



**Executive Board of the  
United Nations Entity for Gender  
Equality and the Empowerment  
of Women**

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**Evaluation**

**What can we learn from UN-Women evaluations?**

**A Meta-analysis of evaluations managed by UN-Women in 2013**

*Summary*

In accordance with the 2014-2017 Corporate Evaluation Plan and with the aim of enhancing the organizational use of evaluation findings, the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) undertook a meta-analysis of corporate and decentralized evaluations managed by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) in 2013.

The meta-analysis synthesizes and aggregates the key findings, conclusions and recommendations of the 23 evaluation reports that met UN-Women quality requirements.

The meta-analysis considered the evaluation insights according to: i) United Nations Evaluation Group evaluation criteria of relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and gender equality; and ii) UN-Women operational priorities and approaches as stated in the Strategic Plan 2014-2017.

The meta-analysis provides six forward looking recommendations aimed at strengthening UN-Women effectiveness.

The intended primary users of the meta-analysis findings are the UN-Women Executive Board and management, as well as staff at headquarters, regional and country levels. The intended uses of the meta-analysis are to inform UN-Women policies, strategies, programmes and operational systems.

## **I. Background and purpose**

1. With the aim of enhancing the organizational use of evaluation findings, the 2014-2017 Corporate Evaluation Plan foresees the production of an annual meta-analysis of corporate and decentralized evaluations managed by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women).
2. Towards the end of 2013, the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) introduced the Global Evaluation Reports Assessment and Analysis System<sup>1</sup> to be able to: i) assess the quality of evaluations managed by UN-Women; and ii) synthesize and aggregate their findings, conclusions and recommendations to facilitate strategic use at the corporate level.
3. The purpose of this meta-analysis is to capture the key findings and recommendations from all 2013 evaluation reports rated as satisfactory or better quality by the 2013 meta-evaluation<sup>2</sup>, with the final aim of providing UN-Women senior management key insights to improve UN-Women relevance, effectiveness and organizational efficiency.
4. The interventions evaluated were implemented in 2011-2012, during the consolidation period of UN-Women. Therefore, key findings, conclusions and recommendations of this meta-analysis should be read in the context of an organization being consolidated while implementing programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> Additional information available at <http://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/evaluation/decentralized-evaluations>.

<sup>2</sup> The meta-evaluation report is available at <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/About%20Us/Evaluation/Evaluation-GERAASMetaEvaluation-2013-en.pdf>.

## **II. Methodology**

5. The meta-analysis process applied a qualitative and quantitative structured analysis. The qualitative analysis considered the evaluation insights according to: i) standard UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) evaluation criteria; ii) UN-Women operational priorities as stated in the Strategic Plan 2014-2017; and iii) UN-Women principles and approaches as stated in the Strategic Plan 2014-2017. The quantitative assessment was undertaken based on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development—Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) methodological guidance for assessing development effectiveness. Quantitative and qualitative data were used to triangulate information and validate the analysis.

## **III. Limitations**

6. The qualitative synthesis applied structured analysis by classifying all individual statements from evaluation reports. Nevertheless, the process, by its nature, requires judgements to be made on: i) what the main findings are in a report; ii) how to interpret these findings and their implications; and iii) what combinations of findings from different reports represent a reliable pattern.

7. The meta-analysis considers only clearly stated findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons presented in the evaluation reports. Insights from the evaluation process that were not documented are considered to be outside the scope of this analysis.

8. While this synthesis draws on the complete portfolio of satisfactory, good or very good quality evaluations managed by UN-Women in 2013, the absolute number of evaluation reports (23) analysed is relatively small, and thus there are limitations on the

potential to generalize. The findings should therefore be used with caution and compared with other sources of evidence where possible.

#### **IV. Findings**

9. To maximize relevance and utility, the presentation of findings is structured around the UNEG evaluation criteria as well as UN-Women operational priorities and principles as stated in the Strategic Plan 2014-2017.

##### **A. UNEG evaluation criteria**

**Relevance: UN-Women programmes are aligned to national priorities and relevant to target groups.**

10. Despite the fact that UN-Women is working in a highly dynamic set of global, regional and national contexts, and is affected by multiple political, cultural and institutional factors, UN-Women programming and normative work has been highly relevant to national priorities, international commitments, policy frameworks and to the needs of women on the ground. This was especially the case where programmes combined policy-level work and capacity development at the national level with delivery of interventions for women at the community level.

**Effectiveness: UN-Women programmes have largely been successful in delivering planned activities and outputs despite constrained funding and complex political environments.**

11. Evaluations reports found out that UN-Women programmes have largely been successful in delivering planned activities and outputs. However, the majority of evaluations also found that, while evaluations collected evidence suggesting that contribution has been

made to planned outcomes, UN-Women had no monitoring systems in place to systematically collect outcome-level data.

