BRIEFING NOTE

UN WOMEN

RAPID ASSESSMENT OF UN WOMEN PREPAREDNESS FOR

CASH-BASED INTERVENTIONS (CBIs)

Assessment objective

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increased interest in UN Women for cash-based interventions (CBIs) within existing and emerging programmes, aiming for an integrated and transformational approach in humanitarian, social protection and development nexus.

As an independent function, and in accordance with its charter, the UN Women Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS) has the mandate to determine its workplan on the basis of new and emerging risks and opportunities. As an area of strategic programming interest and investment, and in an effort to proactively support UN Women achieve its objectives and effectively manage risk, IEAS conducted a rapid assessment of UN Women's level of preparedness to implement CBIs.

The objectives of this rapid assessment were to assess organizational and programmatic preparedness against a CBI benchmarking framework and propose a roadmap to ensure that UN Women is prepared for CBI programmes that deliver impact and results, and has effective governance, risk and control arrangements in place.

Methodology and limitations

The rapid assessment drew on the combined experience and expertise of IEAS internal audit and evaluation staff. Qualitative methodology was used: the team reviewed existing literature and documentation and interviewed key business process owners (BPOs) in headquarters, and regional and country personnel involved in selected CBI programmes. Two UN Women regions, Asia and the Pacific (ROAP) and the Arab States (ROAS) were identified for in-depth case studies for this assessment. Fifty interviews were conducted, and more than 50 UN Women internal documents were reviewed. A CBI benchmarking framework was developed by the IEAS team using key documents from OECD, EU ECHO, CaLP, IASC, WFP and UNHCR, and was used as a reference framework for the assessment.

Due to the COVID-19 situation, the rapid assessment had to rely on remote primary data collection with no direct observations and verification. Additionally, IEAS had to use available external resources and global standards on defining CBIs as UN Women did not have its own definition. This resulted in internal differences of opinion about what could be considered a CBI.

SCOPE OF THIS RAPID ASSESSMENT

Take stock of past, existing and planned CBI programmes within UN Women and related processes and practices. The assessment covered corporate processes and procedures as well as programmes and practices in the field

Identify opportunities, good practices and lessons learned to achieve and demonstrate results, and the risks related to ongoing and planned UN Women CBIs
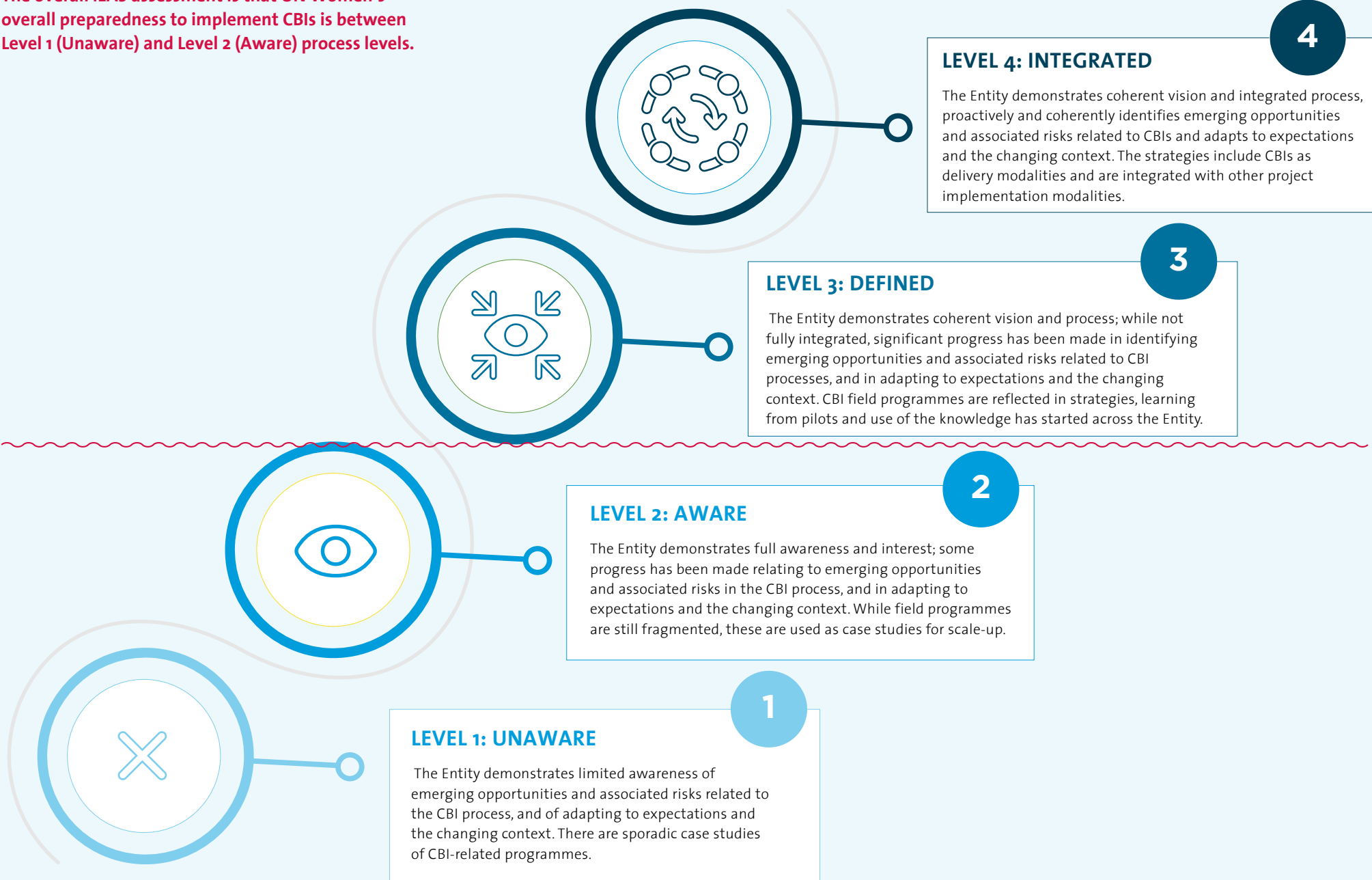

