

**2014 Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards
of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP**

Performance standards on gender mainstreaming across the Strategic Plans 2014-2017

Introduction

The joint paper reviews the integration and implementation of performance standards for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls across the six entities' Strategic Plans 2014-2017. In doing so, and drawing on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of operational activities for development (QCPR), the paper focuses on corporate level accountability through the UN-SWAP¹, as well as on country level implementation of standards for gender mainstreaming.

The six entities have made significant progress in integrating gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls across their Strategic Plans. The Plans are aligned with the QCPR, including as it pertains to gender equality and the empowerment of women, and consistently feature gender sensitive indicators either at the outcome and/or output level. Several entities also have specific gender policies, frameworks or actions plans that further elaborate on how gender will be mainstreamed in their work, some of which were developed prior to the UN-SWAP.

Helping countries eradicate poverty, reduce inequalities and exclusion is at the heart of UNDP's vision. Gender equality and engaging women is at the forefront of its Strategic Plan, and one of the key development challenges addressed by the Organization within its areas of work: sustainable development; inclusive and efficient democratic governance; and resilience building. Every UNDP intervention will build on the pivotal significance of gender equality, understanding that sustainable human development will not be fully achieved unless women and girls are able to contribute on an equal basis with men and boys to their societies.

UNFPA's vision is to change the lives of women, adolescents, and youth. Sexual and reproductive health (SRH), reproductive rights and reducing maternal mortality are central to its work, through a rights-based approach to family planning, maternal health, HIV/AIDS and the link with population dynamics. Achieving universal access to SRH and realizing reproductive rights in humanitarian and development settings is fundamental to attaining gender equality, which is both a key programmatic area with a dedicated outcome, and a cross-cutting approach throughout all other strategic interventions. UNFPA's Strategic Plan fully incorporates the UN-SWAP into its results framework.

Gender equality is integral to UNICEF's Strategic Plan as a normative principle and is central to the refocus on equity. The Plan emphasizes the empowerment of girls and women as well as

¹ The UN-SWAP is the UN System Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. It was endorsed by the CEB in April 2012.

addressing gender-related barriers to achieving results. UNICEF will promote gender-sensitive interventions and a focus on gender equitable results as a core programmatic priority in each of its seven result areas. Interventions will include increasing access to services for women and girls, advocacy and technical support on gender-equitable policies, budgets and resource allocations, positive synergies among related results, collection and use of sex-disaggregated and other gender-related data.

Sustainability is at the core of UNOPS Strategic Plan and it is to be mainstreamed across its areas of work: sustainable project management; sustainable infrastructure; and sustainable procurement. Its approach is framed by the three mutually reinforcing dimensions of sustainability: equitable economic growth; social justice and inclusion; environmental impact. Gender equality is a critical underlying condition and will be mainstreamed in all activities. UNOPS will apply a gender marker to projects and develop a gender-sensitive focus to promote the respect for human rights, engage communities, protect and empower the most vulnerable, and create economic opportunities for local populations.

Research demonstrates that societies with greater gender equality experience faster economic growth, improved agricultural productivity and food security. WFP responds to shocks, rebuilding livelihoods, enhancing nutrition coverage, and reducing vulnerability. With the aim to create an enabling environment for the achievement of gender equality, the Programme systematically integrates gender across its strategic interventions, recognizing protection concerns of women, men, girls and boys, as well as the vital role of women in promoting lasting solutions to food insecurity and under-nutrition. Gender equality is also pursued through the implementation strategy of the Programme, for example by leveraging procurement to benefit women farmers.

A product of UN efforts on system-wide coherence, UN-Women was established to assist countries and the UN system in furthering advances in gender equality and women's empowerment. The entity leads, coordinates and promotes the accountability of the System in its work on gender equality and the empowerment of women. UN-Women supports the development and strengthening of norms and standards (globally, regionally and nationally), alongside their implementation through operational and coordination activities. Entirely focused on gender, its Strategic Plan emphasizes the critical importance of strengthened partnerships with UN entities aimed at integrating a gender perspective into all development sectors.

