



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

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### Evaluation

## Evaluation of UN-Women's contribution to Women's Political Participation and Leadership

### *Summary*

This report summarizes the evaluation of UN-Women's global contribution to women's political participation (WPP) and leadership, 2011-2017. The purpose was to assess UN-Women's cumulative contribution towards women's ability to "lead and participate in decision-making at all levels" and was aimed at supporting learning, decision-making and accountability for UN-Women and its partners.

The evaluation assessed: i) the *relevance* of UN-Women's work on WPP and its role in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); ii) the *effectiveness* of UN-Women's work on WPP across its integrated mandate of normative, operation, and coordination work; iii) the *efficiency* of UN-Women's structures and internal institutional arrangements; and iv) the extent to which UN-Women's work on WPP is *sustainable* for women at individual, collective, and system levels, and in relation to the SDGs.

The primary intended users of the evaluation findings and recommendations are UN-Women's Executive Board, senior management and staff at HQ, regional, and country levels.

## **I. Women’s political participation and leadership**

1. From the local to the global level, opportunities for women’s participation and leadership in political life are restricted. Women are underrepresented as parliamentarians, in local governments, constitutional drafting bodies, political parties, and as heads of state despite their proven abilities and their positive impact for development, and their right to participate equally in governance and decision-making bodies.

2. UN-Women’s response to the under-representation of women in political life is defined in its two successive Strategic Plans (SPs) covering the period of 2011-2017 where women’s political participation was one of six core impact areas that UN-Women aimed to contribute to at the global, regional, and national levels.

3. In 2015, UN-Women developed twelve Flagship Programme Initiatives (FPIs) as a way to further deepen the transformative potential of UN-Women interventions, including one on WPP – the Women’s Political Empowerment and Leadership (WPEL) Flagship Programme.

4. The programmatic work on WPP focuses on the following five sub-thematic areas - constitutional and legal reform, including temporary special measures (TSM); inclusive electoral processes; parliamentary support; violence against women in politics (VAWP); and local government - and one cross-cutting area - leadership. Consistent with UN-Women’s integrated mandate, WPP work also encompasses coordination within the UN System and normative work to support intergovernmental bodies.

5. The policy work in this thematic area is led at the Headquarters (HQ) level by the Women’s Political Participation Unit under the Leadership and Governance Section, Policy Division. At regional level, the thematic area was supported by two dedicated Regional Policy Advisors covering Americas and the Caribbean (AC) and Arab States (AS) regions, reporting to the Programme Division. Varying levels of capacity on WPP exists at country-level, where the majority of activities are implemented.

6. At the global level, key UN-Women partners in this thematic area include United Nations entities, such as UNDP and the Department of Political Affairs, but also intergovernmental mechanisms, other international and regional organizations, non-governmental organizations, academia, the private sector, and bilateral donors.

## **II. Evaluation background and context**

### **A. Purpose, objectives and scope**

7. The UN-Women IES undertakes corporate strategic evaluations of the six impact areas under UN-Women’s Strategic Plan (2014-2017). The *Corporate Evaluation of UN-Women’s Contribution to Women’s Political Participation (WPP) and Leadership* is one such corporate evaluation aimed at supporting learning, decision-making, and accountability for UN-Women and its partners.

8. Covering the period of 2011-2017, the purpose of the evaluation was to assess UN-Women’s cumulative contribution towards women’s ability to “*lead and participate in decision-making at all levels*”, and to provide evidence from past practice to inform its future strategic planning and implementation on this thematic

area. The evaluation assessed UN-Women's contribution across its integrated mandate at the global, regional, and country level against four key objectives aligned with the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria of *relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability*. The evaluation objectives were to assess: i) the strategic relevance and positioning of UN-Women's work on WPP given the broader development policy context and its role in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); ii) the effectiveness of UN-Women's work on WPP across its integrated mandate; iii) the efficiency of UN-Women's structures and internal institutional arrangements; and iv) the extent to which UN-Women's position and contribution towards results and momentum on WPP is sustainable for women at individual, collective, and system levels, and in relation to the SDGs. In addition, the evaluation examined UN-Women's positioning and strategic niche in WPP in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Secretary-General's reform on the Repositioning of the UN Development System.

## B. Evaluation methodology

9. This evaluation adopted a systemic evaluation approach called the *Inclusive Systemic Evaluation for Gender equality, Environments and Marginalized voices (ISE4GEMs)*, which combines innovative systemic evaluation practice with intersectional analysis of three dimensions of gender equality, environments, and marginalized voices (GEMs).

