



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

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Evaluation

Evaluation policy of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

Summary

The revised evaluation policy of UN-Women was developed in accordance with Executive Board decision 2016/2 and is the result of an external review which drew on recent assessments of the evaluation function and consultations with stakeholders. The policy is informed by the General Assembly resolution [71/243](#) on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review, by the UN-Women Strategic Plan 2018–2021, and is aligned with the 2016 norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group.

It outlines the context for an updated evaluation policy, the purpose of the policy, evaluation principles and procedures; sets out roles and responsibilities; presents quality assurance principles; describes contribution to system-wide evaluation for gender equality and empowerment of women, and dispositions for evaluation capacity development; highlights financial resource requirements; and concludes with a note on future review of the policy.

The Executive Board may wish to endorse the revised evaluation policy.

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I. Introduction

1. The policy set out in the present document governs the evaluation function of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). It establishes a framework for ensuring an independent evaluation function that provides credible evidence with respect to the performance of UN-Women in terms of results achieved in the pursuit of gender equality and the empowerment of women. It also establishes the role of UN-Women in system-wide evaluation and in promoting evaluations responsive to gender equality and the empowerment of women, including women's full enjoyment of their human rights in the United Nations system. The policy applies to all initiatives supported and funds administered by UN-Women. It enters into force on 1 October 2020 and is accompanied by systems to support its implementation.

2. UN-Women was created by the General Assembly by its resolution [64/289](#) "to provide, through its normative support functions and operational activities, guidance and technical support to all Member States, across all levels of development and in all regions, at their request, on gender equality, the empowerment and rights of women and gender mainstreaming". The role of UN-Women is also one of leading, coordinating and promoting accountability with respect to gender equality and women's empowerment in the United Nations system with a view to more effective coordination, coherence and gender mainstreaming.

II. Purpose

3. Evaluation in UN-Women acts as a means to support the gender mainstreaming agenda and the norms and principles outlined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Sustainable Development Goals, Economic and Social Council agreed conclusions 1997/2 and resolution 2011/5 and the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) policy on gender equality and women's empowerment and its corresponding System-wide Action Plan 2.0.

4. More specifically, the implementation of the Entity's evaluation policy is aligned with the quadrennial comprehensive policy review resolutions on gender equality and the empowerment of women, system-wide evaluation and the implementation of the System-wide Action Plan performance indicator regarding gender-responsive evaluation.

5. In UN-Women, evaluation is conducted for three main and equally important purposes that together support the overall delivery of results. First, it is a means to demonstrate accountability to stakeholders, including women who are rights holders and duty bearers, in managing for results (e.g., in the context of governing bodies, donor and partner Governments, sister United Nations agencies and UN-Women beneficiaries around the world). Secondly, it provides credible and reliable evidence for decision-making in relation to gender equality and the empowerment of women in order to improve results. Thirdly, it contributes important lessons learned about normative, operational and coordination work in the areas of gender equality and the empowerment of women to the existing knowledge base, including knowledge about how to achieve greater coherence between normative and operational work in those areas.

III. Evaluation principles

6. UN-Women subscribes to the UNEG definition of evaluation¹ and directly incorporates principles of gender equality and the empowerment of women, including women's full enjoyment of their human rights. Evaluation in the Entity is defined as a systematic and impartial assessment that provides credible and reliable evidence-based information about the extent to which an intervention has resulted in progress (or the lack thereof) towards intended and/or unintended results regarding gender equality and the empowerment of women. As a process itself, evaluation is also a means to enhance gender equality and the empowerment of women through the incorporation of gender equality and human rights perspectives into evaluation approaches, methods, processes and use. Accordingly, not only does evaluation act as an important driver of positive change towards gender equality and the empowerment of women, but the way in which the evaluation process itself is undertaken empowers the stakeholders involved.

7. More specifically, evaluations responsive to gender equality and the empowerment of women assess whether interventions:

(a) Have been guided by the relevant international (national and regional) normative frameworks for gender equality and the empowerment of women, including women's full enjoyment of their human rights, United Nations system-wide mandates and organizational objectives;

(b) Have analysed and addressed the structures that contribute to inequalities experienced by women, men, girls and boys, especially those experiencing multiple forms of exclusion;

(c) Have maximized participation and inclusiveness (with respect to rights holders and duty bearers) in their planning, design, implementation and decision-making processes;

(d) Sought out opportunities to build sustainable results through the empowerment and capacity-building of women and rights holders and duty bearers;

(e) Have contributed to short-, medium- and long-term objectives (or the lack thereof) through the examination of results chains, processes, contextual factors and causality using a gender equality and human rights-based approach.

