

A smiling woman wearing a green headwrap and a red dress with a black pattern, looking out from a doorway. In the background, a group of people is sitting on a bench outdoors.

IN BRIEF

COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION UN WOMEN SUDAN (2018–2023)

Photo: UN Photo/Maimana El Hassan

This report presents the main evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Country Portfolio Evaluation (CPE) of the UN Women Sudan Country Office conducted between January and June 2023. A CPE is a systematic assessment of the normative, coordination and operational aspects of UN Women's contribution to development results relating to gender equality and the empowerment of women at the country level.

PURPOSE

The UN Women Independent Evaluation Service (IES) conducted this evaluation to provide an independent and systematic assessment of UN Women's contributions to advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women in Sudan between 2018 and 2023, which covers the Strategic Note period. The purpose of the evaluation is to support enhanced accountability for development effectiveness and learning to inform the next Strategic Note.

OBJECTIVES

The evaluation objectives were to:

1. Assess the effectiveness, efficiency and coherence of the country portfolio (planned and implemented), including between the normative, coordination and operational elements of UN Women's triple mandate, and the extent to which human rights and gender equality have been addressed.
2. Identify lessons learned and good practices that can be scaled.
3. Provide actionable recommendations to inform the development of the new Strategic Note.

INTENDED USERS

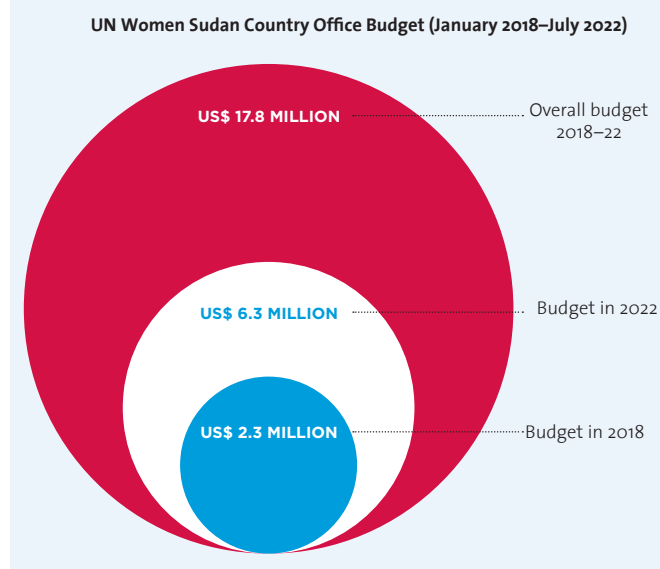
The primary intended users of this evaluation are the Country Office which will use the findings to develop, design and implement its new Strategic Note. Secondary users are expected to be the UN Women East and Southern Africa Regional Office, headquarters colleagues, national partners and others working in Sudan.

BACKGROUND ON UN WOMEN IN SUDAN

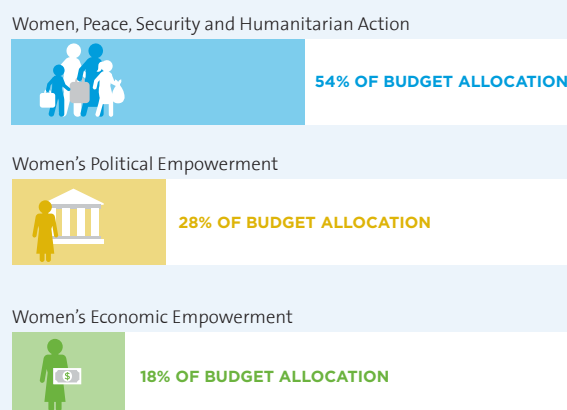
Sudan has undergone significant political changes in recent years: the 2018 revolution led to a transitional government; and, in October 2021, the military took over the transitional government. At the time of data collection for this evaluation, Sudan was ruled by a new Sovereign Council in the absence of a cabinet of Ministers. The military takeover has led to funding partners suspending aid. Plans for a transition from military to civilian rule were put on hold by the fighting that started on 15 April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces, which has resulted in thousands of injuries and hundreds of deaths and forced thousands to flee their homes. The 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview estimated that approximately 30 per cent of the population needed humanitarian assistance in 2022. The high incidence of conflict has led to a large population of refugees and internally displaced persons. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by the ongoing humanitarian crises in Sudan.

The Strategic Note is the main planning tool for the Country Office to articulate how it will implement UN Women's triple mandate across normative, coordination and operational work in Sudan. The Country Office's budget between 2018 and 2022 was \$5 17.75 million. The Country Office's largest area of work is Peace, Security and Humanitarian Action, accounting for 54 per cent of budget allocation; followed by Women's Political Empowerment (28 per cent) and Women's Economic Empowerment (18 per cent).

