



ARE WE GETTING THERE?

A synthesis of UN system evaluations of SDG 5



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March 2024

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Are We Getting There? A synthesis of UN system evaluations of SDG 5 was a collaborative effort conducted by evaluation specialists, evaluation officers and independent consultants representing UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP. The report and overall synthesis process was informed and enriched by the participation of management and reference group members who actively contributed to the design and methodology of the synthesis, and provided their thoughtful comments and insights resulting in the report you find here today. The SDG 5 synthesis team is grateful to management and reference group members for investing significant time and effort to ensure that the report is of maximum value and use to the UN system and its partners.

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FOREWORD

The achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, enshrined in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, is essential if we are to achieve a more just, prosperous and sustainable future. Gender equality is not only a distinct goal, but also a catalyst for the advancement of the other goals. Put simply, if we cannot achieve Goal 5, then we risk the attainment of the SDGs more broadly. Regrettably, progress towards achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls has stalled and the world is not on track to achieve SDG 5 by 2030.

The urgency of advancing gender equality is further amplified by the often-overlapping crises we currently face. Climate change, with its disproportionate impact on women and girls, the gendered impact of COVID-19, conflict and humanitarian crises and other global challenges all present significant barriers to advancing SDG 5. Too often, progress in women's rights and gender equality faces significant pushback from entrenched power structures, fuelled by deeply rooted social norms.

Within this context and as we approach the mid-point in the SDGs, it is more important than ever to look at how we can get back on track and accelerate progress towards SDG 5. Agencies across the United Nations system work to advance SDG 5 through a variety of programmes, and its independent evaluation offices produce a significant number of reports each year pertaining to SDG 5.

Until now, however, there has been no synthesis of our collective UN evaluative evidence on achieving SDG 5. Together, we saw the value in gathering this evidence as a way of taking stock of lessons and identifying ways to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

This synthesis has been an inter-agency initiative between UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP. Our collaborative approach contributed to the depth and richness of the findings contained in this report. The synthesis drew on evaluations from 33 different UN entities. The report presents results and lessons across each of the nine SDG 5 targets. We invite you to delve into the targets that resonate most and to critically explore how the lessons can impact your work. To highlight the potential way forward, the report concludes with a set of implications for policymakers, programme implementers, donors and UN agencies that summarizes some of the key actions that can drive progress on SDG 5.

We hope that these results will serve as a catalyst for action by providing policymakers, programme implementers, donors, UN agencies and others with the evidence needed to champion and advance their work on achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