12. The two main factors identified by evaluation reports as making a positive contribution to achieving results were both internal:

- i) the dedication, professional capacity, technical skills and responsiveness of UN-Women staff; and
- ii) implementation of projects using human-rights approaches, i.e. participatory, inclusive and empowering processes.

13. By comparison, the two main factors that challenged effectiveness were largely external (and therefore requiring UN-Women to have the capacity to respond appropriately):

- i) political, cultural and socioeconomic environments that are resistant to concepts of, or the prioritization of, gender equality and women's empowerment. This manifests itself in terms of lack of high-level champions and continuous changes in leadership of gender initiatives; and
- ii) highly constrained levels of funding and poor budgeting capacity, in governments and local partners.

14. It is reported by at least 33 per cent of evaluations that UN-Women strategic planning and positioning could have been enhanced to better address these challenges to effectiveness. In particular, it was recommended that practices be enhanced in terms of strategic adaptation and clear and timely decision-making on when to adjust strategies that are not working. Another area of concern was the limited scale of many pilot projects, which remained confined to the original target areas and lacked realistic planning for being scaled up.

**Efficiency: Organizational efficiency was reported as being quite mixed.**

15. Individual good examples of programme efficiency (results achieved despite constrained capacity) are set against a backdrop of fund disbursement delays, delays in appointing people to project-critical positions at field level, and gaps in knowledge management systems.

16. Forty-two per cent of decentralized evaluation reports noted that delay and bureaucratic procedures in fund release were a major barrier to efficiency. In most cases this was the result of multi-layered management systems imposed by donors, national protocols and joint programmes. However, it was also due to the fact the contractual requirement to withhold from implementing partners a percentage of funds until the end of each project is having a detrimental effect—especially as local CSOs have no sources from which to borrow finance.

17. Moreover, at least 16 per cent of decentralized evaluations did observe that programme funds were generally not being shifted from poor performing components to high performing components over the course of implementation.

18. Where UN-Women managed programmes directly, evaluation reports found that both teams and systems were generally appropriate and that successful collaboration was achieved with key stakeholders. However, despite the strong commitment of UN-Women staff, the extra efficiency gained by direct execution came at the price of excessive administration for overburdened UN-Women staff.

19. In few cases, human resources systems were also found to be slow in appointing and maintaining programmes and project staff at field level. The problem of turnover of people (and loss of institutional memory) in government institutions, partners and UN-Women underpins a recommendation by several decentralized evaluations to strengthen management information systems, including results-based monitoring.

20. While joint UN programmes are intended to help overcome some of these constraints, evaluations suggest that generally the implications of the joint modality on ways of working are not well understood, and the costs of coordination have been both unanticipated and high.

**Impact: UN-Women is well placed to create change, but its main objectives will take a long time to come to fruition.**

21. All of the evaluation reports included in this synthesis state that assessing impact on the lives of women was not possible due to the insufficient passage of time. At the very most, programmes evaluated had only been running for three to four years, although some built on previous work undertaken by United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Many of the types of changes being sought—via gender mainstreaming, legislative change, labour market reform, advocacy and security—requires many years to manifest.

22. However, 33 per cent of decentralized evaluations found that the selected interventions were not well geared to creating long-term changes. Short-term micro-grants, small numbers of project participants, and three-year projects were all noted as falling short in developing the critical mass, or momentum, and the needed scale for impact.

23. This is partly rooted in tendency for theories of change to be unclear (or missing), affecting both programmes and strategic partnerships. At least 50 per cent of evaluation reports had to reconstruct implicit theories of change or programme logics. Assessing impact was also made difficult due to weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation systems. Very few programmes had clear baseline data to work with. In numerous cases there were also no indicators or tracked data available for the intended higher-level results.

**Sustainability: Despite the complex political context, constrained financial resources and capacity gaps in national institutions, modest ground had been gained in ways that contribute to sustainability of programmes and results.**



24. Of the evaluations that addressed sustainability, most implied that sustainability in terms of the mere continuation or duration of results particularly at the community level has been greatly affected by constrained financial resources and short span of programmes and projects. Such budget constraints lead partners to over-rely on the individual motivation, skills and tacit knowledge of their frontline service staff. This results in a pattern of high burnout and exceptionally high stress levels among overburdened service providers, with a particular example being the legal clinic lawyers tasked with providing support to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

25. Fifty per cent of the decentralized evaluations found that high-level political support was a major influence on the future sustainability of programmes. However, programmes did not have any significant means to influence this factor. Most often, political will exists in ministries and agencies that hold the gender portfolio, but it is dependent on the granting of support from elsewhere in the political system.

26. Twenty-five per cent of decentralized evaluation pointed out that enhancing sustainability across all strategic areas will require establishing and maintaining networks and coalitions of civil society organizations (CSOs) and national government institutions. Several of the evaluations therefore also judged sustainability in terms of ownership, regular outreach to communities, continuous capacity development of national partners, strategic partnership, and adoption of different modalities including joint programmes.

