

IN BRIEF

COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION NEPAL

Photo ©UN Women Nepal

This report presents the main evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Country Portfolio Evaluation (CPE) of the UN Women Nepal Country Office conducted between January and August 2022. A CPE is a systematic assessment of the normative, coordination and operational aspects of UN Women’s contribution to development results relating to gender equality and women’s empowerment at the country level.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the CPE was to provide an independent and systematic assessment of UN Women’s contribution to development results with respect to gender equality at the country level, to feed into learning on what strategies work well and what areas need strengthening over the course of the Nepal Country Office’s Strategic Note 2018–2022. A secondary purpose was to identify the comparative advantages of UN Women in Nepal and support future decision-making for the Country Office’s strategy. Given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this evaluation captured how UN Women is responding to the crisis and has analysed how UN Women can best support socioeconomic efforts in the country in the future.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

The primary intended users of this evaluation are the UN Women Nepal Country Office and its key stakeholders, including the Government, civil society organizations (CSOs), development partners, other United Nations agencies, the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific and UN Women headquarters, including the Senior Management Team and the Independent Evaluation Service (IES). The United Nations Country Team (UNCT) Nepal may also use the findings of this evaluation as key input to its new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF).

OBJECTIVES

The evaluation’s objectives were to:

1. Assess effectiveness and organizational efficiency in progressing towards the achievement of results in gender equality and the empowerment of women.
2. Assess the relevance and coherence of UN Women’s programme vis-à-vis the United Nations system, UN Women’s value added, and contributions to the outcomes of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2018–2022.
3. Analyse how a human rights approach and gender equality and disability inclusion principles are integrated in the design and implementation of UN Women’s work in Nepal and contribute to transformative change and the sustainability of efforts.
4. Provide lessons learned and actionable recommendations to support UN Women’s strategic positioning in the future.

PRIMARY INTENDED USES

- **Support decision-making** regarding the development of the next Strategic Note.
- **Ensure accountability** for the development effectiveness of the existing Strategic Note in terms of UN Women’s contribution to gender equality and women’s empowerment.
- **Facilitate learning** on effective, promising and innovative strategies and practices.
- **Support capacity development** and mobilization of national stakeholders to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women.

METHODS

This CPE employed a non-experimental, theory-based, gender-responsive approach. In consultation with the Country Office, a reconstructed theory of change was developed and used as the basis for contribution analysis. Evaluation questions were developed using the theory of change and assessed against the criteria of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD/DAC), comprising relevance, coherence, effectiveness, sustainability, gender equality and human rights and organizational efficiency. UN Women evaluations are gender-responsive and apply the key principles of a human rights-based approach: they are inclusive, participatory and transparent; ensure fair power relations; and analyse the underlying structural barriers and sociocultural norms that impede the realization of women's rights. Multiple sources of data were obtained, and 201 stakeholders from across stakeholder groups were consulted (161 women, 39 men, 1 transgender woman).

The CPE followed UN Women procedures to ensure high-quality evaluation processes and products and ethical conduct as outlined in the UN Women Evaluation Policy and Evaluation Handbook. All evaluation products were subject to quality review by IES management, a peer reviewer, the Evaluation Reference Group and the Evaluation Management Group.

BACKGROUND ON UN WOMEN IN NEPAL

Nepal ranks 142 of 189 countries in the Human Development Index published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)¹ and 110 of 162 countries on the Gender Inequality Index. Nepal is a federal state consisting of seven provinces, 77 districts and 753 local levels. The 2015 Constitution, along with the Fifteenth National Development Plan and the National Gender Equality Policy of 2021, include provisions for gender equality. The National Gender Equality Policy focuses on removing discriminatory barriers to the socioeconomic development of women, children and adolescent girls; ending gender-based violence; adopting a gender-responsive governance system; and achieving the economic empowerment of women.

Despite changes at the policy level, women in general across Nepal have a weaker role in decision-making within families and communities and less control over resources. Their physical movement is often restricted in comparison with men. Even among women, differences in position within the family affect roles, responsibilities and decision-making opportunities.² While the constitution of Nepal provides rights to sexual and gender minority citizens, political advances have not yet been fully realized. Persons of diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identities and Expressions, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) experience discrimination and violence in numerous aspects of their life.³ The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an increase in intimate partner violence, domestic violence and gender-based violence. The pandemic also highlighted and intensified discrimination based on gender, sexuality, disability, caste, ethnicity and economic status across intersecting identities, significantly eroding the gains made on gender equality and women's empowerment in Nepal.

The UN Women Nepal Country Office was established in 2012 and received full delegation of authority in 2013.⁴ The Strategic Note is the main planning tool for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment through UN Women's support to normative, coordination and operational work and is designed to align with UN Women's Global Strategic Plan, in addition to United Nations country-level outcomes as defined in the UNDAF 2018–2022 and national priorities for development, gender equality and women's empowerment. The Strategic Note is aligned with and seeks to contribute to Nepal's national priorities as described in its Fourteenth and Fifteenth Three-year Periodic Plans, i.e. its commitments to gender equality, the needs of women's organizations and the principle of leaving no one behind. The Country Office's programme comprised four outcome areas in the Strategic Note 2018–2022 cycle with resources totaling US\$ 16 million. The Country Office focused on two Global Strategic Plan Outcome areas: Women's Political Empowerment, with a budget of US\$ 5.8 million; and Women's Economic Empowerment, with a budget of US\$ 6.3 million.