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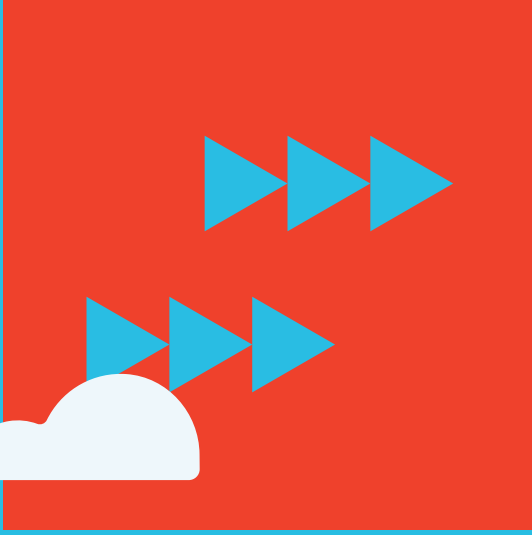
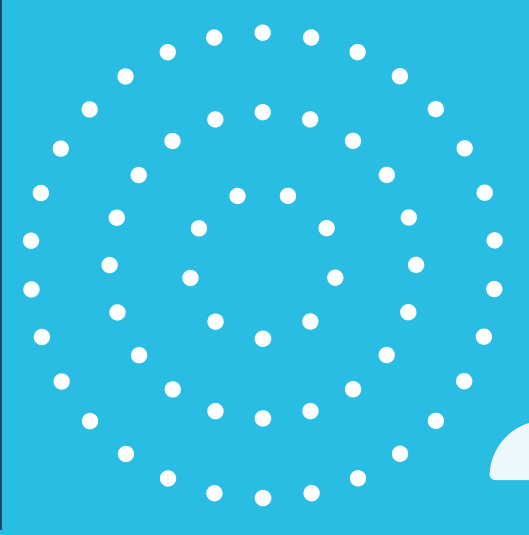
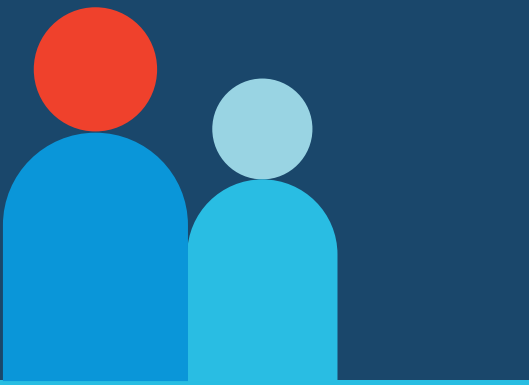
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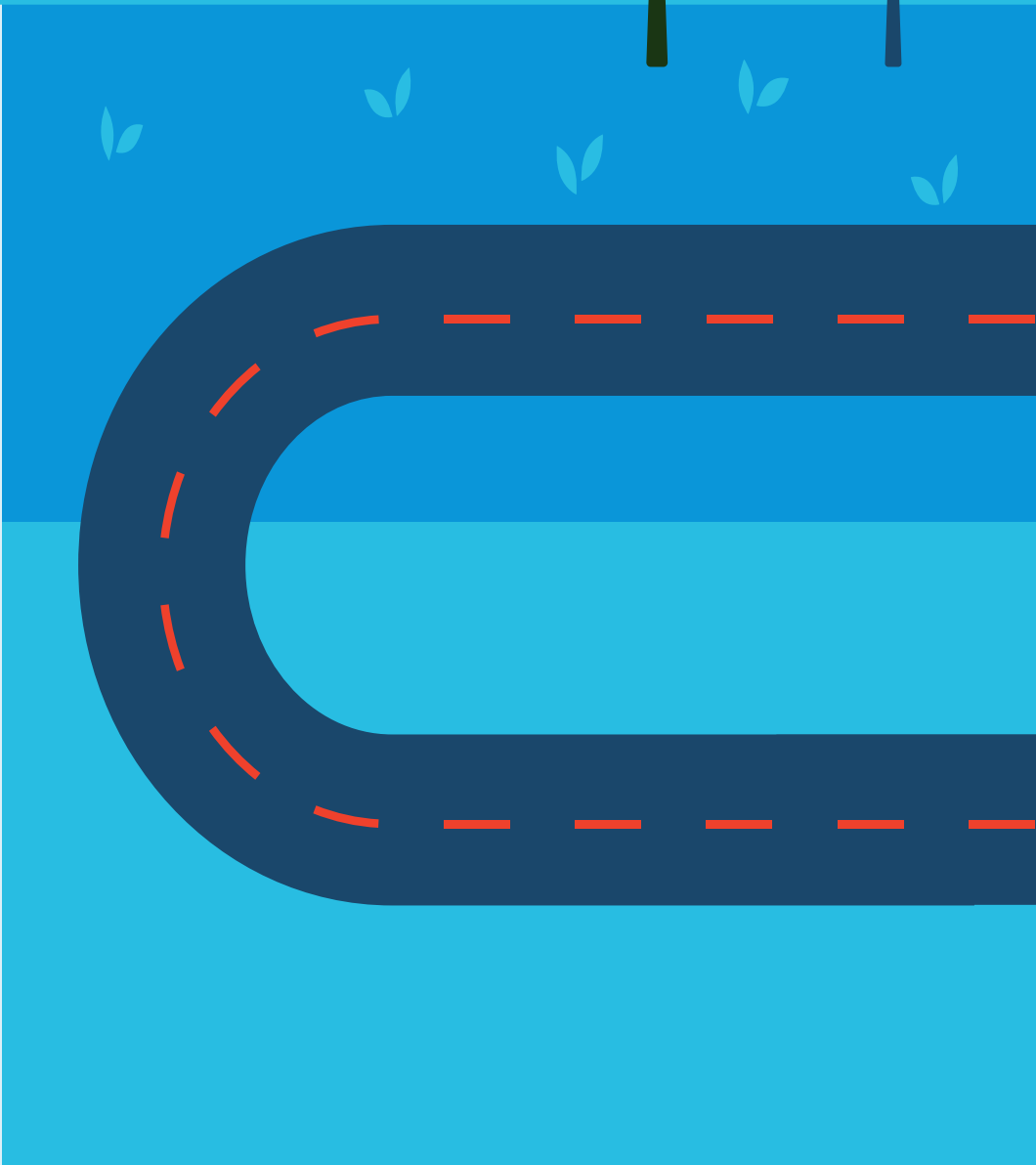
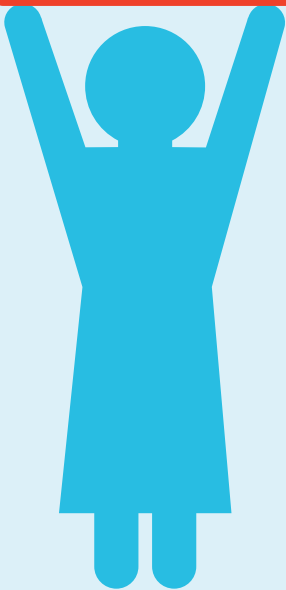
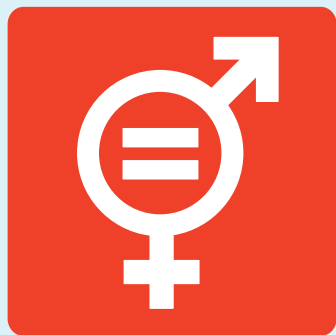
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ACRONYMS

ACRONYM	FULL NAME
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSO	Civil Society Organization
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OIOS	Office of Internal Oversight Services
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics.
UN AIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UN Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UNV	United Nations Volunteers
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



BACKGROUND

Progress on SDG 5 has stalled. Globally, no indicators have been met or almost met and only two are close to target. Countries lack 44 per cent of the data needed to track progress on SDG 5, and over 80 countries are missing data on at least one SDG 5 target.¹

Recent setbacks in progress, and even reversal in some areas, can be attributed to the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic; backlash against gender equality in some contexts; the increasing number of women and girls displaced or living in fragile or conflict-affected countries; and women and girls' increasing vulnerability to climate change, biodiversity loss and disasters.

