

Independent Evaluation Service-Led Evaluation: UN Women response to crisis situations in Asia and the Pacific

I. Background

The year 2020 was like none other, as the Secretary General of the United Nations stated on 18 June 2021, “The last 18 months have been unprecedented, with the COVID-19 pandemic revealing the cracks in society... Millions of families lost their loved ones, 114 million jobs have been lost, more than 55 per cent of the world’s population is left without any form of social protection, and poverty has risen for the first time in 20 years.”¹ The multi-dimensional nature of the socio and economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic brought to the forefront different types of challenges that were not experienced by international organizations responding to natural disasters or even in other complex emergency situations in the past. Prior to the pandemic, the humanitarian community had advocated for a new focus on the nexus approach, which integrates the humanitarian, development and peace systems with the aim of having a more coordinated, holistic and sustainable approach to humanitarian response and international development. For some, the COVID-19 pandemic has only heightened the need for such a holistic response and the international community has realized that lessons learned during the ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic must be integrated into overall organizational response systems to ensure readiness for responding to diverse types of crises and adapting to complex situations.

At the same time, the humanitarian community has also widely recognized the need for renewed and strengthened focus on gender responsive humanitarian response. The first thematic evaluation commissioned by the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations Steering Group in 2020 focused on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls recommended to “Increase Humanitarian Country Teams Access to Strategic and Technical Expertise on GEEWG”.² The evaluation also identified the: Gender Hub, a UN Women-led initiative in Cox’s Bazaar, Bangladesh as a promising practice for enhancing gender coordination.

A rapid evaluation is proposed as a means for providing the organization with an independent assessment of how the organization has responded and is continuously adapting programming to ongoing and diverse crises³ in the Asia and the Pacific region. This information can help ensure the organization has in place systems and mechanisms that facilitate rapid decision-making and adaptation that ensure effective response that meets the needs of the most vulnerable women and girls in the most efficient and sustainable way. The evaluation should be completed in a condensed timeframe to allow for feeding into current responses in the region.

II. UN Women’s support to Crisis response

During crises, such as conflict or disasters, women often endure extreme hardships, such as increased violence and insecurity, restricted mobility and additional care, domestic and livelihood responsibilities. Although there is growing recognition of the

¹ Secretary General Antonio Guterres, speech on his re-appointment 18 June 2021; <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/general-assembly-plenary-ga12339>

² the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations Steering Group in 2017 focused on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls,

³ Within the humanitarian system specific terminology is used to initiate a certain level of response from the international system – for the purpose of this assessment, crisis is used so as not to be confused with specific humanitarian response systems; these are outlined in the Relief Web *Glossary of Humanitarian Terms*: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/4F99A3C28EC37D0EC12574A4002E89B4-reliefweb_aug2008.pdf
Complex Emergency: A multifaceted humanitarian crisis in a country, region or society where there is a total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from internal or external conflict and which requires a multi-sectoral, international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single agency and/or the ongoing UN country programme. Such emergencies have, in particular, a devastating effect on children and women, and call for a complex range of responses. (OCHA)

Disaster: A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society causing widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses which exceed the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources.

Emergency: A sudden and usually unforeseen event that calls for immediate measures to minimize its adverse consequences. (UN DHA)

importance of women’s participation in humanitarian action, women’s leadership roles as early responders and promoters of community resilience continues to be underutilized. It must be recognised that women’s meaningful influence on decision making, especially at the higher levels, remains limited in both protracted and sudden onset emergency responses. Further, while there has been observed progress on GEEWG implementation, gaps in country level gender expertise and coordination thwart efforts to support and sustain it. There is a need to strengthen meaningful participation of women in humanitarian decision making and improve gender equality expertise in sudden onset emergency response.⁴ UN Women reports that when women are involved in prevention and crisis response, it leads to better outcomes and lowers risk.

