including a long-term goal that addresses the vision of gender equality and women’s empowerment (to embed the longer-term goal of GEWE into the SP results planning and logic).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. When developing indicators of achievement, build on the qualitative as well as quantitative indicators developed; specify targets where possible; and identify sources to test measurability (the Performance Measurement Framework tool in 1.b captures this)</li> <li>b. Develop a limited number of core corporate SP indicators with additional tailored indicators to be decided at other levels depending on context</li> <li>c. Support the process with statistical expertise and guidance;</li> <li>d. Acknowledge the complexity of social transformation and the need to balance linear cause and effect logic planning through more adaptive approaches less easily measured</li> </ul>
	<p><b>3. Require the development of baselines within one year of strategic plan development.</b> Development result baselines should be established principally at country level while a management results baseline</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Provide guidance and training on baselines especially for the first year of the new SP, (including for conflict/post-conflict situations) and ensure the dissemination of experience and promising practice from any of the four UN Women entities and the two Trust Funds.</li> <li>b. Clarify that a baseline describes the starting point relative to the plan results (it is not a generalised context analysis).</li> </ul>

	needs to be developed corporately and at country level.	
<b>The Strategic Planning Process</b>	4. <b>Recognise that the primacy of change is at the country level</b> – so merge bottom-up with top-down planning processes. Timing and sequencing of planning will need to take account of institutional demands for a UN Women strategic plan within a short time frame (a draft in April 2011 for June submission to the Executive Board)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Develop and disseminate a roadmap for the corporate strategic planning process to inform staff and clarify consultation processes and channels to which staff and stakeholders can contribute</li> <li>b. In the process, distinguish the essential elements of the corporate SP for Executive Board submission and those that can be elaborated later in a more consultative manner;</li> <li>c. Devise mechanisms for consultation and communication e.g. representative groups from field offices, briefing notes, regular intranet updates</li> <li>d. Develop a roadmap for the country strategy planning process that allows flexibility for country conditions / links into UNDAF and other local planning cycles</li> <li>e. Extend guidance materials and training (examples might include: guidance on analysing the enabling environment; on selection of indicators and targets)</li> </ul>
	5. <b>Develop a communications strategy</b> to inform stakeholders at all levels on the UN Women mandate, strategic planning process and strategic plan including further clarification of the normative and operational linkages and role as a ‘driver’ of gender mainstreaming in UNCT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Spell out the role of ‘driver’ of GEWE in the UN, clarify responsibilities and modalities and capture and disseminate good practice</li> <li>b. Spell out clearly the normative and operational dimensions of UN Women’s mandate; provide evidence to demonstrate the linkages and how this supports better results/more benefits for women and men</li> <li>c. Provide HRBA Guidance</li> <li>d. Elaborate, validate and identify experience of successful work relative to key strategies such as Partnership; Knowledge Management and working with men</li> <li>e. Consider a specific focus on learning from UN Coordination work at country level and on normative-operational linkages to guide any new strategic planning process</li> </ul>
<b>Systems to support implementation of the strategic plan</b>	6. <b>Develop and strengthen the systems needed to support results management through the full programme/strategy cycle</b> (including evaluation), keeping the country as the primary unit of change – and set and uphold minimum standards for this.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Develop and refine current SP guidance and ensure timely dissemination to offices (see 4.e above)</li> <li>b. Develop support mechanisms such as call-down technical support; Peer Learning; Community of Practice; Results champions</li> <li>c. Develop results-based management capacity at country and sub-regional level, including dedicated expertise in large offices or to support smaller offices from sub-region/region</li> <li>d. Clarify responsibilities for monitoring of results (performance monitoring) and develop a practical monitoring manual that is explicit on roles and responsibilities of different levels; includes simple tools e.g. use of ‘traffic lights’ for self-assessment of progress; establish monitoring protocols for field visits/missions</li> <li>e. Develop and use downwards and lateral feedback loops (as well as upwards)</li> <li>f. Invest in knowledge management tools and techniques and make available both internal and external Knowledge Management specialist support</li> <li>g. Embed a results focus in SP appraisal tools and quality assurance mechanisms (peer</li> </ul>

		<p>support and review can be useful for coherence and quality)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>h. Develop results-based work plan templates/guidance for offices and individuals</li> <li>i. Align the various tools and processes at different levels e.g. SP; SRS, CS, Results Frameworks, Annual Implementation Plans, Individual Work Plans, Annual Planning, Annual Review, Programme meetings, Programme and Financial Reporting</li> </ul>
	<p>7. <b>Develop and refine the results tracking system to support local level monitoring</b> as well as systematic centralised results reporting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Assess the requirements at field level and the technology required to meet these</li> <li>b. Develop country reporting guidance/template that meets local and central needs</li> <li>c. Provide training to relevant staff, collect and disseminate examples of good practice</li> </ul>
	<p>8. Given the complexity of social transformation required for GEWE, introduce <b>complementary approaches to results tracking that take account of non-linear change and the possibility of unplanned consequences</b> (positive and negative)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. To complement linear results logic, consider also tools from approaches such as Outcome Mapping and Most Significant Change to support SP articulation and implementation (experience of the UN EVAW Trust Fund in outcome mapping should be illustrative).</li> </ul>
<p>Increasing readiness of any future SP to be evaluated</p>	<p>9. <b>Retain the requirement for an evaluation plan in SP</b>, including country strategies, but base this on <b>strategic programme information needs</b>, rather than being dominated by project or donor requirements and require compliance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. While retaining objectivity, channel Evaluation Unit expertise into provision of guidance on addressing evaluation needs throughout the programme cycle</li> <li>b. Promote improved monitoring as a key input to evaluation, including annual and mid-term reviews</li> <li>c. Agree minimum standards for evaluations and develop and embed Quality Assurance processes</li> <li>d. Strengthen the feedback loops between evaluation reports and strategic planning and operations (beyond individual projects/programmes)</li> <li>e. Stress the importance of robust results frameworks (especially at country level) underpinned by baselines, and with clear targets and progress milestones/benchmarks as essential elements for demonstrating contribution</li> </ul>