Despite progress, gender-based discrimination in the labour force, politics and at home persists in many countries (SDG 5.1). COVID-19 has had an especially detrimental effect on rates of violence against women and girls through increased intimate partner violence and increased verbal and physical abuse (SDG 5.2). School closures and economic pressures during the pandemic helped maintain the pervasive practice of child marriage, and female genital mutilation continues, although there are signs of increasing opposition to the practice (SDG 5.3).² Similarly, the pandemic exacerbated the unequal division of time spent on unpaid care as women absorbed additional care responsibilities (SDG 5.4). Despite recent regression in some countries, progress on women's participation is stronger, with parity a distinct possibility if reforms and normative shifts continue (SDG 5.5). Interruptions in health services and access to contraception, along with backlash against women's reproductive health rights, have caused a drop in many measures of women's sexual and reproductive health (SDG 5.6).

Economic decline may also relate to COVID-19 dynamics, which caused more women than men to leave the workforce. Informal workers, who are predominantly women, were particularly at risk of exclusion from pandemic-response social protection programmes (SDG 5.a). While information and communication technologies are increasingly seen as essential, in many countries women have disproportionately limited access to these technologies (SDG 5.b). Unfortunately, the global response to the conditions of women and girls' lives is not proportionate to the problem – just 4.2 per cent of overseas development assistance is allocated to programmes to advance gender equality, and only 26 per cent of countries have comprehensive systems to track such spending from national budgets (SDG 5.c).³

Within this context, and at the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda, there was an opportunity for an inter-agency effort to take stock of lessons learned related to SDG 5 through a synthesis of UN system evaluations. The independent evaluation offices of UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP partnered to undertake this synthesis.

To contribute towards advancing SDG 5, the objectives of the synthesis were to:

- **Map existing UN system evaluation evidence on SDG 5 and its targets.** Identify what evaluation evidence had been collected and where evaluation gaps remain across the nine SDG 5 targets.
- **Synthesize evaluation evidence across SDG 5 evaluations.** Analyse barriers, enabling factors and lessons learned related to SDG 5 policies and programming.
- **Develop recommendations to advance and accelerate progress towards SDG 5 by 2030.**

Accordingly, a series of synthesis questions were developed:

1. What are the enabling factors and what has hindered progress towards achieving the SDG 5 targets?
2. What interventions and approaches to SDG 5 have worked well and which have not?
3. What policy and programme recommendations have been made to advance and accelerate progress towards SDG 5 by 2030?
4. Where is evaluation evidence the strongest and where are the main gaps in evaluation evidence across the nine SDG 5 targets?
5. What lessons have been learned regarding different UN activities and approaches to advance SDG 5?

METHODOLOGY

The initiative was a qualitative synthesis drawing on evaluation reports from the UN system. To guide the search and screening process, eight inclusion criteria were used to identify relevant evaluation reports. The primary source of evaluations was from publicly available UN agency evaluation databases. Overall, a total of 619 evaluation reports were identified that met the inclusion criteria.

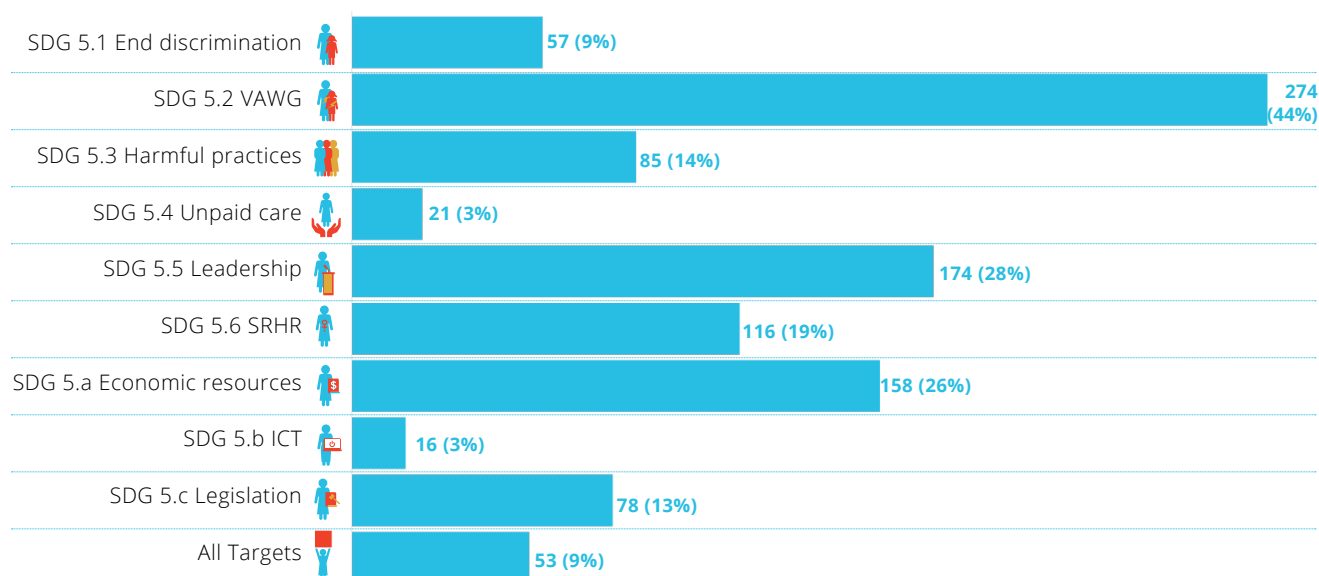
A target sample size of 300 was selected based on feasibility, time frame and the desire to reflect insights from as many evaluations as possible without posing a risk to the analysis. The achieved sample was 295 evaluation reports.