UN Women works proactively with humanitarian actors to ensure their emergency response plans adequately integrate gender equality and women’s empowerment; that women and girls are equally consulted to understand and address their needs and vulnerabilities; that women’s leadership is leveraged; that gender is integrated into humanitarian assessments, reporting and monitoring tools; and that gender experts are included in the humanitarian teams responding to the crisis. UN Women helps to ensure that gender equality and the empowerment of women remains central to both development programming and humanitarian action. UN Women Independent Evaluation Service led corporate evaluation on UN Women’s contributions to Humanitarian Action identified that most stakeholders recognize UN Women as a key actor providing clear, practical and evidence-based guidance for gender equality and women’s empowerment in humanitarian action and that the Entity ensures these issues are both integrated effectively and consistently in humanitarian responses. UN Women’s normative work has proven to be particularly relevant to these efforts. In relation to global forums, UN Women has made significant contributions to various policies, frameworks and initiatives.⁵

In the context of COVID-19, UN Women in Asia and the Pacific reported leveraging its experience in the areas of Women’s Economic Empowerment, Peace and Security and addressing violence against women to meet immediate needs of women and girls and ensure that the world post-COVID-19 is built on principles of human rights and gender equality. This is done to protect the gains made on gender equality and women’s empowerment and ensure that recovery is centred on the principle of leaving no one behind, and on approaches that are gender transformative. UN Women efforts in Asia and the Pacific include providing gender analysis, data, and expertise to inform regional and national preparedness and response. It is also leveraging its coordination and convening roles for advocacy and accountability to women and girls in the response and mobilizing women’s organizations to reach those left furthest behind with risk communication, and to ensure women have equal voice, leadership, and access to information. Country Offices in the region are engaged in COVID-19 preparedness planning, including ensuring measures are in place for continued GBV service provision, as well as mobilizing women’s organizations to influence and participate in response work.⁶

Stakeholder mapping

Ideally, rights holders who have directly participated in or are affected by UN Women’s crisis response efforts will be engaged in discussing the outcomes of these efforts from their perspective. However, the cost/benefits to the participation of rights holders as evaluation participants will be assessed during the inception phase, as the evaluation will ensure a do no harm approach also considering the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In cases where it would not be possible to engage rights holders, a representative of the rights holders engaged by UN Women will be contacted for feedback and this may need to be done remotely. Limitations to the evaluation will be clearly explained in the final report.

The table below is an overview of key stakeholder groups relevant to this evaluation. During the inception phase, the evaluation team will be undertaking a more comprehensive mapping to ensure the universe of key stakeholders is identified

⁴ Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls, 2020. Accessible at: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2021-01/The%20Inter-Agency%20Humanitarian%20Evaluation%20%28IAHE%29%20on%20Gender%20Equality%20and%20the%20Empowerment%20of%20Women%20and%20Girls%20%28GEEWG%29-Report.pdf>

⁵ Corporate Thematic Evaluation: UN Women’s Contribution to Humanitarian Action, 2019. Accessible at: <https://gate.unwomen.org/Evaluation/Details?evaluationId=11372>

⁶ The First 100 Days of the COVID-19 Outbreak in Asia and the Pacific: A Gender Lens, 2020. Accessible at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/the-first-100-days-of-the-covid-19-outbreak-in-asia-and-the-pacific>

and to inform the sampling approach.

Stakeholder Role	Specific Group	Main Contributions
Target groups of rights holders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women and Youth groups • Hidden vulnerable groups such as LGBTIQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, or Questioning), women with disabilities, women’s right activists, undocumented women migrant workers and women living in informal settlements or in areas that are particularly vulnerable to climate change. • Women belonging to minority religious or ethnic groups • Selected Community representatives in affected communities • Community Based Organisations (CBOs) • Faith Based Organisations 	<p>Direct beneficiaries and programme/project participants</p> <p>Responsible partners</p>
Principle and primary duty bearers who make decisions and implement humanitarian projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UN Women ROAP /CO/field presences • UN Women Executive Board; HQ Senior Management Team (SMT)/ Executive Leadership Team (ELT)/ Humanitarian Section • UN RCO • Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) members • UNDP • UNFPA • UNOCHA • UNICEF • UNHCR • WFP • IOM • Inter Sector Coordination Group (ICSG) • Humanitarian Country Team members • Multi-Donor Trust Fund Office • Provincial governments • Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and key ministries 	<p>Development, implementation, M&E of policies and programmes</p> <p>Joint programmes development and responsible partners</p>