The six entities consulted closely in the preparation of their Strategic Plans, collaborate regularly on a variety of issues at global, regional and country level (including through formal MOUs), and engage in peer review exercises as appropriate. They participate actively in inter-agency mechanisms on gender equality, such as the IANWGE - Inter Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, the UNDG Task Team on Gender Equality, and other networks. In addition, they coordinate their contributions and participation in key inter-governmental mechanisms focusing on gender equality (e.g. the Commission on the Status of Women, CEDAW), as well as on gender related aspects of other global negotiations (e.g. Rio+20, the post 2015 development agenda).

Key issues, challenges and lessons learned

The UN-SWAP provides an excellent mechanism to ensure improved performance on gender mainstreaming in the Strategic Plans of the entities, by establishing minimum standards and the level of capacity and resources needed to deliver results for women and girls. The six entities fully participated in the first round of reporting under the Action Plan. Drawing from the results of the reporting exercise, some common trends have emerged across the entities with respect to the fifteen performance indicators identified by the accountability framework². Coherence is the area where all six entities fully meet performance requirements (either exceed or meet). Five out of six fully comply with the requirement to establish specific policies for gender equality that are linked to the implementation of strategic plans. The majority also fully meet standards in several other performance areas, including: programme review, monitoring and reporting, resource tracking, and knowledge generation/communication. Half of the entities meet requirements in relation to strategic planning, capacity development, and organizational culture. Despite a positive record in several areas, important challenges remain: five out of six are not fully compliant in relation to resource allocation and audit requirements, with only two out of six fulfilling expectations in the areas of capacity assessment, evaluation, and gender parity.

Entities are working to address these weaknesses in a consistent manner. For example, drawing from the pioneering work of UNDP, UNICEF and other UN entities, the recently endorsed UNDG standards and principles for the adoption of gender markers address specific performance standards, in relation to tracking resource allocations and expenditures across the UN system. The implementation of gender markers will hopefully have a positive impact on resource allocations for gender equality. With a renewed focus on gender in the Strategic Plans, entities are better placed to demonstrate the achievement of specific gender related outcomes.

The overview of compliance with the UN-SWAP shows that the six entities have made some important progress in gender mainstreaming, and that they are well positioned to lead further advances of the larger UN system³. However, ensuring full institutional alignment to deliver on gender equality results will require sustained efforts during the implementation of the Strategic Plans, especially in areas where weaknesses are more prominent. Hence, developing and resourcing concrete remedial actions will be of critical importance. The entities must continue to raise standards of accountability on gender across all areas of their work, and work more effectively with all partners to catalyze transformational change, including by ensuring the protection and fulfillment of women and girls' rights. Undoubtedly, the UN-SWAP can play a key role in furthering the accountability of the six entities, with a view to meeting performance standards across all areas of the framework by 2017.

Besides the corporate level, it is crucial that performance standards for gender mainstreaming in the Strategic Plans are implemented at the country level, so as to realize tangible benefits in the lives of women and girls. The entities must ensure that their work at the country level is firmly anchored in those performance standards, and UNCT Performance Indicators for Gender Equality (Gender Scorecards/Audits) can be helpful in operating that link.

In Iraq for example, a Gender Audit of the UN Country Team took stock of the current level and nature of gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment initiatives supported by the UN system. The Audit was undertaken in 2013 in the context of the UNDAF 2011-2014 review, with

² See figure 1 in Annex

³ See figure 2 in Annex

a view to identifying commitments and innovative strategies for integrating gender equality into the interventions addressed by the UNDAF. The exercise covered various performance areas, such as gender specific strategies and policies, gender mainstreaming in policy and programmes, issues of leadership and accountability, organizational culture, staff capacity, resources, monitoring and evaluation and partnerships. The Audit found that progress took place in developing gender specific interventions, and in monitoring and evaluation. It also highlighted weaknesses in mainstreaming gender in programming and policy. UNDAF outcomes and indicators unevenly address gender, with some priority areas lacking gender-specific perspectives. Resource tracking, accountability and staff capacity for gender were identified as additional areas of weak performance. All six entities participated and contributed to this forward looking exercise that has provided concrete recommendations to the UN Country Team on how to most effectively achieve results in gender equality and women's empowerment. The challenge ahead will be to ensure that those recommendations are translated into actionable targets.

