



WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM UN WOMEN EVALUATIONS?

A meta-analysis of evaluations managed by UN Women in 2014 and 2015

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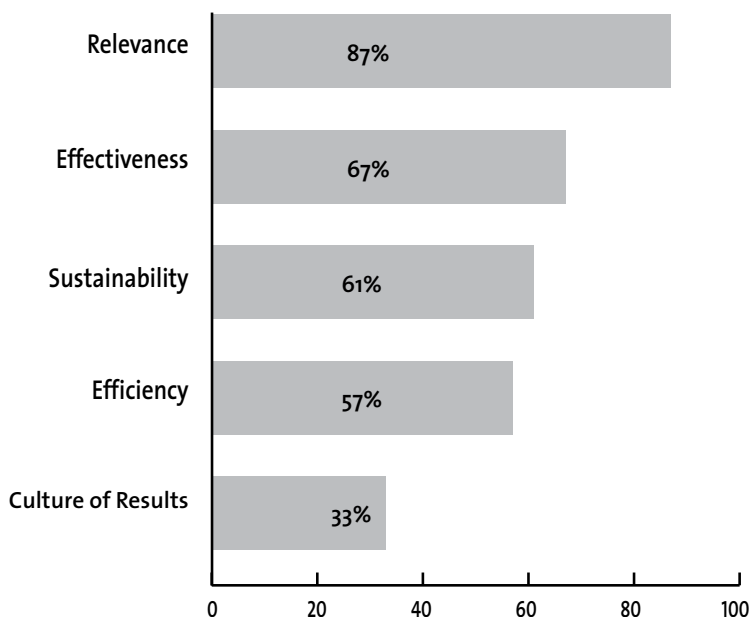
To promote accountability and related learning for strengthened organizational effectiveness, the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) undertakes annual meta-analyses. This year meta-analysis aggregated and synthesized information generated from 49 evaluations and transformed this evidence into accessible knowledge for future systematic strengthening of programming, organizational effectiveness and the evaluation function.

This brief provides the main conclusions, recommendations and lessons captured in the meta-analysis report which is available at <https://gate.unwomen.org/>. It also provides a brief synthesis of changes on some emergent insights captured in previous meta-analysis reports.

Key Finding

The quantitative and qualitative evidence broadly confirmed that UN Women is strongest in terms of the relevance of its interventions and the achievement of intended outputs. It further shows that UN Women interventions are increasingly making positive contributions towards gender equality outcomes and policy changes, but challenges remain in terms of reaching substantial scale and reach. In addition, there is a scope to improve results based management systems, efficiency and sustainability at the country level.

Performance of Development Effectiveness Criteria



* The percentage of satisfactory rating is based on positive findings about UN Women's performance.

Main Conclusions

- 1) The strongest aspect of UN-Women's development effectiveness is the high level of relevance its interventions have to both the policy context and the assessed needs of women.
- 2) UN-Women achieves stated outputs. However, increasing levels of evidence on UN-Women's contributions to outcomes highlights the need to expand the reach of interventions (to benefit more substantial numbers of people) and expand the timeframe of projects (to address root causes of marginalization and inequality).
- 3) Major determinants of outcome performance are the design and length of interventions, fragmentation of thematic areas and mandates, and the positive relationships maintained by UN-Women staff members.
- 4) Evaluations recommended that organizational priorities to improve development effectiveness should be to shift towards a programmatic approach, better leverage the UN coordination mandate at the country level, and streamline systems of decision-making.
- 5) Sustainability across UN-Women's operational portfolio is mixed, although the level of evidence that achievements are likely to continue with longer programming cycles is increasing.
- 6) Improvements in the instigation of results-based management systems at the country level continue to be held back by severe resource constraints, low capacity for monitoring and the need to strengthen project results indicators.

2013-2015 trends in development effectiveness

- 1) Relevance remains high, with noted improvement with regard to the selection of effective partnerships.
- 2) Evaluations are finding more evidence of UN-Women's contribution to outcomes, but the problem of scaling impact is still a challenge reported in many evaluations.



- 3) Evaluation evidence indicates an improvement in the operations efficiency of UN-Women, although scope remains for enhancing both organizational and programmatic efficiency.
- 4) Despite signs of improvement, substantive challenges to sustainability continued to be identified by most evaluations.
- 5) A positive trend in the deployment of results-based management systems continues to be held-back by weak monitoring capacity.

Lessons Learned

- 1) Flexibility in working with partners is a major comparative advantage for UN Women when it is used to adapt and improve programmes that are already being implemented. It is necessary to have a strong theory of change and effective mechanism for dialogue between partners to ensure that this flexibility positively contributes to improving development effectiveness.
- 2) Moving from delivering outputs to contributing to outcomes requires more complex interventions. These have worked best where there has been multi-disciplinary work—both within UN Women and through multi-stakeholder coordination of external technical experts.
- 3) Working with rights holders groups as implementing partners means working with both their strengths and their capacity challenges. Improving links between UN Women's different partners helps to maximize the comparative advantage of each partner and maximizes the benefit of UN Women's relationships with diverse groups of stakeholders.
- 4) Securing political support for UN Women at the highest level of government supports the achievement of results and also acts as an important attractor for other strategic partners.

- 5) UN joint programmes work best when management arrangements and responsibilities promote horizontal (mutual) accountability between partners. Parallel funding arrangements maintain traditional vertical accountability for fundraising and fund management, and entrench agency-specific interests.
- 6) Programming in fragile contexts carries particularly high levels of political and socio-cultural risk. Programme interventions work best when they are designed to maximize inclusion based on a clear understanding of inter-group dynamics.
- 7) Creating platforms for dialogue between women-led grassroots organizations and national decision makers is an effective tool for increasing the understanding and political will behind women's priorities in realizing their human rights.
- 8) Engagement with CSOs is especially important in building broader responses to GEWE. CSOs often have direct links with influential policymakers and some CSOs are relatively important players in their areas of specialization. To be successful, programmes need to recognize and respond to capacity gaps experienced by the women's movement at the local level.
- 9) UN Women can play a crucial role in institutionalizing spaces for dialogue between stakeholders at all levels to facilitate the process of change and overcome resistance to GEWE.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Address the fragmentation of thematic areas and mandates
- 2. Boost country-level UN coordination as a means to drive synergies and efficiency
- 3. Examine the case for multi-year country programme modalities to address concerns with short project cooperation agreements and sustainability
- 4. Expand and innovate the core value proposition of capacity development and technical assistance so as to include knowledge management and brokerage
- 5. Adopt special measures to address results-based management and monitoring at the country level
- 6. Conduct more high level and strategic country portfolio evaluations

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

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

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