

TRANSFORM



Corporate Formative Evaluation of UN Women's Support to Capacity Development

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We Can Do



Dear Readers,

Capacity development – sharing and developing knowledge, capacities, skills and lesson learned – is one of UN Women’s key strategic interventions to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment. This strategic vision encompasses a wide range of different activities from including beneficiaries in defining their learning needs to tailoring learning paths based on these discussions.

Although UN Women does not have a clear definition of and framework for capacity development, different Country and Regional Offices have developed and implemented many methods to pass along knowledge, based on the different contexts in which they operate and taking into account the myriad variables that can apply. Providing technical assistance, south-south learning cooperation, mentoring and coaching are just some of these methods, which become more effective when combined. The recent global COVID-19 pandemic also influenced UN Women’s modus operandi, bringing challenges but also opportunities and shaping new ways of learning (e.g. online learning) which are here to stay and that UN Women, like all other organizations, is learning to master.

The Independent Evaluation Service (IES) of the UN Women Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS) undertook a formative evaluation of UN Women’s support to partner capacity development as part of its corporate evaluation plan. The evaluation assessed UN Women’s capacity development support to partners and provided forward-looking recommendations, with a particular focus on work undertaken at national level. What emerged is a comprehensive understanding of what UN Women already does and how it can strengthen its own organizational processes to be as effective and efficient as possible with the resources it has. The evaluation also provides relevant insights on UN Women’s partnerships, internal structure and sustainability.

We hope you find this new TRANSFORM issue engaging and the information within it useful for strengthening the capacity development work of UN Women and its partners in the Entity’s pursuit of transformative results and further advancement to better deliver on gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Inga Sniukaite

Chief, Independent Evaluation Service
Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS)

Think Beyond. Stay Ahead.

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The analysis and recommendations in this magazine are those of the Independent Evaluation Service (IES) and do not necessarily reflect the views of UN Women. This is an independent publication of the UN Women Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS).

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ON THE COVER

Representatives of governments, civil society, the private sector, and the international community from across Europe and Central Asia gathered at the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development 2022 roundtable.

Photo: UN Women/Antoine Tardy



Why evaluate UN Women's support to capacity development?

UN Women's support to capacity development focuses on working with partners to strengthen their capacities for the achievement of UN Women's outcomes and to contribute to UN system results.

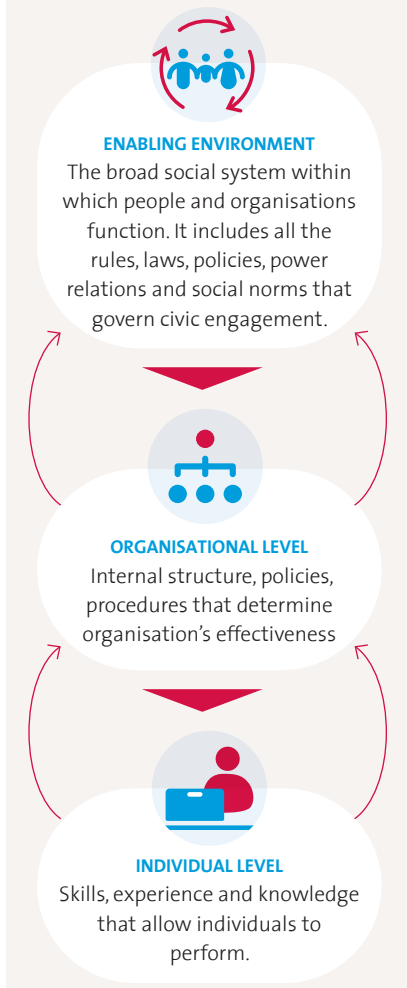
Capacity development has been considered a core function of the UN for many years and has appeared in General Assembly resolutions over the past two decades. The United Nations Development Group recognizes capacity development as one of six key programming approaches for UN integrated programming at country level and is tasked to further "support the building, development and strengthening of national capacities to support development results at the country level and to promote national ownership and leadership, in line with national development policies, plans and priorities."

Although UN Women does not have an overarching strategy for partner capacity development, it has been a key intervention strategy in UN Women's work and cuts across the organization's thematic areas and cross-cutting priorities.