In Rwanda, a similar exercise (the Gender Scorecard) undertaken at the end of 2011 by the UN Country Team resulted in a full management response adopted by the UN Gender Task Force in 2012, with clearly identifiable actions and resources to integrate gender in planning, programming, capacity development, and in monitoring and evaluation. With reference to programming, one key recommendation for the UN Country Team was to move from joint gender projects, which appear to be a list of activities being implemented by individual agencies, to joint programmes in which participating UN entities address gender inequalities and women's empowerment in a holistic manner.

In Nicaragua, the Joint Programme 'From Rhetoric to Reality: Promoting Women's Participation and Gender Responsive Budgeting' fostered significant advances in strategic planning, integrating a gender perspective in the national and municipal planning and budgeting system. The Programme provided the participating institutions with a wealth of methodologies, tools, and capacities to mainstream gender in their structures and services. It promoted the creation of gender units and commissions with coordination mandates, and introduced significant advances in public policy making, both at central and regional level. Moreover, improvements in the Law of Municipalities have made gender analysis mandatory for the approval of municipal projects. UNFPA, UNDP, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP participated in the joint programme, together with other UN entities. UNOPS has also been supporting a joint programme in Nicaragua, providing technical support and financing for micro entrepreneurial initiatives led by women groups, in partnerships with other UN entities and the Local Economic Development Agencies (MyDEL programme).

Conclusions

Performance standards for gender mainstreaming have been incorporated into the Strategic Plans of the six entities and will be monitored during the implementation phase, using a uniform and system-wide accountability framework that has been welcomed both by ECOSOC and the General Assembly⁴.

⁴ Resolutions 2102/24 and 67/226

The UN-SWAP acted as a catalyst and accelerator of internal reflection within the six entities, resulting in several significant and immediate shifts in how they, and the larger UN system, will approach their work on gender equality and the empowerment of women. A more coherent and harmonized data system will also facilitate coherence and consistency in reporting. Moving forward, full ownership of the UN-SWAP and sustained leadership within the six entities will be critical factors of success. Ultimately, the success of the Action Plan will be measured by the extent to which the entities will contribute to achieving greater gender equality and the empowerment of women in the countries that they support.

Member States also have a crucial contribution to make to the enhancement of gender mainstreaming across the entities, including by supporting the system's effective implementation of the UN-SWAP through their participation in the relevant governing bodies.

With regards to implementing performance standards through country level operations, over the past five years some thirty-five UN Country Teams have monitored performance indicators to review and refocus the way in which they integrate gender in their work (including through gender audits or the Gender Scorecard). The six entities can make a difference if they are able to address coherently those strategic challenges through UN Country Teams, and to ensure appropriate linkages with their own internal gender review processes. As highlighted by the Independent Evaluation on Delivering as One (DaO), pursuing a coherent approach strengthens the UN system's capacity to work on cross-cutting issues in response to national priorities, and enables greater focus on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, including in joint policy, programming and advocacy initiatives. Accountability and performance standards are an important element of this process.

The first generation of joint gender programmes (JGPs), including those funded by the MDG Achievement Fund (MDG-F), has generated a wealth of experience and lessons learned, some of which have already been documented by MDG-F and some of the entities. Some tangible results were achieved in areas such as equitable control of resources; eliminating violence against women; building national counterpart capacity; improved collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data; and gender-responsive budgeting. JGPs have the potential to facilitate multi-sectoral approaches, better addressing the complex and multi-dimensional challenges of promoting gender equality. An inter-agency joint evaluation of JGP is entering its final stage⁵, providing an overall assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of the JGP modality. Its report and joint management response will serve to develop standards for the design, implementation and evaluation of JGPs, and inform decision-making to scale up collaborative work in the area of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Possible questions and issues for discussion during the Joint Meeting of the Boards

- 1) In what way do Member States consider that the post-2015 development agenda is likely to impact the implementation of the six entities' Strategic Plans, with specific reference to performance standards for gender mainstreaming?
- 2) Given that sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights are essential components for achieving women's empowerment and gender equality, how can Member States encourage UN entities to better integrate the commitments made

⁵ Supported by UN-Women, UNICEF, UNFPA and UNDP together with the MDG-F, Spain and Norway.

in the ICPD programme of action across the UN system as well as within Member State programmes and policies?

- 3) How can other normative frameworks (e.g. CEDAW, Beijing+20, Rio+20) be strategically linked to operational level work of the six entities, including through the UNDAF, in supporting national priorities?
- 4) How else can the m=Member States encourage the UN development system to acquire sufficient resources, including financial and technical expertise for gender mainstreaming in programme planning and implementation, to achieve higher impact of UN supported interventions?