**Gender equality: Programmes and projects integrate gender equality into the fabric of their design and have achieved some significant gains.**

27. The contribution of UN-Women to shaping global norms on gender has been the object of two corporate evaluations, focusing on women's leadership and participation in

peace and security, and ending violence against women. Both evaluations found that the organization has positively contributed to enhancing global-level normative frameworks.

28. Evaluations also found programmes to be normatively aligned with gender equality policies and to be using human-rights based approaches in terms of empowerment, participation, non-discrimination and prioritization of vulnerable groups. Some programmes were found by both global and decentralized evaluations to have contributed to significant national effects, including changes in national laws and policies, improved accountability environment and political attention.

29. While UN-Women programmes and projects integrate gender equality into the fabric of their design and have achieved some significant gains, low levels of national capacity in terms of gender-responsive skills and expertise is a major challenge. At least 33 per cent of decentralized evaluations found that local human resources capacity for gender programming amongst partners was highly constrained.

30. While UN-Women was generally found to have a strong comparative advantage in terms of staff expertise, knowledge and skills, this appeared to vary across thematic areas. UN-Women human resources capacity was highly praised in terms of gender-responsive budgeting, for example, but some concerns were raised regarding decentralized technical capabilities in the area of peace and security.

#### **B. UN-Women operational priorities in the Strategic Plan 2014-2017**

31. The Strategic Plan 2014-2017 states that UN-Women operational priorities are: i) drive more effective and efficient strategic partnerships and UN system coordination; ii) institutionalize a strong culture of results-based management, reporting, knowledge management and evaluation; and iii) enhance organizational effectiveness. The meta-analysis draws findings against each of these operational priorities.

**Partnership: UN-Women is developing a strong track record in convening coalitions and initiating partnerships.**

32. UN-Women has a strong convening power for partnership and coalitions of CSOs and national institutions. Evaluations at the regional and country level found that UN-Women is strong in terms of building and coordinating coalitions of civil society and national institutions. Capacity strengthening of CSOs, community-based organizations and self-help groups was found to be an important contributing factor to the effectiveness of partnership.

33. However, the absence of clearly agreed upon and commonly understood theories of change was reported as hampering the effectiveness of partnerships where these relied on organizations working towards common goals with a common rationale. The development of partnership frameworks describing the partnership rationale, scope, objectives, theory of change, strategies, coordination and modalities is a recommendation in at least three evaluations.

34. Little evidence of engagement with the private sector as advocates or direct agents of gender equality and women's empowerment was found. Partnership with the private sector received very little attention in the programmes evaluated, with only Ethiopia and Zimbabwe considering private-sector involvement at the project level.

**UN coordination: UN-Women is recognized as being strong at convening UN stakeholders at the global level, but the clarity and performance of its coordinating role appears to vary at the country level.**

35. While UN-Women is recognized in corporate and decentralized evaluations as being strong at convening UN stakeholders, the clarity and performance of its coordinating role appears to vary—especially at the country level.

36. Generally, UN coordination at the global level is the strongest. Coordination of UN agencies at the country level, including in joint gender programmes, was found to be less well defined and dependent on context. Coordination in humanitarian emergencies was found to need skills and capabilities that UN-Women is still at the early stages of building.

37. Evaluations identify challenges in defining the coordinating role of UN-Women among UN agencies at the country level, ensuring that coordination maintains a strong sense of common purpose and working through the steep learning curves—and high transaction costs—particularly a feature of many joint gender programmes.

38. The corporate evaluations noted that progress in improved UN coordination at the country level is slow and reliant on other factors, particularly ‘Delivering as One’ status. Meanwhile, the improvement in strategic relationships with key stakeholders, particularly within the UN system, and inter-agency coordination at the global level has been more rapid. Securing adequate and predictable finance was found to be a major institutional barrier to facilitating effective UN coordination.

39. A number of evaluations, including corporate evaluations, suggest that the coordinating role of UN-Women will improve further as it more clearly defines its niches and approaches at global, regional and country levels.

**Culture of results: Results-based management is a systemic weakness in UN-Women.**

40. Virtually all the evaluations found results-based management (RBM) as a systemic weakness in UN-Women operations. There is a great deal of consensus across all evaluations that the current systems, tools and practices for RBM do not sufficiently meet UN Development Group and UN-Women policy commitments.

41. Despite some strong individual efforts, the majority of programmes lack explicit theories of change, measurable results frameworks or adequate monitoring. Most theories of change that are used are implicit—known only to staff members and undocumented. Most programmes were also found to have overly ambitious goals or scope, given the resources, timeframe and capacity available.

42. Inadequate provision for monitoring and evaluation systems was found by all evaluations. This has significant consequences for UN-Women, including: i) limiting the ability to demonstrate results and learn lessons from experience; ii) hampering the ability of project staff to fully capture all of their achievements; and iii) not knowing the long-term effects of interventions on women's lives.