- National, regional and global protection clusters/committees/other protection structures.
- Human Rights commissions of respective countries where appropriate
- Bilateral Donors
- Private organisations set up to respond to COVID-19

II. Evaluation Purpose and Objectives

The UN Women Evaluation Policy⁷ and UN Women Evaluation Handbook⁸ are the main guiding documents that set forth the principles and organizational framework for evaluation planning, conduct, and follow-up in UN Women. These principles are aligned with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards for Evaluation⁹ and Ethical Guidelines.¹⁰

Purpose

The purpose of this rapid independent evaluation is to conduct a forward-looking assessment to provide information for decision-making and learning, to ultimately strengthen UN Women’s ability to respond effectively when confronted with a crisis and develop high quality replicable interventions that can be tailored to the operating environment that requires specific guidelines, operating procedures and strategic principles to enable the Entity’s offices to respond quickly and consistently to emergencies and complex humanitarian responses.

Evaluation objectives

The objectives of this evaluation on are to:

1. Document the basic components of organizational readiness for effective response to crisis based on international standards and in line with key sister agencies compared with UN Women policies, procedures, and practice.
2. Assess UN Women coherence, effectiveness, contributions towards impact, sustainability, and organizational efficiency in responding to crises in 3 country cases in Asia and the Pacific.
3. Identify the successes, gaps and comparative advantages of UN Women crisis response and provide action-oriented recommendations to UN Women headquarters, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific and field presences.

Key questions

The evaluation will explore the following key questions:

1. What is expected in a crisis response according to international standards?
2. What are stakeholder’s expectations of UN Women in responding to a crisis?
3. How has UN Women responded in recent crisis response situations?

⁷ UN Women Revised Evaluation Policy, UNW/2020/5/Rev.2 ; accessible at: <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/executive%20board/2020/second%20regular%20session/unw-2020-5-rev2%20revised%20eval%20policy%20for%20endorsement%20at%20srs%202020%203%20sept%20rev.pdf?la=en&vs=3925>

⁸ UN Women Evaluation Handbook, 2015; accessible at: <https://genderevaluation.unwomen.org/en/evaluation-handbook>

⁹ UNEG, “Norms and Standards for evaluation”, 2016, available online at: <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914>.

¹⁰ UNEG, “Ethical guidelines”, 2008, available online at: <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/102>.

- What are the internal bottlenecks (and root causes for these) to crisis response from an organizational perspective (i.e. systems, capacities, etc.)?
 - What is the internal enabling/disabling environment for responding to crises and adapting programming?
 - What does UN Women’s performance look like in crisis response situation?
 - How does UN Women develop high quality replicable interventions that can support women and girls in crisis situations or that can ensure gender equality is taken into consideration when responding to crises?
 - How does oversight, overall feedback loops (between HQ, RO, CO’s) and support from Headquarters and the Regional Office contribute to the performance?
 - What contributions towards impact and sustainability with respect to furthering gender equality and women’s empowerment has the organization made in crisis response?
4. What are the successes, scope for improvement/gaps and comparative advantage(s) of UN Women’s response when compared with the international standards?

Scope

The geographic scope is regional, specific to UN Women Country Offices in Asia and the Pacific. However, the global level systems and procedures will be examined. For the purposes of this evaluation, these offices will include the **Myanmar** Country Office’s humanitarian response in political crisis and conflict situation, **Bangladesh** Country office’s protracted humanitarian response in Cox’s Bazaar with a specific focus on contributions of the Gender Hub, and the **Fiji** Multi-Country Office’s (MCO) emergency response systems to natural disasters, specifically to Tropical Cyclone Yasa in Fiji. All offices were dually affected by the global COVID-19 pandemic. The Regional Office aims to support Country Offices and field presences with timely technical advice, facilitating knowledge exchange, and resource mobilization. The Headquarters and Regional Office support to Country Offices and overall feedback loops during these crises will also be assessed.