EVALUATION MAPPING

The SDG 5 evaluation universe included 619 evaluation reports from 33 different UN entities. The majority, 64 per cent, of evaluations were project/programme/thematic evaluations, while country portfolio evaluations accounted for 27 per cent and institutional effectiveness/strategy evaluations accounted for 9 per cent.

Evaluation reports were tagged with up to three SDG 5 targets. The most covered target was target 5.2 on ending violence against women (274 reports, 44 per cent), followed by 5.5 on leadership and participation (174 reports, 28 per cent) and 5.a on economic resources (158 reports, 26 per cent). Targets 5.4 on recognizing unpaid care and 5.b on technology for women's empowerment had the least evaluative evidence available (21 reports and 16 reports respectively, approximately 3 per cent each).

Number and per cent of evaluations by SDG 5 target (reports tagged with up to three relevant targets; N = 619)



RESULTS

The report presents the main results for each SDG 5 target. This includes a description of the evidence base; background and context; main interventions and approaches; enabling and hindering factors; evidence on what's working and not working; and finally, a set of lessons derived from the analysis. The results section of the report does not need to

be read in order: readers are encouraged to jump to the targets that are most relevant for their work.

An overall summary across targets of the enabling and hindering factors, evidence on what's working and not working, recurring recommendations and gender mainstreaming is presented below.

Enabling and hindering factors

The synthesis found a variety of enabling and hindering factors across each SDG 5 target; however, several factors cut across many of the targets and are highlighted here.



Social norms: Harmful social norms were continuously cited as a barrier to progress across SDG 5 targets. This includes social norms that normalize violence against women and girls, perpetuate harmful practices, limit leadership opportunities, reduce access to health services or ascribe domestic work as a woman's responsibility.



Government commitment and institutional readiness: Political will and institutional capacity to develop, enact and implement gender-responsive legislation and policies are critical enablers to advance progress across SDG 5 targets.



Financing for gender equality: Financing for gender equality was cited as a major barrier to achieving gender equality outcomes across the targets. Challenges in increasing the volume and duration of funding available for gender equality as well as the gender-responsive allocation of funds were both cited in the reports reviewed.



COVID-19: In recent evaluations, the pandemic was frequently mentioned as a hindering factor by exacerbating gender inequalities; increasing the unpaid care and domestic work burden faced by women; increasing rates of gender-based violence; and disrupting services critical to women and girls. At the same time, the response to the pandemic introduced new modalities and tools which can be harnessed to advance SDG 5.

EVIDENCE ON WHAT WORKS AND DOES NOT WORK

Evidence on what works and does not work explores the effectiveness of identified interventions and approaches. A summary of these results across all the targets is presented here. Following the evidence base, effectiveness is often described in terms of influencing outputs, processes and approaches. Where evidence is available, contribution towards outcomes is included.

Policy work



UN work in the normative sphere has contributed to advancing gender-responsive and non-discriminatory legislation on participation in public life, violence against women, employment and economic benefits, marriage and family law, and other areas. Framing issues, engaging civil society, constituency building, encouraging national ownership and long-term relationship building with policymakers contributed to policy and legislative reform in different contexts. Technical support was effective at integrating or strengthening gender equality in national and regional plans, and the production of knowledge products supported policy development by providing credible evidence on what works. More remains to be done, particularly to support the implementation of legislation and policies through fostering institutional cultures of gender responsiveness among policymakers and implementers; advocacy to influence sentiment around gender-responsive policies; and capacity strengthening of duty bearers and service providers.

Programming



Integrated and holistic programming is effective in addressing the complexity of gender equality issues and highlights a strength of inter-agency programming. For example, sexual and reproductive health and rights programmes were more comprehensive and effective when integrated with maternal, newborn and child health, HIV/AIDS and violence against women and girls' services. Across policies and programmes, the use of a gender lens is not automatic and requires advocacy, technical support and knowledge generation. There have been some missed opportunities to address gender equality in unpaid care, economic empowerment, access to services and public participation in social protection policies. The synthesis also found that, at times, even in cases where programmes were effective, the scale was insufficient to generate widespread change. In some cases, the reach of services, cash or goods through social protection systems, economic empowerment programmes or other initiatives was relatively small.

Knowledge, data and research



The use of knowledge, data and research to support advocacy, technical support and capacity strengthening was a common practice. Knowledge products provided credible backing to advocacy and policy work, enhanced service delivery and fostered knowledge exchange among stakeholders. Knowledge products were more useful when contextualized to local circumstances or designed for specific programmatic purposes. Regional programming and South-South cooperation facilitated knowledge exchange and strengthened programming. These approaches allowed stakeholders to draw on the experiences of similar interventions in comparable contextual environments.

