



EVALUATION OF REGIONAL OFFICE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC
CONTRIBUTIONS TO WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

Synthesis Report



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This evaluation was conducted by the UN Women Independent Evaluation Service (IES). The evaluation team comprised Sabrina Evangelista, UN Women Regional Evaluation Specialist for Asia and the Pacific and team lead for this evaluation; Aleksandar Zivanovic, international evaluation consultant; Rachel Aquino, national evaluation consultant for the case study on the prevention of violent extremism in the Philippines; Caitlyn Quinn, international publications and communications analyst; Arushi Pankaj Dubey, Evaluation Research Intern; and Trang Pham also contributed to the inception phase as the international evaluation consultant.

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ACRONYMS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AP	Asia Pacific
BARM	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
BGD	Bangladesh
CAD	Canadian Dollar
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CO	Country Office
CSO	civil society organization
DPPA	Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
EVAW	ending violence against women
FGD	focus group discussion
FSI	Fragility State Index
GBV	gender-based violence
GEWE	gender equality and women's empowerment
GGGI	Global Gender Gap Index
GNWP	Global Network of Women Peacebuilders
HA	Humanitarian Action
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
IAS	Internal Audit Service
IDN	Indonesia
IEAS	Independent Evaluation and Audit Services
IES	Independent Evaluation Service
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGO	international non-governmental organization
INTERPOL	International Criminal Police Organization
LGBTIQ	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
NAP	National Action Plan
NGO	non-governmental organization
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development-Development Assistance Committee
OEEF	Organizational Effectiveness and Efficiency Framework

PCVE	preventing and countering violent extremism
PHL	the Philippines
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PO	Programme Office
PPO	Programme Presence Offices
PVE	preventing violent extremism
RCO	United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office
RES	Regional Evaluation Specialist
RO	Regional Office
ROAP	Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SN	Strategic Note
SP	Strategic Plan
ToC	theory of change
ToR	terms of reference
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDPPA	United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCT	United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNRCO	United Nations Resident Coordinator Office
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council resolution
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
VAW	violence against women
VE	violent extremism
WLE	women in law enforcement
WEE	women's economic empowerment
WPS	women, peace and security



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EVALUATION OF REGIONAL OFFICE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS TO WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

Introduction and background

UN Women’s efforts in women, peace and security are guided by a series of international commitments including United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 and nine supporting resolutions: 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, 2242, 2467 and 2493. Other key reference points are the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular Goals 5 and 16, further reflects Member States’ recognition that the solutions to peace and security and sustainable development are inextricably linked.

KEY FIGURES

42

Approx. **42 projects*** in the Asia and the Pacific region were implemented by 10 UN Women field presences** and the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific between 2017–2020

36M

These projects had a total committed budget of more than **\$US36.8 million***** between 2017–2020

57%

Of these, 16 projects, or 38 per cent, were exclusively funded by the Government of Japan. The **16 projects account for 57 per cent of the total women, peace and security budget** in the region between 2017–2020, or more than US\$20.8 million.

*We count each project by its unique project ID. For example, the regional project on prevention of violent extremism spans over four years, but each year, its budget, its project ID, its coverage and its interventions are different, and they are counted as different projects.

**The UN Women offices implementing the women, peace and security portfolio include: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Timor Leste and Thailand. Some regional activities were also implemented in Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Viet Nam. Pakistan implemented one preventing violent extremism project of approximately US\$1 million, but it was subsumed under the women’s economic empowerment portfolio, and the Regional Office did not provide a women, peace and security focal point, thus it was not captured during this mapping.

***Source of information is the committed budget specified in the Project Document or Donor Agreement. For projects beginning in 2020 and ended post-2020, its total committed budget for the whole duration is used, not the delivery to date. This is for consistent treatment among projects but also for ease of compilation. Thus, the actual budget/delivery may vary.

Evaluation purpose and intended audience

The purpose of this evaluation was to provide insights for decision-making with respect to the work of the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific on women, peace and security over the next Strategic Note period (2022–2026) and to facilitate understanding and learning about UN Women’s portfolio in the Asia Pacific region, achievements since 2017, opportunities and challenges, as well as gaps in programming and results.

The primary audience is UN Women’s Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific and field presences in the region engaged in women, peace and security. However, the evaluation may be useful for other actors working in women, peace and security, including partner governments, CSOs, United Nations agencies, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), NGOs and national partners, and donors.

Evaluation objectives

The CPE+A had the following objectives:

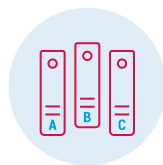
- **Assess** the relevance and coherence, effectiveness and organizational efficiency, and the sustainability of the efforts of the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in support of the thematic area of Women, Peace and Security;
- **Analyse** how the human rights approach and gender equality principles, including LGBTIQ and disability inclusion perspectives, are integrated in this work;
- **Identify** a “menu of evidence” of what works and what does not work in terms of UN Women’s programmatic support to women, peace and security, with the aim of providing input on the investments of field presences in this area for future work.
- **Identify** lessons learned and provide action-oriented recommendations to inform UN Women’s work in this area.

METHODOLOGY



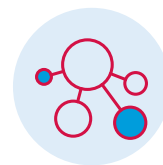
Interviews and focus groups

interviews and focus groups with 66 stakeholders (44 female and 22 male) and 1 online survey (with 32 civil society partner respondents, 35 per cent response rate)



100 documents reviewed

review of more than 100 documents (annual Work Plans, evaluations, project documents reports etc.) and 2 case studies



Mixed methods

mixed methods of data collection and analysis, non-experimental, theory-based and gender responsive approach



Portfolio analysis

analysis of the women, peace and security portfolio and a meta-analysis of 8 evaluations, 4 reviews and 2 audits on women, peace and security and the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.



Contribution Analysis

Contribution analysis was based on the theory of change reconstructed for this evaluation and was captured through an evidence map.



Remote data collection

the evaluation relied on remote data collection due to COVID-19 pandemic. Rights holders in one case study location were contacted through the phone.

CONCLUSIONS AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS: RELEVANCE AND COHERENCE

CONCLUSION 1

Since 2017, the visibility and credibility of work by the Regional Office on women, peace and security has grown within the region, and the Regional Office is now recognized as providing a unique gender perspective and linkages with civil society to its partners in the peace and security space. While UN Women's added value within the peace and security space is clear, it has not been fully capitalized upon. With a more strategic and longer term vision as the basis for its approach, the Regional Office could clarify its niche at the regional level, ensuring that it leverages not only the global mandate of UN Women in women, peace and security, but also the country-level expertise and varied experience across the region. A clearer vision may help direct work to where it is needed most and help partners understand how they can best leverage UN Women's expertise, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Co-create a vision for women, peace and security in the region with UN Women offices across the region and key peace and security actors from across stakeholder types and identify UN Women's value proposition in the peace and security sector. Prioritize where to focus based on a sound analysis of the current situation, country needs, the overall direction of the Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action thematic area and UN Women's capacity to deliver on the ground.

CONCLUSION 2

There is opportunity for the UN system coordination mandate of UN Women to be fully leveraged to the advantage of the Regional Office women, peace and security team. The lack of coordination mechanisms focused on peace and security within the region could be an opportunity for UN Women to demonstrate leadership by stepping up to facilitate exchange and coordination amongst actors in this area. The Regional Office should continue to identify strategic partnerships and engage in a more systematic manner within the peace and security space in a way that can be mutually beneficial and help the Regional Office to bring its efforts to scale and move beyond South-East Asia.

EFFECTIVENESS AND SUSTAINABILITY

CONCLUSION 3

UN Women made significant contributions to the establishment of national action plans related to preventing violent extremism and women, peace and security that were inclusive and represented diverse voices. National (and regional) action plans on women, peace and security and the prevention of violent extremism were adopted in Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines, and progress was made through ASEAN. UN Women integrated normative and policy expertise, and its reach with civil society to ensure participation in these processes was key to this progress. The adoption of these frameworks demonstrates national ownership of the women, peace and security agenda and provides an important impetus for national-level action. The challenge for the Regional Office will be to identify how to ensure continued support in implementing and localizing the agenda. Important lessons can be learned from across the region, where national action plans on women, peace and security have been implemented and supported by UN Women offices.

CONCLUSION 4

Presented with an opportunity for innovating in the women, peace and security space, the women, peace and security team at the Regional Office in several cases pushed boundaries, leveraged new media and implemented a range of unique initiatives in a space that is not yet fully understood. These initiatives aimed at increasing awareness and knowledge around preventing violent extremism and other women, peace and security issues and facilitating economic empowerment as a deterrent to violent extremism and factor that reduces the risk of trafficking. While these individual efforts may have contributed towards advancing the women, peace and security agenda, without a longer-term vision or framework, outcome-level monitoring and clarity in how the various efforts are connected, UN Women (in the region and globally) cannot fully expect transformative impact or benefit from or exploit their learning.

RECOMMENDATION 2

As part of the Regional Office coordination strategy, ensure coordination for the Women, Peace and Security thematic area is clearly outlined, explaining how the Regional Office will engage in coordination with the United Nations system and beyond as well as how these efforts seek to influence partners with established key performance indicators that can meaningfully measure progress.

CONCLUSION 5

Although there was an indication that women have experienced some immediate benefits, including a sense of empowerment within the home and community and increased immediate income, without continuing support these gains are at risk of being lost. Solid baseline information and engagement with the community to determine the best type of support and investment from its perspective is essential. A horizontal approach to looking at how the different initiatives (within the Regional Office and at field presence level) can support each other for greater impact needs to be built in from the start by basing it on the overarching vision. This could also enhance the potential for sustainability by pooling resources so that efforts are not interrupted. Expertise and interlinkages between thematic areas, field presences and teams within UN Women (Regional Office, Country Office, headquarters) were not fully leveraged, which may have reduced the effectiveness of programmatic efforts, particularly the economic empowerment initiatives and publication/communication efforts.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Continue building an evidence base on what works to build social cohesion, reduce marginalization and ensure peaceful societies by establishing a regional programming approach for translating national action plans and other normative-level efforts into action through coordinated efforts. This regional programming approach should be based on the vision and priority areas articulated and apply innovation principles by inviting UN Women Country Offices (in consultation with key stakeholders) to make a pitch for project models to be tested. Through robust indicators and a monitoring and evaluation framework, lessons learned can feed into the scaling up of the most effective approaches across the region.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

CONCLUSION 6

Human rights and gender equality are at the core of the Regional Office's work. The regional women, peace and security team included the targeting of marginalized groups during the design phase and was able to reach marginalized groups. However, the Regional Office must strengthen its efforts and provide support to implementing partners to prioritize and track how the most marginalized groups of the targeted population are engaged and benefit (or not) from programming efforts, not only because of the mandate of the organization, but also because there is evidence that marginalization is a key driver of violent extremism and increases vulnerability to trafficking. The fundamental strategy for achieving gender equality and empowerment of women is changing social norms – driving positive gender norms and ending harmful practices, discrimination and marginalization. Measuring efforts aimed at changing these norms is essential so that UN Women and its partners can understand what works and what does not work in diverse contexts and track change, including steps forwards and steps backwards, over time.

ORGANIZATIONAL EFFICIENCY

CONCLUSION 7

While several good practices were identified, several challenges that were rooted in the women, peace and security regional programme and related project design and implementation limited efficiency. These include: the potential efficiency gains of a regional approach were lost as the result of a siloed approach; defining a risk appetite could help with balancing the need to take risks to allow for innovation, while at the same time ensuring risks are properly managed; diversification of donors and regional-level pooled funding could support enhanced efficiency. Regional Office support to Country Offices beyond the regional programmes could have resulted in efficiency gains and multiplied the impact of UN Women efforts. Enhanced capacities of UN Women and implementing partners on expectations of UN Women monitoring and results-based reporting are also needed to ensure the data required to report at the aggregate level and on a disaggregated level are collected. Pooled funding could be a way to encourage donors to contribute to women, peace and security efforts while allowing the Regional Office the flexibility to place the funding where it is needed most, while ensuring the sustainability of efforts and cross-linkages across Regional Office teams and countries.

RECOMMENDATION 4

The regional women, peace and security team, in collaboration with the Regional Office focal point for partner agreements, should develop a toolkit for enhancing the capacity of relevant implementing partners on how to identify and engage in defining appropriate programmatic approaches and indicators for measuring progress over the longer term, including social norms change. In addition, it should monitor and report in collaboration with the target population, including the most marginalized groups, such as women with disabilities, women affected by conflict-related sexual violence, women-headed households, ethnic minorities and LGBTIQ persons.

RECOMMENDATION 5

The Regional Office should clearly articulate and demonstrate how regional programming efforts could enhance efficiencies across countries and take concerted action to enhance the organizational efficiency of women, peace and security efforts through diversification of the donor base and modalities, capacity-building, and dedicating time to assessing the best value for money approach.



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INTRODUCTION

1. Women, peace and security in Asia and the Pacific

Progress on women, peace and security over the last 20 years in the Asia and the Pacific region is notable as reported in a study on the topic released by UN Women in 2020¹: 14 countries have developed national action plans on women, peace and security; 59 per cent of peace agreements in the region included substantive gender provisions; 10 per cent of the police force in the region are women, compared with the global average of 9 per cent; and there are 723 women peacekeepers from 12 countries engaged. Despite progress, challenges remain. There are few women, peace and security champions in the region; women's participation in peace negotiations and peace-building processes is modest; and gender-based violence is widespread.² The nature of conflict in the region, which is increasingly local and long-lasting, is seen to be very different from other regions. It is also not very well understood owing to the size of the region, political sensitivities around officially recognizing conflict situations, and the fact that few United Nations peace operations are within the region's borders.³

There has been strong momentum to advance women, peace and security in South-East Asia in recent years, particularly within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The ASEAN-owned regional study on women, peace and security demonstrates commitment to better understand these issues in the specific context of ASEAN. It also demonstrates increasing recognition of

the linkages between traditional and non-traditional security issues and emerging challenges in various areas, from addressing the COVID-19 pandemic to climate change and conflict prevention, including preventing violent extremism.⁴

Advancement of women, peace and security in the Asia and the Pacific region is critical because the region is vulnerable to conflict. The ASEAN report also notes that pressure from violent extremism and terrorism has intensified, taking an ongoing toll on human rights and setting back hopes for development, equality and justice.

The relevance of the women, peace and security agenda is heightened in the context of COVID-19. First, the need to control the spread of COVID-19 has resulted in some national authorities mobilizing the security sector to enforce emergency responses, including surveillance and checkpoints, which may put women's rights, freedom and safety at risk compounded by the underrepresentation of women in the military and policing in the region⁵. Second, COVID-19 has worsened women's vulnerabilities in conflict, post-conflict and fragile settings due to crowded conditions, limited water and sanitation facilities and poor public health. Third, COVID-19 has the potential to act as a driver of conflict, as the war against the virus may be understood by some as a war against virus carriers, strengthening the us-versus-them mentality that can aggravate existing social tension, discrimination and conflict.⁶

2. UN Women in women, peace and security

UN Women's efforts in women, peace and security are guided by a series of international commitments including United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 and nine supporting resolutions: 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, 2242, 2467 and 2493. Other key reference points are the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular Goals 5 and 16, further reflects Member States' recognition that the solutions to peace and security and sustainable development are inextricably linked.

The UN Women Strategic Plan 2018–2021 guides the organization's work in this area, namely Impact Area 4, Outcome 5: "Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and from humanitarian action", and its Output 13: "More commitments on women, peace and security are implemented by Member States and the United Nations system, and more gender equality advocates influence peace and security processes".

1 Women, Peace and Security in Asia Pacific, 20 Years on: Progress Achieved and Lessons Learned, UN Women (2020).

2 According to the Global study on Homicide 2019 (United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime), Asia was the region with the largest number of women killed in 2017; 39 per cent of all homicides in Oceania were related to intimate-partner or gender-based violence.

3 Women, Peace and Security in Asia Pacific, 20 Years on: Progress Achieved and Lessons Learned, UN Women (2020).

4 ASEAN Regional Study on Women, Peace and Security, p. 9: <https://asean.org/storage/ASEAN-WPS-Study-7-March-2021-FINAL.pdf>.

5 Women, Peace and Security and COVID-19 in Asia and the Pacific (UN Women publication, 2020); accessible at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20easia/docs/publications/2020/03/ap-wps-covid-in-asia-pacific.pdf?la=en&vs=1416>.

6 Ibid.

UN Women and women, peace and security in Asia and the Pacific

Approximately 42 projects⁷ in the Asia and the Pacific region were implemented by 10 UN Women field presences⁸ and the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (the Regional Office) between 2017–2020, with a total committed budget of more than \$US36.8 million⁹. Of these, 16 projects, or 38 per cent, were exclusively funded by the Government of Japan. The 16 projects account for 57 per cent of the total women, peace and security budget in the region between 2017–2020, or more than US\$20.8 million. These efforts are described further below.

Regional Office approach to women, peace and security

The Regional Office programme of work is guided by the Strategic Note 2019–2021. The Strategic Note embeds women, peace and security work under the UN Women Strategic Plan Outcome 1: “A comprehensive and dynamic set of global norms, policies and standards on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls is strengthened and implemented”. Under this outcome area, the Regional Office has combined governance, gender statistics, HIV/AIDS and climate change efforts along with women, peace and security. Outcome 6.6: “Women are empowered to build resilient, cohesive and peaceful communities to prevent radicalization and violent extremism” and Outcome 6.7: “At-risk border communities are more resilient to human trafficking and related escalation, focusing especially on women” are the areas related to women, peace and security. During 2017–2020, the women, peace and security budget was allocated the largest share of funding, making up 47 per cent of the total budget of the Regional Office.

The Regional Office had seven projects in this thematic area between 2017–2020. Four of these are under the category of “Empowered Women, Peaceful Communities: Preventing Violent Extremism in Asia” and referred to as “prevention of violent extremism” projects, with country-level interventions in Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines. These four regional projects had a one-year timeframe and accounted for 63 per cent of the total women, peace and security budget of the Regional Office,

or more than \$US4.47 million (excluding the funds that went to UN Women field presences). The main themes and overall goal of these projects are preventing radicalization and violent extremism through women’s empowerment, social cohesion and peaceful communities.

The UN Women Headquarters’ Global Facility (GF) for Women, Peace and Security, funded by the Government of Australia (US\$422,039), supported Regional Office efforts to build media and information literacy skills for young leaders, with the aim of preventing violent extremism.

Three regional projects (US\$2.4 million) targeted the issue of human trafficking and transnational crime in border communities in the Mekong subregion and, since 2020, in the ASEAN subregion.

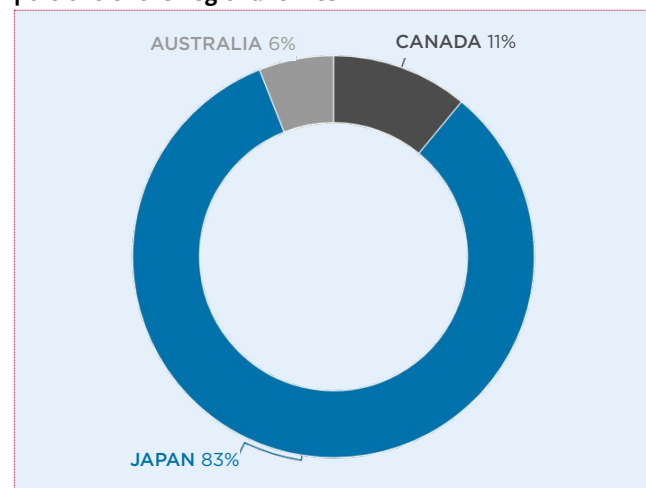
Financial and human resources

KEY DONORS

Two major donors to the regional women, peace and security portfolio are the Government of Japan (from their supplementary budget, which requires a one-year time frame) and the Government of Canada through the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

At the national level, women, peace and security efforts of UN Women are also funded by the Governments of Australia, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Malta, Norway, and the United Kingdom.

FIGURE 1. Main donors to the women, peace and security portfolio of the Regional Office



7 We count each project by its unique project ID. For example, the regional project on prevention of violent extremism spans over four years, but each year, its budget, its project ID, its coverage and its interventions are different, and they are counted as different projects.

8 The UN Women offices implementing the women, peace and security portfolio include: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Timor Leste and Thailand. Some regional activities were also implemented in Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Viet Nam. Pakistan implemented one preventing violent extremism project of approximately US\$1 million, but it was subsumed under the women’s economic empowerment portfolio, and the Regional Office did not provide a women, peace and security focal point, thus it was not captured during this mapping.

9 Source of information is the committed budget specified in the Project Document or Donor Agreement. For projects beginning in 2020 and ended post-2020, its total committed budget for the whole duration is used, not the delivery to date. This is for consistent treatment among projects but also for ease of compilation. Thus, the actual budget/delivery may vary.