8. A number of principles guide evaluation planning, conduct and follow-up, to ensure that all evaluation processes reflect: (a) the integrated normative, operational and coordination mandate of UN-Women as an entity within the United Nations system, (b) the commitment of UN-Women to evaluation that is responsive to gender equality and the empowerment of women, including women's full enjoyment of their human rights, and (c) alignment with the UNEG norms and standards and the UNEG

¹ An evaluation is an assessment, conducted as systematically and impartially as possible, of an activity, project, programme, strategy, policy, topic, theme, sector, operational area or institutional performance. It analyses the level of achievement of both expected and unexpected results by examining the results chain, processes, contextual factors and causality using appropriate criteria such as relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. An evaluation should provide credible, useful evidence-based information that enables the timely incorporation of its findings, recommendations and lessons into the decision-making processes of organizations and stakeholders. The purposes of evaluation are to promote accountability and learning. Evaluation aims to understand why – and to what extent – intended and unintended results were achieved and to analyse the implications of the results. Evaluation can inform planning, programming, budgeting, implementation and reporting and can contribute to evidence-based policymaking, development effectiveness and organizational effectiveness.

ethical guidelines and tools.² Evaluation conducted in UN-Women should adhere to the following principles:

(a) National ownership. Evaluation should be planned and conducted to promote national ownership and leadership of evaluation processes by both rights holders and duty bearers. To this end, it should help to support the development of capacity to conduct evaluations that are gender responsive;

(b) United Nations system coordination and coherence with regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women. Evaluations should be conducted system-wide and jointly with United Nations sister agencies, whenever possible, as a means to promote coordination and coherence regarding gender equality and the empowerment of women. Evaluations should systematically assess how to improve coordination and coherence in terms of gender equality and the empowerment of women, particularly with regard to normative and operational work in those areas;

(c) Innovation. Evaluations should seek to identify and illuminate innovations in the work of UN-Women with respect to gender equality and the empowerment of women. They should also apply innovative evaluation approaches and methods that have potential to more fully capture the complex and long-term nature of achieving results in those areas;

(d) Fair power relations and empowerment. Evaluations should be conducted with an understanding of contextual power relations that affect gender equality. The process should seek to empower women and those left furthest behind, including women with disabilities and women facing marginalization;

(e) Participation and inclusion. Evaluation processes should ensure stakeholder participation that is both relevant and inclusive, given the evaluation subject at hand. In particular, stakeholder analysis should be conducted and planned to take into account the additional time and resources needed to allow for the participation of all relevant stakeholders, especially women who face barriers to participation;

(f) Independence and impartiality. Evaluations are conducted independently of management functions in order to ensure that their process and results credible and free from undue influence. Evaluators should demonstrate impartiality and be free from any conflict of interest or bias. They should have full access to information regarding the subjects that they are evaluating;

(g) Transparency. Evaluations should be conducted in transparent and consultative manner with key stakeholders. Evaluation plans, terms of reference and reports should be made publicly available in order to enhance the transparency of UN-Women with regard to efficiency and commitment to managing for results;

(h) Quality and credibility. Evaluations should be conducted in a systematic manner, applying sound approaches and methods to ensure the quality and credibility of findings, recommendations and lessons generated. Reports should be complete and balanced. A quality assurance mechanism will support evaluators and evaluation managers in this regard;

(i) Intentionality and use of evaluation. Planning for evaluations should demonstrate a clear intent regarding the purpose and use of findings (i.e. findings of facts) and of evaluation results to improve the work of UN-Women based on identified strategic and/or programmatic needs in UN-Women or in the United Nations system in the areas of gender equality and the empowerment of women;

² Including integrating Gender Equality and Human Rights in Evaluation – UN-SWAP Guidance, Analysis and Good Practices, and Guidance on Evaluating Institutional Gender Mainstreaming.

(j) Ethics. Evaluators should exert professional integrity and abide by the UNEG ethical and professional guidelines for evaluation in the UN system. Evaluators must act with cultural sensitivity and pay particular attention to protocols, codes and recommendations that may be relevant to their interactions with women.

IV. Evaluation process

Planning

9. UN-Women systematically plans and budgets for evaluations through a quadrennial process that includes a corporate evaluation plan. The corporate evaluation plan will be periodically reviewed and updated to reflect emerging priorities, context and organizational learning needs. Decentralized evaluation plans are developed in the context of regional and country specific Strategic Note preparation as well as during annual work plan and project design processes. Evaluation planning will follow coverage norms set out separately from this policy document.