43. National ownership and sustainability are maximized where accountability is grounded within the national context and understood as truly mutual. Thus, the approach recommended by evaluations for enhancing monitoring and evaluation systems is one of national capacity development, combining support with demand for accountability, and allocating the necessary staff and budgetary resources. In addition to RBM training, specific recommended activities include developing management information systems and supporting generating national-level sex disaggregated data.

**Organizational effectiveness: Financing constraints and weak knowledge management—especially in terms of sharing lessons between country-level and global work—are issues that UN-Women needs to address in order to enhance organizational effectiveness.**

44. Several findings relevant to operational effectiveness were related to the consolidation phase of UN-Women. Both corporate and decentralized evaluations found that:

i) UN-Women is facing many of the challenges of new organizations, especially in terms of clarifying role and mandate, and developing synergies across components;

ii) nevertheless, the transition has increased the strategic presence and credibility of UN-Women, which is effectively expanding the work of its predecessor entities; and

iii) this enhanced visibility has brought with it high expectations that are proving to be a challenge for the organization to meet, especially at the country level.

45. At the centre of these issues are two factors that are repeatedly highlighted by evaluations: knowledge management and financing.

46. While evaluations highlight UN-Women strategic position and strong contribution to some specific areas of knowledge at the global level, they also further highlight the importance of further decentralizing this capability and linking it to enhanced knowledge management systems. Evaluations found that more is required in terms of connecting global policy and normative engagements with country programmes and operations.

47. The second issue, finance, is found to be a challenge for UN-Women at all levels. Availability of funds is a constraint to effectiveness that is identified in many evaluations. This is exacerbated by delays in disbursement at the programme level.

48. Despite these challenges, UN-Women is found by a range of evaluations to have dedicated staff, a strong reputation and good understanding of local contexts. These mean that projects and programmes have been effective but leave the organization reliant on the performance of individual staff and vulnerable to changes in operational teams.

### **C. UN-Women principles and approaches in the Strategic Plan 2014-2017**

49. The Strategic Plan 2014-2017 states that UN-Women employs the following principles and approaches: i) supporting capacity development as the foundation strategy for effective and sustainable development; ii) being demand-driven, responding to requests for support from Member States and other stakeholders, aligning support with national development plans and strategies and reaffirming the centrality of national ownership and leadership; iii) promoting inclusiveness, highlighting the crucial role of men and boys, and focusing, where appropriate, on the poorest and most excluded groups; iv) advocating for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment; and v) acting as a global broker of knowledge and experience. The meta-analysis draws findings against each of these principles and approaches.

**Capacity development: While capacity development is recognized as a major strategy across all UN-Women work, more data is required on whether or not it is effective in delivering results.**

50. Capacity development features strongly as an approach across all UN-Women work. This is very welcome, as capacity gaps of the national gender institutions represent the greatest challenge to delivering relevant programming. However, the speed with which these capacity gaps can be overcome by local implementing partners and the UN system is frequently overestimated.

51. Most evaluations found that considerable contributions had been made to the individual and organizational capacities of UN-Women partners, increased political will, or changed perspectives and understanding of gender issues. Monitoring systems to systematically track data on the outcomes of capacity development is, however, rarely available.

52. Most interventions were found to have had limited success in institutionalizing capacity, which raises questions about sustainability. The need to consolidate achievements and develop a clear exit strategy was a repeated recommendation.

53. A number of reports gave particular attention to the need to invest in basic organizational capacities for community-based organizations and self-help groups. These include proposal writing, coordination and management skills and training in RBM.

**National ownership: National ownership is strong among institutions involved in programmes for gender equality.**

54. All evaluations except one found that programmes, including joint programmes, are well aligned with national priorities on gender equality and owned by national institutions (the exception was in a context of delayed post-conflict elections). There is also strong national ownership among institutions that have been closely involved in programme design and implementation. However, the challenge faced by many programmes is strengthening ownership and gender-responsive capacity in national institutions whose mandate is not directly linked to gender equality and empowerment of women.

55. The capacity of UN-Women to engage and influence high-level national stakeholders appears to vary according to thematic area and the approach in-country. Significant progress was reported largely in relation to institutionalizing gender-responsive budgeting or issues relating to economic empowerment.

56. Common barriers identified to national ownership of gender initiatives include: i) a resistance among political parties to practice gender and social inclusion policies; ii) weak engagement and lack of high-level support in ministries other than the one that holds the gender portfolio; iii) frequent transfer of government staff; and iv) lack of specific government budget lines for gender.



**Promoting inclusiveness: UN-Women programmes have established a number of effective approaches and mechanisms for enhancing inclusiveness, especially in service provision to women and marginalized groups. Many evaluations found, however, that significant progress on realizing the rights and freedoms of women cannot be made without greater inclusion of men as active programme participants in changing social norms.**

57. Evaluation reports found that UN-Women programmes have largely been effective in enhancing inclusiveness, especially in service provision to women and marginalized groups. Within this success story, however, many evaluations underscored the importance of greater inclusion of men as active participants in changing social norms and sustaining instrumental gains in gender equality. In this context, at least 25 per cent of decentralized evaluations reported evidence of gender equality being more instrumental than intrinsic—for example, men being happy to accept the increased earning power of their wives but with very little evidence of changes in gender norms.