UN Women delivers on its commitment to support Member States in addressing structural barriers to gender equality and women's empowerment by leveraging its triple mandate of normative support, UN system coordination and operational activities. Within this triple mandate, UN Women uses capacity development to partners as a key strategy to achieve its outcomes. UN Women's support to capacity development focuses on working with partners to strengthen their capacities for the achievement of UN Women's outcomes and to contribute to UN system results. The UN Women Strategic Plan 2018–2021 clearly envisioned capacity development as a key type of support in its operational activities, and the 2022–2025 Strategic Plan recognizes capacity development as one of the main interventions to achieve results.

Traditionally, capacity development efforts have focused on the individual and organizational levels, but practitioners have increasingly recognized the importance of working at the system level to provide a conducive environment for change.

CAPACITY LEVEL CLASSIFICATION



The most widely accepted definition of “capacity”, and that utilized by the evaluation, is “the ability of people, organisations and society as a whole to manage their affairs successfully”. Capacity development is defined as “the process whereby people, organisations and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt and maintain capacity over time”. In the context of this evaluation, this relates specifically to strengthening UN Women partners’ capacities in support of gender equality and women’s empowerment results.

To provide further clarity on what is understood by “capacity development” within this evaluation, some key distinctions are outlined below:

- A capacity development approach suggests enhancing and strengthening capacities, rather than building them from scratch as the term “capacity building” implies.
- Capacity development is an endogenous transformation process, supported but not steered by external interventions.
- The intention of capacity development is not to increase knowledge per se but to acquire knowledge to do things differently, modify habits and practices, and apply the learning to different contexts and cultures.
- Capacity development is understood as a long-term process, strengthening capacity to facilitate lasting and systemic change.

Traditionally, capacity development efforts have focused on the individual and organizational levels, but practitioners have increasingly recognized the importance of working at the system level to provide a conducive environment for change. Capacities can therefore be classified into three interlinked levels: individual, organizational and enabling environment, as shown in the figure below.

The evaluation covered the period 2018–2022 and was intended to inform and strengthen organizational learning and accountability in this area.

The purpose of this formative evaluation was to:

- Understand UN Women’s capacity development support to respond to the needs of women and girls with the aim of achieving gender equality at national level.
- Evaluate UN Women’s effectiveness and efficiency in providing capacity development support for partners to respond to the needs of women and girls at national level.
- Identify examples of good practices from key interventions that include support for capacity development of partners, including corporate tools that Country Offices can leverage for capacity development initiatives.
- Develop lessons learned and recommendations to strengthen UN Women’s national capacity development support strategies to partners to respond to the needs of women and girls.

Gender Data Bootcamp

For data enthusiasts
from North Africa

25-29
September
2023

Amman, Jordan



Photo: ©UN Women/Antoine Tardy

Key questions for a formative evaluation on partner capacity development



To what extent is UN Women's support for partner capacity development effective in delivering impact for women and girls?



To what extent is UN Women's support for partner capacity development coherent in its approach and coordinated across the organization and with external stakeholders?