KEY PARTNERS

A comprehensive human rights based stakeholder analysis and roles/contribution to programmes are presented in Annex 6. UN Women collaborated and worked with a diverse range of local and international partners, including United Nations partners, donors, governments, non-gov-

ernmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs). It was also active in mobilizing women's groups, grass-roots youth organizations and faith-based organizations as community partners. The Regional Office and relevant field presences also cultivated relationships with partners in the private sector and academia.

3. Evaluation purpose, objectives, scope and methodology

Purpose

The purpose of this evaluation was to provide insights for decision-making with respect to the work of the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific on women, peace and security over the next Strategic Note period (2022–2026) and to facilitate understanding and learning about UN Women's portfolio in the Asia Pacific region, achievements since 2017, opportunities and challenges, as well as gaps in programming and results.

The evaluation may be useful for other actors working in women, peace and security, including partner governments, CSOs, United Nations agencies, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), NGOs and national partners, and donors.

Evaluation objectives

The objectives of this evaluation are to:

- Assess the relevance and coherence, effectiveness and organizational efficiency, and the sustainability of the efforts of the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in support of the thematic area of Women, Peace and Security;
- Analyse how the human rights approach and gender equality principles, including LGBTIQ and disability inclusion perspectives, are integrated in this work;
- Identify a “menu of evidence” of what works and what does not work in terms of UN Women's programmatic support to women, peace and security, with the aim of providing input on the investments of field presences in this area for future work.
- Identify lessons learned and provide action-oriented recommendations to inform UN Women's work in this area.

Evaluation scope

The evaluation focused on the functions of the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific and regional programmes implemented at country level.

UN Women's integrated mandate: normative, UN system coordination and operational was covered. The efforts of the Regional Office in the thematic area of Women, Peace and Security captured under the Regional Office Strategic Note (2019–2021) Outcomes 6.6 and 6.7 and aligned with the UN Women Strategic Plan 2018–2021 (Outcome 5 and Output 13) were the main focus of this evaluation. Because the project on preventing violent extremism was initiated in 2017, the scope also included initiatives carried out in 2017 and 2018 under the Women, Peace and Security thematic area.

The evaluation did not cover all efforts focused on women, peace and security in the region, but rather focused on the Regional Office efforts, which did not cover all UN Women offices in the region or headquarters support to the region. The geographic scope included the Asia Pacific region, with an in-depth case study in the Philippines and a lighter touch case study in Indonesia.

Methodology

The evaluation employed a **non-experimental, theory-based approach**. A case study approach was the primary source of information for the assessment of contributions to outcomes in the selected areas; the reconstructed theory of change presented above was used as the basis for analysis, and outcome mapping through the case study contributed to a bottom-up understanding of the key contributions of programmatic efforts. The UN Women **building block framework**¹⁰ was utilized in the case study to assess the extent to which contributions were made across UN Women's mandate. To tie the multiple lines of evidence together, contribution analysis, an approach that recognizes the challenges with attribution in assessing performance of organizations aiming to achieve transformative goals in a complex and dynamic environment, was employed to tell the story of how the Regional Office has contributed to advances in women, peace and security in line with the theory of change and considering external influencing factors.

¹⁰ The building block framework is introduced in the UN Women Guidance Note: Evaluating Impact in Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, 2021.

UN Women evaluations are also **utilization-focused**, which means that they are tailored to the needs of the organization through a **participatory approach** from inception through to the development of recommendations, which facilitates the production of a useful evaluation. This evaluation applied Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development-Development Assistance Committee **(OECD-DAC) evaluation criteria** (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and sustainability) and a **human rights and gender equality criterion**. The evaluation followed the Ethical Guidelines of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), which ensures respect for the social and cultural environment, the “do no harm” principle and the rights of institutions, organizations and individuals to provide information confidentially.

Data collection and analysis

The evaluation employed mixed methods of data collection and analysis and included a review of more than 100 documents, interviews and focus groups with 66 stakeholders (44 female and 22 male), 1 online survey (with 32 civil society partner respondents, 35 per cent response rate), and 2 case studies. The team conducted an analysis of the women, peace and security portfolio and a meta-analysis of eight evaluations, four reviews and two audits on women, peace and security and the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. These were driven by the evaluation questions and selected with the aim of providing the most useful information possible to the Regional Office. Recognizing that the COVID-19 pandemic complicated in-person data collection, the evaluation relied on remote data collection, seeking to also minimize the burden on already

stressed colleagues and partners. Contribution analysis was based on the theory of change reconstructed for this evaluation and was captured through an evidence map. The project on preventing violent extremism was also assessed against the building blocks and innovation pathways frameworks. A summary of the evaluation matrix is provided in Annex 5. Data collection tools are provided in Annex 7.

All participants were provided full information about the evaluation and what participation would involve before informed consent to participate was sought.

Limitations

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, no in-person data collection took place, making it more difficult to ensure a fully participatory approach and reach rights holders meant to benefit from UN Women initiatives. In consultation with the programme managers, the evaluation team selected sites in which key projects have been implemented and where there was a high probability of reaching stakeholders who are directly engaged. Beneficiaries consulted were limited to the project on preventing violent extremism in the Philippines. The evaluation recognizes the complexity of UN Women’s theory of change in the thematic area of Women, Peace and Security and the challenges in identifying attribution versus contribution to the programme objectives. The evaluation employed multiple methods of data collection from multiple sources to ensure the validity and reliability of data and a case-study approach for more targeted analysis.

4. Evaluation governance and quality assurance

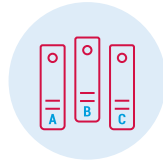
UN Women evaluations follow established mechanisms to ensure high-quality evaluation processes and products in line with the UN Women Evaluation Policy and Handbook and according to established UNEG norms and standards. All products are subject to a quality review by the UN Women IEAS Director, the Chief of Evaluation, a peer reviewer, the Evaluation Reference Group and the Evaluation Management Group. The Evaluation Reference Group comprises national government partners, civil society representatives, development partners/donors and

United Nations representatives. The Evaluation Reference Group was engaged for input on inception, data collection, preliminary findings and the draft report. The group’s feedback was important to ensure factual accuracy, accurate interpretation of contextual information and the identification of gaps in the analysis. For the terms of reference for the Evaluation Reference Group see Annex 2.



Interviews and focus groups

interviews and focus groups with **66 stakeholders** (44 female and 22 male) and 1 online **survey** (with 32 civil society partner respondents, 35 per cent response rate)



100+ documents reviewed

review of more than 100 documents (Annual Work Plans, evaluations, project and financial documents, reports etc.) and **2 case studies**



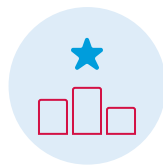
Mixed methods

mixed methods of data collection and analysis, non-experimental, theory-based and **gender responsive approach**



Portfolio analysis

analysis of the women, peace and security portfolio and a **meta-analysis** of 8 evaluations, 4 reviews and 2 audits on women, peace and security and the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.



Contribution Analysis

Contribution analysis was based on the **theory of change reconstructed** for this evaluation and was captured through an evidence map.



Remote data collection

the evaluation relied on remote data collection due to **COVID-19 pandemic**. Rights holders in one case study location were contacted through the phone.

5. Theory of Change

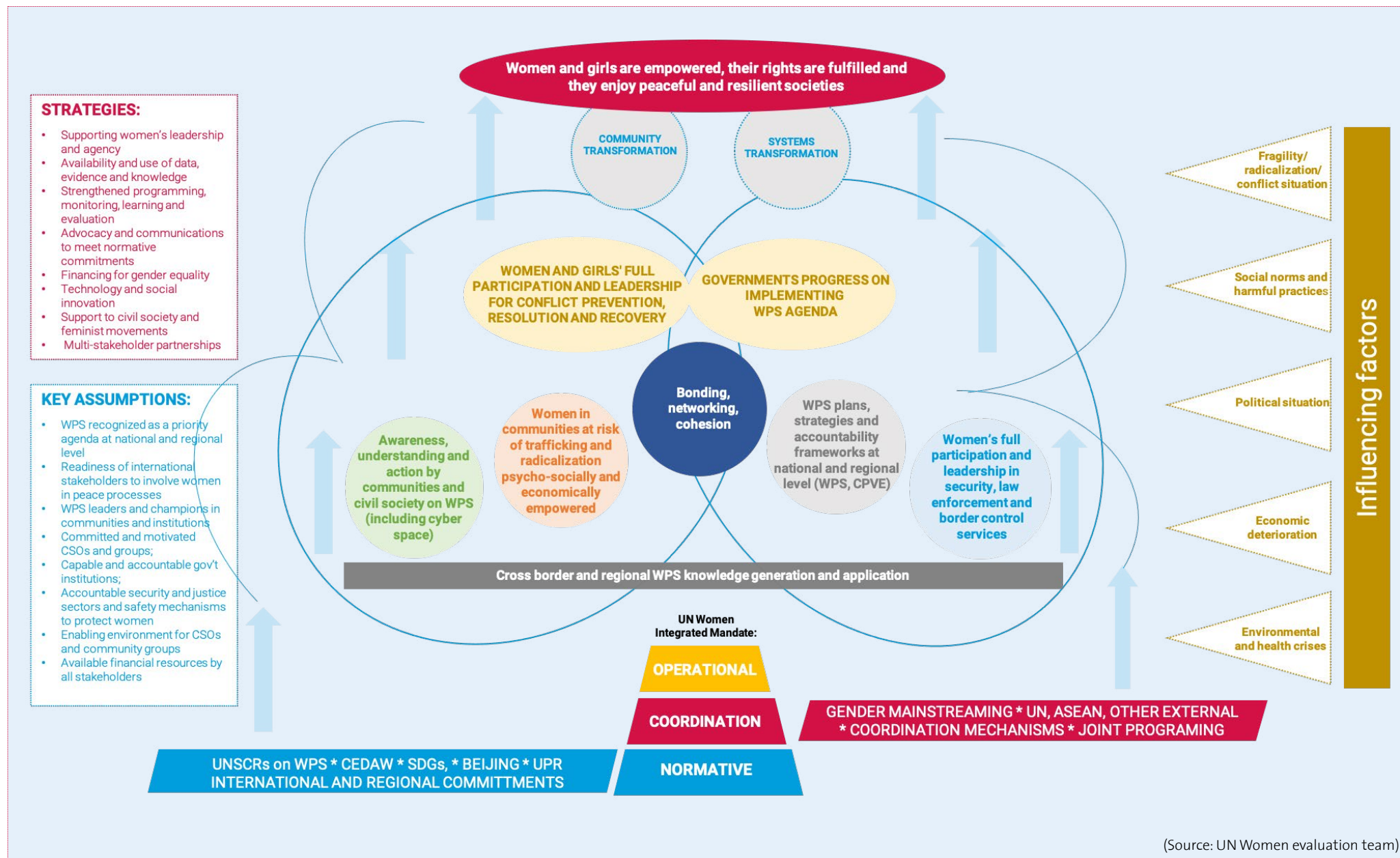
The evaluation team reconstructed a common theory of change to guide the evaluation and test the findings against and identify where and how the UN Women Regional Office has contributed to the expected changes. UN Women's integrated mandate (normative, operational and coordination) serves as the fundamental basis for the theory of change. The principles, strategies, expected results chain and external factors (assumptions) that may affect Regional Office work on women, peace and security are also factored into the theory of change. The theory of change was defined based on the literature review, the theory of change of the UN Women Strategic Plan 2018–2021 in the thematic area of Women, Peace and Security, the theories of change of the regional programmes and consultations with the Regional Office women, peace and security team.

Although two Regional Office programmes have separate theories of change, both aim to build resilience in communities against the destructive phenomena of violent extremism and transnational crime. Both phenomena have some common features and require systems and community transformation.

At the normative level, interventions aim to create an enabling environment and to influence structural changes to enable women's participation and leadership in peace-building and peace processes or in policy development and law enforcement, and to provide for protection of women victims or those at risk. From the community perspective, women's psychosocial and economic support and women's participation are common tools in women, peace and security interventions, to address domestic and transnational security needs and to empower women and girls to participate in conflict prevention, resolution and recovery and contribute to resilience of the communities. Synergy with other United Nations agencies and programmes as well as those of ASEAN and other international and national stakeholders is required as well.

Key strategies of UN Women's support to the women, peace and security agenda in the region and the detailed theory of change are described in Annex 1.

FIGURE 2. UN Women Asia and the Pacific Regional Office: reconstructed Theory of Change on Women, Peace and Security



(Source: UN Women evaluation team)



Photo © UN Women/Fahad Kaizer

FINDINGS

RELEVANCE

To what extent does Regional Office support to women, peace and security align with global, regional and national priorities?

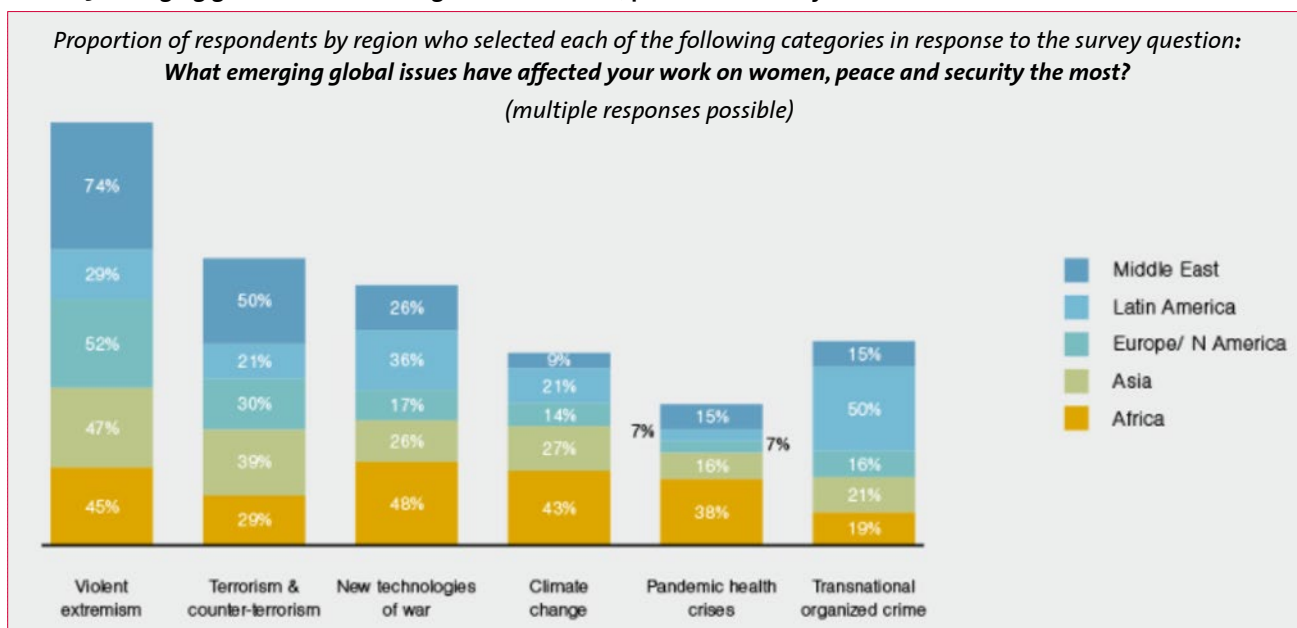
FINDING 1

Regional Office programming topics align with broader global-, regional- and country-level priorities on women, peace and security. The overall programming efforts considered emerging issues in the region but were also driven by donor priorities.

The programming of the Regional Office is aligned with the global framework on women, peace and security and with United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent related resolutions on women, peace and security,¹¹ including both engagement with duty bearers and rights holders and the broader SDGs (see Box 1). In particular, the projects of the Regional Office are linked to resolution 2242 (2015), which sets out to increase

women's role in countering violent extremism, and resolution 2331 (2016) on human trafficking, which condemned the phenomenon and stressed how human trafficking can exacerbate conflict and foster insecurity. As Figure 3 illustrates, there has been high interest in the topic of violent extremism and terrorism since 2015 amongst civil society respondents from Asia to a global study on women, peace and security¹².

FIGURE 3. Emerging global issues affecting work on women, peace and security



Source: United Nations Global Study on Women, Peace and Security (UN Women, 2015)

Although visibility has increased, evaluation interviews with regional and country level UN officials, donors, government and civil society stakeholders identified that awareness is primarily limited to the specific actions related to the regional projects. Regional Office programming on women, peace and security has targeted primarily ASEAN

member countries, and its relevance is more recognized among UN Women offices and partners in that subregion. In the remaining countries of the Asia Pacific region, the contribution of the Regional Office was less visible to stakeholders consulted.

¹¹ https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un_documents_type/security-council-resolutions/page/1?ctype=Women%2C+Peace+and+Security&cbtype=women-peace-and-security#o38;cbtype=women-peace-and-security

¹² The results presented are from Global Report: Civil Society Organization (CSO) Survey for the Global Study on Women, Peace and Security CSO Perspectives on UNSCR 1325 Implementation 15 Years after Adoption: "The CSO survey report is based on 317 CSO surveys collected from organizations based in 71 different countries, providing a wealth of quantitative and qualitative data reflecting the views of CSO working on the ground to implement the women, peace and security agenda."

BOX 1. Alignment with SDGs



SDG 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment, and targets on reducing all forms of violence and violence related deaths and ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.



SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, promotion of the rule of law, strengthening the national institutions for building capacity at all levels to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime etc. particularly the targets related to: general safety and security, strengthened national institutions to prevent violence and combat terrorism and promotion of non-discriminatory laws and policies;



SDG 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth, including its target to end modern slavery, trafficking and child labour

As a result of the liaison efforts of the UN Women Regional Office, the Indonesia Country Office and ASEAN, there is a high level of alignment between Regional Office programmes and ASEAN commitments on preventing and countering violent extremism, particularly the Declaration to Counter the Rise of Radicalization and Violent Extremism (2017) and the ASEAN Plan of Action to Prevent and Counter the Rise of Radicalization and Violent Extremism (2018–2025) and also ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2015). There has been continuous engagement of UN Women in the development of joint workplans, including the ASEAN–United Nations Plan of Action 2021–2025, the five-year workplans of the ASEAN sectoral bodies and the specific joint plan between the ASEAN Secretariat and UN Women. At the country level, Regional Office programming responded to increased interest of national governments to develop national action plans on preventing and countering violent extremism and on women, peace and security.

The Regional Office narrowed the scope of the Women, Peace and Security thematic area to the issues of preventing violent extremism and combatting human trafficking. The reasons provided for this included that the women, peace and security agenda in the region is relatively nascent and considered by some partners as relevant only to conflict countries.¹³ Factors that influenced the selection of thematic priorities, countries and locations were the demand from governments and national stakeholders and donor interest sparked by several terrorist activities in the region during the period under review. Regional Office work on women, peace and security relied mostly on one donor: the Government of Japan, which funded 83 per cent of the Regional Office portfolio on women, peace and security. The UN Women Internal Audit Service headquarters audit of the UN Women Peace, Security and Humanitarian Section noted that “Two independent assessments and the Headquarters Functional Analysis Report concluded that a high dependence on non-core funding risks reducing focus on priority activities and means donors have a greater influence on UN Women’s work.”¹⁴

Comparing the Women, Peace and Security Index¹⁵ (developed by the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security), the Global Gender Gap Index¹⁶ (GGGI, developed by World Economic Forum), the Fragile States Index¹⁷ (FSI, developed by the Fund for Peace), and the Global Terrorism Index¹⁸ (GTI, developed by the Institute for Economics and Peace, Australia) with the level of UN Women’s budgets in the Asia Pacific region revealed that countries indicated as more gender-equal, less fragile and less impacted by terrorism received more UN Women funding for women, peace and security.

Among the nine countries in the Asia Pacific region with a women, peace and security budget, Afghanistan and Myanmar were ranked lower on the WPS index in the areas of well-being and inclusion (economic, social, political); justice (formal laws and informal discrimination); and security (at the family, community and societal levels) but the UN Women field presences received less funding than, for example, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Indonesia (Indonesia being ninety-fifth, which is relatively high ranking on this scale). At the same time, Pakistan, with very low performance on the WPS index, had only one project of approximately US\$1 million for a programme on preventing violent extremism funded by the Foreign Policy Instruments unit of the European Commission.

13 Women, Peace and Security in Asia Pacific, 20 Years On – Progress Achieved and Lessons Learned; UN Women, 2020, p. 5.

14 UN Women Internal Audit Service, Peace, Security and Humanitarian Section Governance, Risks and Controls; 24 November 2020 IEAS/IAS/2020/007.