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS



UN Women Sudan largest area of work in terms of financial investment



METHOD

This CPE employed a non-experimental, theory-based, gender-responsive approach. In consultation with the Country Office, a reconstructed theory of change was developed and used as the basis for contribution analysis. Evaluation questions were developed using the theory of change and assessed against the criteria of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD/DAC), comprising relevance, coherence, effectiveness, sustainability, gender equality and human rights, and organizational efficiency. Multiple sources of data were obtained, and 160 stakeholders were consulted through interviews and focus groups (80 per cent women and 20 per cent men). The CPE followed UN Women's procedures to ensure high-quality evaluation processes and products and ethical conduct as outlined in the UN Women Evaluation Policy and Evaluation Handbook. All evaluation products were subject to quality review by IES management, a peer reviewer, the Evaluation Reference Group and the Evaluation Management Group.

CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSION 1: After a difficult start to the Strategic Note period, UN Women has been successful in reinstating itself as a key player within Sudan and has effectively mobilized resources. The Country Office has managed to rebuild donors' trust by demonstrating an ability to deliver and pivot quickly to the changing context. Country Office capacity has also improved with the recruitment of quality personnel seen as key experts in their fields. UN Women is now seen as a critical supporter of the women's movement and an advocate for gender in Sudan, committed to working with grassroots organizations. Other areas of its comparative advantage include its gender expertise and its ability to respond to political changes and willingness to take risks.

KEY FINDINGS

The Country Office has made important strides in its support to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. During the period under evaluation, the country and Country Office have also undergone changes. The size of the country, scope of challenges and positioning of UN Women in Sudan provides ample opportunity for the office's growth to achieve greater impact at scale. The Country Office has achieved key results in three thematic areas: supporting women's engagement with political and economic institutions; access to productive resources; and sustainable resource creation. It has also influenced duty bearers on women, peace and security issues. UN Women's programming is coherent with the priorities of the UN Country Team and other stakeholders, ensuring a broader enabling environment.

CONCLUSION 2: The Country Office has effectively delivered against its target outcomes, achieving key results in its three thematic areas. It has supported more women of all ages to fully engage with political and economic institutions; supported women to secure access to productive resources and engage in sustainable resource creation activities; and influenced duty bearers in their delivery of commitments on women, peace and security. The Country Office has also supported the broader enabling environment. In terms of coordination, it has contributed to the UNCT Gender Theme Group and capacity building of UN agencies on gender mainstreaming. UN Women's programming is generally coherent with the work of the UNCT and other key stakeholders and the Country Office has been working to coordinate its partners and the women's network.

CONCLUSION 3: The effectiveness of the Country Office's work could be improved by addressing some of UN Women's weaker areas. The Country Office's contribution to UNCT coordination could be strengthened, with promising areas of work including the UNCT Gender Theme Group, the Humanitarian Country Team and increased joint programming with other UN agencies. Links across thematic areas could be strengthened, moving towards larger, holistic programmes that tackle different components of gender equality and women's empowerment. The current political situation means work with the government is not possible, but normative work and activity at the macro level to complement micro-level programming is critical for delivering at scale and supporting sustainable, structural change. Project duration and scope need to be carefully considered to ensure projects are able to support sustainable outcomes, and participants are able to take forward project outputs and outcomes.

CONCLUSION 4: The Country Office has effectively managed the difficult context by being flexible and making the most of political and funding opportunities. However, its mandate is broad, and needs within the country are significant, affecting the Country Office's ability to deliver against its priorities.

Furthermore, while Country Office capacity has been significantly strengthened, limitations in the office's current capacity continue to affect all areas of its work, constraining what it is able to do. In the next Strategic note, the Country Office should further prioritize its areas of focus, building on its comparative advantage and its unique position and mandate to support women's empowerment through structural change. It should also seek to reach greater scale with limited resources by tilting more of its efforts towards its normative and coordination mandates, to complement its programmatic work.

CONCLUSION 5: The Country Office has effectively supported structural changes in gender equality and women's empowerment, successfully addressing cultural norms, power structures and the root causes of gender inequality. However, in some cases, short project duration and budgets limited the ability of the office to address social norms and support structural changes. While projects were generally designed considering the differential needs of different target populations, in some cases accessibility issues affected the target population's ability to participate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1.

Considering comparative advantage and evidence to guide decision-making

The Country Office to (a) prioritize efforts to focus UN Women's limited resources, building on needs assessments/context analysis that considers other stakeholders' programming and UN Women's particular comparative advantage, alongside the current conflict context, and document this process; and (b) assess the changes required to the strategy developed under the transitional government period; and (c) move towards more prioritized, consolidated, larger, longer-term projects.



RECOMMENDATION 2.

Strengthening office capacity

The Country Office to further strengthen its capacity by clarifying the management structure and considering the split of responsibilities between the Country Representative and other senior staff; filling gaps in finance/operations, monitoring and communications; and reviewing personnel time allocated to the office's humanitarian and coordination mandates.



RECOMMENDATION 3.

Strengthening coordination

The Country Office to invest more in its coordination mandate and ensure this is reflected in corporate and individual workplans.



RECOMMENDATION 4.

Maximizing intervention effectiveness and sustainability

When designing interventions, the Country Office to consider the scope and scale necessary to effect sustainable change and the barriers that may affect uptake of outcomes.



RECOMMENDATION 5.

Increasing accessibility for relevant participants and partners

When designing interventions, the Country Office to further consider potential barriers to accessibility and consider how activities can be best designed to maximize accessibility for all target participants.