10. The evaluation was conducted in line with gender equality and human rights principles as defined in the UN-Women Evaluation Policy, the UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation in the UN System, and the UNEG Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct. The ISE4GEMs approach places an emphasis on the identification and inclusion of marginalized voices (youth, rural women, indigenous groups, etc.) within the data collection and analysis where feasible and ethical.

11. To address thematic information needs, the evaluation sampled *five sub-thematic areas* – constitutional and legal reform, including temporary special measures (TSM); inclusive electoral processes; parliamentary support; violence against women in politics (VAWP); and local government – and *one cross-cutting area* – leadership – that were developed into case studies to serve as inputs to the evaluation report.

12. A mixed-methods approach was applied, involving a blend of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods from different data sources, and analysis methods using triangulation for consistency, validity, and reliability. The evaluation draws on the totality of evidence collected. This included the overall portfolio analysis and Boundary Story of UN-Women's WPP work across a sample of 43 countries (about one-half of the global portfolio). The evaluation undertook an in-depth analysis across a narrower sample of 24 countries that included site visits to six countries (Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Malawi, Mexico, Pakistan, and Zimbabwe) covering five regions (Western and Central Africa, Eastern and Southern Africa, Americas and the Caribbean, Arab States, Asia and the Pacific). The Europe and Central Asia region was covered remotely. In total, 397 interviews were conducted with a diverse range of internal and external partners, 575 documents were reviewed and two online surveys were administered to internal and external stakeholders.

## III. Key findings and conclusions

The evaluation contains twenty findings (see Annex A) on which the following six conclusions have been developed.

**Conclusion 1: The 2030 Agenda and the SDG framework’s systemic approach situates UN-Women as the key UN actor and thought leader to provide integrated policy advice on WPP.**

13. Grounding its work in international frameworks and commitments related to WPP, UN-Women is seen as an impartial and highly credible actor. For the UN System to be “fit-for-purpose,” however, there is widespread recognition that the organization must also adopt a more systemic (as opposed to siloed) approach to its work. UN-Women’s GEWE mandate and six thematic areas of work stemming from UN Women’s Strategic Plan 2014 - 2017 (women’s voice, leadership and participation; women’s economic empowerment; ending violence against women and girls; women’s peace and security; governance and national planning; global and normative framework) situate it to act as the key agency and thought leader within the UNDS to provide integrated policy advice on WPP. A more systemic approach to addressing WPP would include strengthening existing internal and external synergies and forging new ones relevant to the cross-cutting dimensions for sustainable development.

**Conclusion 2: In order to be “fit-for-purpose” to support SDG implementation, UN-Women would benefit from adopting a thematic lens to strengthening its internal capacities and resources to match desired impact with delivery capacity on WPP.**

14. Progress on WPP was widely cited as one of the key “drivers” for enhancing progress across all other UN-Women thematic areas, as well as across the SDGs. While this evaluation demonstrates that UN-Women has been able to achieve relevant results on WPP with current capacities, resourcing and organizational structure, it has not yet been able to demonstrate that it has achieved and sustained the level of results needed to generate the broader impact on WPP as expected, let alone as a driver for broader GEWE impacts. This is despite ample evidence of how UN-Women has successfully leveraged partnerships – which in itself requires a certain level of investment – both within the UNDS and with other global, regional and national partners to enhance its reach.

15. Despite possessing the building blocks for becoming “fit-for-purpose” on WPP, persistent staffing gaps and under-resourcing at the global, regional and country levels affect UN-Women’s ability to meet demand for support. The prioritization of WPP over a broad geographic scope (91 countries in 2016) and the political complexities this work entails are part of the issue. However, current levels of capacity are not adequate to fully implement UN-Women’s integrated mandate effectively. Most significantly, gaps in terms of thematic policy expertise and variations in the skills of country leadership have meant that UN-Women is not always able to meet the demands or expectations of partners. External stakeholders, especially CSOs, are particularly keen to work with UN-Women on WPP given its specialized GEWE mandate in relation to other actors. Strong policy expertise at the global level and in the two regions with dedicated Regional Policy Advisors combined with flexible funding mechanisms have enabled UN-Women to adapt to overcome capacity constraints somewhat but the structural human resource constraints remain in the long-term. More investment is needed both externally in terms of funding and support for the coordination mandate on WPP, but also internally in terms of investment in knowledge management, training, planning, monitoring and evaluation,

partnership management and in terms of decisions around staffing and roles and responsibilities.