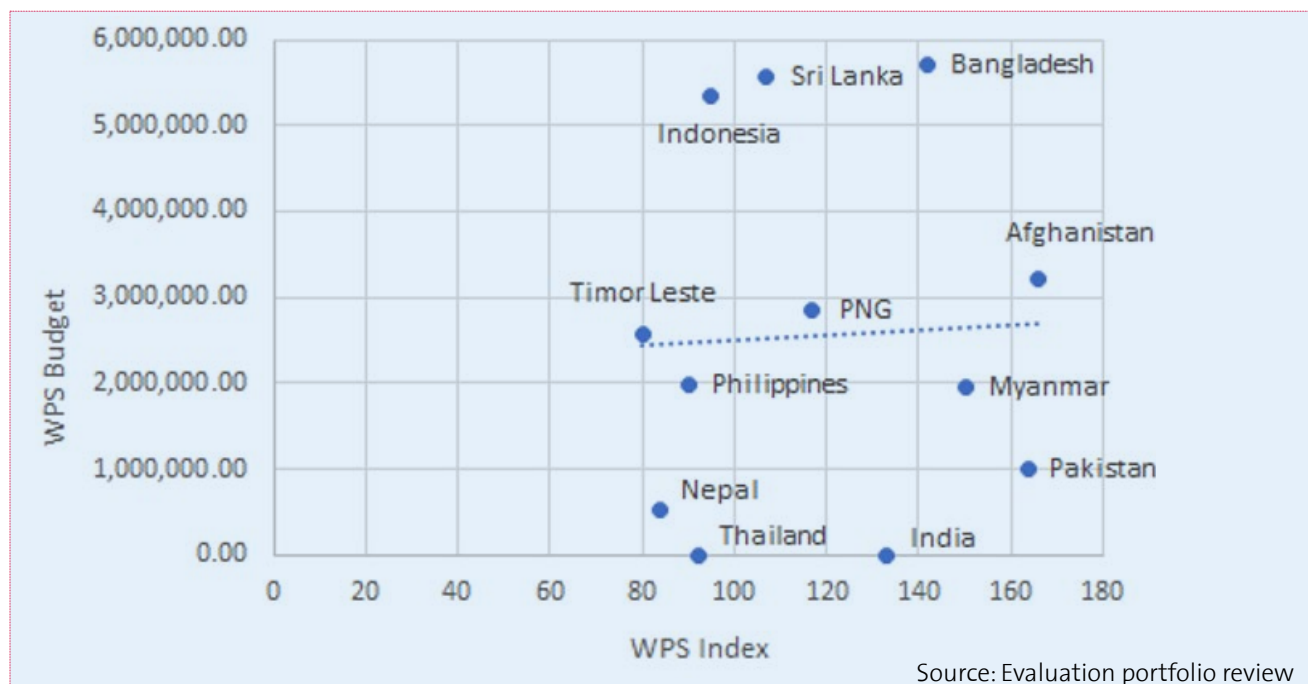
15 Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/2020: <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf>.

16 World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2020: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/gender-gap-2020-report-100-years-pay-equality>.

17 Fund for Peace, Fragile States Index Report 2020: <https://fundforpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/fsi2020-report.pdf>

18 Vision for Humanity, Institute for Economics and Peace, Global Terrorism Index: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism 2020: <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/global-terrorism-index/#/>.

FIGURE 4. Correlation between women, peace and security budget and Women, Peace and Security Index, UN Women Asia and the Pacific (2017–2020)



The Philippines ranked sixteenth on the GGI (the lowest level of gender inequality), while Papua New Guinea ranked 127th (the highest level of gender inequality). Looking at the correlation between the budget of each country for women, peace and security and their corresponding GGI ranking, countries with a high level of gender inequality such as Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and Myanmar did not necessarily receive the highest level of funding to their respective UN Women field presence (see Annex 10). Bangladesh and Nepal are outliers. UN Women Bangladesh had the highest budget for women, peace and security of more than US\$5.7 million (however, over one third of these funds went to Cox's Bazaar, where the Rohingya refugee crisis has been protracted). While Nepal was ranked the fourth most gender unequal country out of the eight countries, UN Women Nepal had the smallest budget for women, peace and security, at US\$500,000.

A correlation between funding for women, peace and security and the FSI ranking was also found (Figure 4). Countries with low fragility received higher levels of women, peace and security budgets. On the FSI, Indonesia ranked ninety-sixth, meaning it was the least fragile State, but UN Women Indonesia received almost the highest budget, while Afghanistan ranked ninth, meaning the most fragile State, yet UN Women Afghanistan received a low women, peace and security budget (see Annex 10).

Finally, the GTI measures the impact of terrorism. South Asia has been the region most impacted by terrorism since 2002. The 2020 GTI report ranks countries in the region most impacted by terrorism as follows: Afghanistan (first), Pakistan (seventh), India (eighth), the Philippines (tenth), Sri Lanka (twentieth), Thailand (twenty-first) and Nepal (twenty-seventh). However, UN Women budgets in the women, peace and security thematic area did not always correspond to the GTI ranking (see Annex 10).

The analysis above indicates that budget allocations and programming efforts in Asia and the Pacific region are driven by UN Women positioning in a country rather than a regional perspective or informed by key determinants for peace and security, such as the level of women's inclusion, human rights position, security, fragility, impact of terrorism and to some extent gender inequality, in corresponding countries did not inform decision-making on where to implement regional programmes.

With regard to the women, peace and security projects that were implemented by the Regional Office, there was a perception that there was space for more in-depth consultations at the project design stage at the country level to ensure relevance at community level. This was confirmed both by UN Women field presences and project partners. Also, the first two external reviews managed by the project management in 2018 and 2019 of the prevention of violent extremism projects raised the issue of the selection of project sites. The reviews identified that the communities selected for programme implementation were less likely to be at-risk of radicalization, and this was confirmed by some of the key informants of this evaluation. UN Women noted that security concerns would make it more difficult for piloting new programming in sites that were considered at risk of radicalization. While security considerations are important, there is a question as to the extent to which the theory of change would hold if the communities were not at risk of radicalization. The design stage could have been better utilized for understanding the communities and engaging those who were most in need or marginalized within these communities to inform the selection. There is an opportunity to enhance project design, particularly ensuring clarity on how transformative change will be achieved.

COHERENCE AND COORDINATION

To what extent is the regional programmatic work of the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific internally coherent with UN Women's overall women, peace and security agenda?

FINDING 2

While there is conceptual alignment between the Regional Office's women, peace and security initiatives, particularly in relation to preventing violent extremism, and work in this thematic area at UN Women headquarters and at the country level, in practice internal coherence is limited because of several factors, which has resulted in a projectized approach that is not linked to a broader Regional Office theory of change.

1. There is a low level of alignment between the Regional Office impact area statement where women, peace and security is placed and the women, peace and security area of work. The placement of women, peace and security under Impact Area 1, which is related to UN Women support to global norms and standards, was purely administrative and without coherence as to how the outcome linked to the impact statement or how the different outcomes underneath the impact area linked with each other. At the global level, UN Women has combined the women, peace and security and humanitarian action areas of work; however, these were not linked at Regional Office level.

The UN Women Strategic Plan 2018–2021 outlines the priority areas of work for the organization with specific outcomes dedicated to each, including one focused on women, peace and security (amongst other issues). Regional Office work in women, peace and security is conceptually aligned with Outcome 5 of the global Strategic Plan (See Table 1 below). However, to encourage regional offices to move away from regional project management and implementation towards supporting Country Offices in the region with technical policy expertise, knowledge-sharing, etc., the headquarters Programme Division¹⁹ advised the Regional Office to place work related to Women, Peace and Security under Outcome 1 of the Strategic Plan, which was intended to focus on normative technical support including to intergovernmental processes, rather than on the implementation of development results. However, core resources to support thematic advisers was not provided by headquarters, and the Regional Office had been actively mobilizing non-core resources with the aim to also maintain regional thematic expertise. The Regional Office decided to consolidate efforts related to governance (access to justice, statistics, climate change, HIV/AIDS) and women, peace and security under the same area: Impact Area 1.

As a result, the Regional Office Development Results Framework (DRF) is being used as an administrative tool to channel resources rather than as a programming tool to support a broader theory of change. The evaluation team observed that in practice, the Regional Office areas under Impact Area 1 worked in silos according to regional projects without an overarching strategic vision of how to link activities with the impact statement or operational plan on how to link the different projects (each is assigned an outcome) underneath the impact area. This also affected reporting, as at an organizational level, the efforts related to women, peace and security reported by the Regional Office would need to be manually extracted out of Impact Area 1 if they were to be included as contributions to overall UN Women organizational results on women, peace and security. And although at global level, the Strategic Plan linked the women, peace and security area with Humanitarian Action, disaster risk reduction and climate change, at regional level the humanitarian, disaster risk reduction and climate change teams sit under different units and there was limited programmatic collaboration between the teams.

2. Alignment between the ROAP WPS Outcomes and the related SP WPS area have been assessed by the evaluation team to have a medium level of alignment (see Table 1). The trafficking/women in law enforcement aspects have a low level of alignment with the Women, Peace and Security thematic area. While preventing violent extremism has a high level of alignment conceptually, in practice work at the regional level was not linked with headquarters, which prioritized the intergovernmental processes related to counter-terrorism and policy issues such as the Global Counter Terrorism Strategy and the Screening, Prosecution, Return and Reintegration of foreign terrorist fighters, among others.

¹⁹ In 2017, the Programme Division at Headquarters existed, but was subsequently merged into the Policy, Programme and Intergovernmental Division (PPID).

Discussions with both headquarters and Regional Office personnel for this evaluation confirmed that limited interaction between headquarters and the regions contributed to this lack of coherence. Similarly, the UN Women Internal Audit Service (IAS)²⁰ identified that without a clear frame-

work assigning responsibility for leading quality assurance and ensuring coherence in its thematic area, there was a risk of programmes and projects not aligning with the principles and theory of change articulated at headquarters level.

TABLE 1. Evaluation team assessment of alignment²¹ between strategic documents: UN Women Regional Office Strategic Note and UN Women Strategic Plan 2018–2021

Alignment between Strategic Documents	Strategic Note Impact/ Strategic Plan Outcome	Strategic Note Outcome/ Alignment with Strategic Plan	Strategic Note Outcome/ Alignment with Strategic Plan
UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific Strategic Note	Strategic Note Impact 6: An enabling environment is in place to advance gender equality and women's empowerment, in line with international norms and standards identified	Strategic Note Outcome 6.6: Women are empowered to build resilient, cohesive and peaceful communities to prevent radicalization and violent extremism	Strategic Note Outcome 6.7: At-risk border communities are more resilient to human trafficking and related escalation, focusing especially on women
UN Women Strategic Plan 2018–2021	Strategic Plan Outcome 1: A comprehensive and dynamic set of global norms, policies and standards on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls is strengthened and implemented	Strategic Plan Outcome 5: Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and from humanitarian action Strategic Plan Output 13: More commitments on women, peace and security are implemented by Member States and the United Nations system, and more gender equality advocates influence peace and security processes	Specific reference to trafficking of persons does not appear in the Strategic Plan; the UN Women website refers to safe migration (under Ending Violence Against Women and Girls). Efforts related to terrorism are aligned with Strategic Plan Outcome 5: Women, Peace and Security/Preventing Violent Extremism area of work. Efforts related to Women in law enforcement are aligned with: Strategic Plan Outcome 2: Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems Strategic Plan Output 7: More justice institutions are accessible to and deliver for women and girls
Assessment of alignment	Low level of alignment Strategic Plan Outcome 1 is aimed at intergovernmental support, substantive support through policy expertise and knowledge generation – it is not aimed at development results and the corresponding Strategic Plan theory of change does not articulate actions.	High level of alignment Strategic Plan Outcome 5 is focused on efforts to support women, peace and security, including prevention of violent extremism.	Medium level of alignment The Strategic Plan does not refer to trafficking of persons specifically. Strategic Plan Outcome 2 is focused on governance and covers access to justice, which refers to engagement of law enforcement.

²⁰ UN Women Independent Audit Service, Peace, Security and Humanitarian Section, Governance, Risks and Controls; 24 November 2020. IEAS/IAS/2020/007.

²¹ Low level: does not clearly link with the Strategic Plan; medium level: has some elements that link with the Strategic Plan; high level: clearly links with the Strategic Plan.

3. Horizontal synergies between thematic areas of the Regional Office were limited.

The regional projects under the Women, Peace and Security thematic area had a key component on women's economic empowerment and, as noted above, aspects related to engaging law enforcement (referenced under access to justice) and safe migration (Ending Violence Against Women and Girls). However, stakeholders noted that as a result of the project-centric focus, while there was some knowledge exchange, there was limited collaboration or joint work across Regional Office thematic teams. One factor that may contribute to the lack of coherence across thematic areas raised by UN Women personnel was the competition among units to mobilize resources. This was also pointed out in the Headquarters Functional Analysis Report, which suggested a coordinated approach to resource mobilization across offices and divisions within a global matrix network.²²

4. With respect to country-level women, peace and security alignment, although there was conceptual alignment, coherence was limited due to a regional project-centric focus. The Regional Office had limited engagement with field presences that were not engaged in regional projects and regional efforts outside of the regional projects did not clearly link with or build off country-level efforts in women, peace and security.

The evaluation team portfolio analysis showed that the women, peace and security work of countries that were not engaged in regional programmes was aligned with UN Women Strategic Plan Outcome 5 on Women, Peace and Security, mainly in relation to development and implementation of national action plans on women, peace and security (Afghanistan, Nepal, Timor Leste, Papua New

Guinea and Sri Lanka). UN Women personnel noted that during the period under review, the single donor driven nature of the regional efforts narrowed the focus primarily to preventing violent extremism, and the high operational involvement required of personnel in implementing the project created challenges for the Regional Office team to meaningfully engage with UN Women personnel working in the women, peace and security space across the region (beyond Regional Office projects), which affected the ability to have greater coherence and impact. There is a need to better connect with Country Office programmes to identify needs, expectations and emerging good practices in those countries so that future approaches can build on that knowledge and experience.

The above findings are in line with the Internal Audit Service 2020 audit of the Women, Peace and Security section at UN Women headquarters, which identified that the internal thematic coherence was affected negatively by the lack of reporting lines between the headquarters Women, Peace and Security section and regional advisers and by the lack of an established approach for quality assurance of strategic notes and project proposals. The audit recommended the establishment of a policy accountability framework and process for providing quality assurance on the coherence of its Strategic Plan theme on Women, Peace, and Security and Humanitarian Action throughout UN Women, including the reporting lines for regional advisers. It also highlighted the need to clarify the roles and reporting lines for regional advisers in quality assurance and support for projects related to the Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action theme to strengthen the quality assurance and technical substance of communication with regions.²³

What is UN Women's added value given the work of its partners and its expertise?

FINDING 3

The Regional Office took action to respond to COVID-19 through the refocusing of programmes and the generation of briefs highlighting the linkages between the COVID-19 pandemic and women, peace and security concerns.

The Regional Office and its partners at country level have taken action to maintain the relevance of efforts in women, peace and security during the COVID-19 pandemic since early 2020. These efforts entailed repurposing funding of the projects to respond to immediate needs of rights holders (food and hygiene packages, additional funding

to women's businesses), moving activities to online space, and the generation of briefs that highlighted the impacts of COVID-19 on women and the linkages between the COVID-19 pandemic and women, peace and security concerns.²⁴

²² UN Women Independent Audit Service, Peace, Security and Humanitarian Section, Governance, Risks and Controls; 24 November 2020 IEAS/IAS/2020/007.

²³ Ibid..

²⁴ For example: Women Peace and Security and COVID-19: Women in Decision-Making ; [Women Peace and Security and COVID-19 in Asia-Pacific – Action Brief](#) ; [Women Peace and Cyber Security and COVID-19 in Asia Pacific](#) or [Women Human Rights Defenders: Women, Peace and Security in Asia and the Pacific](#).

Women in law enforcement activities and activities at universities were more suitable to being moved online, while most of the community level activities slowed down (i.e. Indonesia and the Philippines). Efforts in preventing violent extremism were reported²⁵ to have stalled or significantly reduced because of COVID-19 restrictions of movement. This was also confirmed by the 2021 ASEAN Study on Women, Peace and Security,²⁶ which found a reduced focus on this issue in ASEAN States during the pandemic and highlighted the need for gender-responsive policies to address women's political leadership and inclusive decision-making to ensure effective and comprehensive responses to the health, social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic. This occurred despite heightened awareness of the impact of COVID-19 restrictions, increased economic vulnerability and physical insecurity, especially gender-based violence affecting women, migrant workers, and their families. The study called for more gender-responsive policing and security as well as targeted support to frontline responders. The Regional Office research reported a shrinking space for women human rights defenders as a result of restrictions in movement and the inability to access those in need, but also due to increased surveillance of online activities, limited freedom and limited access to justice in crisis contexts in Asia and the Pacific.²⁷ The impacts of COVID-19 included

the delay of implementation of peace agreements, aggravation of conflicts and human rights concerns and challenges in the provision of gender-responsive humanitarian response.²⁸

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed increasing challenges of cybersecurity and a spike in online sexual exploitation and abuse of women and girls.²⁹ While online recruitment has been an important tactic employed by violent extremist organizations, confinement and new grievances associated with the COVID-19 pandemic may have resulted in more drivers of radicalization and increased vulnerability to recruitment.

Some stakeholders perceived that COVID-19 restrictions threatened to weaken the fragile social bonds established through social cohesion activities. This was the result of physical distancing but also because women had to focus on their personal and household priorities during the crisis. Some of the stakeholders also raised concern about how radical groups might exploit the opportunity of having many young people on the Internet as a result of COVID-19 related restrictions and suggested that this should be researched and properly addressed. These issues have also been raised in action briefs and deserve attention to maintain the relevance of UN Women's engagement in women, peace and security.

FINDING 4

The added value of regional efforts in women, peace and security by the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific was its gender expertise, particularly in relation to the generation of research and policy advice, and its partnerships with civil society at country level, which provided more direct access to rights holders' voices.

The meta-analysis of evaluations completed for this evaluation, interviews with stakeholders from across stakeholder types and the survey of civil society partners on UN Women's publications confirmed that the key added value of UN Women to the peace and security space is its technical knowledge and expertise on women, peace and security, and the generation of research related to very specific peace and security issues and how they affect women

differently from men, such as radicalization, prevention of violent extremism and border management. Both national and international partners noted in both interviews and a survey that they often used and referred to UN Women publications in efforts to mainstream gender in their programmes or get updated on women, peace and security and gender aspects of preventing violent extremism.

25 Both government and civil society stakeholders consulted for this evaluation and a series of briefs produced by the Regional Office on women, peace and security and COVID-19.

26 ASEAN Regional Study on Women, Peace and Security (2021): https://asean.org/?static_post=asean-regional-study-women-peace-security.

27 [Women Human Rights Defenders: Women, Peace and Security in Asia and the Pacific](#), UN Women ROAP Brief

28 Reports of CSOs from Afghanistan and the Philippines to the data base on women, peace and security and COVID-19 managed by the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP) and supported by UN Women (globally). Also women's CSOs reported challenges for women faced with ongoing conflicts and other rising challenges such as sexual and gender-based violence, economic impacts on livelihoods, food insecurity, limited or no access to services, digital gap, etc. See more information at the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders - COVID-19 and Women, peace and security database: <https://gnwp.org/resources/covid-19-wps-database/>

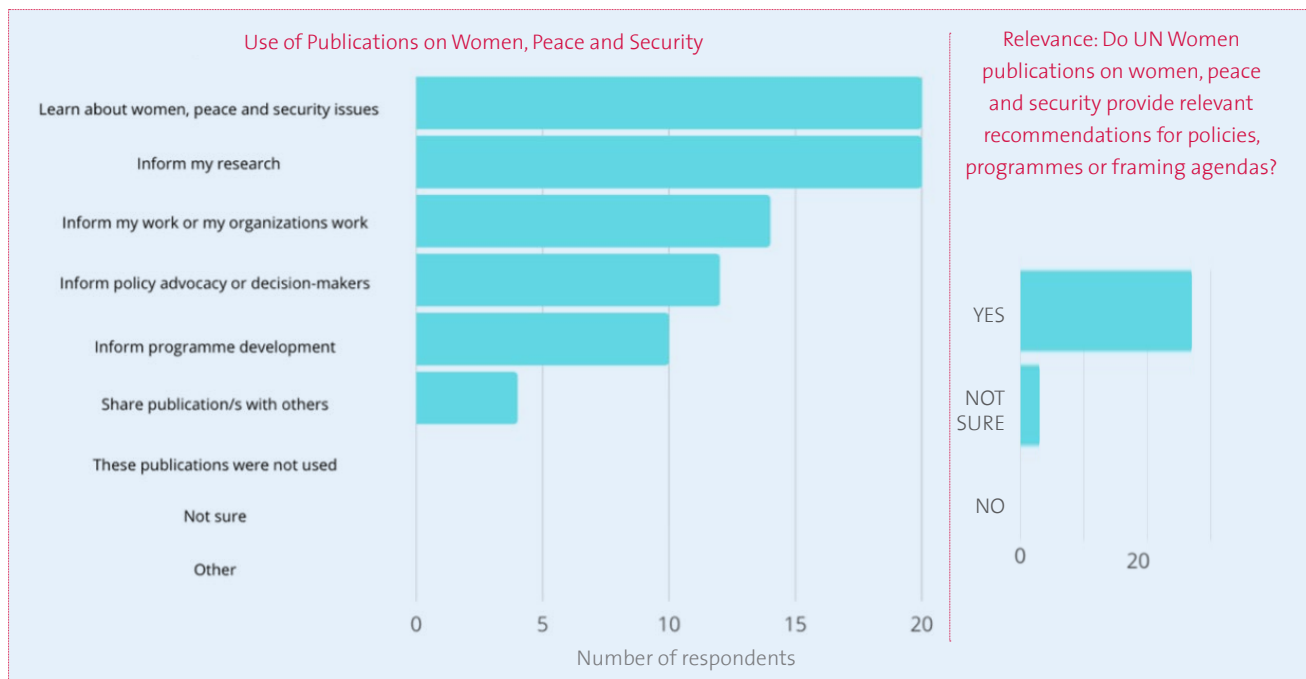
29 UN Women Action Brief – Women, Peace and Cyber Security: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/06/action-brief-women-peace-and-cyber-security-in-asia-and-the-pacific>.

