



IN BRIEF

COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION

CAMBODIA



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This brief presents the key conclusions and recommendations of the Country Portfolio Evaluation (CPE) for the UN Women Cambodia Country Office Strategic Note 2019-2022. A CPE is a systematic assessment of the normative, coordination and operational aspects of UN Women's contributions to development results with respect to gender equality and the empowerment of women at the country level.

Background

UN Women established a Country Office in Cambodia with Delegation of Authority in 2013 after a long history in the country as UNIFEM (since 2004). The Country Office's total budget over the CPE period 2016–2019 (including core and non-core funds) was US\$ 5.9 million.¹ In 2019, the UN Women Change Management team identified the Cambodia Country Office as an office for transition due to various factors.

The Royal Government of Cambodia has continued to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in its overall development strategies. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the country's population experienced rapid economic growth and social change amid shrinking political space and protection of human rights:² laws instituted in Cambodia have limited the right and fundamental freedom to assembly and

association of peoples and civil society organizations (CSOs); and limited freedom of the press. The 2020 Global Gender Gap Index ranked Cambodia 89 of 127 countries. Women's political empowerment is low with only 20 per cent of seats in parliament and 9 per cent of ministerial positions held by women.³ Cambodia is classified as a "Medium Human Development" country in the Human Development Index (HDI), ranking 146 of 189 countries and territories: between 1990 and 2018, the country made significant progress with the HDI value increasing to 51 per cent.⁴

Evaluation purpose and intended audience

The Independent Evaluation Service (IES) primarily conducted this Country Portfolio Evaluation (CPE) to assess the contributions of UN Women in advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women in Cambodia. The CPE was designed to support enhanced accountability for development effectiveness and learning from experience based on implementation of the Country Office's previous Strategic Note cycle 2016–2018.

¹ Data taken from the Results Management System (RMS).

² UN Women Cambodia CO, AWP Cover Note (2019)/Asian Development Bank. Asian Development Outlook 2019 Update (September 2019) <https://www.adb.org/countries/cambodia/economy>

³ World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Index 2020, available online: http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf

⁴ UNDP HDI report 2019, available online: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/2019-human-development-index-ranking>

A secondary purpose was to provide a forward-looking perspective to support decision-making for the continuation of the current Strategic Note 2019-2022 and to provide insights on the strategic direction for the Country Office within the context of the changing status of the office and COVID-19.

The primary intended users of this evaluation are the country office personnel and the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. The secondary intended users are UN Women headquarters, the Government of Cambodia; civil society as representatives of rights holders; and development partners, such as UN agencies and bilateral/ multilateral agencies.

Evaluation objectives and methodology

The evaluation had the following objectives:

1. Assess effectiveness and organizational efficiency in progressing towards the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women results.
2. Assess the relevance and coherence of UN Women programme vis-a-vis the UN system to identify the added value of UN Women.
3. Analyse how a human rights approach and gender equality principles are integrated in the design and implementation of UN women's work in Cambodia and contribute to sustainability of efforts.
4. Provide lessons learned and actionable recommendations to support UN Women strategic positioning moving forward.

The evaluation employed a non-experimental, theory-based design and was gender-responsive. The evaluation focused on the previous and current Strategic Note cycles covering the period 2016–2019 and the first half of 2020, with a view to the Country Office's future strategy, particularly considering its transition from a Country Office to non-resident status. UN Women's integrated mandate was assessed, including contributions in operational (implementation of projects), UN system coordination and normative spheres. The ongoing COVID-19 global health emergency and the transition of Country Office personnel caused unprecedented issues for the Country Office and the evaluation process.

DATA COLLECTED FOR THE CPE



DESK REVIEW

+70 Documents reviewed



45 INDIVIDUALS CONSULTED



34 females



11 males



1 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

with 5 female and 1 male Youth Leaders.



2 ONLINE SURVEYS

18 Respondents

11 UN Women CO personnel



8 females



3 males

7 agencies



3 females



3 males



1 Prefer not to say



1 CASE STUDY

Case study focusing on Ending violence against women (EVAW) and National action plan prevent violence against women (NAPVAW).

LIMITATIONS



COVID-19 travel restrictions for core team meant majority of interviews were remote.



2 field visits by National evaluator, but also reliance on UN Women reporting.



Although limited number it represents key stakeholders identified by the Country Office and across range of stakeholder types.

KEY FINDINGS



Relevance and coherence

The Country Office demonstrated a deep understanding of the country context and employed strategies that were relevant to this context. The Country Office was able to build trust with partners through sustained engagement, provision of technical expertise, flexibility and by listening and responding to the priorities of its partners – whether government or civil society.

The Country Office is recognized as the lead UNCT agency on gender equality and the empowerment of women, having made substantial technical contributions to mainstreaming gender in the UNDAF; although a noted void in gender equality and women's empowerment leadership had already been felt in 2020 as the Country Office transitioned to Non-resident status and therefore decreased engagement in coordination activities.

During 2019, UN Women underwent a corporate Change Management process in which the typology for country presence was reviewed. Despite the strong relationships established, if clarity on the office's vision and way forward is not provided in a timely manner, there is a risk to the impact of programming, with a loss of credibility and diminished trust in UN Women. The external stakeholders consulted as part of the evaluation, including government, donor and UN partners expressed frustration and confusion regarding the status and future of the Country Office.