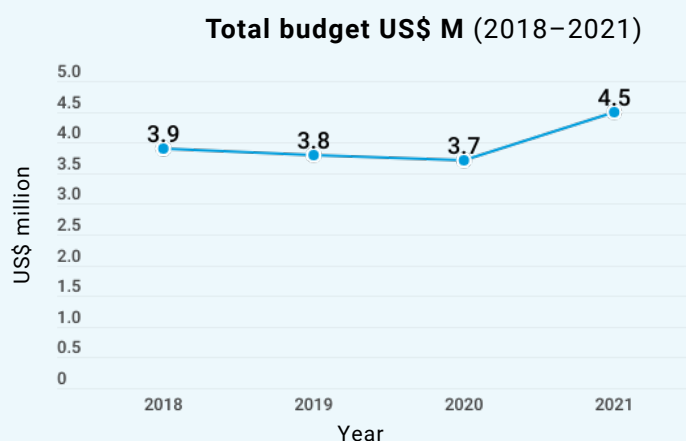
¹ UNDP. Human Development Report.. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/latest-human-development-index-ranking>

² M. Lama and O. Gurung (2012). Social Inclusion Survey, Caste, Ethnic and Gender Dimensions of Socio-Economic Development, Governance, and Social Solidarity. Kathmandu: Central Department of Sociology/Anthropology, Tribhuvan University, p. 167.

³ USAID, UNICEF, UNDP (2014). Being LGBT in Asia: Nepal Country Report: A Participatory Review and Analysis of the Legal and Social Environment https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1861/Being_LGBT_in_Asia_Nepal_Country_Report.pdf.

⁴ <https://un.org.np/agency/un-women>.

KEY FIGURES ON UN WOMEN IN NEPAL (2018-MARCH, 2022) AND DATA COLLECTED FOR THE EVALUATION



Thematic areas total budget US\$



130 Individuals Interviewed	100+ Documents reviewed	7 Focus group discussions	3 Case studies	2 Surveys conducted
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KEY FINDINGS, LESSONS LEARNED, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

UN Women Nepal has implemented its Strategic Note 2018-2022 in unprecedented times, recognizing the dynamic context, with the federalization process of the Government of Nepal, political instability and the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the Nepal Country Office has emerged as a leader within this context and has built a strong and credible voice in Nepal in support of gender equality, social inclusion and women's empowerment. The Country Office's value added is the technical and advocacy support provided to development partners in their work to articulate how to implement the gender equality and social inclusion agenda in Nepal. By having a clear intent in its strategies and investment in its personnel to be able to embody and spread its messages, the Country Office has built expertise in operationalizing intersectional approaches to programming for gender equality and social inclusion.

The Country Office has used various approaches to increase its ability to reach the most marginalized groups; for example, overall targeting of focus provinces and districts/local government units with higher concentrations of some types of marginalized groups, such as Dalits; using a core strategy of creating partnerships with CSOs with strong reach at grassroots level, including CSOs with an explicit and singular focus on particular marginalized groups, such as disabled persons' organizations, the Feminist Dalit Organization and LGBTQI+ groups/

networks; and working with organizations representing marginalized groups to strengthen a gender perspective within the group, emphasizing the specific issues facing women, and their inclusion in events, leadership and analysis undertaken by the organization.

A key lesson learned was that convening and listening to voices across the spectrum of different stakeholders is essential for an effective and relevant response during times of crisis. When a solid understanding of the target population and challenges in reaching them can be integrated, relief response can reap real long-term benefits. Another key lesson was that embedding a scale-up strategy or plan from the design stage can provide clear avenues for sustainability. Documenting models so that results can be easily shared with other parties for further scale-up across the federal structure is important. There is an opportunity for the Country Office to continue to "walk the talk" with respect to embodying feminist principles, share critical lessons learned and be a source of inspiration for other UN Women offices. Its next five-year Strategic Note period will be critical for sustaining and deepening gains and scaling up through knowledge-sharing and partnership. The new UNSDCF presents a critical opportunity to ensure that gender equality and social inclusion remain central to the efforts through a coherent and relevant United Nations system approach.

CONCLUSION 1

The UN Women Nepal Country Office has adopted a relevant framework and holistic strategies for addressing gender-based discrimination due to the persistence of societal structures, beliefs, values and harmful practices. The office's thematic areas of focus remain highly relevant; however, they require more concerted efforts at provincial and local levels to maintain relevance within the context of federalization. To maintain its strong positioning, during implementation of the new UNSDCF, the Country Office must find ways of translating its advocacy into concrete technical advice and tools for partners across the UNSDCF areas of focus.