Stakeholders referred to knowledge products developed at all levels of UN Women (country, regional and global) as providing unique perspectives that were useful for their own research, advocacy or programme development. UN Women's added value was also recognized in joint United Nations publications, such as *Women in Law Enforcement in ASEAN Region*³⁰ (INTERPOL, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and UN Women) and *Conflicting Identities: The Nexus between Masculinities, Femininities and Violent Extremism in Asia* (United Nations Development Programme, UN Women).

The role of UN Women in convening partners from different sectors (government, CSOs and grass-roots organizations, business organizations, international develop-

ment partners) was also recognized as another advantage. United Nations partners particularly appreciated UN Women's ability to reach the most marginalized groups of the population through direct partnerships with CSOs or networking with other stakeholders at the regional and local levels and voicing their perspectives at the national level. As an example, partners pointed to UN Women's efforts to ensure inclusive consultations and facilitation of the issue of women, peace and security across different groups of stakeholders during the development of national action plans on women, peace and security or on preventing and countering violent extremism in Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines.

FIGURE 5. Use and relevance of UN Women's publications on women, peace and security



Source: Publications survey by UN Women Independent Evaluation Service, 31 responses

Several stakeholders in the Philippines referred to the ability of UN Women and its partners to reach the most marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities living on remote islands of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) and whose perspectives in peace and security processes were rarely highlighted.³¹

While other United Nations agencies were recognized

more in engaging with youth in Indonesia and the Philippines, stakeholders in Bangladesh pointed to the strong efforts of UN Women with the Centre for Peace and Justice of BRAC University in the active engagement of students and youth in peacebuilding efforts, which was identified as critical due to the high risk of radicalization among that population.³²

³⁰ <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/peace-and-security/promoting-women-in-law-enforcement>.

³¹ Due to COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions and low connectivity in these remote islands, the evaluation team was not able to validate the information.

³² Reports and literature show students are more susceptible and are frequent targets of radical groups. See: *Local Drivers and Dynamics of Youth Radicalisation in Bangladesh*, Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies, 2017; Huq, S. and M. Badiuzzaman, *Knowledge, Attitude and Practice of Youth in Promoting Peace and Social Cohesion*, Dhaka, Centre for Peace and Justice, BRAC University, 2019; *Conflict Analysis of Bangladesh*, Sian Herbert, University of Birmingham, 13 May 2019.

To what extent and how are the efforts of the Regional Office contributing to enhanced United Nations system coherence and coordination on women, peace and security at the regional or country level?

FINDING 5

Limited coordination on Women, Peace and Security at the country level and the regional level affected United Nations system coherence on this thematic area in the Asia and Pacific region. However, there was support for the UN Women Regional Office and field presences to contribute to strengthening the coherence of United Nations system efforts through coordination mechanisms on women, peace and security, and new partnerships (such as with ASEAN) bring potential for expanding coordination efforts beyond the United Nations system.

The evaluation confirmed that United Nations partners recognized UN Women's mandate in women, peace and security and high-level expertise in mainstreaming gender.³³ This is a strong asset that supported UN Women's involvement in coordination with other United Nations agencies, such as UNDP, UNODC, the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (UNDPPA) both regionally and at the country level, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) at the country level (around peace education and youth, peace and security agenda).

According to United Nations partners, UN Women's expertise was needed and beneficial in multi-annual joint United Nations programming, United Nations COVID-19 response in the countries, through formal coordination mechanisms of United Nations Country Offices as well as at the project level in the development of interventions in women, peace and security and preventing violent extremism at both country and regional level. According to both UN Women and other United Nations partners consulted for this evaluation, coordination is stronger at the programming and project design stages than in the implementation stage, when the work in many cases gets siloed. Good practice was identified with respect to policy support to the regional and national counterparts or in research and publications.

Coordination seems to be stronger as a result of the unique contribution of gender expertise provided by UN Women in the peace and security space, which is not or is less present in other agencies.

During the period under review, there were limited formal United Nations system coordination mechanisms at regional level (coordination has been through the regional Human Rights and Gender Equality thematic group) and few joint programmes. Although UN Women has been proactive in attempting to coordinate project-level initiatives on preventing violent extremism and anti-trafficking,

UN Women is not seen as the technical lead in these areas by its United Nations partners, but rather as a contributor. Some of the key hindering factors mentioned to the evaluation team were limited financial and human capacities (number of staff), limited operational capacities and lack of field presence. However, UN Women's global mandate on women, peace and security was not challenged, even though in a couple of cases United Nations partners pointed to a decline in institutional leadership or visibility of UN Women in this area at the global level, from their perspective.

Regional coordination

While there is no formal coordination mechanism for women, peace and security at the regional level, United Nations agencies work on this agenda is mostly coordinated through informal discussions and joint projects. According to stakeholders, success largely relied on the personal commitment of the United Nations personnel engaged in the efforts. The Regional Office reported that information had been shared through regional gender thematic working groups. The 2019 internal audit³⁴ of the Regional Office recommended that the office define a regional coordination strategy in line with regional priorities. However, this was still pending completion owing to reported bottlenecks with headquarters pertaining to guidance for Regional Offices.

At the subregional level, coordination with ASEAN progressed substantially during the period under review, mainly as a result of the establishment of the Indonesia Country Office in 2019 and the creation of a P4 post funded by core resources dedicated to the ASEAN liaison function in Jakarta, which demonstrated UN Women's commitment to this partnership. UN Women's coordination with UNDPPA was also recognized by stakeholders as critical to catalyzing and supporting efforts of ASEAN to advance the agendas on women, peace and security and preventing and countering violent extremism in the region.

³³ Meta-analysis of evaluations and evaluation interviews.

³⁴ UN Women, Internal Audit Service, Internal Audit: Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, 2019; https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/about_2019/accountability/audit-reports/2019/un-women-audit-report-2019-010-asia-pacific-ro-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5521.

Stakeholders noted that the more recent strategic engagement with ASEAN and UNDP also helped to increase the visibility and credibility of UN Women. The ASEAN study published in 2021 in partnership with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) mission to ASEAN also planted seeds for future collaboration. These efforts may have also helped to mobilize the US\$6.36 million programme “Empowering women for sustainable peace: preventing violence and promoting social cohesion in ASEAN” funded by Global Affairs Canada with the support of UN Women as a lead United Nations partner. This new project seeks to consolidate and systematize subregional normative efforts and develop a foundation for effective implementation of the women, peace and security agenda in the ASEAN subregion.

UN Women, UNODC and Interpol coordinated efforts through the regional joint project “Enhancing women’s role in law enforcement and border security to prevent trafficking in persons, transnational organized crime and terrorism” implemented in the Greater Mekong subregion. Stakeholders identified the Regional Office’s gender-mainstreaming expertise in research and training efforts on women’s leadership and empowerment as the added value.

The Regional Office coordinated with UNDP in its programme design, but there have been no formal mechanisms for coordinating more broadly on the women, peace and security agenda or sharing experience, results or lessons learned. Interactions were reported to be largely informal and based on personal connections. The 2019 internal audit of the Regional Office also identified the need to ensure better work planning across Common Chapter agencies to facilitate effective implementation

of Common Chapter issues, including joint programming opportunities, which this evaluation has identified as an issue that still requires attention.

Country-level coordination (for the regional project target countries)

In general, coordination on peace and security issues was more broadly flagged by stakeholders within the United Nations system as an area that has historically lacked formal coordination mechanisms (outside of formal peacekeeping missions). During the period under review, this did come to a turning point, at least in Bangladesh and Indonesia, where the United Nations Resident Coordinator’s Office took action to enhance coordination. In Bangladesh, for example, a specialist on preventing violent extremism was hired by the Resident Coordinator’s Office with the mandate to enhance coordination of United Nations efforts in this area; while in Indonesia the United Nations Peace Hub was established to provide physical space for key partners, mainly UN Women, UNODC and UNDP, to brainstorm, discuss and reflect on peacebuilding efforts. However, in the Philippines, particularly BARMM, due to high donor attention, national partners called for better United Nations coordination in implementation, as some of them voiced fatigue with multiple projects, some of which were seen to be overlapping. One of the partners also reported inefficient United Nations coordination of activities that were jointly implemented and where all implementing United Nations agencies were expected to provide feedback on the deliverable. Nevertheless, there is a need for overall improvement of coordination and information flow, particularly with respect to programme implementation.

EFFECTIVENESS

To what extent and how is Regional Office support to the Asia Pacific region (UN Women Country Offices, United Nations Country Teams and partners) contributing to the advancement of the women, peace and security agenda and benefiting women and girls?

FINDING 6

Regional Office projects on women, peace and security made key contributions to advancing the normative agenda on this issue through regional advocacy for regional and national action plans on women, peace and security, preventing violent extremism and mainstreaming of gender equality in border management policies in ASEAN countries.

Contributions of the Regional Office through its regional programmes to advance the normative agenda on women, peace and security were recognized by regional and national counterparts. Advancements at the country level with respect to national action plans were notable, and progress was also made at the subregional level

with respect to advancing the women, peace and security, preventing violent extremism and anti-trafficking agendas³⁵ in the ASEAN subregion. Normative support usually included research, awareness-raising, consultations, capacity-building and evidence-based policy advocacy.

BOX 2. Inclusive Development of National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism



In Bangladesh UN Women reported that technical support was provided to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in organizing public consultations and drafting the 2019-2022 national action plan on women, peace and security through context analysis, workshops, dialogues and awareness-raising. The consultations were organized by the women's organization Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha through the network of 21 grass-roots level CSOs to support inclusive development of national action plans. UN Women reported that 21 consultations were organized with 639 women and 231 men. Participation of United Nations agencies, academia, research organizations and think tanks was reported. A road map on how the implementation would take place was developed to guide the process going forward. The national action plan was launched at the end of 2019.



In Indonesia, UN Women supported the National Counter-Terrorism Agency in developing a gender-sensitive national action plan on preventing and countering violent extremism. Both United Nations and Government stakeholders consulted recognized the strong contribution of UN Women to the pillar on prevention, where empowering of women and community work is addressed. UN Women supported one consultation event among the institutions and one civil society and community consultation voicing their needs. Insights from Peace Villages were considered, and the model was envisioned to be at the forefront for the implementation of the national action plan on preventing violent extremism. The national action plan was launched in January 2021.



In the Philippines, UN Women provided a gender expert to the inter-agency technical group and supported consultations around the development of a national action plan on preventing and countering violent extremism. The plan places strong emphasis on implementation by local and regional government actors in Mindanao, including BARMM. Following the national action plan, in partnership with the Department of Interior and local government, a guidance note was developed for implementation of the gender provisions in the national action plan. The development of the plan was also supported by UNDP and the joint Peacebuilding Fund supported project "Building Capacities for Sustaining Peace in Mindanao" implemented by UN Women, UNDP and UNICEF. Some participants in the consultations noted that the consultations on national action plans were inclusive and time-efficient. However, rather than seeking input during the design stage, the consultations were focused on checking participants' opinions about existing plans, and thus participants did not feel that their opinions were being integrated. At the level of BARMM, UN Women supported 100 CSOs to participate in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region Women's Summit in 2019 and facilitated the 10 point "Women's Agenda" as a foundation for engendering transitional and peace processes in the region.

Source: UN Women preventing violent extremism project reports and evaluation interviews

UN Women engaged with ASEAN to address women, peace and security through the Joint Statement on Promoting Women, Peace, and Security in ASEAN during the 31st ASEAN Summit in November 2017. Continuous and strengthened cooperation resulted in engendering the ASEAN Plan of Action to Prevent and Counter the Rise of Radicalization and Violent Extremism, adopted in 2018, and the [recent joint ASEAN Regional Study on Women, Peace and Security](#) and discussions on the position of women in regional border management. A new project funded by Canada will further this work by supporting ASEAN through capacity-building to increase expertise for the development and implementation of regional women, peace and security policies and frameworks, the application of innovative approaches in conflict prevention at the national level and the establishment of subregional cooperation platforms. It aims to help ASEAN become a knowledge hub on women, peace and security and lead the advancement of the women, peace and security agenda in the ASEAN region.

Following the research on women in law enforcement in 10 ASEAN countries, and wide promotion of the report on women in law enforcement in the ASEAN region, the

promotion of the recommendations and advocacy resulted in the engendering of the ASEAN Border Management Cooperation Roadmap Draft (November 2020). The draft document calls upon the research and encourages the collection of disaggregated information that includes gender and a chapter dedicated to increasing the capacity of border officials to address the growing incidence of human trafficking of women.

The Regional Office, in coordination with UN Women offices participating in regional projects, supported the development of national action plans on women, peace and security and preventing and countering violent extremism in Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines, mostly through the engagement of gender experts, capacity-building of line ministries and ensured inclusion of CSOs in consultations. Stakeholders pointed to the inclusive and wide consultation that informed national action plan development as the key achievement of UN Women, which helped to ensure that diverse voices were heard. UN Women contributed to supporting localization of the women, peace and security agenda.

In the Philippines, the BARMM Transitional Authority accepted the Women's Agenda and discussions on localization continue; while in Indonesia, the nation action plan on preventing and countering violent extremism is localized through the Peace Village Initiative and Peace Village Declarations. While policy work and capacity-building of national counterparts was recognized, key government partners and CSOs consulted expected the United Nations to support the effective implementation of adopted national action plans and policy frameworks. They noted that there was an opportunity for UN

Women to better articulate the longer term approach for supporting implementation of action plans.³⁶ It should be noted that although other UN Women Country Offices worked on the development of second edition national action plans (e.g. Nepal and Timor Leste) or key political processes related to national action plans (e.g. referendum in Papua New Guinea - Bougainville), UN Women focal points on women, peace and security noted limited engagement with the Regional Office on the matter.

FINDING 7

There was evidence that economic empowerment initiatives related to women, peace and security contributed to women's enhanced self-esteem and positive reputation in the community and led to marginal income generation and improved livelihoods. However, there was no systematic approach or model employed, and the value for money and sustainability of specific initiatives remain unclear due to the lack of outcome-level monitoring. The relationship between economic empowerment and resilience of the communities to radicalization and violent extremism also requires more time to document and understand.

Based on the theory that violent extremism and radicalization are closely related to exclusion and poverty, the Regional Office and its CSO partners incorporated women's economic empowerment initiatives into the preventing violent extremism programme, which comprised four rounds of one-year projects (referred to below as PVE 1 – PVE 4). While there is some evidence that the initiatives helped to support a sense of empowerment in the community and initiated changes in power dynamics within the family, there was limited information on whether the same individuals were being reached in subsequent phases, and results of the business efforts and other community interventions were not comprehensively tracked at outcome level. This was also complicated by the short time frame and the stop-and-go nature of the initiatives.

Economic empowerment initiatives varied across the countries. Approximately US\$447,000 was invested across the first two phases of the PVE project, amounting to around 4 per cent of the overall budget. Through the case study on preventing violent extremism, the evaluation team studied initiatives in the Philippines and to some extent in Indonesia. Several key informants suggested that the direct link between economic empowerment and preventing violent extremism was unclear, and that they believed there may be other, more significant factors that contribute to

radicalization, such as social exclusion, discrimination, disturbed family relationships and unaddressed grievances. Still, there was a sense that economic empowerment is a good entry point to discuss stability and peace and that it could contribute to individual and collective empowerment of women and to their active engagement in the communities on various issues, including preventing violent extremism.

Additionally, some of the rights holders in the Philippines stated that through economic empowerment programmes, entire families were reached, and their cohesion supported. According to the project reports, a total of 3,333 women in Indonesia and the Philippines received leadership and entrepreneurship training, and 1,072 benefited from business development grants, loans or a connection to the market. In the Philippines, 213 men were involved as well, and a total of 18 women's cooperatives were established.

Table 2 provides an overview of the prevention of violent extremism project economic empowerment initiatives that included direct cash and equipment transfers to beneficiaries. As can be noted, very different approaches were taken at each site and even within each country. The financial resources given to beneficiaries varied dramatically from US\$170 per person to US\$466 in the same country.

³⁶ This also corresponds to the finding of the Corporate Evaluation of UN Women's Support to National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security (2021) that there is sufficient evidence and demand for UN Women to go beyond the development of national action plans on women, peace and security and systematically support their implementation, p.52.

TABLE 2. Overview of direct cash or equipment support to beneficiaries provided through Regional Office prevention of violent extremism project phases 1 and 2 (2017-2020)

Project / Country	No. Of Beneficiaries	Amount	USD Per capita investment	Initial results
PVE 1: Bangladesh	600	USD 280,000	USD 466	Increased income, perception and decision making in families, perception in the community (all), new products, new cooperatives (PHL) awareness on PVE (BGD, IDN)
PVE 1: Indonesia	400	USD 74,000 loans [and 39,000 equipment]	USD 185 [excluding equipment]	
PVE 2: Philippines	885 / 18 cooperatives	USD 10,350 to cooperatives, plus equipment, supply, material, and ingredients to start up the cooperatives	USD 575 / cooperative	
PVE 2: Bangladesh	230 in a different area than PVE1	USD 39,100	USD 170	
PVE 2: Bangladesh	20 students (4 groups)	USD 4,700	USD 1175 / group	

Source: Project reports, reviews and evaluation interviews

Philippines

In the Philippines, during the second phase of the PVE project UN Women partnered with the Moropreneur Inc. to empower women through the development of craft-based social enterprises in the Basilan and Maguindanao provinces in BARMM. The partner reported that cooperatives were selected based on an analysis of extremist activities and poverty levels and the focus was on areas of medium risk. However, the analysis was not provided to the evaluation team. Final approval for the beneficiaries was requested from barangays (local authorities). According to the project reports, a total of 885 beneficiaries (672 women) in 22 communities were provided training in leadership and social entrepreneurship, and 18 cooperatives were established. These cooperatives also served as peer support groups for women entrepreneurs. In Maguindanao, women produced water hyacinth woven handicrafts, corn-based and coconut-based products, and cocoa soap. In Basilan, women produced bamboo tea and straws, cassava chips, dried seafood and woven handicrafts.

The evaluation team interviewed the leaders of 8 of the 18 cooperatives and 2 cooperative members supported through the PVE project in 2018–2019 in Basilan and Maguindanao to better understand their perspective on the extent to which the economic empowerment initiatives combined with leadership training and networking of women empowered them to participate in community-building and contributed to preventing violent extremism.

All of the women interviewed saw some economic benefits of the programme, although in most cases businesses were still fragile and susceptible to external threats.

BOX 3: Partnership agreement with the Moropreneur Inc.



Seven women claimed to have improved their self-esteem and self-confidence to run the cooperative, as well as to have improved their position in the family and in the neighbourhood. Four of the women engaged with the wider community in advocacy, barangays (community-level) decision-making, health promotion and vaccination efforts. Engagement of one cooperative in dissuading a group of youths being contacted by a radical group and one cooperative mediating a case of violence against women and children was reported.