58. Outside of specific programmes to address men, such as Grenada's 'Man-to-Man Batterer' initiative, male participation was found to be low. This limited the coverage, effectiveness and impact of programmes—a finding that was frequently vocalized by women's community-based organizations and representatives.

59. Evaluations concluded that increased male inclusion is required for achieving broader community-level social change and that the role of men needs to be clearly defined. A recommendation in several evaluations is to include explicit efforts to address and advance men's values towards gender equality in parallel to supporting women.

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**Advocacy: Advocacy for UN-Women is generally approached from ‘behind-the-scenes’, by building up evidence, working with decision makers, and supporting local stakeholders to publicly advocate for positive changes.**

60. Two corporate evaluations and at least 33 per cent of decentralized evaluations found that UN-Women has contributed to shaping policy and norms at the global, regional and national levels through advocacy. This has included collecting data, generating evidence, bringing it to the attention of decision makers, and successfully contributing to changes in legislation or policy. Importance was placed on encouraging national stakeholders to champion relevant laws and providing them with tools to do so, rather than direct public advocacy by UN-Women.

61. Decentralized evaluations found that broader involvement of CSOs (not only women’s groups) in advocacy is important to developing a common grassroots cause that avoids ‘side-lining’ gender issues. It was also found that the media are an enabling partner in terms of connecting stakeholders, as well as broadcasting messages. It was recommended that more systematic monitoring of changes in the attitudes of people is, however, required in UN-Women work with media.

**Knowledge brokerage: UN-Women is recognized for its strong contribution to some specific areas of knowledge at the global level. Evaluations highlight the importance of further decentralizing this capability and linking it to enhanced knowledge management systems.**

62. While the internal knowledge management system within UN-Women is subject to some challenges, evaluations found that external knowledge products produced by UN-Women is rich and authoritative, particularly at the global level. However, production and distribution of substantive guidance on good practices and standards, and the development

of evidence bases, could be further strengthened at the local level. They recommend systematically drawing upon lessons and insights from country and regional projects to inform organizational learning at the corporate level.

63. Examples of positive practice in knowledge brokering at the local level were identified as the one-stop shop approach to providing integrated services for internally displaced women, multi-country approaches to developing programmes and projects, and building on opportunities for exchange of knowledge, lessons and best practice among programme partners, stakeholders and women beneficiaries. Decentralized evaluations emphasized the importance of supporting the development of strategic knowledge products, including model policies, position papers and guidance notes.

## **V. Lessons identified in evaluation reports**

64. The following broad lessons have been compiled by bringing together and synthesizing the lessons learned that were included in evaluation reports.

**Lesson 1: UN-Women is well placed to create change, but its main objectives will take a long time to come to fruition.**

65. UN-Women has established credibility within its strategic areas. However, high-level change in these domains will take many years to come to fruition. Many of the ingredients for change—such as gender mainstreaming or gender-responsive budgeting—are already present in countries, and programmes that patiently build on these while maintaining a clear long-term vision offer the best overall prospect for effectiveness.

**Lesson 2: Some of the most effective mechanisms for change are based on community mobilization and self-help, but these require ongoing access to capacity support and formalization if they are to be sustained.**

66. Mini-groups of self-empowered and capacitated local activists offer an effective and efficient mechanism for grassroots voice and action. Sustaining the continuous interest of participants, capacitating communities to interrogate their practices regarding gender relations, and defining locally manageable development objectives are important components of sustainability. In addition to capacity development support, this has worked best where multiple small groups have been convened, amalgamated, formalized and linked to professional service providers.

**Lesson 3: Coalitions of local CSOs work best when they are not limited to gender-focused organizations and receive basic capacity development for RBM.**

67. While working with smaller groups of CSOs is tempting from an administrative perspective, it risks side-lining and weakening effective long-term civil society coalitions. Coalitions have shown the greatest promise where they have been broad-based, inclusive (not just orientated to women), and supported with RBM capacity strengthening.

**Lesson 4: National ownership is maximized where accountability is embedded in local institutions, starting with the design process. This requires both political will and capacity support.**

68. Ownership has been generated when key stakeholders are involved in all aspects of the design and implementation of interventions. This involvement strengthens accountability

by embedding it in local infrastructure, although it requires ongoing political will and capacity development to convert local accountability into effectiveness. In many cases, for example, even where political will exists, required technical expertise in gender is frequently sporadic or missing from important national institutions.