**Conclusion 3: UN Reform efforts provide new opportunities as well as challenges to implementing its coordination role on WPP, especially at country level.**

16. UN-Women's ability to effectively implement its coordination mandate was hindered by differing interpretations among UN actors regarding the mandate and role division, lack of policy framework (aside from electoral assistance) or other agreements regarding role division, and resource imbalances especially at the country level. Most of these factors are inherent to the UN System and largely outside of UN-Women's sphere of influence and would require joint UN system action to resolve differing interpretations. Recent UN Reform efforts may provide an opportunity for UN-Women to address some of these challenges. The UN Reform efforts could also present challenges for UN-Women's positioning particularly in countries where it has no presence or a significant resource imbalance vis-à-vis UNDP. For these coherence efforts to be effectively implemented as a means of jointly producing results in the field of WPP, the joint chapter of the Strategic Plan would have to be complemented in the long-term with WPP specific targets across the relevant UN agencies and an inter-agency mechanism at the highest level.

**Conclusion 4: UN-Women has demonstrated effectiveness across its normative and operational work but could increase the level and sustainability of its results by adopting a more systemic and holistic approach to its programmatic work.**

17. UN-Women has achieved results across its normative and operational mandate. Normative results were particularly prominent regarding the adoption of inter-governmental norms, while operational results were found across all sub-themes and countries due in large part to UN-Women's advocacy capacity, convening credibility, and strong partnerships.

18. UN-Women's WPP normative and operational work however presents some challenges: in some countries linkages between policy and operational work remain weak; and operational results have been uneven across and within sub-themes. This may be due to the wide range of activities implemented, which makes it difficult to: 1) develop specific strategies to operationalize normative outcomes; 2) achieve shared institutional learning, and 3) develop common branding around innovative models. Some sub-thematic areas would therefore benefit from the definition of a few key 'signature' products around which UN-Women could invest in specialized M&E, internal learning, knowledge production, and branding.

19. Meanwhile, sustainability of WPP results also presents some challenges due to the WPP specific work environment and corporate limitations: 1) political volatility, 2) entrenched nature of social norms, 3) long-term and regressive nature of the change processes UN-Women is working towards, 4) limitations of M&E systems including nascent risk management system, and 5) short-term approach to the conceptualization and operationalization of results.

20. While UN-Women's ability to respond to emerging political opportunities is a strength, it is important to balance adaptability with a longer-term systemic and holistic perspective, which includes 1) prioritizing projects based on scale-up and sustainability potential (e.g. electoral context vs. election period; de jure vs. de facto laws; descriptive as well as substantive representation); 2) balancing and sequencing efforts across the integrated mandate; but also 3) gauging and mitigating potential

negative reactions that may arise in the form of violence, public opinion or public policy backlash.

**Conclusion 5: UN-Women needs to prioritize and increase its efforts to address marginalization within its WPP work.**

21. UN-Women programming supported the “leaving no one behind” agenda in country offices, but progress was uneven, limited by data and strategy gaps, and limited partnerships with groups representing marginalized communities. Internal and external stakeholders want UN-Women to provide more support to marginalized groups, likely due to the additional impetus of the 2030 Agenda. UN-Women’s strength in developing and maintaining strong partnerships with civil society groups as part of its overall implementation of a human rights based approach is key to strengthening and widening its partnerships with marginalized groups in engaging on WPP. UN-Women can use its convening power to ensure inclusion of marginalized groups in national or local dialogues or processes related to WPP. UN-Women could strengthen its attention to marginalized groups within sub-thematic areas, including those groups prioritized within the current Strategic Plan (young women, indigenous women and women with disabilities). Developing stronger synergies with SDG 16 on broader inclusive governance processes is also connected to and would be supportive of this work. Internally UN Women’s knowledge management and M&E systems need to be strengthened to support learning on how best to identify and engage marginalized groups and accurately capture and record results.

**Conclusion 6: Work on social norm change to support WPP is a promising, yet under-developed area of programming for WPP.**

22. The political empowerment of women may not be sustained unless there are real shifts in social norms around women entering and staying in politics. Social norms change remains a relatively under-analyzed, under-developed and under-measured area of programming. There is a need to redirect energies to develop more concerted and specific programming around social norms change that will complement the women’s political empowerment strategies undertaken. This requires deepening the analysis of and then targeting the context specific attitudes, stereotypes, and perceptions held by men, women, boys and girls of women in politics and women as leaders that work to prevent women’s political participation and empowerment. The challenge for UN-Women will be to find innovative ways to tackle social norm change on WPP “upstream” and link this with new strategies for addressing social norms change “downstream”. Social norms change efforts need to go beyond general or ad hoc awareness-raising activities to develop more long-term and sustained programming that targets not only men and boys, but also women and girls, with specific outcomes, outputs, indicators, baseline and targets. It requires long-term monitoring methods that track change beyond a specific programme and leverages new and innovative monitoring methods.