Leave no one behind



The principle of leave no one behind was recognized as central to the UN's work and was integrated into most programmes and evaluations; however, there are insufficient operational frameworks for systematically implementing the principle. Guidance on mapping less visible groups; how to ensure participation across the programme cycle; addressing intersecting forms of discrimination; and measuring outcomes for those at risk of being left behind is needed.

Partnerships



Partnerships with civil society organizations (CSOs), including grassroots women's organizations, were seen as essential for advancing SDG 5. Evidence suggested that capacity strengthening with civil society may be more effective when accomplished through formal partnerships rather than ad hoc engagement; however, some grassroots organizations found UN procedures to be too demanding, limiting their participation and results. Partnerships with the private sector have been effective in some areas, such as advancing technology for gender equality and women's economic empowerment; however, there is opportunity for greater private sector engagement across SDG 5. Partnerships with the media have been a productive strategy to raise the visibility of important policy issues.

Changing social norms



Engaging religious leaders and champions such as sports figures and other community leaders was an effective mechanism for reaching and influencing community members. Male engagement through capacity strengthening was a common intervention with some reported successes; however, there was limited evaluative evidence of longer-term outcomes of male engagement.

Humanitarian response



Although progress is being made, UN agencies' attention to the needs and rights of women and girls in humanitarian response is focused on a limited number of areas, such as protection and gender-based violence, and tends to reduce after initial needs assessments. Achieving SDG 5 targets requires their more sustained and comprehensive prioritization in humanitarian settings, including through stronger accountability, resourcing and expertise.

Monitoring and evaluation



Project-level monitoring and evaluation often focused on the output level rather than measuring contributions to longer-term gender equality outcomes. There is an opportunity to incorporate more innovative monitoring and evaluation approaches to measure contribution to complex goals, such as policy advocacy and social norm change. Theories of change were seen as effective tools for linking interventions to gender equality outcomes and exploring complex causal pathways within programming, but these were not always used at the project level.

Recurring recommendations

Recurring recommendations from the sampled evaluation reports were analysed to identify opportunities for advancing SDG 5. A number of common themes emerged across the targets.



Prioritize those most at risk of getting left behind, for example, through expanding support and services for vulnerable groups; enhancing participation in policymaking; and strengthening their capacity



Strengthening **inter-agency collaboration**



Generate knowledge, data and research; closing evidence gaps and sharing knowledge; and addressing harmful social norms within programming



Form strong partnerships with diverse stakeholders, including governments, civil society, academia and the private sector



Enhance monitoring and evaluation methods to accurately assess programme effectiveness and impact

GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Across UN agencies, there is great variation in the degree of gender mainstreaming in internal and programmatic operations. Many agencies are reported to have made great strides in gender awareness, analysis, guidance and reporting, as well as in internal parity and equality across genders. Gender working groups have been widely used as an effective instrument for internal gender advocacy and policy in UN agencies. Those coordinated at senior management levels have had considerable influence, in some cases, producing an agency's first gender strategy, overseeing gender training programmes, or producing guidance for gender analysis and project design. Evaluation case studies found that gender analyses in emergency response have improved in quality over time; however, gender mainstreaming in humanitarian action is weaker and inconsistent across the different phases of response and programme areas.

Strategies to better mainstream gender drawn from the evaluations include recognizing that gender mainstreaming is the responsibility of all

personnel, not just gender officers or advisers; incorporating gender in theories of change, especially at outcome or impact levels; undertaking gender needs assessments to inform programme design; direct, specific feedback on reports, plans, analyses, etc.; mentoring between more senior and junior women staff members; and developing regional gender strategies.

EVIDENCE GAPS

There is an imbalance of evaluative evidence across SDG 5 targets with some target areas, notably the recognition of unpaid care and the use of technology to empower women and girls, having limited evidence to draw from. At the programmatic level, more evidence is needed on how both harmful and positive social norms impact women and girls, and how harmful norms can be changed. There is a gap in measuring the outcomes of engaging men and boys and other family members, which has great potential to be gender transformative but requires stronger and more innovative evaluation approaches.

Stakeholder convening, while a common intervention, was infrequently evaluated in-depth, leaving room to better understand how this intervention contributes to broader outcomes and how it can be improved. There are opportunities to conduct additional evaluations in areas with limited evaluative evidence, including understanding social norm change in relation to ending violence against women and girls, women's political participation and economic empowerment; identifying effective approaches for male engagement in addressing masculinities, eliminating harmful practices, ending violence against women and girls and supporting domestic work; and the use of ICT to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

Several opportunities to synthesize available evidence on key topics also emerged, such as in ending violence against women and girls. Potential sub-topics include violence against women in humanitarian and/or conflict situations, violence against women in politics, intimate partner violence, CSO engagement, prevention strategies and response services. A second opportunity is a dedicated synthesis on humanitarian action delving further into the unique challenges of pursuing SDG 5 targets in conflict and disaster settings. A third opportunity is women's leadership, with potential sub-topics including women in national politics, private sector leadership, community-level leadership and women's leadership within the peace and security sector.

Overall lessons

Drawing on the available evidence, the synthesis identified key, overall lessons that cut across the SDG 5 targets.