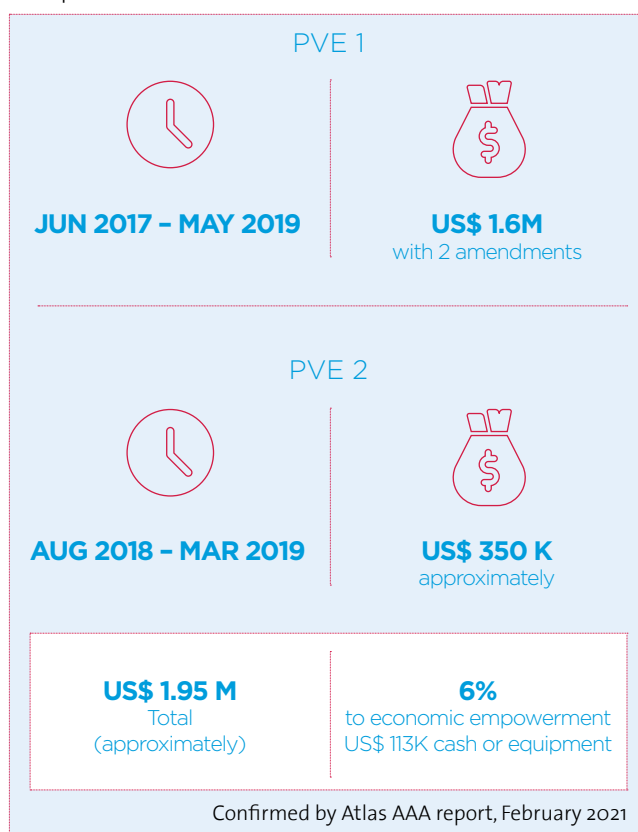
Women's peer support and networking was recognized as an important factor of empowerment, as well as the need for local authorities and governments to support the emerging businesses through their local development programmes. The Moropreneur Inc. continued to support the women's cooperatives even after the project ended, and their help was recognized through advisory support, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the beneficiaries said that the Moropreneur Inc. helped them to shift their production to face masks instead of traditional garments.

While there are nascent effects of the intervention on empowerment and women's lives, the links between the prevention of violent extremism and economic empowerment activities and between supported beneficiaries and peacebuilding in wider communities are still unclear given the short period of time and limited outcome-level monitoring in place.

Indonesia

In Indonesia, economic empowerment was an important component of the Peace Villages Initiative and efforts in preventing violent extremism implemented by the Wahid Foundation, which aimed to provide leadership skills, build self-esteem and support bonding and peer-support among women. The Wahid Foundation started supporting economic empowerment in the villages in 2013,³⁷ and the more comprehensive peacebuilding concept of Peace Villages started with the preventing violent extremism project in 2017. The Wahid Foundation participated in two phases of the PVE project, receiving almost US\$2 million in funding, with US\$113,000 allocated to economic empowerment activities (or 6 per cent of the total). UN Women reported that 2,661 women received leadership and entrepreneurship training and 400 women benefited from the savings and loan system established with the seed money provided by the project to the cooperatives and equipment granted by the project to facilitate business operation.

BOX 4: Wahid Foundation contracts PVE 1 and PVE 2



The selection criteria for how the communities were chosen and why these 400 women received the loan were unclear (no baseline study was provided to the evaluation team). More detailed information on the demographic make-up of recipients or whether they were considered vulnerable to radicalization was not provided.

There were many lessons learned from the first year of implementation. The monitoring missions conducted by the Regional Office team identified key issues with the programme design and implementation.³⁸

The implementing partner had replaced the stipulated approach of savings and loans groups with microfinancing at a 30 per cent interest rate, which they had already been operating with in the same communities. The implementing partner reduced the interest rate after discussions with UN Women. It was also noted that several women who received the loans ended up giving the loans to their husbands. A review of the project conducted by an external consultant in April 2018 identified that a significant amount of time had to be invested in supporting loan disbursement which diverted attention away from peacebuilding training and found that there were no plans for ensuring adequate support to the loan recipients after project completion.³⁹

The UN Women mission report also noted that in some cases communities were not consulted on the choice of business, resulting in equipment not being used by the community, or about ongoing business support. For example, in at least one case, the cooperative was provided with washing machines, but a monitoring mission by the Regional Office noted that these machines had been sitting unused for some time and the cooperative was not interested in developing the business. Similar issues were reiterated in the review conducted by an external consultant in May 2019 noting, "In Indonesia, several of the businesses and cooperatives that were established in phase 1 of the programme were not successful and struggled to maintain group membership. Some interview participants discussed their concerns that without longer term support to the women participating in economic initiatives, beneficiaries could go into debt or be unable to repay their loans, and the programme could end in doing more harm than good. Other interview participants mentioned that they wished there had been stronger economic analysis and reflection, such as market or value chain analysis, done before setting up economic modalities. They described a need to better tailor livelihoods activities to local realities, including establishing stronger links with local service providers. These participants felt that the economic activities could have been stronger if there had been more time for reflection on the most effective and context-specific strategies for livelihood approaches."⁴⁰

37 <http://peacevillage.id/pages/bhineka-itu-berkah>; https://wahidfoundation.org/index.php/menu/index/c_2/Peace-Loving-Cooperative.

38 Monitoring mission report, July 2017

39 Review of 'Empowered Women, Peaceful Communities' A UN Women Project on Preventing Violent Extremism in Asia-Pacific, April 2018

40 Light review of phase two of the PVE project, March 2018 - May 2019.

Another challenge noted in the monitoring mission report conducted by the Regional Office team was that the implementing partner did not use a standard curriculum for capacity-building efforts. Thus, when participants were asked about the learning sessions, they only referred to financial literacy skills with limited mention of peace, social cohesion or women's rights issues. It was also noted that the groups of women already knew each other, thus linkages with peacebuilding were unclear.

However, neither the project review conducted by an external consultant⁴¹ nor this evaluation conducted site visits. According to the reports of the Wahid Foundation and key informant interviews, women participants engaged in the community more easily and participated in village planning processes, facilitated community dialogues, and participated in early warning community groups. In one case, the Wahid Foundation reported that the economic empowerment programme helped a woman who was reportedly related to a radical group to reintegrate into the community and start a business.

FINDING 8

Three key issues hampered the overall effectiveness of the design and implementation of the women, peace and security programme by the Regional Office:

1. The one-year projects lacked a vision or model with built-in approaches to scale up or down, based on project results over the longer term.
2. The evidence base for potentially scaling up innovations was weak.
3. The linkages within and across projects on women, peace and security could have been strengthened to achieve greater impact.

The Regional Office designed and implemented its women, peace and security projects in a complex and dynamic environment with multiple stakeholders. This was affected by numerous external factors, such as conflict, fragility and radicalization, diverse social norms across the region, political and economic turbulence, and natural and health crises. The very nature of work on women, peace and security entails high risk and many unknowns, including the evidence base for what works. Given this very dynamic context, programming should be designed to factor in flexibility, with a defined risk appetite to ensure that emergent outcomes are accounted for and lessons are learned.

As noted under Finding 2, challenges related to the overall coherence of the Women, Peace and Security thematic area (e.g. lack of overarching vision and interaction with the headquarters policy area), combined with the reportedly high pressure from UN Women headquarters to mobilize resources, led to donor priorities influencing the focus of work. This led to the Regional Office accepting a large amount of money to be implemented within a one-year time frame. The project on preventing violent extremism represented the highest financial commitment received

by the Regional Office for a one-year project during the Strategic Note period 2018-2021. Because it was based on supplementary funds from the Government of Japan,⁴² all funding had to be spent within a one-year time frame.

Three key issues hampered the overall effectiveness of implementation of the women, peace and security projects:

1. The one-year initiatives lacked a vision or model with built-in approaches to scale up or down, based on project results over the longer term.

There was a mismatch between the ambitious outcomes of the preventing violent extremism projects and the short annual time frame. The projects aimed to build communities that are more resilient to radicalization and to support social cohesion. The projects set two outcome indicators to demonstrate that women are empowered to build resilient, cohesive and peaceful communities to prevent terrorism and hate speech: the number of individuals who have strengthened their understanding of the role women play in preventing terrorism, violent extremism and hate speech; and the number of gender-responsive policies or strategies developed to address violent extremism.

⁴¹ Light review of phase two of the PVE project, March 2018 – May 2019.

⁴² The Government of Japan has contributed to UN Women since its establishment, and there has been an upward trend in Japan's regular and other resources contributions over the last three years. Between 2011 and 2019, Japan provided an aggregate contribution of US\$134.33 million to UN Women globally. In 2019, Japan was the seventh-largest government contributor, with US\$17.65 million, and the fourteenth-largest regular resources contributor, with US\$3.93 million. The Government of Japan issues a supplementary budget to support short-term emergency response.

As identified by the evaluability assessment, neither of these indicators measure outcome-level change related to empowered women, resilient communities or social cohesion. Outcome-level change would be very difficult to measure in a one-year time frame, especially given that the actual implementation time would be much less than one year. In this case, implementing partners had 6-10 months to implement their actions (9 partners with average implementation duration of 8.7 months). However, without a vision or model for the initiatives there was no approach for scaling up or down based on the project results over the longer term.

Another issue was that the approaches varied significantly across each implementing partner and country. This may have been due to a lack of clarity in the project document, which allowed the implementing partner to propose the implementation approach. While projects should accommodate co-designing, adaptation and localization, without a coherent overarching approach or model, the added value of the regional programme is lessened because the ability to have a meaningful comparison across countries is at risk. This finding is also in line with an IAS report from 2019 on implementing partners, which identified that UN Women projects needed to better define project implementation approaches during formulation and planning, prior to initiation of the implementing partner selection process.⁴³

2. The Regional Office women, peace and security team pushed boundaries and tried new approaches, which allowed innovative approaches to be tested. However, without a clear risk-appetite statement and a strategy linking these efforts to programming, the evidence base for potentially scaling up these innovations was weak. Approaches to innovation at UN Women are nascent. Although there is an organization-wide innovation strategy, it is not well known across the Entity and is primarily focused on the use of technology for innovation.⁴⁴ Some regions, such as the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, have elaborated their own strategies for innovation.⁴⁵

The Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (and its women, peace and security team) has yet to develop a strategy for innovation. It was credited by consulted partners with taking an “innovative” approach in its efforts to tackle the prevention of violent extremism. Elements of innovation that were identified related to taking new approaches, such as the usage of comedy, videos and influencers to address counter-narratives to violent extremism. The linkage with economic empowerment was also identified as a new approach to tackling peace and security

issues. While these efforts provided a new and welcomed approach, the value for money and their integration with the broader programmatic and research efforts could have been strengthened so that the effects of these efforts could be measured and expanded upon for scaling up effective solutions (see Finding 8).

3. The linkages between different elements (normative-level change, community-level change and broader knowledge and awareness-raising) and across projects (preventing violent extremism and border management) could have been strengthened to achieve greater impact.

The Regional Office outlined a three-pronged approach in its project document seeking to influence normative-level change, community-level change, and broader knowledge and awareness-raising.

FIGURE 6. Evaluation team reconstructed approach to women, peace and security project theory of change



The literature review and the meta-analysis of evaluations confirmed key strategies that should be combined in programmes targeting women’s and community empowerment.⁴⁶

1. Multidimensional capacity-building (psychosocial, leadership, economic empowerment, entrepreneurship, advocacy);
2. Establishment of safe spaces or peer-support groups for women;
3. Linking women’s empowerment programmes with wider community dynamics and local government planning and budgeting processes, including in the security sector;
4. Ensuring longer term project support as a key factor for empowerment.

43 UN Women Internal Audit Service, UN Women Implementing Partner Management Process, 2019; IEAS/IAS/2019/006 https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/about_20us/accountability/audit-reports/2019/un-women-audit-report-2019-006-implementing-partner-management-process-en.pdf?la=en&vs=4658.

44 [UN Women Innovation Strategy](#)

45 UN Women Europe and Central Asia, <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/9/press-release-un-women-launches-a-series-of-innovation-labs-for-gender-equality>.

46 Annex 3. Meta-analysis of evaluations and Annex 1. Theory of Change.

While this may have worked well in theory, in practice the implementation of the various initiatives lacked synergy. Advancements were made in each area, however the evaluation found that greater progress was noted only where attention to the interactions between these elements was heightened.

There are good examples of where the different initiatives worked together for greater impact. For example, in Indonesia, experience from the Peace Villages Initiative informed the development of a national action plan on preventing violent extremism, and the Government committed to expanding Peace Villages as the flagship initiative of the national action plan. Peace Villages is a comprehensive model developed by the Wahid Foundation to support peacebuilding and prevent violent extremism in the local communities of Indonesia. Community and religious leaders in the villages engaged around a set of peacebuilding priorities, focused on nurturing peace values through decision-making, education, arts and culture, economic and political engagement of women in the community and early warning mechanisms. To become a Peace Village, a village needs to accept a set of nine peace indicators to be followed. As of May 2021, 14 of the 30 villages approached had officially accepted the indicators and declared themselves Peace Villages as recognized by the Government. Another example is a project by the CSO Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha, which is related to building capacities and raising awareness of local communities to prevent violent extremism and feeds into the national action plan on women, peace and security. The CSO presence in the field organized consultations on women's priorities on women, peace and security in 21 regions countrywide. Prior to the consultations, a comprehensive training of trainer's programme was organized to ensure better understanding of this issue and the consultation process among future facilitators.

However, several other initiatives⁴⁷ had far weaker linkages between the three dimensions and lacked clear connections to the wider women, peace and security processes.

- In Indonesia, the UN Women Regional Office supported the Institute for Education Development, Social, Religious, and Cultural Studies (INFEST) to engage the Government and establish an online safe travel platform managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and provided content related to preventing violent extremism to the Indonesian

Migrant Workers Resource Center Portal. It also helped the Habibie Centre implement a capacity-building project of women mediators and an interfaith dialogue in local communities. However, the linkages with the Peace Villages and normative efforts were unclear.

- The Regional Office produced videos that were disseminated by key influencers in several countries. For example, in Bahasa-speaking parts of Indonesia there were interesting results regarding immediate effects, including a reported 10 per cent reduction in the same area of pro-Islamic State (ISIS) tweets, Facebook and Instagram posts after the launch of the videos.⁴⁸ However, the Regional Office noted that for security reasons the videos were not directly disseminated in the Peace Villages. The videos were not linked with a comprehensive approach to raising awareness and supporting behaviour change, and the results were not tracked over time. Exploration of other factors that might have influenced the results with respect to the reduction in tweets supporting extremism and trends that followed the dissemination of videos would be important to document and understand for future efforts. In this case, the broader effects of how these videos influenced social cohesion and radicalization or policy-level change were not well documented or understood. The potential of the videos could have been systematically exploited and researched in community activities, which would make follow-up on their effects easier (See also Finding 9).
- In Bangladesh, the UN Women regional project on preventing violent extremism supported the Centre for Peace and Justice of BRAC University to set up Women Peace Cafés at two universities. The cafés served as hubs for hundreds of students to discuss the prevention of violent extremism among youth and build peace leadership among students and as incubators of social entrepreneurship and community actions. However, the initiative was not linked with the national-level normative actions mentioned above or any other process to support multiplication and long-term sustainability, so the results remained within the two targeted universities.

⁴⁷ As per this evaluation case study, annual reports and light reviews of the preventing violent extremism project.

⁴⁸ Mythos Labs was the implementing partner procured by the Regional Office to produce the videos and monitoring reports. These were provided to the evaluation team but were not validated.

- In the Philippines, the Moropreneur Inc., a social entrepreneurship NGO, empowered women in the Mindanao and Basilan provinces through leadership training and the development of craft-based social enterprises. There were ideas to link the efforts to local governments, however it was not possible in a short time frame. Although these efforts were perhaps meant to be clearly linked with normative-level efforts, the documentation on results is unclear. For example, the extent to which these leaders are the same leaders who were engaged in influencing the development of the national action plan on preventing and countering violent extremism or other policy efforts (e.g. the BARMM Women's Summit) is not well understood from the documentation.

Many other activities were implemented with the multitude of partners. However, the extent to which they were working coherently together remained unclear, as the lack

of data collected hindered the analysis of linkages across the different dimensions.

Opportunities for synergies between the different women, peace and security projects were missed as well.

For example, although all projects related to women, peace and security had a women's economic empowerment component, there was no model that was being tested and adapted, and lessons learned were not exchanged between the initiatives. The Regional Office could have leveraged the resources across projects through the establishment of a broader model for economic empowerment linked with the prevention of violent extremism and the trafficking of persons, which could be taken to scale with partners. Similarly, it is unclear whether components of the policy-level advocacy were captured through the normative efforts of the projects on preventing violent extremism. For example, development of the national action plan could have linked with key lessons and the advocacy messages of the trafficking/ border management project.

BOX 5: Community Group Engagement to Support Survivors of Trafficking

Community groups were engaged to report trafficking and to support survivors of trafficking in border areas of the Mekong subregion. Support included raising awareness and knowledge on safe migration, preventing and reporting human trafficking and violence against women, and case referral procedures. Some groups also supported migrant workers in entrepreneurship and vocational training for starting their own businesses or gaining decent employment. The community groups included: in Cambodia, Cambodian Women's Crisis Center and World Hope International (WHI); in Myanmar, Htoi Gender and Development Foundation; and in Thailand, the Asian Research Center for Migration, the Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, the Center for Girls, and Rights Beyond Borders.

FINDING 9

There is evidence that Regional Office publications and communication products and events have helped to fill a gap in the women, peace and security space and contributed to raising the profile of the Regional Office and UN Women with respect to women, peace and security in the Asia Pacific region. There was opportunity for enhanced monitoring and follow-up and linkages with programming, so that the effects could be understood and tracked both individually and in relation to the other efforts (e.g. economic empowerment and capacity-building).

One of the key functions of the Regional Office as identified in its Strategic Note is to “function(s) as a knowledge and policy advisory hub which provides services to UN Women offices, United Nations Country Teams and partners in the region with new knowledge, programming evidence, policy and technical expertise.”⁴⁹

The evaluation case study focused on Regional Office publications and its communication strategy on women, peace and security as an integral enabling strategy for

achieving the aims set forth in the reconstructed theory of change. The Regional Office WPS team produced a significant number of publications, communication products (mainly videos) and workshops and learning events between 2018 and 2019 comprising an estimated 23 per cent of the total budget for just the first and second phase of the PVE project, which have contributed to the visibility of women, peace and security at the regional and country level.⁵⁰

49 UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific Strategic Note Narrative 2019–2021.

50 As identified by the case study completed for this evaluation and confirmed through interviews.

These efforts served an array of uses for partner institutions, providing relevant recommendations for policies, programmes and framing agendas⁵¹, and contributed important research to under-studied women, peace and security issues. Overall, linkages with programme implementation in countries could have been strengthened, as it would have allowed more in-depth understanding of the effects of the publications and videos.

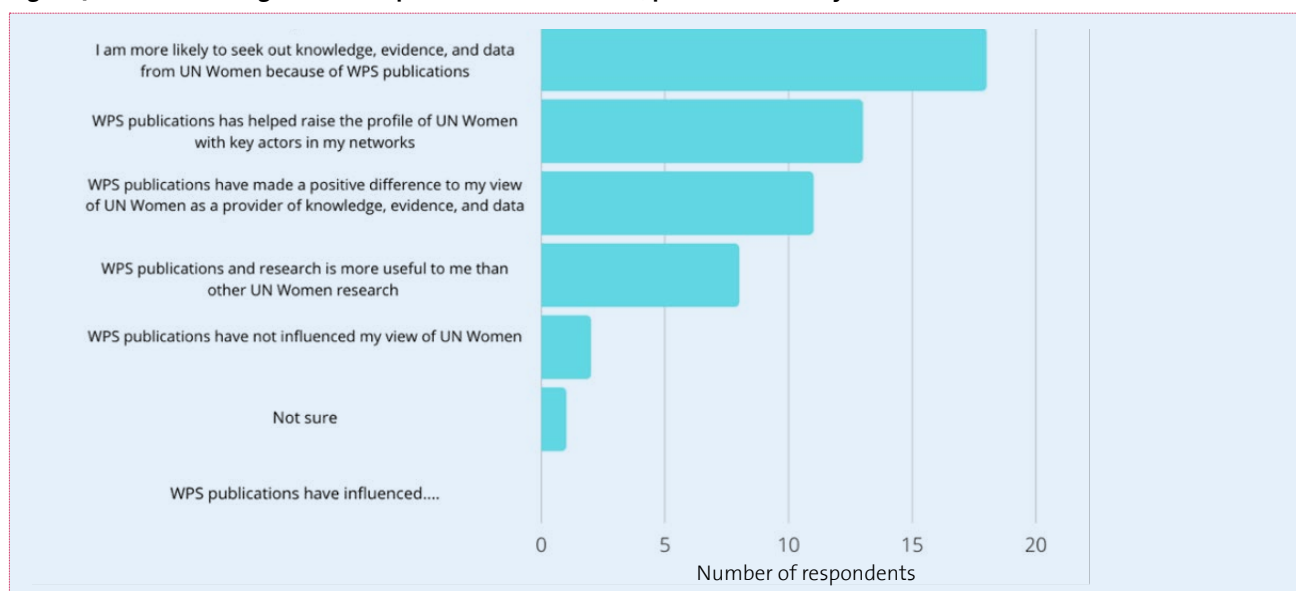
Publications

The Regional Office women, peace and security team produced 32⁵² publications between 2018 and 2020 (no publications were produced in 2017). The total cost of the publications, including research, was difficult to estimate given the involvement of consultants and research firms. However, it was at minimum US\$1.07 million, which was

the estimated cost of six publications that were included in the in-depth case study combined with the amount contracted to research firms.