Operationalization

10. Evaluations assess the operational work of UN-Women conducted at the global, regional and country levels, the normative support work undertaken by the Entity, and its coordination role within the United Nations system. All evaluations should assess the coherence of normative and operational work.

11. UN-Women evaluations provide evidence of the processes employed and results achieved at the output, outcome and impact levels; illuminate the connections implicit in the unique role of UN-Women in terms of operational, normative support and coordination work; and reveal the factors and modalities that facilitate or hinder the achievement of results. They deploy innovative approaches and mixed methods to highlight the pathways to follow in the often complex, non-linear and long-term process of achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women at the global, regional and country levels.

12. UN-Women evaluations fall into two main categories:

(a) *Independent evaluations*, which are corporate and strategic evaluations (such as country portfolio and regional evaluations), that are strategic independent assessments undertaken by the Independent Evaluation Service with the support of external evaluators where necessary. They are used to assess issues of corporate and strategic significance concerning development effectiveness, organizational performance and normative and operational coherence;

(b) *Decentralized evaluations*, which are conducted by independent external evaluators but managed by programmatic offices. They are conducted in consultation or in partnership with national stakeholders and United Nations agencies, to the extent possible. Decentralized evaluations are used to assess issues of significance at the programmatic level and play a crucial role in managing for results. They are key inputs for corporate evaluations and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework evaluations.

13. UN-Women independent and decentralized evaluations assess the operational, normative support and coordination work of the Entity through strategy/policy, organizational, thematic, regional, country and programme evaluation. Joint evaluation is also promoted.

14. UN-Women independent and decentralized evaluations are undertaken during different stages of the programme life cycle and include evaluability assessment, mid-term evaluation, final evaluation and meta-evaluation.

Use

15. Evaluation findings, recommendations and lessons learned are used to improve organizational and United Nations system-wide performance in the areas of gender equality and the empowerment of women, and to improve coherence between the normative and the operational work carried out in those areas. More specifically, evaluation provides key inputs for:

- (a) The refinement of norms on gender equality and the empowerment of women by intergovernmental bodies such as the Commission on the Status of Women;
- (b) The provision of support for the UN-Women Executive Board's oversight and approval role;
- (c) The planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of:
 - (i) UN-Women plans, policies, strategies and programmes/projects;
 - (ii) United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks;
 - (iii) Initiatives to support the UN reform implementation and its gender parity strategy;
 - (iv) United Nations system-wide policies, action plans and programmes;
 - (v) International, regional and national plans, policies and goals;
 - (vi) The strengthening of system-wide coordination mechanisms for gender equality;
 - (vii) System-wide evaluation processes;
 - (viii) The development of gender-responsive evaluation approaches and methodologies;
 - (ix) Knowledge management and research initiatives.

Dissemination and Disclosure

16. UN-Women demonstrates its commitment to public accountability and the sharing of knowledge by disclosing all evaluation plans, independent evaluation terms of reference, final reports and management responses/action plans through the centralized, web-based and publicly accessible UN-Women Global Accountability and Tracking of Evaluation Use (GATE) system.

17. Evaluation plans are posted within one month of their approval. Evaluation terms of reference, reports, management responses and action plans are also posted; final evaluation reports are to be disclosed concurrently with the corresponding management responses and action plans. Evaluation dissemination products are posted upon their finalization.

18. UN-Women understands that disclosure through the GATE system in and of itself is not sufficient to promote the use of evaluative information, nor is it adequate to ensure accessibility to a wide range of stakeholders. Therefore, dissemination strategies are developed and resourced for all independent evaluations. They seek to address barriers to access, particularly to women, and are geared towards enhancing use and promoting evaluative evidence through:

- (a) The use of evaluation results in corporate governance, including by executive and senior management;
- (b) The development of tailored knowledge products;
- (c) The use of innovative dissemination methods.

V. Roles and responsibilities

19. It is the responsibility of all UN-Women staff to adhere to the principles of this policy and promote a culture of evaluation responsive to gender equality and the empowerment of women, including women's full enjoyment of their human rights in the context of their respective roles, both within the Entity and in the wider United Nations system.

20. The Executive Board approves the evaluation policy and is informed of corporate evaluation plans, corporate evaluations and the corresponding management responses. It is made aware of the status and the implementation of both corporate and decentralized evaluation plans and management responses and action plans through the annual evaluation report, which is prepared by the Independent Evaluation Service. The Executive Board may also request corporate evaluation, including joint evaluations with other United Nations agencies. More specifically, it:

- (a) Reviews and discuss the corporate evaluation plan;
- (b) Discusses key results of corporate evaluations and consider their implications for the strategic management of UN-Women;
- (c) Will be informed of strategic evaluation findings and recommendations when exercising its oversight and approval functions with respect to UN-Women policies and strategies.