**Lesson 5: Joint programmes require higher transaction costs and longer to realize than is often assumed. Working to develop shared understandings and commitment across agencies' leadership, enabling the capacity of the lead entity, and the role of the Resident Coordinator are all foundations of joint programmes.**

69. 'Delivering as One' environments generally provide the most conducive setting for joint gender programmes and UN coordination. United Nations entities operate a multitude of different systems and operational arrangements, demanding realism in setting the targets for joint programmes. Potential for coherence is maximized where the capacity, capability and empowerment of the lead entity, Resident Coordinator, and any existing gender theme group are supported.

**Lesson 6: Programme design that is informed by better quality research and analysis is better able to include advanced risk management strategies, make market-appropriate project selection, and create sustained structural changes.**

70. The robustness of the analytical basis, inclusiveness of programme design processes, and designing-in of risk management strategies were associated with the most successful experiences of implementation. Within areas such as economic empowerment, thorough market research provides the basis for projects with high potential for growth, sustainability and long-term structural impacts.

## **VI. Conclusions**

Based on the above findings and lessons learned, the meta-analysis reached the conclusions below.

**Conclusion 1: UN-Women programmes are considered highly relevant in terms of global norms, national frameworks and the needs of women.**

71. Evaluations across all thematic areas find the design and objectives of programmes to be firmly in line with global norms, up-to-date thinking and relevant national frameworks. They also view programmes as relevant to the needs of target groups, although the infrequent use of gender analyses in evaluation designs and the common reference to ‘women’ as a single stakeholding group is an area to be strengthened.

**Conclusion 2: Effectiveness is achieved within the boundaries of outputs set by programmes, but evaluations and monitoring systems are insufficient to fully measure outcomes and impacts on women’s lives.**

72. UN-Women programmes are found to be delivering strongly on outputs. The systematic measurement of outcomes is, however, far less frequent and the designs that are generally adopted for evaluations are insufficient to assess impact. This highlights an urgent need to improve RBM, including: ensuring that all programmes have a clear theory of change, measurable indicators at least at output and outcome levels, and systematic monitoring and review processes.

**Conclusion 3: The implicit design of programmes is efficient, but operational delays to fund disbursement and contracts that are not sensitive to the needs of local NGOs, as well as delays in recruitment of UN Women staff at field level, are barriers to effectiveness.**

73. Effective implementation is hampered by delayed disbursements and contract conditions that are difficult for local non-governmental organizations to work under. While the majority of disbursement delays were linked to the slow release of funds by donors, there does appear to be scope for UN-Women to develop an alternative set of disbursement protocols that allow country offices to advance grant funds to local implementing partners that do not have access to other sources of project finance. In particular, several evaluations expressed a need to enable adequate funding to be released on time to these implementing partners within the required standards of accountability. In addition, human resources procedures should be streamlined to avoid delays in recruitment, and facilitate retention of staff at field level.

**Conclusion 4: Innovative approaches are being developed that ensure the inclusion of women, including the most marginalized, but greater attention is required on the inclusion of men if results are to be sustained.**

74. Evaluations found positive evidence of participation and empowerment among women and women's groups in relation to a range of thematic areas, including (but not limited to) economic empowerment, women's leadership, peace and security, and freedom from violence. Several programmes have supported the development of innovative models for enhancing inclusion—such as one-stop shops for services within internally displaced communities. Within this success story, however, many evaluations question whether achievements can be sustained or impacts extended without greater focus on including men (especially as advocates for gender equality and empowerment of women and peer-to-peer educators of other men).

**Conclusion 5: Strong local ownership is being achieved within the gender-focused community and national gender institutions, but shifting the political will of non-committed power holders remains a major challenge for gender equality advocates.**

75. Evaluations found that national institutions and CSOs dedicated to gender equality most often have a strong sense of ownership of, and participate in, UN-Women programmes. Outside of these gender-focused organizations, effectiveness (especially in policy reform and sustained service delivery) relies on securing the political will of power holders. Winning over these ‘gatekeepers’—especially in sensitive areas such as freedom from violence—remains a continuous challenge for many programmes.

**Conclusion 6: Capacity development is a major component of UN-Women strategy in every thematic area and more data is required on whether or not it is being effective in delivering results.**

76. Capacity development is a pervasive feature of the programmes that have been evaluated sitting at the heart of UN-Women efforts in terms of both effectiveness and sustainability. While evaluations are able to collect data on the completion of activities, there is little evidence available on the contribution of capacity development to higher level outcomes, or analysis of whether or not the right target groups and capacity gaps are being addressed. This needs to be addressed in terms of how the monitoring of capacity development is conceived and implemented.

**Conclusion 7: UN-Women has strong convening power for partnerships but limited engagement with the private sector at decentralized levels.**



77. Evaluations find that UN-Women has strong recognition as a normative authority at both the international and national levels. This provides it with strong convening power, which is evidenced in a number of coalitions and regional partnerships that feature in evaluation reports. Despite this convening power, evaluations found little evidence of engagement with the private sector as advocates or direct agents of gender equality and women's empowerment.