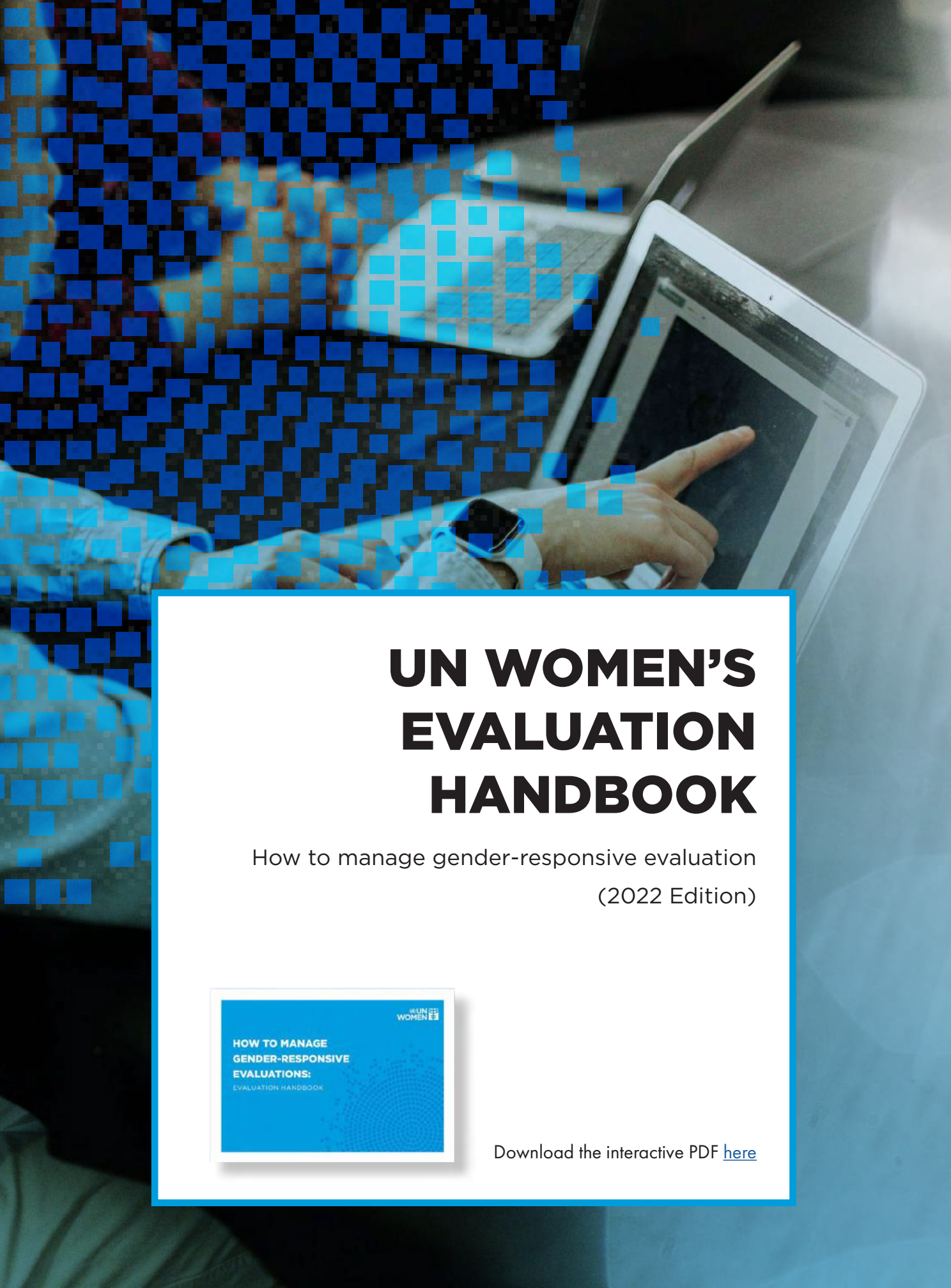
How are human rights, gender equality and inclusion incorporated into UN Women's support for partner capacity development?



To what extent are UN Women's organizational processes and structures, and its human, financial and technical resources, adequate to provide capacity development support to partners?



How sustainable are the results of UN Women's support for partner capacity development?



UN WOMEN'S EVALUATION HANDBOOK

How to manage gender-responsive evaluation
(2022 Edition)



Download the interactive PDF [here](#)



Findings and conclusions: What does the evaluation evidence tell us?

CONCLUSION 1:

Capacity development support is a central element of UN Women's work at national level and is recognized by multiple stakeholders as both valuable and needed. However, development of a clear organization-wide definition, framework and approach for UN Women's support to partner capacity development could significantly increase its potential to contribute to results.

Among UN Women personnel there are a variety of perceptions regarding the definition of capacity development and the role of capacity development within UN Women's work. This contributes to the absence of a common approach to designing, delivering, monitoring, reporting on or communicating UN Women's capacity development work and results.

There is a clear need for an organization-wide strategy or framework that articulates the purpose of capacity development; how support for capacity development contributes to change; and the principles that should inform capacity development interventions.

CONCLUSION 2:

UN Women uses a range of capacity development practices that, if meaningfully integrated within a broader "systems" approach, could contribute more effectively to impact. The current focus is on developing capacity at individual and organizational levels, with limited focus on developing capacity at the level of the enabling environment or working across multiple levels. UN Women is highly valued for its collaborative partnerships at all levels, so is particularly well placed to support capacity development across multiple levels.

There are very few examples of capacity development work across individual, organizational and enabling environment levels. There is also much stronger emphasis on capacity development that equips individuals with knowledge and skills, compared to developing capacity across wider systems or addressing norms, attitudes and behaviours. A more systemic and holistic approach is required in which capacity development initiatives are based on an understanding of, and well connected to, the wider system

which they seek to influence; work at multiple levels; and build different types of capacities.

A central strength of UN Women is its strong networks across different levels and its ability to bring together different types of actors. This can be drawn on to develop a more multileveled, "systems" approach to capacity development, in particular working with those beyond UN Women's "usual partners" to advance gender equality from multiple sites.