Leveraging the diverse expertise of UN agencies through close collaboration builds effective integrated programmes to address gender equality challenges.

Multisectoral programmes enrich programme development, support knowledge dissemination, and increase awareness and access to essential services.



UN agencies, especially with forward planning, have the power to define issues, frame dialogues and influence policymakers. Formal as well as informal spaces for dialogue provide opportunities to introduce linkages between issues and explore common priorities.



SDG 5 cannot be achieved without the partnership of CSOs, including grassroots women's organizations. CSOs play key roles in reaching those furthest behind, advocating for policy change, holding policymakers and duty bearers accountable, and as service providers.



UN agencies play an important role as knowledge, data and research producers, curators and brokers. Tailored and contextualized knowledge products enhance usability and support localized uptake of research results.



Regional programming and South-South cooperation provide essential nodes of knowledge exchange on how to strengthen programmes. These approaches allow stakeholders to draw on the experiences of similar interventions in comparable contextual environments.



Intentional strategies are necessary to reach the furthest behind; however, there are insufficient conceptual and operational frameworks for implementing the leave no one behind principle. Programme designers and implementers need guidance in mapping less visible groups of people, ensuring their participation and addressing intersectionalities.



Greater attention to project monitoring and evaluation is needed to learn how to reach complex goals and longer-term gender equality outcomes, such as in policy advocacy and social norm change. Theories of change, which can be effective tools for linking interventions to gender equality outcomes and exploring complex causal pathways within programming, are not always used at the project level.



There may be missed opportunities in working with the private sector. Private sector engagement is not a common strategy across SDG 5 targets, except for Target 5.b on enabling technology for women's empowerment and Target 5.a on economic empowerment. This pattern suggests there is considerable room to expand collaboration with businesses, brands and related associations in pursuit of progress on SDG 5.



Financing for gender equality is a critical gap. Meaningful and sustained financial commitments and strengthened budgeting processes are fundamental to support implementation of legislation, policies and gender-responsive services to advance gender equality across all SDG 5 targets.



Programmes are largely failing to engage men and boys in programming on key issues. However, there are innovative approaches to reaching men and boys that have proven effective and other approaches that need rigorous impact evaluation so that successful strategies can be scaled up.



Achieving SDG 5 requires a more sustained and comprehensive prioritization of the targets in humanitarian settings. Although progress is being made, attention to the needs and rights of women and girls in humanitarian response is focused on a limited number of sectors and tends to reduce after initial needs assessments.



Individual agencies glean greater benefits from UN-wide tools for gender mainstreaming when they are well integrated. Universal tools and reporting mechanisms are used in different ways and with varying levels of success by different agencies.



Harmful social norms are perhaps the greatest impediment to progress across SDG 5 targets, both in communities and among officials and service providers.



Major disruptive events such as the COVID-19 pandemic call for agility and flexibility. COVID-19 interrupted access to and delivery of services (e.g. sexual and reproductive health and rights [SRHR] services), livelihoods, and policy development and implementation. At the same time, collective responses to the pandemic introduced new modalities and tools (e.g. digital payment systems) and brought a renewed focus to social protection systems (to support citizens during the crisis) that can be harnessed to advance SDG 5.



It is necessary to systematize certain approaches to overcome the effects of turnover in government staffing, elected officials and service providers. This is particularly true in programmes conducting capacity strengthening work, social norms shifting and policy development. The most successful programmes worked to institutionalize training and awareness raising for newcomers on topics such as gender budgeting, legal frameworks for gender equality and reproductive rights.

THE WAY FORWARD

The synthesis offers several implications to guide the work of UN agencies, policymakers, practitioners, and public and private donors. The primary intended users of this synthesis are the UN agencies involved in supporting SDG 5, notably UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP, along with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, UN Resident Coordinators, national governments, regional economic commissions, CSOs, women's organizations, donors and others who support implementation of SDG 5.

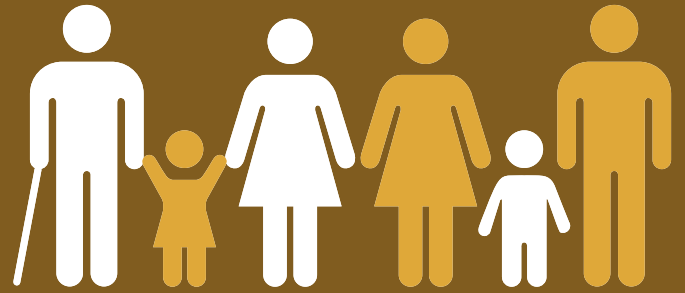
UN agencies should continue their role in the normative sphere and support governments, civil society and other stakeholders in the implementation of gender-responsive legislation and policies. UN agencies can also strengthen and promote integrated programming; develop practical frameworks to support programmes that benefit those at risk of being left behind; and strengthen outcome and impact measurement. Critically, UN agencies can support the costing of gender equality goals so that realistic plans, investments and benchmarks can be made.