**Conclusion 8: Coordination of the United Nations at the country level is a significant ongoing challenge.**

78. While UN-Women is recognized as being strong at convening UN stakeholders at the global level, coordination of UN agencies at the country level was found to be less well defined and dependent on context. Coordination in humanitarian emergencies was found to need skills and capabilities that UN-Women is still at the early stages of building.

79. Despite the mandate and influence of UN-Women, the complexity and resources required to effectively coordinate joint initiatives remain both sizable and frequently underestimated. Evaluations indicate that UN-Women needs to be realistic in assessing the costs—as well as potential gains—from joint programmes and focus joint programmes in terms of both the number of partners and the programmatic scope. Furthermore, as the purpose and scope of evaluations is primarily linked to specific programmes, there is a gap in the evaluative evidence being generated about UN-Women wider coordination work at the country level.

**Conclusion 9: While UN-Women is producing valued knowledge in some areas at the global level, this is not sufficiently connected to operational experience and lessons by way of a strong internal knowledge management system.**

80. UN-Women is acknowledged and valued for the knowledge base it is establishing in some thematic areas at the international level. However, a significant proportion of evaluations indicate that the internal knowledge management systems of the organization need strengthening. They highlight in particular the missed opportunities to share lessons learned between programmes and for operational experiences to help guide normative and policy work at the international level.

## **VII. Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1: Ensure that all programmes have in place a clear theory of change and a results framework and monitoring system that can hold the programme to account for higher-level results.**

81. Most evaluations are not able to draw on a ready set of performance or monitoring data from programmes, projects and partnerships. This severely inhibits the ability of UN-Women to demonstrate contributions towards impact-level results. UN-Women Headquarters needs to ensure that country offices prioritize the development of a clear results framework (with a minimum number of output, outcome and impact indicators), and ensure that outcome-level data (changes in behaviours and institutions) is consistently captured. Special attention is required to ensure that the outcome-level effectiveness of coordination and capacity development (as well as service delivery) is captured and used for learning.

**Recommendation 2: Apply the level of creativity that is being focused on inclusiveness of women towards enhancing the role of men at all levels in supporting gender equality and empowerment of women.**

82. Decentralized evaluations of several programmes have found that, despite excellent progress, the non-inclusion of men can leave a barrier—or, at the minimum, strong inertia—to sustaining gains in gender equality and empowerment of women and achieving outcomes.

A number of these evaluations have recommended that projects and programmes identify mechanisms for including men—in their roles as family members, life-partners, peer-to-peer educators and power holders—in future work. Particular importance can be placed on recruiting advocates among men who occupy positions of political power outside of the national gender-infrastructure, such as government ministers, police commissioners, and military commanders. Winning and maintaining their support is critical for implementing gender-responsive policies.

**Recommendation 3: Improve organizational efficiency by deploying simplified disbursement protocols for local non-governmental organizations and CSOs that lack credit facilities, as well as streamlined human resources recruitment mechanisms for time-sensitive posts.**

83. One of the organizational comparative advantages identified is UN-Women capability to mobilize and support coalitions of local CSOs. Maintaining and building on this strength would benefit from having an improved disbursement protocol to local implementing partners within the required standards of accountability. Similarly, the timely initiation of projects, organizational responsiveness to strategic opportunities, and preservation of institutional knowledge would all benefit from streamlined human resources mechanisms for recruiting and retention of staff.

**Recommendation 4: Build upon good country-level experience in convening coalitions and building partnerships, including by engaging the private sector.**

84. Evaluations have highlighted a number of positive experiences in using the UN-Women mandate and convening power to support the formation and growth of effective civil society coalitions and partnerships. Important ingredients include: i) having clear and shared purpose; ii) ensuring continuous engagement (including with members of the group being

targeted by the partnership); and iii) involving a diverse range of organizations (not just those with a gender focus). However, UN-Women partnerships are not yet engaging with the private sector on a regular and systematic basis. While recognizing the different culture and needs of the private sector (compared to civil society), existing experience, coalitions and networks offer a good foundation for a renewed focus on public-private partnerships.

**Recommendation 5: Strengthen the UN coordination role of UN-Women at the country level.**

85. The role of UN-Women, the mandate of which positions it, where conditions permit, as a logical technical and/or coordination lead, should be clarified and made explicit at the country level. This should include guidance on real-world resources, time, skills and strategies required to coordinate effectively, as well as clear and practical ways of assessing and communicating the value-addition for various UN entities and national stakeholders.

**Recommendation 6: Review the organizational knowledge management system, including how lessons are captured from operations and influence the technical capacity development of staff.**

86. The mandate and strategy of UN-Women—working at the normative, coordinating and operational levels—provides the organization with the possibility of both generating and using authoritative knowledge on gender equality and empowerment of women. Maximizing this possibility requires an efficient and effective knowledge management system that draws on the experience of UN-Women operational programmes, as well as informing their design with cutting-edge thinking. Evaluations identify that the present knowledge management system is resulting in missed opportunities and flag this as an important issue for resolution.