IV. Methodology

UN Women adheres to the UN Women Evaluation Policy and Handbook, which is in line with the United Nations Evaluation Group Norms and Standards. The approach will be formative – there is no overarching results framework that guided the regions work in responding to crises other than the individual Strategic Notes and related amendments, and in some cases, projects for specific response efforts. Thus, a framework will be developed based on a desk review of international standards and sister UN agency policies and procedures in place for responding to crisis and adapting programming efforts. UN Women’s efforts will be assessed against this framework to identify good practices and gaps.

UN Women evaluations are gender responsive, meaning that they are participatory, transparent and analyze the underlying barriers and social norms that inhibit progress on realizing women’s rights. Individual case study reports will be prepared with a view to providing useful information for the respective country office based on its unique context. However, the synthesis report will identify trends, good practices and lessons learned that are applicable to offices across the region, and hopefully beyond. The following countries have been identified as case studies: Bangladesh – Cox’s Bazaar, Fiji/Pacific Islands, and Myanmar, (see Box 1 for the rationale for selection). Each country has experienced a different type of emergency response over the past two years, ranging from a protracted humanitarian response and ongoing refugee crisis, natural disaster and crisis, or armed conflict, and all have been dually affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, a look into these different scenarios will provide insights into how UN Women is responding in very different contexts –with respect to both development and the humanitarian response systems. As a rapid evaluation focused mainly on UN Women’s processes and internal systems for responding in crises, an internal reference group will be established. The evaluation will also limit time allocated to each phase of the evaluation to ensure that the evaluation process is rapid.

Box 1. Country case study proposal	
Country	Rationale for selection
Bangladesh – Cox’s Bazaar: protracted humanitarian response	<p>Protracted humanitarian response: UN Women has invested significantly since 2018 in Cox’s Bazaar, receiving funds from the Government of Canada to establish a Gender Hub aimed at enhancing the gender-responsiveness of the overall humanitarian response.</p> <p>This case study will provide lessons learned specific to UN Women’s role in coordination in humanitarian response and adaptation during COVID-19. The case study will assess contributions towards outcomes for women and girls based on UN Women’s ability to influence other actors through coordination and capacity building efforts.</p>
Fiji – Pacific – natural disasters - emergency response systems	<p>The Pacific islands are one of the most disaster-prone areas in the AP region. In December 2020, Fiji was affected by Tropical Cyclone Yasa, which was the second Category 5 severe tropical cyclone in 2020 – while at the same time the country was grappling with the ramifications of the global COVID-19 pandemic; at the time this was mainly the economic effects (COVID-19 case count was very low). This case study aims to provide lessons learned from Fiji MCO response to both the natural disaster and the pandemic.</p>
Myanmar – complex humanitarian response in political crisis and conflict situation	<p>On 1 February 2021, the Myanmar military took power of the country and declared a state of emergency resulting in demonstrations and violent conflict. As a result, the UN country team has advanced principles of engagement which centers on only providing life-saving support and not to engage with the de facto authorities beyond addressing humanitarian needs. As of mid-June UNHCR, estimated that 200,000 people have been displaced within Myanmar since 1 February.¹¹ WFP reported that ongoing conflict has impacted on the socio-economic situation and is exacerbating food insecurity and malnutrition.¹² This case study will look into how UN Women is responding to the dual conflict and COVID-19 response.</p>

The data collection tools will include:

- **Extensive desk review:** sister UN agency emergency response systems in place including triggers and preparedness measures, UN Women policies and procedures for crisis response, and UN Women field

¹¹ UNHCR Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific – Myanmar Emergency Update as of 15 June 2021;

<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Myanmar%20emergency%20update%2015%20June%202021.pdf>

¹² World Food Programme Situation Report #2 June 2021; <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WFP-0000129298.pdf>

presence programmatic and operational information, key publications and monitoring reports and relevant project documentation.