Policymakers can integrate gender-equality considerations in the design and development of legislation, policies, infrastructure projects, services and regulations; foster cross-ministerial collaboration; include the voices and perspectives of civil society and women's mechanisms; and prioritize leave no one behind principles during the policymaking process. Policymakers can also integrate and institutionalize

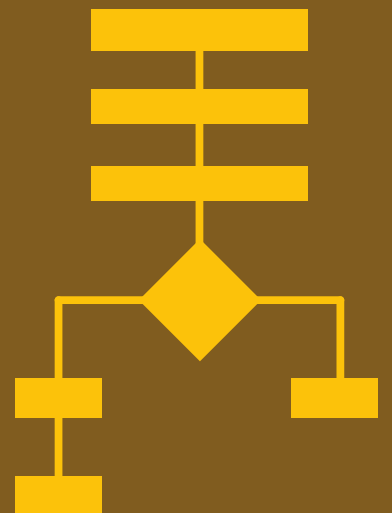
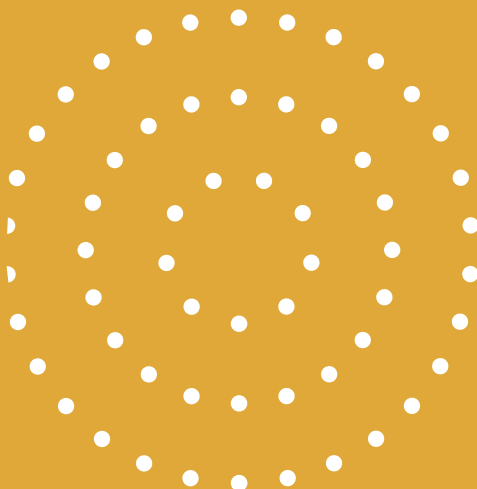
gender into capacity strengthening initiatives for officials, duty bearers and service providers to foster gender-responsive work cultures and support implementation of gender-responsive legislation. Tracking commitments to gender equality through budget allocations, expenditure and gender audits is also key to help address the funding barrier.

Programme implementers can integrate gender equality into programme design and include gender-equality objectives at the outcome level or higher, where relevant. Theories of change can be adopted to guide programme implementation and support monitoring and evaluation. Programme implementers should systematically conduct gender-responsive and gender transformative needs assessments as part of the planning and implementation process, including in humanitarian settings. Work to address root causes of gender equality, especially harmful social norms, by engaging men, religious leaders, cultural figures and other influential leaders should also be pursued. Finally, programme implementers are well placed to continue amplifying community voices, particularly women from marginalized populations, conflict settings and those facing intersectional discrimination.

Donors can provide funding to longer-term programmes that support the achievement and measurement of intermediate gender equality outcomes and target-level impact, and provide flexibility to programme implementers to adjust programme strategies and incorporate real-time feedback. Donors are also well placed to help increase the quality and volume of funding for gender equality, including within the humanitarian sphere, and can require programme implementers to incorporate gender equality into proposals, programme documents, reports and evaluations.



SECTION 1: BACKGROUND



INTRODUCTION

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted in 2015. Goal 5 of this framework is to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” and includes nine targets with 18 indicators to meet this goal (see Annex 4). While progress has been made on some of these targets, notable gaps and barriers remain. Notably, the COVID-19 pandemic has stalled and even undone some of the progress towards SDG 5.

At the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda and amid pandemic recovery, there was an opportunity for an inter-agency effort to take stock of lessons regarding SDG 5 through a synthesis of UN system evaluations related to SDG 5. Since the start of the 2030 Agenda, numerous evaluations have been conducted related to SDG 5, across many UN agencies; however, there has not yet been a synthesis to compile, triangulate and bring together the evidence and lessons from these evaluations. UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP undertook this synthesis of the evaluation evidence and lessons on SDG 5 to support learning and decision-making for future programming related to SDG 5 and to contribute to the wider body of knowledge on progress towards SDG 5.

The primary users of this synthesis are intended to be the UN agencies involved in supporting SDG 5, notably UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP. Additional users include the United Nations Economic and Social Council, UN Resident Coordinators, national governments, regional economic commissions, CSOs, women’s organizations, donors and others who support implementation of SDG 5.⁴

OVERVIEW OF SDG 5

Gender is integrated throughout the SDGs, but SDG 5 – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls – focuses on nine targets with 18 indicators and sub-indicators in priority areas for women and girls. Table 1 shows the targets and indicators along with a summary status of progress at the global level, as reported in *The UN Women and UNDESA Gender Snapshot 2023*.⁵






Worldwide, countries lack 44 per cent of the data needed to track progress against SDG 5 with over 80 countries missing data on at least one SDG 5 target.⁶ Where data is available, progress on SDG 5 is lacking. Globally, no indicators have been met or almost met and only two are close to target. Eight are a moderate distance away from the target and four are far or very far from the target. Four indicators have insufficient data at the global level to assess progress.⁷ Recent setbacks in progress, and even reversal in some areas, can be attributed to the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic; the backlash against gender equality in some contexts; the increasing number of women and girls living in or displaced from fragile or conflict-affected countries; and women and girls’ increasing vulnerability to climate change, biodiversity loss and disasters.