**GENDER
EQUALITY**



CONCLUSION 3:

There is an insufficiently systematic approach to ensuring quality standards across the various stages of capacity development interventions. It would be helpful to develop a consistent approach to analysing context; undertaking needs assessments; identifying the most appropriate capacity development modalities; and undertaking follow-up. This would help to strengthen the quality of interventions.

While the evaluation found some examples of strong and systematic approaches to planning, delivering and monitoring capacity development programming, in most cases the process was undertaken in an ad hoc way, with significant variety across the organization. Follow-up emerged as a particularly weak part of the capacity development cycle: it was absent in many smaller

initiatives, although was more likely to be undertaken within larger-scale capacity development programmes that are part of a wider package of interventions.

The lack of a consistent and robust approach to the various stages of capacity development means that interventions vary substantially in quality, results and impact.

CONCLUSION 4:

The absence of designated roles and responsibilities between headquarters, Regional and Country Offices in relation to capacity development can lead to inconsistent support to Country Offices, and untapped knowledge-sharing opportunities across the organization. Similarly, UN Women's thematic areas develop their capacity development work independently (in the absence of an overarching strategy), with limited synergies between areas. The overall efficiency of capacity development support across the organization could be improved by strengthening coordination, coherence and knowledge-sharing.

There is little structured approach to coordination among headquarters, Regional and Country Offices on capacity development, with the extent and quality of such coordination depending largely on the initiative of individual personnel. Headquarters support to Country Offices is considered valuable in some cases for its technical inputs, particularly engagement between thematic personnel within headquarters and Country Offices. Similarly, some capacity development resources produced by headquarters are highly valued by Country Offices.

There is little evidence of Regional Office strategies on capacity development and the scope of Regional Office involvement with Country Office capacity development work varies significantly.

UN Women's systems for sharing knowledge and guidance on capacity development could be strengthened as there is currently no repository of capacity development materials. Where Country Office personnel are not supported to access relevant knowledge materials, this can result in Country Offices "reinventing the wheel" or having to identify external resources for guidance.





CONCLUSION 5:

There is limited evidence on the impact of capacity development support at the national level. This is due to overreliance on lower-level results; limited monitoring of longer-term outcomes and impact; and limited use of baselines against which to assess change. There is a need to strengthen both conceptualization of how capacity development interventions will contribute to impact and theories of change.

Reported results from capacity development work are frequently outputs or lower-level outcomes, which do not provide sufficient insight into how interventions may have contributed to gender equality goals. This is a common pattern across Country Offices, thematic areas and different types of capacity development interventions.

The evaluation identified a need to increase focus on and investment in tracking how outputs or lower-level outcomes contribute to higher-level outcomes and impact over time,

information which could both help understand the impact of existing interventions and inform the development of more impactful future interventions. The short-term nature of many capacity-building projects contributes to the challenge of tracking impact over time. Moreover, some capacity development interventions do not include a clear and realistic theory of change that elaborates how they are expected to contribute to change and against which progress can be measured.

CONCLUSION 6:

The extent to which capacity development support contributes to gender transformative change is constrained by a limited focus on addressing norms, attitudes and behaviours that drive gender inequality, as well as the limited, purposeful inclusion of the most marginalized populations. It is important to strengthen personnel's understanding and application of leave no one behind principles within capacity development work.

Most capacity development initiatives seek to advance gender equality by empowering individual women through developing their knowledge capabilities and access to resources, or by strengthening gender equality provisions within institutions and policies. There has been less focus on addressing informal systemic drivers of gender inequality, such as discriminatory norms and exclusionary practices.

There is a mixed picture regarding the extent to which capacity development initiatives integrate intersectionality and leave no one

behind principles. As has been noted in several other previous assessments and studies, there is no corporate common understanding of, or systematic approach to, what integrating leave no one behind principles entails. While certain thematic areas and regions had a stronger focus on intersectionality and leave no one behind within their capacity development programming, in many programmes the evaluation found little evidence of a deliberate focus on these principles. In some programmes, delivery modalities had in fact excluded the most marginalized groups.

CONCLUSION 7:

There are limited human and financial resources for capacity development support. However, individual capacity development interventions, as stand-alone initiatives, were mostly perceived as efficient in developing both technical and operational capacity, although the latter is frequently not documented.

Human resources specifically dedicated to capacity development are limited and there is a heavy reliance on consultants and short-term personnel to deliver this work (although capacity development responsibility is frequently embedded in programme positions). In terms of financial resources, a lack of sufficient, long-term funding for capacity development results in small-scale interventions and is an obstacle to maintaining or scaling up capacity development work once projects finish.