A survey of key civil society and academic partners was conducted by the evaluation team. Most respondents (61.3 per cent) described the Regional Office publications as high quality. No respondents described the publications as being of poor quality. Survey respondents were also asked how the publications influenced their view of UN Women. Most respondents agreed with the statement, “I am more likely to seek out knowledge, evidence, and data from UN Women because of women, peace and security publications”, and the second most popular response was “Women, peace and security publications have helped raise the profile of UN Women with key actors in my networks”.

Figure 7. Influence of Regional Office publications on women, peace and security

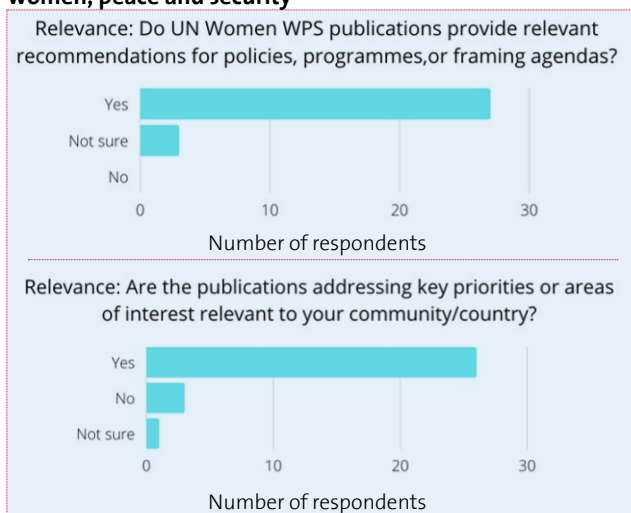


(Independent Evaluation Service survey – Women, peace and security publication analysis survey, 2021)

Most survey respondents stated that the publications provided relevant recommendations for policies, programmes or framing agendas and addressed key priorities or areas of interest relevant to their community/country.

As identified by the Regional Office women, peace and security team, the publications aimed for a range of uses, including positioning the Regional Office as a thought-leader on women, peace and security through its research on emerging or under-researched areas; informing programming, training and guides; advocacy to advance the women, peace and security agenda, and advocacy for UN Women’s work. The survey respondents identified that they used the publications to learn more about women, peace and security issues and inform their own research. Informing their work or their organization’s work and informing policy advocacy of decision-makers were also popular responses.

Figure 8. Relevance of Regional Office publications on women, peace and security



(IES survey - Women, peace and security publication analysis survey, 2021)

51 As reported in the survey of CSO partners conducted for this evaluation.

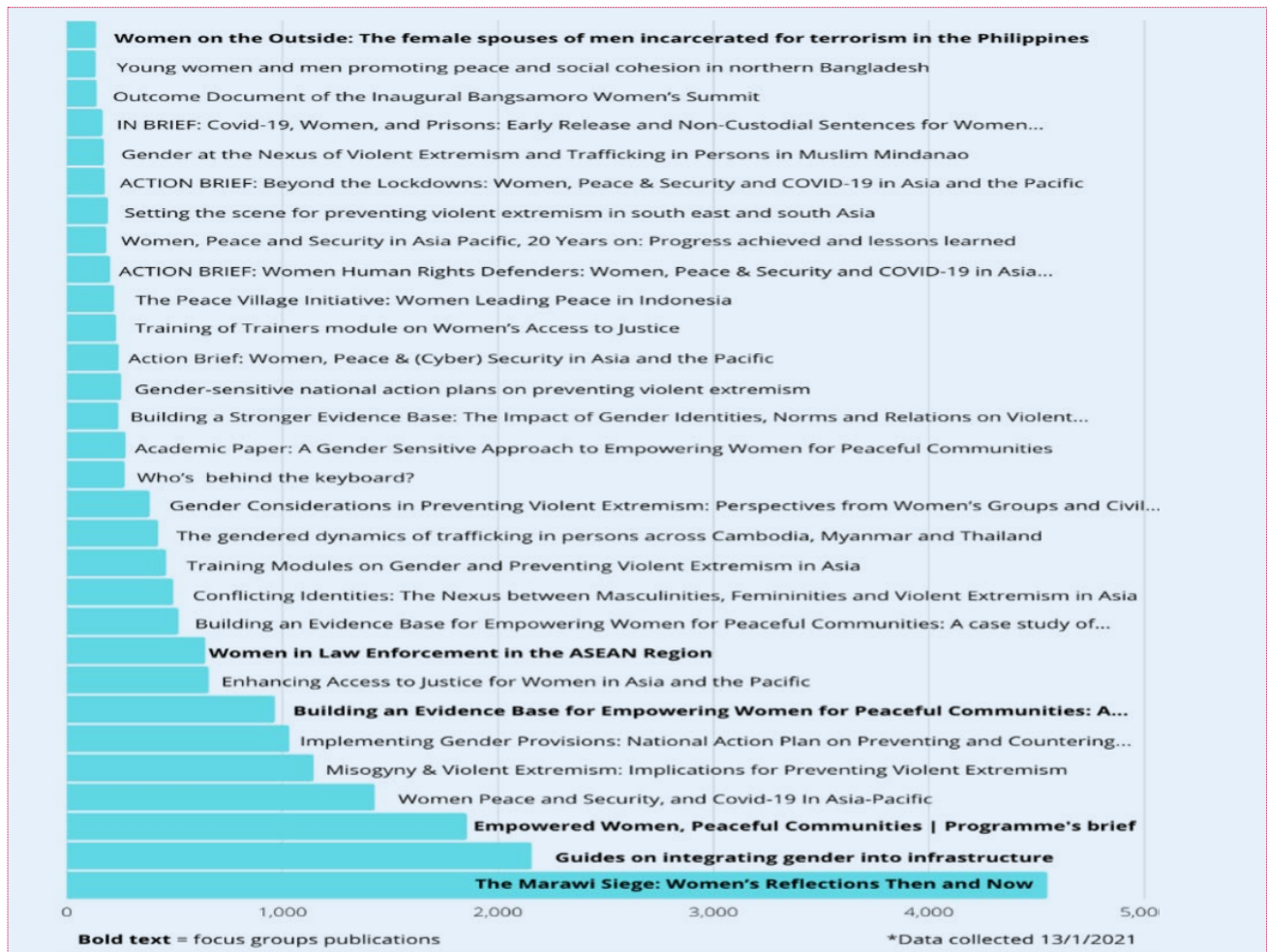
52 The total number of publications is 33. However, this evaluation does not include the publication Mapping Access to Justice for Women in Nepal, as it is not included in the publication section of the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific website.

Although mainly anecdotal, there are indications that regional publications fed into policymaking. For example, the research publication *Women in Law Enforcement in the ASEAN region* issued specific recommendations to support ASEAN and member States to establish gender-inclusive policies. UN Women reported that the publication fed into the ASEAN Border Management Cooperation Roadmap presented at the 14th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in Kyoto in March 2021.

Six publications on women, peace and security were reviewed in depth. These amounted to a cost of approximately US\$123,000, excluding personnel time. However, it should be noted that much more was invested in publica-

For example research conducted with Monash University and the Overseas Development Institute as part of the preventing violent extremism projects amounted to almost US\$950,000.⁵³ There was a broad range of publication access: the highest number of downloads was 4,547 ([The Marawi Siege – Women’s Reflections Then and Now](#), 2019); while the lowest number of downloads was 46 ([Preliminary findings of the national survey on the threat of radicalization among Muslim men and women in Indonesia](#), 2018).⁵⁴ The publication with the highest number of downloads was also the least costly of the six reviewed because it was produced by UN Women personnel. The cost per download of the six publications reviewed ranged between US\$2 and US\$44. There did not seem to be any correlation between in-house or external production and reach, although it should be noted that the publication with the highest reach was produced internally at very low cost.

FIGURE 9: Downloads of publications on women, peace and security between January 2017 and December 2020



53 UN Women financial system Atlas AAA report February 2021 for projects IDs 109376, 104702, 109318.

54 Page views per month graph in Annex 8 Case Study: Publications and communications

Dissemination of publications and information on women, peace and security

The dissemination strategy varied for each publication and depended on the significance of the publication. Typically, a launch event where hard copies of the publication were distributed was planned, and panel discussions on the publication were often held. There was scope for the WPS team to further engage with stakeholders to ensure that the publications were not only reaching targeted user groups, but that the publications were also meeting the needs of these parties. The case study examined Regional Office social media characteristics and found that the top performing content was through sharing photos, followed by videos. (See Annex 8 for more information on the characteristics of social media followers.) The Regional Office women, peace and security team has implemented social media strategies to promote publications, but there are areas for improvement, particularly concerning the distribution of promotional videos.

Videos

Since 2018, 31 videos on women, peace and security⁵⁵ have been produced by the Regional Office⁵⁶. One of the videos with the highest number of views that was promoted through UN Women channels was [Gender Equal Peaceful World – GEPW](#) (2018), which had over 6,000 views and cost approximately US\$50,000 (including production, related event and dissemination). It is a four-and-a-half-minute comedic video which features YouTube star, Japanese comedian, television personality and entertainer

PIKOTARO (685,000 YouTube subscribers) as he adapted his viral video “PPAP” (140 million views) to promote SDGs 5 and 16. An interview with the Regional Director for the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific follows. A 55 second version (song only) of the video was also posted directly to Facebook, where it was viewed 21,000 times, approximately US\$ 0.50 per view.



Another popular video through UN Women channels was [After Decades of Conflict, Women Build Peace in the Philippines](#) (2019), which was viewed

over 1,500 times. It is a six-and-a-half-minute video that explores UN Women’s Empowered Women, Peaceful Communities programme in the Philippines. The link posted to Facebook reached 1,147 people, and 67 social media engagements were made⁵⁷.

The Regional Office also partnered with Mythos Labs, a production company that produces videos to combat violent extremism and promote women in law enforcement. The Regional Office had three contracts with Mythos Labs extending from 2017 – 2021, with total expenditures reaching US\$630,210 to produce thirteen comedic videos and provide social media capacity-building (approximately US\$50,000 per video), which reportedly were viewed 3,631,086 million times. The Regional Office reported that to mitigate security risks, the videos produced for the project were not visibly branded with UN Women branding.⁵⁸

TABLE 3. Snapshot Report by Mythos Labs on the reach of videos to combat violent extremism (PVE Phase 1).

	India’s Next Top Role Model (India)	Mana Hero Wanita Kita (Malaysia)	Suatu Malam di Museum (Indonesia)	Perfect Patri (Bangladesh)
Total views within six months of launch (Facebook and YouTube)	1,298,000	60,178	110,001	31,671 (video released in Sep 2019. Over 160,000 views as of Sep 2020.)
Total likes	90,000	109	7,200	

55 Number of YouTube views as of February 2021.

56 Four videos on women, peace and security have been produced by the Philippines field presence and are not included in this analysis.

57 Social media engagement is the measurement of comments, likes, and shares.

58 Key word searches of each video were conducted on the Regional Office Facebook page and relevant field presence Facebook pages.

The Mythos Labs partnership provided an assessment related to the immediate effects of the videos. According to the assessment, around 90 per cent of comments on the videos were positive; 60 to 70 per cent of the participants in post-viewing surveys reflected that videos made ISIS propaganda less credible (of total of 61 and 67 respondents, depending on the video); and at least 83 per cent of the participants were willing to share the videos with friends who they suspected had sympathies for ISIS. Sixty-four per cent of the respondents who identified as “harboring sympathies for certain grievances expressed by groups such as ISIS” said the video “introduced or strengthened doubts about the credibility of extremist ideologies”. Mythos Labs also used machine learning and emotional recognition equipment and algorithms in a monitored environment with focus groups sampled in accordance with the targeted population to assess the effectiveness of the videos, noticing relevant facial expressions of curiosity, excitement and amusement in viewers⁵⁹. For example, the dialogue about women earning less than men elicited high levels of excitement among female viewers (52 per cent increase); the dialogue about ISIS ideology aimed at women elicited high levels of curiosity among all viewers (67 per cent increase); and “female testimonials” about why working for ISIS was horrible for women elicited spikes in viewer curiosity (43 per cent) and amusement (61 per cent). Watching the female protagonist fight the terrorists elicited high levels of excitement among all viewers (41 per cent), especially female viewers (78 per cent). Also, according to the project report, 25 per cent of the participants in training in Bangladesh where the videos were shown went on to train their peers in the local communities on the creation and dissemination of the counter-extremism videos as their own voluntary action after the training. As noted under Finding 8, Mythos Labs also reported a reduction in pro-ISIS tweets and other social media posts in Bahasa speaking parts of Indonesia. While the results presented by Mythos Labs to the Regional Office indicate important insights into the reactions to the videos, they were provided by the company who produced the videos and were not validated by the evaluation (thus may not be fully independent or could be biased) and speak to short-term effects on the viewers and cannot be generalized to the audience that UN Women is targeting to build resilient communities. Change in attitudes could be observed only with a baseline and endline study and/or through more strategic use of the videos in project activities in the communities targeted through other activities.

Regional and national conferences

The Regional Office women, peace and security team invested heavily in knowledge-sharing and capacity-building by hosting 37 regional and national conferences just for the first and second phases of the PVE project. At regional level, the investment was around US\$1.2 million⁶⁰ (additional funds at country level were also used). Additionally, according to key informants from the United Nations and project reports, the events were used to keep a gender perspective in preventing violent extremism present in national and regional discourse as well as to build stronger relationships with regional stakeholders, including ASEAN, and to push some of the national policy development processes forward. Events also served to launch new research, publications and video products.

Key informants were not widely aware of the knowledge-sharing benefits of regional workshops and events. Some suggested that more opportunities among project implementing partners could have been used to assess and discuss emerging practices, results and the need for adjustments of approaches. Opportunities for sharing among partner CSOs (for example the Wahid Foundation, Moropreneur Inc., the Centre for Peace and Justice of BRAC University, etc.), which would be important to assess what works and how in the complex local contexts, were limited. Some of the country-level events were recognized by both national and international partners as important for strengthening buy-in of national decision-makers, such as the Bangsamoro Women’s Summit in March 2019, which brought together 120 women leaders, community groups and CSOs to collect input and launch the Women’s Agenda, which served as a foundation for designing the future cooperation with the government stakeholders in BARMM.

Measuring the results and linking with programming

Overall, the publications and communication efforts (particularly the videos produced) of the Regional Office women, peace and security team pushed boundaries and had significant reach. However, reach does not directly translate into raised awareness, and there is limited information or understanding about the extent to which awareness translated into changed behaviours by the target audience and thus contributed to preventing violent extremism.

59 Mythos labs reported: “Mythos Labs conducted focus groups with viewers who fit the target demographic for each video but who had not yet seen it. Viewers watched the videos in a monitored environment. Video feed of their reactions in real-time were analyzed by an emotional recognition algorithm that was able to detect seven key emotion-driven reactions: amusement, nervousness, anger, enthusiasm, boredom, curiosity and excitement. The algorithm was trained on hundreds of thousands of hours of viewer reactions and could recognize changes in emotional states based on “micro-expressions” unnoticeable to the human eye, i.e. extremely discrete changes in facial muscles.”

60 Based on AAA Atlas expenditure report. All items tagged as “learning costs”.

With such a high level of investment, an overarching monitoring system to capture how these videos affected the target audience awareness or behavior over time or direct linkages with the programmatic work at community level would have provided more insight into the value for money. Attention should be paid to the design of products and events to best address the needs of the target audience and capture how information is used.

Similarly, interaction between programme interventions (e.g. economic empowerment) and awareness-raising initiatives was missing (see also Finding 5). Although the project was designed in a one-year time frame, more meaningful data with more robust tracking at the outcome level, both vertically and horizontally across the Regional Office would have allowed the combined effects of the efforts to be better understood.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

To what extent did the Regional Office identify and engage the most marginalized groups within the context of women, peace and security (e.g. survivors of conflict-related violence, women with disabilities, LGBTIQ persons)?

FINDING 10

Evidence of identification of marginalized groups was limited at the project formulation stage and in annual reports, with no systematic approach to persons with disabilities and LGBTIQ persons. However, stakeholders noted that UN Women civil society partners were reaching marginalized and hard to reach groups through project-level efforts at the country level. Regional Office publications on women, peace and security and research provided a wealth of analysis looking into how marginalized groups are affected differently.

The intention of the Regional Office to address the rights and position of women from marginalized groups is visible from the design of the projects. However, there was no strategic approach to their selection or reporting on who was reached. While project documents stated that vulnerabilities would be addressed and mentioned primarily female-headed households, migrant women and youth, no in-depth analysis and rationale for the groups planned to be reached was provided, nor was there information on how the Regional Office would identify these groups. In reports from partners, there was no disaggregated data on participation, and there was limited information on effects on the marginalized groups that were reached. Overall, there was room for strengthening a more systematic approach as well as partners' capacity on social inclusion and intersectionality.

The groups that were most frequently reported to have been reached were female-headed households, women living in poverty or living in remote areas, former combatants, indigenous women, young women and girls, and survivors of trafficking. Stakeholders consulted in the Philippines noted that UN Women's network with CSOs in the field supported engagement of ethnic minorities in the most remote islands of BARMM. In Bangladesh, UN Women reported that within Peace Cafés, students from minority and marginalized communities, including students with disabilities, received capacity-building training and organized and actively participated in various

awareness-raising events around peace, social cohesion and COVID-19 resilience. Youth groups running Peace Cafés provided hygiene packages and food to poor and indigenous communities. UN Women's ability to reach these groups was recognized as an added value in the women, peace and security space. In Mekong subregion, UN Women reported that women who were victims of trafficking or at risk of trafficking were empowered and provided vocational and entrepreneurial training.

Partner CSOs reported that there was no instruction given by UN Women on a strategy for inclusion. They developed their own approaches based on the context in which the projects had been developed. There was also no specific approach to include women with disabilities and LGBTIQ groups, except in one of the projects supporting migrant workers in Thailand, where LGBTIQ migrant workers were targeted for economic empowerment and their self-support groups were established.

The exception was with respect to policy development activities (national action plans on women, peace and security and preventing and countering violent extremism, BARMM transition process in the Philippines), where inclusivity of the process was one of the key criteria and, according to the partners, UN Women brought the voices of different groups (victims of conflict, former combatants, women from hard-to-reach areas and islands, young women) to the planning process (see Finding 6).

Additionally, in contrast to the project reports, the Regional Office publications and research on women, peace and security explored phenomena of vulnerability, exclusion, power relations and the position of marginalized groups. For example, this included covering the issues of vulnerable groups in research, addressing the rights and unequal treatment of vulnerable groups in action briefs and outlining respective recommendations, addressing the position of human rights defenders in crisis situations or exploring the issues of human rights of vulnerable groups or issues of marginalization and exclusion as a driver of conflict and radicalization in the training.⁶¹ There is space for strengthening the link between recommendations from research and publications and opera-

tional work in the field in future. For example, there are quite comprehensive sets of recommendations in the publications on prevention, response and return and reintegration of trafficking survivors and expansion of work with youth; transitional justice recommendations related to survivors of the Marawi siege; policy and operational interventions to support participation of women and reintegration of women former combatants, reintegration of female spouses of men incarcerated for terrorism, support to human rights defenders, etc. The next Strategic Note is an opportunity to systematize them and decide which recommendations might best serve the women, peace and security agenda in the Asia Pacific region.

To what extent did UN Women actively identify and address the social norms that underlay discrimination in the women, peace and security area?

FINDING 11

Regional Office women, peace and security efforts aimed to challenge gendered roles and power relations and have planted the seeds for changing broader social norms. However, efforts to change social norms need to be nurtured over time, and effects need to be systematically captured.

The UN Women Regional Office and field presences paid attention to gender equality issues and power relations in the project design and envisaged both normative interventions to engage duty bearers to systemically address them and community interventions to address women's exclusion and psychosocial and economic needs and in some cases to work with the communities to sustain what was achieved through empowerment.

At this stage, the empowerment interventions are reported to have contributed to changes at the individual, household and to some extent the community level. Women consulted in the Philippines noted that they had increased their self-esteem and demonstrated to their partners that they can earn income. They also reported that they had become visible and more respected in their communities, and some women had engaged in village decision-making. The Centre for Peace and Justice of BRAC University in Bangladesh reported on female students leadership in discussions on peacebuilding and women's rights. Their leadership is reported to have positively influenced traditional gender relations in their families and influenced the involvement of the wider student community in Peace Café activities. Female students were also provided an opportunity for entrepreneurial thinking. In Indonesia, there are anecdotal stories by the Wahid Foundation on women's advocacy actions in Peace Villages, and

actions of some villages to stop traditional violent retaliation practices.