**VIII. Overall conclusions**

87. Taking into account that this meta-analysis is based on evaluations covering UN-Women interventions in 2011 and 2012, this meta-analysis constitutes a qualitative baseline of the performance of the organization during its transition and consolidation period.

88. In this context, UN-Women has achieved important results while developing its own structure. Programmes are relevant to international and national priorities and achieved planned outputs despite constrained funding and complex political environments. However, UN-Women should address areas of organizational efficiencies were challenges have been identified.

89. UN-Women has performed well in relation to the Strategic Plan's operational priorities. The organization is developing a strong track record in convening partnerships and it is recognized as being strong at coordinating UN entities at the global level. However, challenges remain at the country level. In addition, UN-Women should strengthen its own RBM systems, and should explore the opportunity to engage the private sector as appropriate.

90. UN-Women performed well in relation to its own principles and approaches as stated in the Strategic Plan. UN-Women has established a number of effective approaches for enhancing inclusiveness; capacity development and advocacy are recognized as major strategies; national ownership is strong; and important contributions to some specific areas of knowledge have been made. However, more needs to be done to involve men as active programme participants in changing social norms and in strengthening knowledge management systems.

91. Overall, UN-Women has demonstrated strong relevance and potential to fully achieve effectiveness and efficiency once the consolidation process is finalized.

## Annex I: 2013 Evaluations included in the meta-analysis

<i>Corporate/decentralized</i>	<i>Title of evaluation</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Evaluation type</i>	<i>Report quality</i>
Corporate	Thematic evaluation on the contribution of UN-Women to preventing violence against women and girls and expanding access to services	Global	Thematic	Very good
	Thematic evaluation on the contribution of UN-Women to increasing women's leadership and participation in peace and security and humanitarian response	Global	Thematic	Very good
	Joint evaluation of joint programmes on gender equality in the United Nations system	Global	Joint evaluation	Very good
Arab States	Final evaluation of the Mehwar Center for the protection and empowerment of women and their families	Country office for Palestine	Programme evaluation	Satisfactory
Asia and the Pacific	Final evaluation of the support to the Government of Afghanistan through the commission on the elimination of violence against women to implement the law on eliminating violence against women and assistance to women victims	Country office for Afghanistan	Project evaluation	Good
	Final evaluation of the programme on sustaining the gains of foreign labour migration	Country office for Nepal	Programme evaluation	Good

<i>Corporate/decentralized</i>	<i>Title of evaluation</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Evaluation type</i>	<i>Report quality</i>
	through the protection of migrant workers' rights			
	Final evaluation of project on "making politics work with women" in Nepal	Country office for Nepal	Project evaluation	Good
Europe and Central Asia	Final external formative evaluation of the project on women for equality, peace and development in Georgia	Country office for Georgia	Programme evaluation	Very good
	Final evaluation of "Women connect across conflicts: building accountability for implementation of Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009) and 1889 (2009)"	Multi-country office for Central Asia (Kazakhstan)	Programme evaluation	Good
	Final evaluation of the project on promoting gender-responsive budgeting in South-Eastern Europe	Multi-country office for Bosnia and Herzegovina	Project evaluation	Very good
	Final evaluation of the project on advancing women's economic and social rights in Montenegro and Serbia	Multi-country office for Bosnia and Herzegovina	Project evaluation	Very good
	Final evaluation of the project on advancing the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) in the western Balkans	Multi-country office for Bosnia and Herzegovina	Programme evaluation	Satisfactory
Eastern and Southern Africa				
	Evaluation of the joint programme on gender equality and women's empowerment	Country office for Ethiopia	Programme evaluation	Good
	Final evaluation of gender and governance programme	Country office for Kenya	Programme evaluation	Satisfactory
	Evaluation of action taken by UN-Women concerning the prevention and elimination of violence against women, with a focus on the awareness-raising campaign "UNiTE to End Violence against Women"	Country office for Mozambique	Project evaluation	Satisfactory
	Final evaluation of Isange one-stop centres	Country office for Rwanda	Programme evaluation	Satisfactory
	Evaluation of joint programme on gender equality	Country office for Uganda	Country-level evaluation	Good
	Final evaluation of the gender support programme	Country office for Zimbabwe	Programme evaluation	Good

<i>Corporate/decentralized</i>	<i>Title of evaluation</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Evaluation type</i>	<i>Report quality</i>
	Evaluation of UN-Women support to the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region	Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa	Project evaluation	Very good
Americas and the Caribbean	Final evaluation of the “Young Women Citizens” programme	Country office for Brazil	Programme evaluation	Satisfactory
	Final evaluation of the “Safe Cities” programme	Country office for Guatemala	Programme evaluation	Satisfactory
	Longitudinal evaluation of Grenada’s “Man-to-man batterer intervention” programme	Multi-country office for the Caribbean (Barbados)	Pilot evaluation	Satisfactory
West and Central Africa	Evaluation of joint programme on gender equality and women’s economic empowerment	Country office for Liberia	Programme evaluation	Good