Effectiveness

A comprehensive strategy to build capacities at individual and institutional levels translated into empowered voices that advocated for normative change and resulted in progress for gender equality and women's empowerment. This comprehensive approach could provide inspiration to other UN Women offices and gender equality advocates around the world, particularly those operating in environments where civic space is constrained.

The Country Office is recognized as contributing to strengthened normative frameworks, particularly in EAW and overall government and UNCT support to gender equality and women's empowerment. This can be seen in the extent of national ownership to lead and respond to normative processes, such as CEDAW.

The Country Office has made significant contributions to advancing normative work on EAW by supporting the development of national action plans, guidelines and tools through technical expertise and convening partners. However, implementation remains a challenge due to weak capacity at subnational level and limited dedicated budgets for gender.

Although there is still much work to be done, the successful actions in Cambodia, for example, in relation to the development and implementation of the National Action Plan (I-III) on Violence Against Women must be celebrated: mechanisms for coordinating multisectoral VAWG service response have been strengthened; gender focal points have been established; and awareness of gender issues were raised by many civil servants. The evaluation identified lessons learned from the three NAPVAW processes supported by UN Women.



Human rights and gender equality and Sustainability

The Country Office's strength is its ability to engage with grassroots organizations and build capacities for mobilizing and advocacy on gender equality and women's empowerment – amplifying the voices of the most marginalized groups: persons with disabilities, LGBTIQ persons, women living with HIV, women migrant workers and youth, which in some cases has contributed towards their recognition by state entities. The Country Office employed three main strategies that were successful in amplifying the voices of civil society and in ensuring that marginalized voices were heard:

1. Utilizing coordination mechanisms or platforms to convene stakeholders and amplify marginalized voices on policy initiatives.
2. Targeted programming to marginalized groups at community level.
3. Long-term capacity building efforts targeted at marginalized groups.

The Country Office's approach facilitated national ownership: for example, the Cambodia National Council for Women (CNCW) took the lead in collecting data and reporting to the CEDAW committee in 2019; and women leaders coached by UN Women took the lead on civil society reports. The Country Office also inspired women and youth leaders to amplify their voices through their own platforms, such as #loveisdiversity. There is opportunity to strengthen efforts at the systemic level in tackling informal norms and exclusionary practices, such as scaling up the feminist leadership building approach and engaging men and boys.



Organizational efficiency

The Country Office demonstrated dedication to learning and there were examples of good practice in measuring progress of not only the number of training participants, but also application of the knowledge received. Within the context of the changed status of the Country Office, continued dedication to measuring progress will be important, especially for partners that will carry forward the efforts of UN Women, to ensure lessons are learned and gains are documented.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Conclusion 1:

During the transition of the Country Office to Non-resident status, stakeholders have waited patiently for clarity on the office's future vision. Recognizing that 2020 has been a year of upheaval due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, 2021 should be used to develop the office's vision, ensuring that the strong partnerships built over the years are maintained.



Recommendation 1:

The Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific to articulate a clear vision for UN Women's footprint or exit strategy in Cambodia in line with the UN Women Presence Governance Policy, Guidance and Procedure and communicate this to stakeholders.



Conclusion 2:

Momentum on progress on gender equality and women's empowerment in Cambodia may be stalled without a full UN Women presence on the ground. With the Country Office's change in status, there is a high risk that UN Women in Cambodia will not be able to meet the expectations of all stakeholders. The transition period should be used to ensure smooth partnership handover.



Recommendation 2:

UN Women Cambodia to establish a strategy for transitioning key normative and coordination roles to UN partners or other relevant development partners and, where possible, identify linkages between ongoing programmes and government counterparts to not lose the momentum already achieved and to ensure continuity during and post transition.



Conclusion 3:

Given the limited space for civil society, grassroots capacity and network building remains highly relevant. There is space for the Country Office to ensure these efforts are sustained through linkages with UN partners and ongoing programmes in EAW and climate change/disaster risk management, so that they can tap into these networks and continue and scale up the successful capacity building efforts with youth, women's leaders, LGBTIQ persons, migrant workers and women living with HIV. These efforts will in turn support positive gender norm change.



Recommendation 3:

Identify entry points within current programming efforts and those of UN partners (such as the ILO) to continue capacity building efforts at the grassroots level targeting women's leaders, youth leaders, LGBTIQ persons, women migrant workers, women with disabilities and women living with HIV to ensure the gains made are sustained and nurtured.

3 KEY LESSONS LEARNED



Development partners support to civil society engagement in countries where civic space is constrained, by ensuring inclusiveness in processes related to the formulation of national plans and strategies, is essential for more comprehensive policy approaches that respond to diverse needs.



A comprehensive approach to capacity building through engagement of a cohort of civil society actors in long-term training, application of knowledge and coaching efforts is an effective way of contributing to the women's movement, particularly in countries where civic space is constrained.



Building a strong joint risk management plan with partners that is continuously updated as contexts change can help to mitigate and address challenges that arise.