Due to slow policy development and the slow or limited engagement of wider communities, other transformative changes are still not visible. An exception is the Peace Villages programme in Indonesia, which unlike other partners' projects, established its foundation in the communities even before implementation of the preventing violent extremism project. The programme has been funded consistently over several years, which has reportedly allowed for continuous nurturing of the processes addressing gender inequalities and power relations in the communities. Peace Villages also caught the attention of the Government during development of the national action plan on preventing and countering violent extremism, which committed to fund its scaling up in the coming period. Potentially, it can become a systemic model of addressing gender and preventing violent extremism.

BOX6: Leveraging Social Media

Videos leveraged the reach of influencers aiming to use comedy to question notions of power relations. Although risk mitigation needed to be considered, a broader strategy linking video production and social media efforts with Regional Office initiatives on the ground in communities may have enhanced understanding on the combined impact.

61 Some examples include action briefs (Women, Peace and Security and COVID-19 (2020), Gender at the Nexus of Violent Extremism and Trafficking in Persons in Muslim Mindanao (2020), Promoting the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh (2020)), programme briefs (Extractive Industries, Gender and Conflict in Asia Pacific (2020), Women on the Outside: The female spouses of men incarcerated for terrorism in the Philippines (2019)) and training material (Gender and Preventing Violent Extremism in Asia).

The evaluation found that in other cases the interventions were implemented in silos and stakeholders were not aware of the bigger picture or of what other actions in their country or region were achieving, which eliminates opportunities for transformative processes to be embraced by other stakeholders, including governments. External stakeholders see less of the transformative effects of UN Women's support and rather tend to emphasize its norma-

tive support. Therefore, more integrated work with other United Nations agencies might also contribute to information exchange on transformative efforts, synergies and increasing the effects on the ground. Overall, there is space for stronger outcome-level monitoring in order to describe how transformative changes are made, as well as data disaggregation and analysis of intersecting forms of discrimination.

SUSTAINABILITY

To what extent has UN Women's influence supported increased regional and national ownership of the women, peace and security agenda?

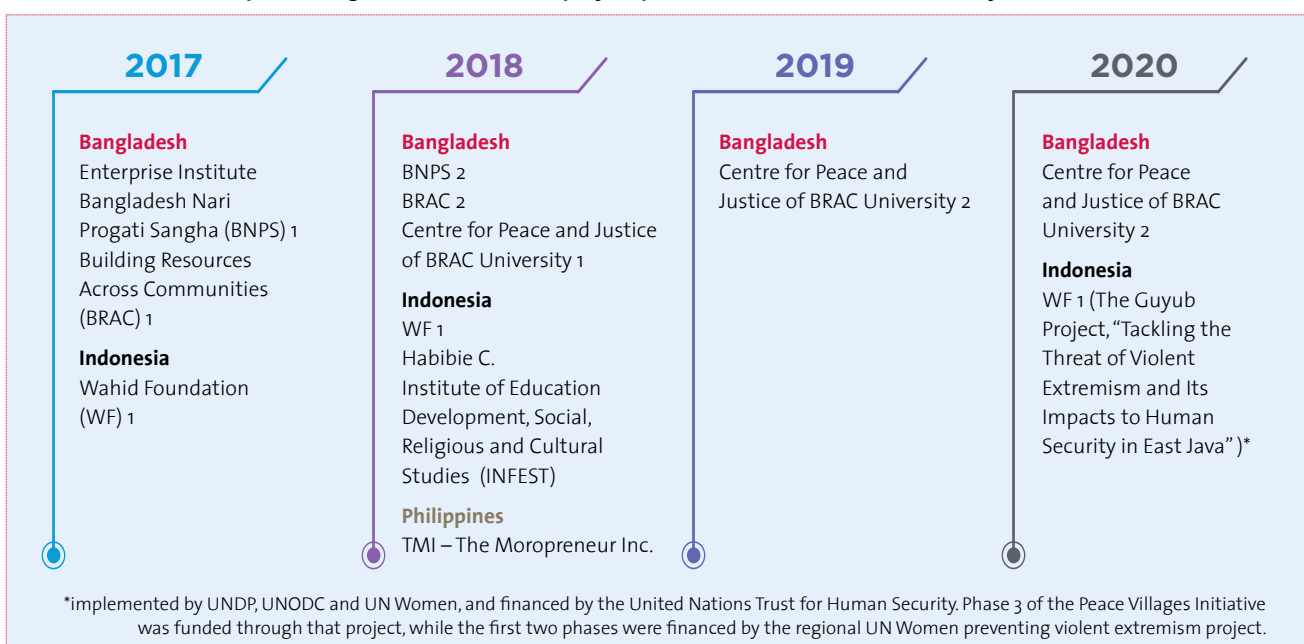
FINDING 12

While support of the Regional Office's regional projects has generated commitment and ownership from national and regional stakeholders to advancing the normative agenda on women, peace and security, continuous multi-stakeholder engagement and support is required to sustain momentum for effective implementation.

A combination of factors limited the potential for sustainability of Regional Office efforts, as outlined in previous findings, including the contextual risks in the peace and security space that affected social cohesion and resilience at the community level. None of the projects had clearly defined exit strategies, even though most of them were clearly defined as one-year projects with uncertainty of extension. Sustainability was hampered by the one-year time frame of the projects and the changing of locations and beneficiaries in each phase, which was insufficient to achieve the project's ambitious outcomes (also iden-

tified by the IAS audit of the Regional Office⁶²). The same challenges transferred to the CSO partners contracted to implement different types of community interventions. The evaluation team reviewed the partner agreements and tracked when they were signed. These short-term agreements (between 6 and 10 months) were finalized during the first 2 to 6 months of project implementation. The partners also required an inception phase, thus in the end only an estimated 4 to 6 months were spent on actual implementation.

FIGURE 10. Timeline of preventing violent extremism project partner contracts reconstructed by the evaluation team



Source: Reconstructed by the evaluation team based on partner agreements under PVE projects.

UN Women recognizes the importance of ensuring policy-level change to enhance the sustainability of efforts. The Regional Office supported consensus-building around priorities at all levels of governance (regional, national, local and community). The Regional Office also supported capacity-building of key partners to support the implementation of policies. Key informants shared concerns about implementation of national action plans or other policy frameworks. Although some of the national action plans supported by the Regional Office were adopted more than a year ago, interviewed stakeholders did not necessarily see their implementation, except some contributions through development projects. While there was a sense of ownership over the national action plan from individuals involved in Regional Office projects, it has insufficiently extended to other government (e.g. line ministries) and non-government stakeholders not directly involved in the development of the national action plan. Also, cross-sectoral bonds and enthusiasm developed during policy development tend to fade after the adoption of documents unless implementation starts immediately. Therefore, several key informants called for stronger United Nations programming to support policy implementation to maintain momentum. The UN Women project with ASEAN funded by the Government of Canada presents an opportunity to co-create, institutionalize and promote ownership of the women, peace and security agenda at the subregional and country levels in line with ASEAN's vision and priorities through regional multilateral cooperation; this approach could be replicated in other subregions.

As policy commitments need to be backed financially, there are good examples of initial support to the national action plan on preventing and countering violent extremism in Indonesia, where the Government plans to support the scaling up of Peace Villages to the regional level as well as to multiply the practices in other villages countrywide. Additionally, the Wahid Foundation and its partners identified the Government's village fund as a good opportunity to materialize the village development priorities supported by the project. It is also likely that Peace Cafés in Bangladesh will be able to survive beyond the project, as the ideas were sown from within the university and there is reportedly a strong commitment among professors and students to continue, potentially with less intensity than now, when it is externally funded. At the same time, BRAC University initiated and will facilitate the Bangladesh Peacebuilders Network to expand the good practices throughout the country. All of this shows that longer term support and well-established partners that will continue working on the same issue beyond project implementation were success factors.

Aspects that will contribute to sustainability were reported by the project supporting women in law enforcement and survivors of trafficking, where key informants reported that the police adopted recommended human trafficking screening tools. There is concern among CSOs that lessons will fade over time after the project ends, particularly because there was reportedly a high turnover among border control officers and because the participants in the training were not tracked to learn about how the efforts were integrated. At the regional level, the Regional Office and partners advocated to ensure buy-in for women in law enforcement agenda as recommended by the regional study (action plans for involvement of more women in law enforcement, recruitment campaigns, revision of quotas, gender disaggregated data, participation of women in operational deployments and targeted training and mentoring for mid-career female officers). Still, more country-level policy support is needed to initiate action that would be led and owned by the governments and law enforcement agencies. The partners, Interpol and UNODC, see UN Women as the future lead in the provision of policy support. Vocational training and economic empowerment of survivors of trafficking and women at risk of trafficking have better chances for sustainability, as the interventions directly respond to the economic drivers of migration. However, economic empowerment programmes must be holistic, looking at the entire value chain, and provide follow-up and continuous support to ensure sustainability, which was not always the case, as identified under Finding 7.

Other achieved results are fragile, and if the Regional Office does not ensure long-term follow-up, the opportunities to support sustainability, if any, are likely to be missed. Emerging social bonds established through the projects have been put to the test because of COVID-19. For example, stakeholders consulted in the Philippines claimed that contacts and activities were reduced to a minimum due to movement restrictions and social distancing. Fragility, radicalization, political and social tensions, harmful practices, economic deterioration, environmental crises and the global COVID-19 pandemic continue to negatively affect the sustainability of the achievements, and coordinated actions from both national and international stakeholders is required.

The new UN Women ASEAN project presents a great opportunity for building sustainability of women, peace and security efforts within the subregion. However, beyond the subregion, attention may be needed, for example to build on the efforts of field presences.

FIGURE 11. Potential enablers and existing risks to sustainability identified by the evaluation



Source: Evaluation team documentation review and key informant interviews.

EFFICIENCY

How well are UN Women's human and financial resources at regional level used to support regional- and country-level women, peace and security work?

FINDING 13

Staff turnover of the Regional Office women, peace and security team during the period under review, combined with heavy involvement in project implementation and organizational systems that are not yet supportive of quick delivery, limited the efficiency with respect to regional- and country-level support and may have contributed to limited resource mobilization.

Several factors contributed to limited efficiency of the women, peace and security team with respect to its ability to support both countries in the region and regional efforts:

1. **Regional Office faced significant women, peace and security team staff turn-over:** The position of Governance, Women, Peace and Security Regional Adviser (P5) was vacant since early 2019 (the Adviser was first on extended leave and then left the organization; as of early April 2021, the position is expected to be filled within the next three to four months). The Regional Programme Specialist (P4) was Officer in Charge during 2019 but posted to a detail assignment from February 2020, while the Women, Peace and Security Programme Specialist

(P3) in the Philippines Office was then assigned as Officer in Charge of the regional women, peace and security team in addition to her responsibilities with the Philippines Office. The regional women, peace and security portfolio was therefore primarily managed by personnel funded by non-core projects and primarily supported by a Regional Governance, Peace and Security Consultant (SSA), a Regional Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist (P3), a Programme Specialist (P3) and two regional administrative support personnel (in addition to personnel in the field). The work of country project coordinators was guided by the Regional Office.

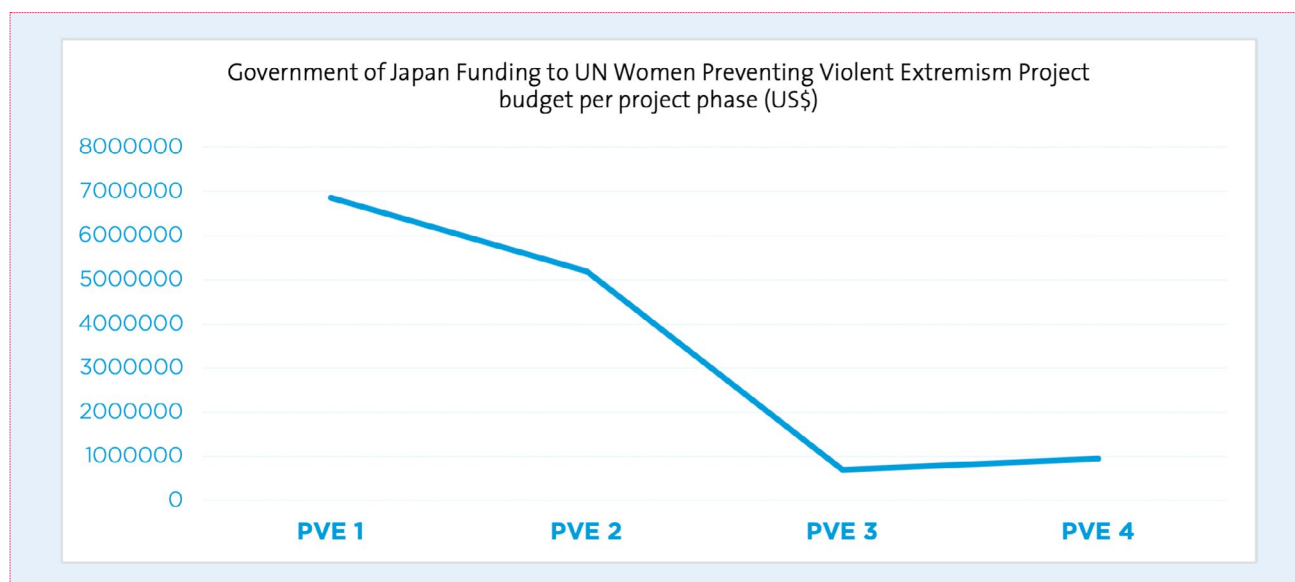
- 2. Regional Adviser took on the role of project manager at the Regional Office:** The IAS audit of the Regional Office in 2019 reported: “Most technical officers were required to work most of their time as project managers for regional non-core funded projects, instead of as technical advisers for the countries in the region, providing technical support and backstopping for national projects. These tasks would have to be performed in spare time or by diverting attention from project management, which may not be fully sustainable or transparent. This weakened ROAP’s role as a technical support hub for the region, particularly for countries not covered by projects managed by the technical officers. The few technical officers funded by core funds may not be sufficient to cover the region which had a programme presence in 24 countries.”⁶³ This issue persisted in the absence of the Regional Adviser.
- 3. UN Women systems were not supportive of large-scale funding to be implemented in a short time frame combined with nascent levels of UN Women project management discipline:** The IAS audit of the Regional Office in 2019 noted that “ROAP had asked the Programme and Strategic Partnership Divisions for programming guidance; a custom project document template; and a modified project appraisal mechanism to benefit field offices managing short-term projects given that their short timeline might not permit standard appraisal procedures.” However, none were provided in time for the preventing violent extremism projects. Country personnel were responsible for primary guidance, oversight of programme management in the field and financial reporting, but the capacities at that level were stretched as well. The regional projects were mainly implemented by offices that were not designated as Country Offices with delegation of authority (or were in transition), meaning that substantial oversight and operational support had to be provided by the Regional Office. Thus, with the high amount of funds that were directly implemented by the Regional Office and the complexity of administrative procedures that were not adequate for one-year time frames to implement such a large amount of funds, the team had to focus on project implementation rather than its Regional Office functions.
- 4. New partnership agreements had to be established for each annual project, even with the same project partner, resulting in a heavy administrative load and the loss of several months that could have gone towards implementation:** As noted under Finding 12, the evaluation team reviewed the 14 implementing partner agreements under the four projects on preventing violent extremism. The partner selection process requires significant documentation, capacity assessment and consultation prior to signature. In the case of preventing violent extremism, each of the 14 implementing partner agreements was signed within the first 2 to 6 months of the project, leaving between 6 and 10 months for implementation. However, document review and consultations with the partners identified that there was also an inception phase, which meant that only an estimated 4 to 6 months was spent on actual implementation. An IAS report on the implementing partner management process issued in 2019 identified that the organization did not have an efficient implementing partner management process. UN Women headquarters issued a new Partner and Grants Agreement Management System (PGMAS) in 2020; the roll-out was underway in the second quarter of 2021, and any enhancements to the efficient management of partners is to be determined.
- 5. Lack of established mechanisms for knowledge-sharing and exchange:** The women, peace and security focal points consulted for this evaluation identified room for strengthening engagement with the Regional Office and sought more exchange with other offices. The focus group discussion organized as part of the evaluation was the first time the country-level project coordinators for preventing violent extremism had connected to discuss lessons learned. Focus groups with country-level women, peace and security focal points as well as interviews with UN Women partners confirmed that the Regional Office contribution was far more present in countries involved in regional projects. On the other hand, in the UN Women offices not involved in regional projects, there is a high demand for such support. Both groups are interested in more structured capacity-building and peer learning. They also see the Regional Office’s role in negotiating with donors’ longer term implementation periods. The new initiative with ASEAN is an opportunity for a more strategic approach to the ASEAN region. However, there is a need to respond appropriately to the needs of other UN Women offices in Asia and the Pacific.

63 UN Women Independent Audit Service, audit of the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, 2019 <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/about%20us/accountability/audit-reports/2019/un-women-audit-report-2019-010-asia-pacific-ro-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5521>.

As mentioned under Finding 1, heavy involvement in project implementation may have distracted the Regional Office women, peace and security team from developing a strategic vision of women, peace and security that would be relevant beyond the countries involved directly in the projects. This factor, coupled with the issues raised above,

may have also contributed to the declining funds and the lack of resource mobilization from other donors. The steady decrease of funds for women, peace and security since 2019 reduced chances to strategically scale up emerging results and capitalize on efficiencies of scale.

FIG. 12. **Decrease of funding from the Japan Government to the Regional Office project on preventing violent extremism**



Source: UN Women Donor Agreement Management System data (November 2020).

FINDING 14

Attention to results-based management could have been strengthened. The programming approach hampered the efficiency and potential impact of regional efforts on women, peace and security.

The regional women, peace and security team dedicated resources to a monitoring and evaluation specialist for the duration of the projects. However, this individual ended up performing many tasks as a result of staff turnover and became the project manager for the joint trafficking project with UNODC. The regional women, peace and security team also dedicated resources for an annual review of the preventing violent extremism project that contributed key insights for subsequent phases. The team developed a management response, which also demonstrated accountability to learning. However, there was no mechanism for capturing issues noted during monitoring activities other than the mission report, thus the extent to which risks identified were managed in a timely and effective manner are unknown, and without a tracking mechanism there is a high risk that the issues identified are repeated.

Project design required strengthening to ensure a robust and meaningful monitoring system. The project documents (preventing violent extremism and trafficking) provided generic statements without any detail on how the monitoring systems would be established to collect, validate or report data. There was no tracking of participants between project phases or of synergies between various interventions, resulting in a limited understanding of how the components worked to achieve social cohesion. Additionally, as identified through the evaluation team's review of the regional women, peace and security team monitoring mission reports, while they were good quality and critical reports, there was no systematic logging and tracking of key issues, risks or lessons learned (see Findings 7-9, 10-11). While there were country-level project coordinators, the fact that key issues with project implementation were not flagged until the regional team was in the field signified weaknesses with respect to the monitoring and oversight of country-level activities in the field.

The IEAS Project Life Cycle Gap Assessment (advisory assessment for the Programme Division, completed in October 2019) recommended that risk management be embedded in the project life cycle as part of the decision-making process.⁶⁴

The clarity of explanation about how women, peace and security efforts will measure desired transformational change varied across the portfolio. At the Strategic Note level, there was a lack of appropriate outcome indicators that measured the changes foreseen and adequate measures for the output level. For example, at the outcome level (Outcomes 6.6 and 6.7 of the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific Strategic Note), contribution to resilience was aimed for, however, the number of adopted policies and measures was the indicator (both preventing violent extremism and anti-trafficking) as well as the number of people reached (preventing violent extremism), such as participants in events, training, fairs, audience of video and radio broadcasts, etc. At the output level, indicators such as raised awareness, improved understanding, increased skills, etc. are defined; however, mostly the number of participants or recipients was mentioned, without a sign of the extent to which awareness was enhanced and how enhanced awareness was put into action.

UN Women attempted to demonstrate the changes in the targeted communities during the first phase of the preventing violent extremism project. At the end of the first phase, the Regional Office reported that there were positive changes in the project sites as identified by the study “Building an Evidence Base for Empowering Women for Peaceful Communities: A Case Study of Bangladesh and Indonesia”, conducted by Monash University.⁶⁵ After

not even one year of implementation, the study compared programme and non-programme sites and reported a significant difference between them in terms of increased perception and awareness of the phenomena related to gender and preventing and countering violent extremism, confidence to join prevention and countering initiatives, and knowledge and self-efficacy to support initiatives in the communities targeted by the programme. Gender differences in perceptions were also identified, showing women were empowered. The research results could have been used as a baseline by UN Women, and a longitudinal study could have been beneficial to identify changes over time to identify how strategies of UN Women and its partners were affecting the communities and potentially to attribute some of the effects to programmes of UN Women and its partners. However, UN Women support was not always sustained in the same locations and with the same beneficiaries. Authors of the Monash University case study identified limitations in their research, including that the six sites were not directly comparable and the inability to control for all other factors affecting the research findings. The selection criteria for the sites (more accessible, less radicalized and those in which partners already had worked) in which the project had been implemented might have also affected the research results. Such an exercise has not been repeated. The team also dedicated time and resources to capturing stories of participants. This is a good practice; however, it was not part of the overall monitoring framework, and it was unclear whether the same people were followed throughout the life cycle of the programme to identify how the project had impacted their lives over time.