In general, individual capacity development initiatives are mostly

perceived by stakeholders as efficient, including in their planning, organization, delivery, expertise, timeliness, logistics and costs. However, in some cases, organizational policies and processes hindered the perceived efficiency of initiatives.

UN Women frequently supports implementing partners to develop operational and administrative capacity development. While this support is highly valued and involves significant UN Women personnel time, it is mostly not documented as it is ad hoc and responsive in nature and not an explicit project outcome.



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CONCLUSION 8:

Building ownership of capacity development work is key to ensuring sustainability of results, but to date this has been hampered by the short-term nature of initiatives and limited funding.

Sustaining the results of capacity development interventions is a key challenge for UN Women, with barriers to sustainability including inadequate and short-term funding and staffing, limited follow-up activities and the absence of sustainability strategies. Ongoing accompaniment emerged as particularly important for sustainability, i.e. to support participants to apply and embed the knowledge, skills and practices

they had developed through capacity development initiatives.

Building ownership of capacity development agendas and initiatives is crucial for sustainability. While there were some strong examples, in general the evaluation found that interventions could include more focus on co-creation and developing ownership within project design and budgets.

CORPORATE EVALUATION OF UN WOMEN'S SUPPORT TO WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWEREMENT

EVALUATION REPORT AND BRIEF (2023)



Read the full report and brief [here](#)

Opportunities for improvement and the way forward



RECOMMENDATION 1

UN Women should develop a systematic approach to capacity development support within the organization.

This approach should be based on a clear vision of the purpose of UN Women's capacity development support; how capacity development support contributes to change; and the principles that should inform capacity development support. The approach could be articulated in a strategy to guide all capacity development interventions. Suggestions for actions to develop this systematic approach could include considering whether it would be useful to have a strategic unit/business owner to lead capacity development across the organization; and clearly defining organizational roles and coordination mechanisms on capacity development across headquarters, Regional and Country Offices.

The strategy should include aspects of UN Women's knowledge management function. It should provide guidance, curricula and training materials, quality assurance, and share lessons and best practices on capacity development across the organization.

The strategy should be aligned with the global Strategic Plan indicators to fully capture UN Women's capacity development goals. Lastly, it is important to include baselines for capacity development and incorporate impact assessment in Prodocs at the Project Appraisal Committee level to systematize the measurement of capacity development's contribution to gender equality and women's empowerment.

RECOMMENDATION 2

UN Women's capacity development interventions should be strategic, holistic and based on a systems approach to supporting change; include work with a variety of partners; and use a range of modalities.

Capacity development interventions should adopt a more systemic and holistic approach, based on a solid understanding of, and being well connected to, the wider systems that interventions seek to influence; working in a joined-up way to develop capacity at the individual, institutional and enabling environment level. Any capacity development framework should reflect this systemic approach. It is also critical that capacity development interventions are based on realistic theories of change that clearly elaborate pathways to impact, thereby enabling strong results-based management principles and facilitating organizational learning about how capacity development support contributes to gender equality goals.

Capacity development interventions should include work with a variety of partners, prioritizing those that have greatest potential for impact and going beyond, where possible, the "usual" partners to develop the capacity of multiple actors to advance gender equality goals from different sites. This may require addressing some internal organizational barriers to partnership with some types of groups and organizations.

Capacity development initiatives should use a mix of modalities, tailored to the local context and beneficiaries. Attention should be given to combining modalities that impart knowledge and skills; address beliefs and attitudes; provide ongoing support for participants to apply new capabilities; and embed sustainability.

RECOMMENDATION 3

UN Women should be more systematic in integrating the most left behind groups within capacity development interventions and ensure that interventions support gender transformative change.

This requires developing an understanding among personnel of how leave no one behind principles should be applied at every stage of capacity development programming, including needs assessments, design, delivery and monitoring of results.

It also requires a greater focus on addressing informal systemic drivers of gender inequality, such

as discriminatory norms and exclusionary practices, which are largely overlooked in UN Women's current capacity development programming. It is recommended that capacity development interventions use the Gender At Work Framework to identify and address different drivers of gender inequality.

RECOMMENDATION 4

UN Women should identify innovative ways to use its current human and financial resources to support capacity development initiatives. Development of partners' operational capacity should be included as an explicit outcome of programmes.