21. In addition, the Executive Board may establish ad hoc working groups to discuss evaluation results. Moreover, individual Executive Board members may participate in reference groups for relevant independent evaluations.

22. The Commission on the Status of Women and other intergovernmental bodies can consider findings, recommendations and lessons learned from UN-Women evaluations in the promulgation of policies.

23. The Executive Director is accountable for UN-Women results and is the main champion of evaluation within the Entity. She or he will provide the political will and enabling environment for enhancing the culture of evaluation. She or he is responsible for safeguarding the independence of the Independent Evaluation Service by appointing a competent Head/Director for Evaluation and ensuring that the Office is adequately staffed and resourced to fulfil its role in UN-Women evaluation and coordination of system-wide evaluations with regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women. She or he approves the corporate evaluation plan and is responsible for ensuring the development and implementation of management responses and action plans corresponding to corporate evaluations and for presenting these to the Executive Board. Through the Deputy Executive Directors, she or he is ultimately accountable for the implementation and resourcing of decentralized evaluation plans and the use of evaluation findings, recommendations and lessons through management responses and action plans.

24. The Independent Evaluation Service is the custodian of the UN-Women evaluation function. It reports directly to the Executive Director and presents the Annual report on UN-Women Evaluation Function to the Executive Board. Its main responsibilities are to:

- (a) establish and implement effective corporate evaluation systems;
- (b) strengthen decentralized evaluation systems;
- (c) lead UN coordination on gender-responsive evaluation;
- (d) promote innovation and knowledge generation concerning what works in promoting gender equality, through national evaluation capacity building;
- (e) work to ensure that evaluation findings are used in the governance processes of UN-Women and are presented to and used by programme managers in the conduct of their work.

25. A competent Head/Director is appointed to lead the Independent Evaluation Service, with the authority to report directly to the Executive Director and to present the annual evaluation report to the Executive Board. She or he is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the Independent Evaluation Service meets high professional standards in the establishment and implementation of its workplan and the corporate evaluation plan. The Head/Director is responsible for appointing the Chief of Evaluation, who manages the Independent Evaluation Service, including the budget and appointment of its staff, under the overall supervision of Head/Director. The Head/Director and the Chief of Evaluation must meet UNEG core competencies for evaluators and abide by UNEG norms and standards, the UNEG ethical guidelines for evaluation and the UNEG code of conduct for evaluation in the United Nations system. The Head/Director and the Chief of Evaluation lead UN coordination on gender-responsive evaluation.

26. The Chief of Evaluation is supported in the implementation of the Independent Evaluation Service workplan by Evaluation Specialists, Evaluation Analysts, and Regional Evaluation Specialists who report directly to her or him, meet UNEG core competencies for evaluators and abide by the UNEG norms and standards and the UNEG ethical guidelines and code of conduct.

27. In particular, the Regional Evaluation Specialists, who report functionally and administratively to the Chief of Evaluation and who are located in regional offices, will conduct independent evaluations and manage strategic decentralized evaluations at the regional and country levels, enhancing the independence of the processes. They will also allow for a more symbiotic exchange between corporate and decentralized evaluation systems by supporting the implementation of the evaluation policies and strategies in their respective regions through the formulation of regional strategies. In addition, they will support the capacity development of UN-Women staff with a view to managing decentralized evaluations, United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework evaluations and other joint evaluation processes from a gender perspective.

28. The Advisory Committee on Oversight (ACO) reviews and advises, the Executive Director on: (i) the overall Evaluation Policy of UN-Women; (ii) the strategy, evaluation plan and annual work plan that relate to the Evaluation Policy of UN-Women; (iii) relevant issues from evaluation reports with a view towards increased management attention to these issues; (iv) the quality assurance system for the evaluation function, including internal and external assessments; and (v) the status of the implementation by management of evaluation recommendations. The ACO reports annually to the Executive Board on its work and advice provided on evaluation issues.

29. Senior management staff (Deputy Executive Directors, Division Directors, Regional Directors and country Representatives) champion the use of all evaluations within UN-Women and ensure that adequate financial and human capacity is made available for decentralized evaluation so as to ensure an effective and efficient

evaluation function. They are responsible for creating an enabling environment for the strengthening of the evaluation culture in the area under their purview. They put in place the conditions and resources necessary to ensure the evaluability of interventions, including quality design and monitoring, reporting and documentation systems. They are responsible for the use of findings, recommendations and lessons learned resulting from the evaluations commissioned by their respective offices and from other corporate or relevant evaluations. More specifically:

(a) Senior management will assign monitoring and evaluation focal points and evaluation task managers in advance of the preparation stage for all decentralized evaluations;

(b) Senior management is responsible for the development, implementation and monitoring of management responses and action plans corresponding to the decentralized evaluations commissioned by their offices, and for reporting on their status through the GATE system;

(c) Regional Directors play an oversight role with respect to decentralized evaluations in their region, and are responsible for ensuring adequate staffing and competencies for the fulfilment of evaluation roles, including the mandatory recruitment of monitoring and evaluation specialists or appointment of monitoring and evaluation focal points.