- **Meta-analysis** of evaluations, assessments, or audits (both internal and external to UN Women).
- **Key Informant Interviews and focus group discussions** with UN Women personnel (at headquarters, regional and country level) and partners (Government, Civil Society and UN system): approximately 20 individuals in each case study and 20 at regional/global level to reach a total of approximately 80 individuals.
- **Survey of UN Women humanitarian focal points in the region:** to identify good practices and key challenges faced by UN Women personnel on the frontline.
- **Outcome harvesting:** the ability to reach direct beneficiaries of UN Women programmes will be assessed at the time of data collection. If rights holders can be reached, the contributions towards outcomes as identified by them will be defined.

Limitations

Given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and security situation in some of the proposed countries, the use of participatory methods is limited, and travel restrictions limit the possibility of in-person data collection. Due to COVID-19 and security travel restrictions, the team will rely on the accuracy and completeness of the provided documents by the Offices, with independent verification of the information provided, where possible. To avoid biases raised, the information will be triangulated and validated with the Country Offices and Evaluation Reference Group.

V. Evaluation Governance

The Independent Evaluation Service (IES) will lead this rapid evaluation with the support of a consultant team (one Humanitarian Evaluation consultant, one International Evaluation consultant, and potentially National consultants). Given the scope of this evaluation is primarily internal and it is intended to be produced in a condensed timeframe, an internal evaluation reference group will be established to provide quality support and ensure transparency. Two peer reviewers representing IES and Internal Audit Service (IAS) with experience conducting evaluations/audits in a similar area will be engaged to provide quality review of the evaluation products and process. The IES Chief of Evaluation and Director of the Independent Evaluation and Audit Service (IEAS) provide oversight to all evaluation processes. UN Women adheres to the Global Evaluation Reports Assessment and Analysis System (GERAAS), which sets forth the criteria by which the report will be assessed.

VI. Timeframe

The rapid evaluation will initiate in August 2021 and a final report will be issued by November 2021.

Preparation	June	July	August	September	October	November
Concept Note	X					
Terms of Reference		X				
Establishment of Internal Reference Group		X				
Recruitment		X	X			
Inception Phase						
Inception presentation and data collection tools			X			
Data Collection and Analysis						
Desk review + meta-analysis			X			

Regional level Interviews / FGDs			X			
Bangladesh Case Study: Gender Hub			X			
Myanmar Case Study				X		
Fiji Case Study				X		
Reporting						
Preliminary Findings Presentation					X	
Draft report					X	
Final report						X
Communication product / Brief						X

VII. Ethical code of conduct

UN Women has developed a [UN Women Evaluation Consultants Agreement Form](#) for evaluators that must be signed as part of the contracting process, which is based on the [UNEG Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct](#). These documents will be annexed to the contracts. All data collected by the team members must be submitted to the evaluation manager in Word, PowerPoint or Excel formats and is the property of UN Women. Proper storage of data is essential for ensuring confidentiality and a data protection plan will be developed during the inception phase. The evaluation's value added is its impartial and systematic assessment of the thematic area. As with the other stages of the evaluation, involvement of stakeholders should not interfere with the impartiality of the evaluation. The evaluator(s) have the final judgment on the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation report, and the evaluator(s) must be protected from pressures to change information in the report. Proper procedures for data collection with rights holders who may have been affected by violence must be adhered to as outlined in the [WHO Ethical and Safety Recommendations for research on violence against women](#). Additionally, if the evaluator(s) identify issues of wrongdoing, fraud or other unethical conduct, [UN Women procedures](#) must be followed and confidentiality be maintained. The [UN Women Legal Framework for Addressing Non-Compliance with UN Standards of Conduct](#), and accompanying policies protecting against retaliation and prohibiting harassment and abuse of authority, provide a cohesive framework aimed at creating and maintaining a harmonious working environment, ensuring that staff members do not engage in any wrongdoing and that all allegations of wrongdoing are reported promptly, investigated and appropriate action taken to achieve accountability.

ANNEXES

- [UN Women GERAAS evaluation report quality checklist](#)
- [UN Women Evaluation Consultants Agreement Form](#)
- [UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation in the UN System](#)
- [UN Women Evaluation Handbook](#)