Annex

Figure 1: UN-SWAP rating of the six entities covered by the JMB (percentages by indicator)

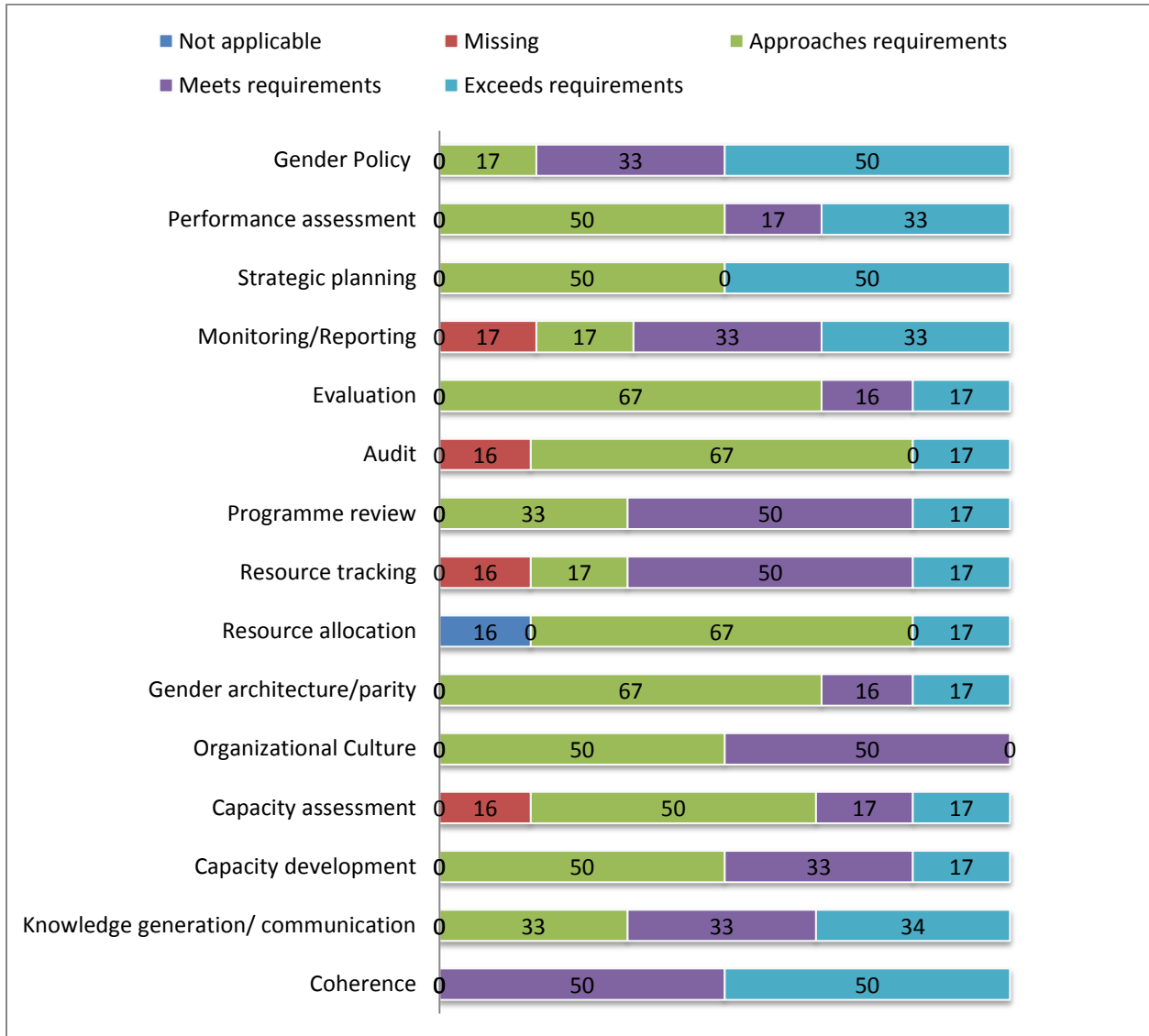


Figure 2: UN-SWAP rating of the six entities covered by the JMB compared with broader United Nations System (percentages)