UN Women should recognize that inadequate funding and staffing of capacity development projects reduces potential for impact and should seek to identify innovative practices to address these weaknesses. This could include by learning from internal experiences and the experience of other organizations in relation to funding and staffing of capacity development work. Learning could take place in the form of webinars and knowledge products documenting innovative good practices.

Support to develop partners' operational capacity is a highly valued, but often largely invisible element of UN Women's work. In order to capture, measure and communicate this aspect of capacity development work, wherever relevant, operational capacity development should be explicitly included as a programme/project outcome.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Strengthen the co-creation of capacity development support to ensure ownership and sustainability.

UN Women should seek to overcome the serious obstacles that prevent impact from capacity development interventions being sustained over the longer term. This could in part be achieved through a stronger focus on building ownership of capacity development agendas and interventions by local actors, something that requires time, commitment and long-term investment in relationships. It is particularly important that capacity development interventions are co-created together with

partners; issues of ownership and sustainability are purposefully built into all stages of the capacity development programme cycle; and a sustainability strategy is developed.

In addition, capacity development programming should involve a stronger focus on ongoing accompaniment over the longer term to support participants to apply and embed the knowledge, skills and practices they have developed and thereby achieve and sustain results.



Photo ©UN Women/Kwanju Kim

Perspectives from Management

This article is developed based on UN Women's management response presented to the UN Women Executive Board..

UN Women management welcomed the findings and recommendations put forward by the evaluation. It appreciated the evidence generated from the evaluation that will contribute to articulating UN Women's capacity development work.

The next steps for UN Women will be to develop a corporate guidance note on capacity development built on country, regional and headquarters' good practices and lessons learned in this strategic area. Key components of this guidance note will include the corporate definition and approach to capacity development along with the three levels (individual, institutional and enabling environment) by which change will happen to ensure the sustainability of results. The guidance note will emphasize how capacity development contributes to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment, in line with the UN Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025 impact areas theories of change, and gender equality accelerators. The note will also include corporate guiding principles, and a flexible monitoring and evaluation framework that can be adjusted with concrete quality assurance criteria and mechanisms.

It will be important that leave no one behind principles are reflected in the guidance note to ensure a wide reach and real impact at the beneficiary level.

On partners' operational capacity, UN Women will continue to apply its policy and procedures for small grants mechanisms that allow for dedicated funding to be provided to civil society organizations to strengthen their operational capacity.

Following the development and launch of the guidance note, UN Women will develop a socialization plan that includes webinars and cross-regional, knowledge-sharing initiatives to strengthen understanding of the Entity's capacity development approach and ensure its standardized implementation across Country and Regional Offices, and headquarters units.

UN WOMEN COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATIONS (CPE)

CPE REVISED GUIDELINES

(2022 Edition)



Download the interactive PDF [here](#)

Comprehensive methodology for evaluation



Mixed-methods approach:

Qualitative & quantitative data collection from different data sources



Human rights and gender equality

integrated into the design of the evaluation and the Gender at Work Framework applied



interviewees

Key informant interviews and focus groups comprising UN Women personnel at headquarters, regional and country levels as well as external stakeholders



benchmarking assessment

13 UN and INGOs studied: to provide a point of comparison with other standards for capacity development, supporting systems and processes



countries reviewed

In-depth review of 10 countries with analysis by evaluation questions and **6 country case studies** of PNG, Ethiopia, Senegal, Jordan, Colombia, and Moldova



surveys conducted

Survey to UN Women business units (41 respondents; 33% of the sample), to **External Partners Govts/CSOs/International Organizations** (230 respondents; 42,2%)

UN Women evaluations are gender-responsive, meaning that both the process and analysis apply the key principles of a human rights-based approach, including disability perspectives.

The evaluation was utilization-focused and employed a capacity development framework, a theory-based evaluation approach and contribution analysis through an examination of country case studies. It also applied a gender-responsive and human rights-based approach. A theory of change was developed for the evaluation. The evaluation employed mixed-methods data collection and analysis, driven by evaluation questions, which were selected to provide the best evidence.

Core components of the evaluation were: a document review and analysis of over 160 documents; 10 desk-based country reviews; 139 key informant interviews; surveys of UN Women personnel and external partners; and six country case studies: Senegal (in-country); Papua New Guinea, Colombia, Jordan, Ethiopia (all virtual); and Moldova (using secondary data from a country portfolio evaluation). In addition, a benchmarking study was conducted with a sample of 13 UN agencies and international non-governmental organizations.



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