64 UN Women IEAS internal report, Project Life Cycle Gap Assessment, 2019.

65 <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/02/building-an-evidence-base-for-empowering-women-for-peaceful-communities>

LESSONS LEARNED



While it is difficult to identify a model that works across different complex contexts, there are some features that contribute to women's empowerment and women's contribution to building social cohesion and community resilience to radicalization and conflict:

- Strategic partnerships and identification of synergies between researchers, policy makers and programme practitioners can support demonstration of policy implementation.
- Empowerment programmes and their results should be linked to wider community dynamics and community or local government development planning and budgeting processes in different sectors, including security.
- Establishment of safe spaces and formal or informal peer-support groups for women (cooperatives, associations) contribute to both individual and collective empowerment.
- Multidimensional approaches to empowerment of at-risk women through psychosocial support, leadership and economic empowerment and training (human rights, prevention of violent extremism) tends to provide stronger agency and action in both private and public sphere.
- Long-term support is necessary for building partnerships and initiating transformational change.



CSOs are allies that can reach those who are the most marginalized, vulnerable and at-risk, even in fragile and conflict contexts:

- Building and nurturing strong long-term relationships with CSOs is important. Continuous consultation from the design phase is key for the selection of communities, identification of priorities and design of the interventions. In a mutually beneficial relationship, CSOs also seek support to build their own organizational capacity for monitoring efforts with a “leave no one behind” lens, particularly in cases where the security context does not allow for an organization such as UN Women to be present in the field.



It is worth investing in framing the message on preventing violent extremism, human rights and gender equality (selecting different perspectives, nuancing and adjusting to the needs of the community) so that the local communities can best connect with it and recognize its relevance to the given context. Relationships with community and religious leaders, both women and men, might be helpful and can extend the potential of the message.

- Implementing partners often faced situations where local communities have rejected or avoided speaking about conflict, radicalism and violent extremism as something that is not inherent to them. Reframing the approach towards community building, peace and development was helpful in opening doors and building ownership.
- Support from community and religious leaders, both women and men, were also helpful for the interventions to be accepted and internalized and for ownership to be strengthened.



Innovative approaches, such as comedy videos, involvement of influencers and other awareness-raising campaigns, bring potential for addressing challenging subjects such as violent extremism at a broad population level. However, integrating these awareness-raising efforts into the wider theory of change of a programme and including a comprehensive monitoring system may help to establish the evidence base on what works to effectively raise awareness and influence behaviour, and thus bring more potential for impact.

- Innovative communication methods, including videos and community theatre, proved to be successful in reaching a large number of people. However, maintaining long-term contact with the target audience to understand and observe change is challenging.
- It would be helpful if these communication channels are also used in synergy with other programme activities in targeted communities and over a longer period of time, so that changes can be observed, and follow-up steps can be taken to translate changes in attitudes and agency into community action. The evidence base can then be built and the awareness-raising efforts can be scaled up to larger population.



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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The presentation of the preliminary findings and discussion on the way forward took place with members of the Evaluation Reference Group in March 2021 and fed into the final recommendations presented below. The recommendations were reviewed by the Evaluation Management and Reference Groups, and subsequent changes were integrated as appropriate. The bullet points below the recommendations represent potential key actions for consideration by the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, based on feasibility within its current

programme of work and available resources. Some of the suggested actions were already under way given the time lag between the issuance of the preliminary findings and the finalization of the report. The level of priority and suggested time frame for implementation are indicated below the recommendation. Feedback from the Evaluation Management and Reference Groups on factual errors in the evaluation report was tracked for transparency.

RELEVANCE AND COHERENCE

CONCLUSION 1

Since 2017, the visibility and credibility of work by the Regional Office on women, peace and security has grown within the region, and the Regional Office is now recognized as providing a unique gender perspective and linkages with civil society to its partners in the peace and security space. While UN Women’s added value within the peace and security space is clear, it has not been fully capitalized upon.

Based on findings

1, 2, 3, 5, 9

With a more strategic and longer term vision as the basis for its approach, the Regional Office could clarify its niche at the regional level, ensuring that it leverages not only the global mandate of UN Women in women, peace and security, but also the country-level expertise and varied experience across the region. A clearer vision may help direct work to where it is needed most and help partners understand how they can best leverage UN Women’s expertise, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, coherence in approach should be prioritized. UN Women is currently working on developing its new global Strategic Plan 2022-2025, establishing the vision and way forward for the next four years and beyond, while the Regional Office in turn is working on developing its Strategic Note. The Regional Office will need to ensure clear linkages both upwards and downwards to ensure the women, peace and security (and humanitarian action) area of work speaks with one voice. This important context and what it means for the Regional Office should also be reflected upon to ensure coherence and building upon strengths and linkages within the humanitarian, peace and development nexus. To achieve greater impact, synergies between the different elements of the programmes and between projects need to be enhanced so that they can be scaled up by UN Women, civil society partners or governments.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Co-create a vision for women, peace and security in the region with UN Women offices across the region and key peace and security actors from across stakeholder types and identify UN Women’s value proposition in the peace and security sector. Prioritize where to focus based on a sound analysis of the current situation, country needs, the overall direction of the Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action thematic area and UN Women’s capacity to deliver on the ground.

Priority

HIGH

Timeframe

Q4 2021

Target Audience:

Regional Office Senior Management, Regional Office Governance Peace and Security Adviser, Regional Office Women, Peace and Security Team, relevant headquarters units.

Suggested key actions:

- Ensure coherence vertically and horizontally:
 - Map linkages between the peace, security and humanitarian areas of work, between global and country levels and between different thematic areas.
 - Map and identify strategies, partners and activities that can be built upon to frame the overall vision and concretely define how to integrate work across teams/thematic areas.
 - Identify the vision and strategies with regard to whether and how to reach those most affected by conflict.
- Engage in meaningful dialogue with other offices in the region and key partners, including donors, inviting them from the beginning to participate in establishing the process for defining the vision and way forward. Determine how to ensure continuous engagement as the work moves forward to ensure open and transparent dialogue and ownership among partners.

CONCLUSION 2

There is opportunity for the UN system coordination mandate of UN Women to be fully leveraged to the advantage of the Regional Office women, peace and security team.

Based on findings

1, 4

- The lack of coordination mechanisms focused on peace and security within the region could be an opportunity for UN Women to demonstrate leadership by stepping up to facilitate exchange and coordination amongst actors in this area. This could be done through existing mechanisms or through new mechanisms. However, without a strategy that clearly outlines the Regional Office's vision for coordination, the opportunity to achieve greater impact through influencing United Nations system efforts may be lost.
- Country-level coordination efforts have demonstrated how attention to coordination can lead to enhanced normative value by ensuring that a gender lens is integrated and that the voices of those left behind are heard. These efforts have also raised the profile of UN Women within the United Nations Country Team. Further institutionalizing these relationships so that they are not lost with staff turnover will be important.
- Partnerships with ASEAN, Canada and the United States Government have been catalytic. The Regional Office should continue to identify strategic partnerships and engage in a more systematic manner within the peace and security space in a way that can be mutually beneficial and help the Regional Office to bring its efforts to scale and move beyond South-East Asia.

RECOMMENDATION 2

As part of the Regional Office coordination strategy, ensure coordination for the Women, Peace and Security thematic area is clearly outlined, explaining how the Regional Office will engage in coordination with the United Nations system and beyond as well as how these efforts seek to influence partners with established key performance indicators that can meaningfully measure progress.

Priority

MEDIUM

Timeframe

Q4 2021

Target Audience:

Regional Office Senior Management, Regional Office Governance Peace and Security Adviser, Regional Office Women, Peace and Security Team, Regional Office Planning and Coordination Specialist, relevant headquarters units.

Key actions for consideration:

- Explore current coordination mechanisms and engage with key actors to discuss the best approach in the medium to long term. Establish a results, measurement and reporting framework for joint women, peace and security results.
- Establish a community of practice with United Nations partners to have informal exchanges on women, peace and security issues.
- Engage in strategic planning discussions with United Nations partners in advance of the Strategic Note (or their respective regional planning process) to consider where efforts of partners are concentrated and where UN Women can best add value.
- Map potential partners in the peace and security space and develop a plan for engagement by prioritizing partnership efforts that have catalytic potential and, in line with the current ASEAN approach, an opportunity for addressing the triple mandate of normative, coordination and operational work.
- Further clarify roles and coordination between the Regional Office and the relevant UN Women offices supporting subregional engagement, such as the ASEAN engagement strategy.

EFFECTIVENESS and SUSTAINABILITY

CONCLUSION 3

UN Women made significant contributions to the establishment of national action plans related to preventing violent extremism and women, peace and security that were inclusive and represented diverse voices. National (and regional) action plans on women, peace and security and the prevention of violent extremism were adopted in Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines, and progress was made through ASEAN.

UN Women integrated normative and policy expertise, and its reach with civil society to ensure participation in these processes was key to this progress. The adoption of these frameworks demonstrates national ownership of the women, peace and security agenda and provides an important impetus for national-level action. The challenge for the Regional Office will be to identify how to ensure continued support in implementing and localizing the agenda. Important lessons can be learned from across the region, where national action plans on women, peace and security have been implemented and supported by UN Women offices in Afghanistan, Nepal, Pakistan and Timor Leste.

CONCLUSION 4

Presented with an opportunity for innovating in the women, peace and security space, the women, peace and security team at the Regional Office in several cases pushed boundaries, leveraged new media and implemented a range of unique initiatives in a space that is not yet fully understood. These efforts were complemented by a myriad of initiatives aimed at increasing awareness and knowledge around preventing violent extremism and other women, peace and security issues and facilitating economic empowerment as a deterrent to violent extremism and factor that reduces the risk of trafficking.

Based on findings

2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14

While these individual efforts may have contributed towards advancing the women, peace and security agenda, without a longer-term vision or framework, outcome-level monitoring and clarity in how the various efforts are connected, UN Women (in the region and globally) cannot fully expect transformative impact or benefit from or exploit their learning. Individual actions and meaningful long-term engagement need to be clearly connected with the wider women, peace and security and humanitarian and development agenda to be able to contribute to community resilience and women's empowerment.

CONCLUSION 5

Although there was an indication that women have experienced some immediate benefits, including a sense of empowerment within the home and community and increased immediate income, without continuing support these gains are at risk of being lost. Solid baseline information and engagement with the community to determine the best type of support and investment from its perspective is essential.

Based on findings

6, 7, 8, 11, 12

Continuous and comprehensive engagement with the same communities over a long period of time should enhance the potential for sustainability. Given the short time frame for project implementation, existing models for women's economic empowerment could have been leveraged or a new model could have been established for testing targeted interventions across multiple sites that would allow for comparability.

While efforts should be made to diversify donor partnerships, if the Regional Office continues to accept short-term funding, the scope of work should match the time frame with a view to how these efforts will contribute to the longer-term vision of women, peace and security work by the Regional Office. A horizontal approach to looking at how the different initiatives (within the Regional Office and at field presence level) can support each other for greater impact needs to be built in from the start by basing it on the overarching vision. This could also enhance the potential for sustainability by pooling resources so that efforts are not interrupted.

The one-year time frame was not the issue per se; it is what was planned within the scope of one year and the lack of plans for scaling up or exiting. Regardless of the donor priorities and one-year funding cycles, there is a need for a strategic approach to the overall Women, Peace and Security thematic area and its preventing violent extremism and anti-trafficking components, to support the design of efforts that aim for long-term support to behavioural changes at the individual level and transformational changes at the societal level.

Expertise and interlinkages between thematic areas, field presences and teams within UN Women (Regional Office, Country Office, headquarters) were not fully leveraged, which may have reduced the effectiveness of programmatic efforts, particularly the economic empowerment initiatives and publication/communication efforts. The Regional Office should consider how expertise in different thematic areas could be leveraged to ultimately enhance the potential effectiveness.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Continue building an evidence base on what works to build social cohesion, reduce marginalization and ensure peaceful societies by establishing a regional programming approach for translating national action plans and other normative-level efforts into action through coordinated efforts. This regional programming approach should be based on the vision and priority areas articulated and apply innovation principles by inviting UN Women Country Offices (in consultation with key stakeholders) to make a pitch for project models to be tested. Through robust indicators and a monitoring and evaluation framework, lessons learned can feed into the scaling up of the most effective approaches across the region.

Priority

MEDIUM

Timeframe

Q2 2022

Target Audience:

Regional Office Senior Management, Regional Office Governance Peace and Security Adviser, Regional Office Women, Peace and Security Team, Regional Office Planning and Coordination Specialist, Regional Office Communications and advocacy and partnerships unit, and relevant headquarters units.

Key actions for consideration:

- Several models could be selected and implemented across the region based on need, interest and capacity of offices. The models must have clear plans for ensuring sustainability and exit strategies.
- To support the regional programming approach, establish or feed into a Regional Office innovation strategy that clearly defines the risk appetite and incorporates an iterative learning and adaptive management approach.
- Establish formal mechanisms for exchange between UN Women offices implementing women, peace and security and assign a focal point to manage them. Mechanisms could include *Microsoft Teams* group community of practice and quarterly interactive exchanges to discuss key topics of interest, challenges and good practices.
- Support sharing and exchange among implementing partners to assess what works in complex local contexts.
- Establish a strategic approach to knowledge production and sharing in collaboration with the communications, advocacy and partnerships unit. Pilot integration of the communication for development approach into programme efforts to ensure knowledge and communication products are clearly linked with the programmatic approach. Liaise with the communications and advocacy and partnerships unit from the design phase and on a quarterly basis to obtain analytics and key insights on social media trends and publication downloads so that the data drives decision-making on which products are most successful and where to focus resources.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

CONCLUSION 6

Human rights and gender equality are at the core of the Regional Office's work. The regional women, peace and security team included the targeting of marginalized groups during the design phase and was able to reach marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities living in remote islands in the BARM. However, the Regional Office must strengthen its efforts and provide support to implementing partners to prioritize and track how the most marginalized groups of the targeted population are engaged and benefit (or not) from programming efforts, not only because of the mandate of the organization, but also because there is evidence that marginalization is a key driver of violent extremism and increases vulnerability to trafficking.

Based on findings 1, 10 The fundamental strategy for achieving gender equality and empowerment of women is changing social norms – driving positive gender norms and ending harmful practices, discrimination and marginalization. Measuring efforts aimed at changing these norms is essential so that UN Women and its partners can understand what works and what does not work in diverse contexts and track change, including steps forwards and steps backwards, over time.

RECOMMENDATION 4

The regional women, peace and security team, in collaboration with the Regional Office focal point for partner agreements, should develop a toolkit for enhancing the capacity of relevant implementing partners on how to identify and engage in defining appropriate programmatic approaches and indicators for measuring progress over the longer term, including social norms change. In addition, it should monitor and report in collaboration with the target population, including the most marginalized groups, such as women with disabilities, women affected by conflict-related sexual violence, women-headed households, ethnic minorities and LGBTIQ persons.

Priority

MEDIUM

Timeframe

Q2 2022

Target Audience:

Regional Office Senior Management, Regional Office Governance Peace and Security Adviser, Regional Office Women, Peace and Security Team, Regional Office Planning and Coordination Specialist, relevant headquarters units.

Suggested key actions:

- Support the development of a toolkit that is specific to engagement of the most marginalized groups so that programmatic efforts are appropriately tailored and implementing partners have the capacity to measure progress and report on who is reached.
- Together with implementing partners, identify social norms that are driving gender inequalities specific to the peace and security space and focus efforts on understanding these issues, addressing them through programmatic work and measuring change over time.

ORGANIZATIONAL EFFICIENCY

CONCLUSION 7

While several good practices were identified, such as embedding a monitoring and evaluation specialist on the team, several challenges that were rooted in the women, peace and security regional programme and related project design and implementation limited efficiency. These include: the potential efficiency gains of a regional approach were lost as the result of a siloed approach; defining a risk appetite could help with balancing the need to take risks to allow for innovation, while at the same time ensuring risks are properly managed; diversification of donors and regional-level pooled funding could support enhanced efficiency.

Country Offices sought support of the Regional Office to provide technical assistance and support resource mobilization for their own efforts. However, the women, peace and security project-driven approach (see Conclusion 1) required a heavy time investment by regional personnel and diverted attention from the broader women, peace and security agenda in the region and regional functions. Staff turnover also contributed to this issue. The Regional Office has the opportunity to bring UN Women offices and stakeholders from across the region together to support knowledge exchange on lessons learned, brainstorming and strategizing, and the establishment of catalytic partnerships that can benefit both Regional and Country Offices. While there were clear technical capacities on women, peace and security at the regional level, which drove the generation of research and evidence that helped to enhance the credibility of UN Women's work in this area, the projects were more a compilation of individual country-level initiatives without clear linkages to the bigger picture. On an individual level, some initiatives were innovative and effective at reaching large audiences (in the case of videos) or planting the seeds for change, but it was the lack of perspective around the sum of the parts that was missing. Regional Office support to Country Offices beyond the regional programmes could have resulted in efficiency gains and multiplied the impact of UN Women efforts. Enhanced capacities of UN Women and implementing partners on expectations of UN Women monitoring and results-based reporting are also needed to ensure the data required to report at the aggregate level and on a disaggregated level are collected.

A large amount of money had to be spent in short periods of time, which presents an inherent risk that funds may not be used in the most efficient or effective way. For example, in the case of the project on preventing violent extremism, large investments were made in videos and events without any linkages to country-level efforts, which resulted in a lack of understanding around the extent to which these efforts were contributing to the overarching objectives. Risks that are identified should be tracked in a way that facilitates learning across teams and followed up on to ensure issues are resolved.

The Regional Office may need to assess when annual project funding may have more transaction cost burden than a benefit to those who are meant to benefit. The annual time frame of the project on preventing violent extremism, coupled with the implementation modality through multiple country-level partner agreements over the course of four years, meant that almost half of the time was diverted away from implementation. The stop-and-go relationship with partners not only affected the potential efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability, it may have also resulted in decreased trust in UN Women by our key partners. Pooled funding could be a way to encourage donors to contribute to women, peace and security efforts while allowing the Regional Office the flexibility to place the funding where it is needed most, while ensuring the sustainability of efforts and cross-linkages across Regional Office teams and countries. The Regional Office will have to advocate with donors to clarify why this could be a more efficient and effective approach, given that UN Women has limited capacity on the ground.

RECOMMENDATION 5

The Regional Office should clearly articulate and demonstrate how regional programming efforts could enhance efficiencies across countries and take concerted action to enhance the organizational efficiency of women, peace and security efforts through diversification of the donor base and modalities, capacity-building, and dedicating time to assessing the best value for money approach.

Priority

HIGH

Timeframe

Q4 2021

Target Audience:

*Regional Office
Senior Management,
Regional Office GPS
Advisor, Regional Office
Women, Peace and
Security Team, Regional
Office Operations
Team, Regional Office
Partnerships Specialist,
relevant headquarters
units*

Suggested key actions:

- When designing initiatives, bear in mind value for money, clear and achievable objectives, indicators that measure meaningful change and baseline assessment and results assessment to enable an understanding of how efforts at the regional level combine to influence and contribute to the overall Strategic Note outcomes and vision, regardless of specific project-level funding.
- Enhance guidance, tools and capacity-building for UN Women personnel and implementing partners on project design, monitoring, validating and results-based reporting to support enhanced data and understanding of efforts.
- Ensure internal consultation with experts (Regional Office/Country Office/UN Women headquarters) from thematic areas, planning and coordination, and communications during programme design (prior to sharing externally with donors) and implementation to discuss issues that arise.
- Ensure continuous risk management and a joint tracking mechanism that tracks key issues identified during project implementation through monitoring missions or discussions with implementing partners to ensure that they are followed up on and not repeated.
- Establish mechanisms for ongoing consultation among project personnel to discuss key issues, risks and good practices. Co-create processes that allow for enhanced ownership and accountability for regional programme management and oversight at country level and key performance indicators for cross-team collaboration.
- Dedicate time to diversifying the donor base for women, peace and security work, advocate with donors about the need for long-term funding and provide clear evidence and justification for why short-term funding may work against progress and how pooled funding could enhance efforts (funding joint work across themes, and shared posts (monitoring and evaluation, communications, etc.).

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The UN Women Independent Evaluation Service is co-located with the Internal Audit Service under the Independent Evaluation and Audit Service. The UN Women Independent Evaluation Service's main purpose is to enhance accountability, inform decision-making, and contribute to learning about the best ways to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment through the organization's mandate, including its normative, operational, and coordination work. The Independent Evaluation Service also works to strengthen capacities for gender-responsive evaluation within UN entities, governments, and civil society organizations.

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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.



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