30. In order to implement evaluation plans and manage evaluations, Monitoring and Evaluation Specialists/Focal Points coordinate, support and communicate information about all evaluation-related work of the programmatic office. In addition, Evaluation Task Managers are responsible for supporting the overall management of individual evaluation processes, including ensuring overall stakeholder participation.

31. The Human Resources Section and the Procurement Section will support to ensure that individual or institutional contracts with external evaluators include signed copies of the UNEG code of conduct for evaluation in the United Nations system.

32. The roles and responsibilities outlined above will be reinforced through a system of inclusion in individual and office workplans and formally through the performance appraisal system.

VI. Quality assurance and Quality Assessment

33. The Independent Evaluation Service develops and maintains evaluation quality assurance mechanisms in order to continuously improve and enhance the quality and credibility of the Entity's corporate and decentralized evaluations products and processes. UN-Women quality assurance system draws on the UNEG norms and standards, the UNEG ethical guidelines for evaluation, the UNEG code of conduct for evaluation in the United Nations system, and on all relevant UNEG guidance documents.

34. Key elements of the quality assurance mechanism include: (a) keeping track of evaluation processes; (b) supporting Senior Managers in developing management responses to evaluations; (c) supporting the monitoring of action plans for management responses to evaluations; (d) providing guidance and tools for conducting and managing evaluations; (e) approving the terms of reference for regional and country portfolio evaluations; (f) providing organization wide quality criteria for assessing evaluation reports; (g) external quality assessment of evaluation reports commissioned by the Independent Evaluation Service. The results of key quality assurance activities are outlined each year in the annual report on the UN-Women Evaluation function.

VII. System-Wide evaluation for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

35. The creation and the mandate of UN-Women was a direct response by Member States in furthering the United Nations reform agenda for system-wide coherence in the area of gender equality and the empowerment of women. UN-Women has an essential role in supporting the evaluation of progress made in fulfilling the commitments of the United Nations system with regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women, specifically the implementation of the CEB system-wide policy on gender equality and women's empowerment and the related system-wide action plan. It will support compliance with and reporting on the plan's performance indicator regarding gender-responsive evaluation.

36. UN-Women will promote United Nations system coherence, coordination and accountability in terms of gender equality and the empowerment of women through system-wide evaluation and joint evaluation by:

- (a) Actively contributing to UNEG and to regional and country evaluation groups;
- (b) Promoting joint evaluation initiatives regarding gender equality and system-wide accountability at the global, regional and country levels;
- (c) Supporting gender-responsive evaluation capacity within the United Nations system;
- (d) Building evidence-based knowledge concerning gender equality.

37. More specifically, at the global level, system-wide evaluation will be used to explore the challenges identified to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women in the UN system; as well as in support of UN reform and the achievement of the 2030 agenda. In addition, regional and country offices will promote coordination in the areas of gender equality and the empowerment of women within the United Nations system through participation in joint evaluation, United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework evaluations, evaluations implemented to support the UN Reform and its priority areas for change, as well as any relevant system-wide evaluation exercise at the regional or country level.

VIII. Evaluation capacity development

38. The Independent Evaluation Service will support the strengthening of evaluation capacity across UN-Women. It will also promote evaluation capacity in the area of gender responsive evaluation across United Nations organizations.

39. The development of national evaluation capacities is an important vehicle to help to realize gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Entity will seek to support national capacity development in relevant evaluation processes. Partnerships for evaluation capacity development may be promoted to support the capacity of Governments, national and regional evaluation associations and networks with respect to gender-responsive evaluation.

40. The Global Evaluation Strategy incorporates principles for strengthening national evaluation capacities for gender-responsive M&E systems.

IX. Resources

41. In order to ensure a system of high-quality evaluations, the evaluation function should be predictably and adequately resourced. UN-Women will allocate between 2 and 3 per cent of its total programme expenditure to the evaluation function. In country and regional offices, resource allocation decisions for evaluations are based on the country and regional costed evaluation plan.

X. Review

42. An independent and external review of the implementation of the evaluation policy will be conducted at minimum every 5 years.