Identify potential gaps in UN Women CBI programme and operational processes, policies and tools for their effective design, management, monitoring, reporting and evaluation

Propose recommendations to ensure that UN Women is prepared for CBI programmes and has effective governance, risk and control arrangements in place to achieve and demonstrate results

MATURITY LEVEL

The overall IEAS assessment is that UN Women's overall preparedness to implement CBIs is between Level 1 (Unaware) and Level 2 (Aware) process levels.

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LEVEL 4: INTEGRATED

The Entity demonstrates coherent vision and integrated process, proactively and coherently identifies emerging opportunities and associated risks related to CBIs and adapts to expectations and the changing context. The strategies include CBIs as delivery modalities and are integrated with other project implementation modalities.

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LEVEL 3: DEFINED

The Entity demonstrates coherent vision and process; while not fully integrated, significant progress has been made in identifying emerging opportunities and associated risks related to CBI processes, and in adapting to expectations and the changing context. CBI field programmes are reflected in strategies, learning from pilots and use of the knowledge has started across the Entity.

2

LEVEL 2: AWARE

The Entity demonstrates full awareness and interest; some progress has been made relating to emerging opportunities and associated risks in the CBI process, and in adapting to expectations and the changing context. While field programmes are still fragmented, these are used as case studies for scale-up.

1

LEVEL 1: UNAWARE

The Entity demonstrates limited awareness of emerging opportunities and associated risks related to the CBI process, and of adapting to expectations and the changing context. There are sporadic case studies of CBI-related programmes.

Summary of key conclusions

Within the current context of a pandemic that is affecting every facet of social and economic life, CBIs are reported to have become one of the key programming modalities in the UN system across the globe. Gender-responsive CBIs are essential for effectively supporting those marginalized by society or in the most vulnerable position who may be over-looked by humanitarian assistance, development and social protection programmes.

UN Women programmes seek not only to provide women with cash as a pure social protection or humanitarian response, but also so that CBIs can be used as an entry point to influence and deliver multisectoral and/or complementary programming contributing to the prevention and response to Gender-Based Violence (GBV), economic opportunities, resilience building and empowerment. So far, in general, CBIs have been small-scale and one of several project components.

There was consensus among sampled UN Women regional offices (ROs) and country offices (COs) about the relevance and value of CBIs to UN Women's humanitarian–development–peace (HDP) nexus efforts and added value in meeting gender equality and women's empowerment objectives. Staff from the various headquarters units and divisions that IEAS consulted presented a **diverse range of opinion** regarding the role of UN Women vis-à-vis CBIs with **some expressing reservations about UN Women implementing CBIs unless the organization effectively manages the associated risks.**

Other units saw a clear **niche for UN Women in the coordination and normative mandate to strengthen gender-transformative CBIs**; while others supported UN Women playing a more active role as they assessed that the opportunities outweighed the risks, especially for strategic positioning and accessing new funding opportunities, while assisting direct beneficiaries. **There was agreement on the need and urgency for a clear corporate vision, policy, resources and better coordination of CBIs within UN Women.** There was also agreement that the Covid-19 crisis had revived the need for a strategic discussion and decision on this issue.

The IEAS assessment team noted that where UN Women has been operating CBIs for years (e.g. in Jordan and Iraq), and where UN Women is a new actor (e.g. Bangladesh), UN Women's apparent contributions to building resilience, albeit at a small scale, were notable. UN Women also established networks with women's grassroots organizations allowing the Entity to reach the most affected populations while simultaneously building these organizations' capacity to respond to crises.

The assessment team concluded that UN Women senior leadership needs to reinitiate and reinvigorate a discussion on this matter and communicate a clear policy stance on the benefits and value proposition of CBIs for UN Women policies and programmes.

CONCLUSION 1: UN Women can add value in the CBI space, particularly through its coordination mandate and within the HDP nexus. Therefore, senior management should provide clear direction relating to UN Women's involvement in CBIs (coordination, operational or both) and guide a strategy to help inform its engagement that is flexible and dynamic in nature to reflect the field context and intended footprint in the CBI space. If the ELT or BRC confirm that the Entity will move forward with CBIs, the following conclusions will be relevant to strengthen the CBIs and related recommendations should be addressed by UN Women.