## **IV. Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions derived from the evidence analyzed for this evaluation and the forward-looking context, the following six recommendations are proposed.

**Recommendation 1: In a context of wide-ranging demands and limited resources, UN-Women needs to strengthen its prioritization capacity at the country level to contribute strategic and sustainable results on WPP.**

23. UN-Women should strengthen evidence-based programming, investment, communication, and fundraising around: 1) the emerging areas of VAWP and Local Government; 2) one or two strategic “signature” programming models within the sub-thematic areas that are innovative, low-cost, and with potential for scale-up and sustainability, considering potential to apply UN-Women’s universal mandate, e.g. institutional support to caucuses and committees on post-legislative analysis and monitoring; ID cards registration and identity management for marginalized women; new technologies for civic education; formal and informal women’s public decision-making; VAWP protocols; local government advocacy tool and global knowledge product; 3) partnerships for party system strengthening and institutional capacity building.

**Recommendation 2: To strengthen implementation of its coordination mandate, UN-Women should establish a clear division of labour with other UN agencies around potentially overlapping mandates and provide thematic operational guidance on planning and implementing its coordination role at the country and regional levels.**

24. UN-Women should clarify and formalize its role and coordination function relative to other UN agencies, with regard to the Strategic Plan’s joint chapter and UN reform, concerning a joint vision, targets, and implementation framework for WPP. It should establish a division of labour with UN-Women as a full partner throughout the project cycle, in resource mobilization efforts and reporting of results. The UN-SWAP model could inspire ways of working with a similar accountability framework for UN System-wide performance and joint delivery on WPP. UN-Women should provide operational guidance on planning and implementing its coordination role at the country and regional level, across sub-thematic areas and across different types of partners. This would clarify for partners how to engage and support UN-Women and UNDP in the country context, drawing on each organization’s comparative strengths. It would also institutionalize the process instead of relying on the goodwill of individual staff members.

**Recommendation 3: UN-Women should develop a long-term WPP capacity strengthening plan to enhance its ability to deliver results and meet stakeholder requests.**

25. UN-Women should undertake a WPP capacity strengthening plan of existing resources. This ideally includes the following elements. Conduct an organizational staff mapping and capacity assessment. Clarify roles and responsibilities at HQ, regional and country-level staff working on WPP. Develop and regularly update policy and programmatic guidance notes that provide a strategic vision for each sub-thematic area with priority activities, role of UN-Women vis-à-vis other actors, possible risks and potential mitigation strategies drawn from experience, and specific indicators and monitoring tools to support documentation of sustainable results, including post-training assessments and surveys. Complement with online and/or face-to-face training for staff. Develop communities of practice or shared staff resources (across countries) on highly specialized subjects and that support cross-country and cross-regional exchange. Strengthen corporate capacities and systems to manage and mitigate risks related to WPP in different political system and contexts.

**Recommendation 4: UN-Women should invest in a thematic resource mobilization approach that builds on existing innovative, flexible, and longer-term funding mechanisms and that addresses regional priorities.**

26. UN-Women should develop a thematic resource mobilization strategy and invest in donor relationship management with the SPD at the country level with Regional Policy Advisors' support. The strategy should provide: a clearer articulation of UN-Women's added value to WPP for strategic funding opportunities, illustrate the complementary impact and enabling nature of WPP work, demonstrate human resource capacity and thematic policy expertise at regional and country levels to deliver on the mandate, a stronger evidence-base for strategic funding opportunities, and communicate the need for more holistic or full cycle approaches to achieve sustainable results. The development of regional WPEL programmes to support resource mobilization at the regional level is also desirable. UN-Women should use innovative and flexible funding mechanisms and longer-term national and regional level funding strategies. UN-Women should advocate vis-à-vis UNDP for an increased share of external resources leveraged in WPP.