RECOMMENDATION 1: The new Strategic Note should define how UN Women Nepal will continue to strengthen its nested approach to supporting the federalization process in partnership with the UN system, while maintaining and strengthening the gender equality, social inclusion and intersectionality focus in practical terms. The Country Office should engage with UN Women partners in defining the next Strategic Note and continue to develop products that help communicate UN Women's vision to partners.

CONCLUSION 2

UN Women Nepal has demonstrated how investment in coordination mechanisms and joint programmes can scale up advocacy and programming efforts for gender equality and women's empowerment. By ensuring that the voices of marginalized persons were heard in these platforms, UN Women demonstrated its value added in linking government and development partners with the reality on the ground. This not only translated into awareness but also concrete actions, as exemplified through the COVID-19 pandemic response.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Continue proactive engagement with UN and development partners to further leadership and advocacy for gender equality and social inclusion in practical ways through key platforms. In line with recommendations from the draft Nepal UNDAF evaluation, to enhance coherence, UN Women should work with its UN system partners to strengthen joint programme management, while ensuring equal visibility of each agency within these efforts.

CONCLUSION 3

UN Women Nepal has made a substantial contribution to gender equality and social inclusion in Nepal through its support to partners in gender-responsive policy development and programming in the context of federalization and the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes using a focused and nested approach to ensure synergy of efforts, at different levels (from individual to an enabling environment) and with a strong partnership approach. At local and provincial levels, results have been achieved through joint programmes or CSO programme partners, particularly those with strong grassroots links, and an increasing focus on organizations run by as well as for marginalized groups.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Continue building an integrated approach to implementation of UN Women's triple mandate, layering efforts across different thematic areas and focusing on priority provinces to avoid being overextended while aiming to scale up efforts in cooperation with the Government, the United Nations system and development partners. Clearly communicate to partners UN Women models with potential for scale-up and value added within the different thematic areas.

CONCLUSION 4

UN Women Nepal has exemplified feminist principles and its dedication to gender equality, diversity and social inclusion through a multi-faceted and comprehensive approach. By having a clear intent in its strategies and investing in its personnel to enable them to embody and spread its messages, the Nepal Country Office has built expertise in operationalizing intersectional approaches to programming for gender equality and social inclusion. By working with civil society led by and for marginalized and excluded groups, supporting and convening its partners to reach and listen to marginalized and excluded groups, UN Women Nepal has built capacity and potential for sustainability. This experience offers valuable learning to others on the principle of leaving no one behind while also providing insight into how methods could be further fine-tuned.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Continue to evolve and strengthen the Country Office's focus on diversity and inclusion both internally and externally, including by regularly disaggregating all monitoring data by social group, and by periodically revisiting the discussion on who are the most marginalized groups and the rationale for targeting specific groups. In collaboration with sister agencies, draw on the detailed experience of programme partners to develop guidance tools on how to operationalize an intersectional approach.

CONCLUSION 5

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, adaptive management helped to respond to the dynamic operational environment. This has required directly supporting personnel and partners to learn in real time and adapt approaches accordingly. The Country Office has taken several actions to support adaptive management. For example, flexible funding received through the Strategic Note has allowed for a more adaptive and flexible use of funding. In addition, the internal focus on Country Office personnel has helped to build capacities and confidence and fostered personnel's adaptability to take on different roles as needed. Consistent evaluations and exploration of innovative means to measure social norms change has also enabled real-time learning and adaptation. The Country Office should continue to advocate for Strategic Note funding with a more diverse range of donors to reduce dependency on one donor. Although the Country Office is aware of the risk, the risk mitigation strategy contained in the resource mobilization strategy could address this issue more robustly, e.g. by collecting systematic evidence on the benefits of Strategic Note funding for dissemination to key like-minded donors.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Document and share lessons learned through investing in adaptive management and innovation to facilitate learning, both internally with other UN Women offices and externally with partners as a resource mobilization tool. Continue advocating for Strategic Note and joint programme funding and explore opportunities for other donors to engage in Strategic Note funding.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Share the internal capacity-building approach internally, continue investing in the capacities of personnel and explore pathways for retention and career development within UN Women.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Continue investing in evaluation as a means to provide a space for reflection, learning and accountability. Monitoring could be strengthened through dedicated capacity-building of CSOs and the establishment of a third-party monitoring mechanism to ensure coverage in the field and during crises.

LESSONS LEARNED



To reach the most marginalized groups, it is key for organizations to provide avenues for **engaging grassroots organizations** in meaningful ways to allow for capacity-building and co-creation of project design.



During times of crisis, **convening and listening to voices across the spectrum** of different stakeholders is essential for an effective and relevant response.



Identifying synergies, geographical focus and layering efforts maximizes progress.



Embedding a scale-up strategy or plan at the initial design stage of a project can provide clear avenues for sustainability.



Diversity and inclusion must start internally to support work externally.



Investing internally can have dividends for organizational credibility.



Unearmarked funding (such as Strategic Note funding) has the potential to support adaptive management and provide space for innovation.