CONCLUSION 2: UN Women lacked a corporate policy, vision, strategy (one is in place but not yet officially adopted), governance structure and dedicated resources (human as well as financial) for CBI programmes, but had established some innovative programmes and initiatives to build from.

CONCLUSION 3: UN Women CBIs appear more effective and efficient when implemented using the established experience of other UN organizations and International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs).

CONCLUSION 4: UN Women to apply a "whole of agency" approach, and carry out a risk-focused review of the relevant key corporate business policies, procedures and systems concerning CBIs to effectively plan and support CBIs..

CONCLUSION 5: Framework and standards on accountability to beneficiaries is required.

CONCLUSION 6: A monitoring, evaluation, knowledge and learning strategy is required. Innovative approaches to measure the impact of some CBIs were in place.

CONCLUSION 7: There is an opportunity to derive benefit from a shift in mind-set, organizational culture and ways of working to embrace the effective use of CBIs as a critical HDP–nexus implementation modality, including linkages to the social protection agenda, Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE), livelihoods and End Violence Against Women (EVAW)-related programming in crisis contexts.

Summary of key recommendations

To reconcile the increasing use of CBIs in the field with the gaps identified in the conclusion above, IEAS makes the following recommendations:

↘ **RECOMMENDATION 1:** UN Women senior management (e.g. Executive Leadership Team, ELT or Business Review Committee [BRC]) to clearly decide whether the organization is to play an increasingly significant and strategic role in ensuring CBIs are gender responsive along the HDP nexus and whether the focus should be through coordination, operations, or both. Consultation and initiating/scaling up of partnerships with key donors, and other institutions and UN agencies should be considered to establish UN Women's role, relevance and value addition in this area to ensure that CBIs are gender responsive. If the ELT or BRC confirm that the Entity will move forward with CBIs, the following recommendations will be relevant to strengthen the CBIs and should be addressed by UN Women.

↘ **RECOMMENDATION 2:** Taking into account existing documents and ongoing projects, develop a corporate policy, vision and strategy for CBIs, clearly stating UN Women's mandate to strengthen the gender-transformative potential of CBIs, the Entity's niche and value added and its ToC. In parallel, establish a clear governance structure for CBI programming to strengthen and ensure corporate ownership, leadership, oversight and accountability for the planning and implementation of UN Women's CBI strategy. Commit human as well as financial resources to support, strengthen and expand gender-responsive CBIs.

↘ **RECOMMENDATION 3:**

a. Preferably, use a partnership business model for delivering CBIs, partnering with UN sister agencies and INGOs with advanced and matured systems for delivering effective CBIs.

b. Adopt a strategic role to achieve gender-transformative CBIs by ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment dimensions are central to the UN-system programme design, quality control, monitoring, oversight, evaluation and learning.

c. When working in partnerships with its PPs including local women's organizations and networks, UN Women to determine the gaps, needs and priorities of the targeted beneficiaries throughout the project life cycle phases and clearly define targeting criteria, payment modalities and other critical implementation issues. The principles of localization should be clarified (and supported) in engaging local women's networks and groups.

↘ **RECOMMENDATION 4:** In order to ensure CBI-related risks are mitigated and the organization is equipped with necessary functionalities to support and operationalize CBIs, apply a "whole of agency" approach, and carry out a risk-focused review of relevant key corporate business policies, procedures and systems concerning CBI accounting and financial, operational and legal frameworks.

↘ **RECOMMENDATION 5:** Irrespective of whether UN Women moves forward with CBIs:

a. Adapt the four pillars of the IASC AAP policy guidelines/framework; leverage the Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) at regional and national level; and roll out mandatory training for PPs and UN Women personnel.

b. Establish governance and oversight arrangements to monitor beneficiary management and Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) related results at the agency level and to inform programming and strategic partnerships across global, regional and country-level interventions as per the actions set out in the Management Response to the Independent review of UN Women's policies and procedures for tackling Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and Sexual Harassment (SH), May 2019.

↘ **RECOMMENDATION 6:** Based on its CBI strategy, UN Women to:

a. Develop an evidence and learning strategy with dedicated resources and architecture to facilitate systematic learning and to address gaps and opportunities to focus on evidence generation, research and advocacy.

b. Establish a monitoring framework with a set of indicators to systematically capture data on monitoring, oversight and learning at the corporate level.

c. Explicitly consider investing in training packages, tools and strategic partnerships to contribute to strengthening capacity and knowledge across the organization on gender-responsive (and transformative) CBIs.

↘ **RECOMMENDATION 7:** UN Women to strengthen its internal coordination between different departments and offices to promote a multidisciplinary and coherent approach to CBI programming and to facilitate internal dialogue between WEE, Humanitarian Unit, Data and Statistics, Policy and Research to identify entry points for UN Women's research, advocacy and programmatic agenda.

Moreover, based on several reviews related to strategic innovations, IEAS encourages UN Women to develop guidance on piloting strategic innovations to support learning and evidence-based scale-up of programmes.