**Recommendation 5: UN-Women should prioritize “Leave No One Behind” within its WPP programming consistently at the global, regional, and country levels and build an evidence-base that can feed into its global normative and advocacy work.**

27. UN-Women should 1) strengthen and increase partnerships and networks with marginalized groups at the country level; 2) develop tailored strategies seeking to fill basic data gaps on marginalized voices and vulnerable groups at country level; 3) implement programme models relevant to marginalized groups' needs (e.g., citizenship/voter registration, VAWP protections, and dialogue with local governments, constituency engagement); 4) strengthen knowledge management and results monitoring systems to better plan, document and report on work with marginalized groups, as well as how best to engage and support their political empowerment; 5) support learning on prioritization through development of strategic pilots, careful testing and scale-up as necessary.

**Recommendation 6: UN-Women should invest in new programming on social norms change that complements its WPP work, and develop effective methods to monitor and report on progress in the long-term.**

28. UN-Women should select specific sub-thematic areas and activities within which to focus social norm change strategies, prioritizing those that allow for leveraging work in other areas for maximum effect. It would be helpful also to build on existing upstream and downstream work to effect social norm change, identifying the appropriate sequencing of activities for mutual reinforcement of symbolic, descriptive, and substantive work to achieve greater effectiveness. UN-Women should strengthen and adopt new monitoring methods that provide evidence of the effectiveness of social norm change efforts for WPP over time. This requires training and guidance to staff and could make use of new technologies such as big data in partnership with the innovation facility, the programme support and guidance unit and data and statistics section for potential synergies or links to SDG monitoring efforts.



## Annex A

### List of evaluation findings

Finding 1 – WPP is a highly relevant area of work for UN-Women and will remain so during the SDG era.

Finding 2 – WPP programming is not sufficiently relevant to the needs and interests of marginalized women.

Finding 3 – Corporate vision and strategy on WPP is clear, while sub-thematic areas may require further clarity.

Finding 4 – UN-Women has been responsive to country contexts by successfully adapting to political opportunities and challenges in many countries (with room for risk management strengthening).

Finding 5 – UN-Women draws its relevance for working on this politically sensitive thematic area from its position as both an impartial actor and the global lead agency on GEWE.

Finding 6 – A focus on women’s political empowerment is essential and important, but sustaining gains requires addressing and influencing social norms on gender equality.

Finding 7 – UN-Women has been effective in assisting Member States in strengthening inter-governmental norms, policies, and standards at the global level.

Finding 8 – The challenges UN-Women faces at country level to implement its coordination mandate on WPP are connected to competing interpretation of mandates and roles, as well as priorities and capacities.

Finding 9 – UN-Women has contributed to strengthening normative frameworks at the country level; further monitoring for signs of regression and implementation extending to the sub-national level would support the sustainability of these gains.

Finding 10 – UN-Women has contributed to strengthening women’s capacity and influence in parliaments; there is scope to work with partners to increase constituency outreach capacity and shift parliamentary procedures and norms.

Finding 11 – UN-Women has been effective in supporting gender mainstreaming in a number of electoral management bodies and a more consistent application of an electoral cycle process would further strengthen and sustain results to support inclusive electoral processes.

Finding 12 – UN-Women has contributed to raising awareness on the emerging issue of VAWP at the global level and is well positioned to build on some early operational responses and lessons learned to accelerate progress.

Finding 13 – UN-Women has shown leadership in establishing a global methodology for tracking SDG indicator 5.5.1b on women’s representation in local governments that can be leveraged to bolster its coordination and operational work at country-level and synergies with local governance.

Finding 14 – Corporate frameworks to guide UN-Women’s efforts on transformational leadership would strengthen efforts to develop women’s capacity to engage as leaders in political life and facilitate synergies across thematic areas.

Finding 15 – Shortage of staffing in terms of overall numbers and varying levels of specialized expertise at the sub-national, country, and regional levels affect UN-Women’s ability to plan for and deliver results.

Finding 16 – Despite recent increases in funding and pledges demonstrating potential donors’ interest, WPP work is under-resourced and could benefit from a more comprehensive thematic fundraising strategy that addresses regional differences.

Finding 17 – UN-Women’s external WPP knowledge products are highly valued. At the same time, there is demand for increased cross-country, cross-regional, and cross-thematic communication and internal knowledge management on WPP to share experiences, lessons learned, and strategies to address challenges.

Finding 18 – Closing corporate gaps identified in reporting, monitoring and evaluation systems would allow for better assessment of WPP results.

Finding 19 – UN-Women can build on and improve its already strong partnerships on WPP by coordinating at the country level and expanding outreach to organizations of marginalized groups, regional and sub-regional organizations, and political parties.

Finding 20 – There is no explicit definition of sustainability for WPP and it is not consistently prioritized or incorporated in planning documents.