Despite progress, gender-based discrimination in the labour force, politics and at home persists in many countries (SDG 5.1). COVID-19 has had an especially detrimental effect on rates of violence against women and girls (SDG 5.2) through increased intimate partner violence and increased verbal and physical abuse. School closures and economic pressures during the pandemic helped to maintain the pervasive practice of child marriage, and female genital mutilation (FGM) continues; however, there are signs of increasing opposition to the practice (SDG 5.3).⁸ Similarly, the pandemic exacerbated the unequal division of time spent on unpaid care as women absorbed additional care responsibilities (SDG 5.4).

Table 1
SDG 5 targets, indicators and world status

TARGETS AND INDICATORS	GLOBAL PROGRESS
5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere	
5.1.1 Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex ⁹	Moderate distance to target
5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation	
5.2.1 Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age	Moderate distance to target
5.2.2 Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence	Insufficient data
5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation	
5.3.1 Proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18	Moderate distance to target
5.3.2 Proportion of girls and women aged 15-49 years who have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting, by age	Insufficient data
5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate	
5.4.1 Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location	Far from target
5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life	
5.5.1 Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments	Moderate distance to target
5.5.1 Proportion of seats held by women in (b) local governments	Close to target
5.5.2 Proportion of women in managerial positions	Moderate distance to target
5.6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences	
5.6.1 Proportion of women aged 15-49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care	Far from target
5.6.2 Number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee women aged 15-49 years access to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education	Close to target
5.a Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws	
5.a.1 (a) Proportion of total agricultural population with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land, by sex; and (b) share of women among owners or rights-bearers of agricultural land, by type of tenure	Insufficient data
5.a.2 Proportion of countries where the legal framework (including customary law) guarantees women's equal rights to land ownership and/or control	Insufficient data
5.b Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women	
5.b.1 Proportion of women who own a mobile telephone	Far from target
5.b.1 Proportion of men who own a mobile telephone	Moderate distance to target
5.c Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels	
5.c.1 Proportion of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment	Very far from target

Legend

 Close to target	 Moderate distance to target	 Far from target	 Very far from target	 Insufficient data
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Source: UN Women and UNDESA, *Sustainable Development Goals: Gender Snapshot 2023*

Despite recent regressions in some countries, progress in women's participation is stronger, with parity a distinct possibility if reforms and normative shifts continue (SDG 5.5). Interruptions in health services and access to contraception, along with backlash against women's reproductive health rights, has caused a drop in many measures of women's sexual and reproductive health (SDG 5.6). Despite progress towards legal guarantees of women's rights to access sexual and reproductive health services and bodily autonomy, there continues to be a significant mismatch with women's de facto abilities to make decisions about their own fertility and sexual behaviour. Economic decline may also relate to COVID-19 dynamics, which caused more women than men to leave the workforce. Informal workers, who are predominantly women, were particularly at risk of exclusion from pandemic-response social protection programmes (SDG 5.a). While information and communication technologies are increasingly seen as essential, in many countries women have disproportionately limited access to these technologies. However, the pandemic spurred investment in digital infrastructure for administration of public programmes and services in some countries and triggered innovations in reaching typically hard-to-reach populations, creating new opportunities to recover lost ground and increase progress (SDG 5.b). Unfortunately, the global response to the conditions of women and girls' lives is not proportionate to the problem – just 4.2 per cent of overseas development assistance is allocated to programmes to advance gender equality, and only 26 per cent of countries have comprehensive systems to track such spending from national budgets (SDG 5.c).¹⁰

OBJECTIVES, PURPOSE AND SYNTHESIS QUESTIONS

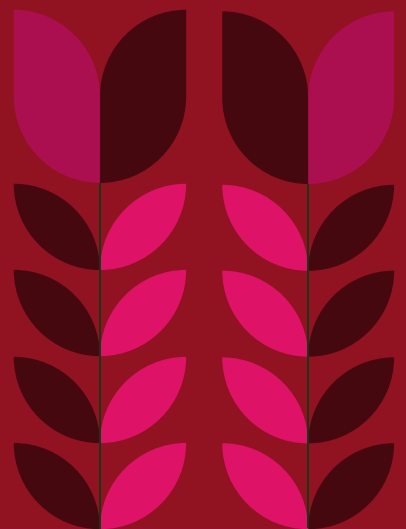
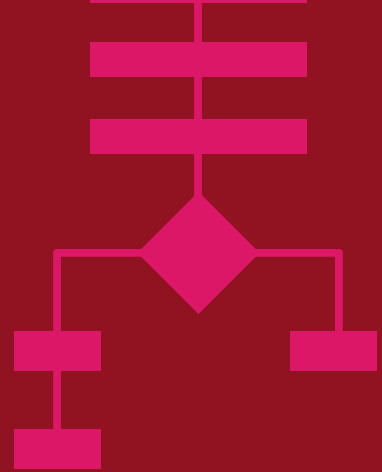
It is within the above context that the Synthesis of UN System Evaluations of SDG 5 was conducted. The purpose of the synthesis was to gather evaluative evidence and lessons on SDG 5 to support learning and decision-making for future programming related to SDG 5 and contribute to the wider body of knowledge on progress towards achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

The objectives of the synthesis were to:

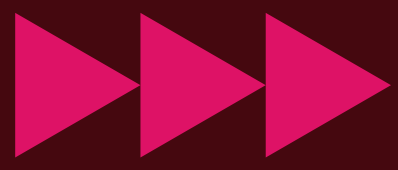
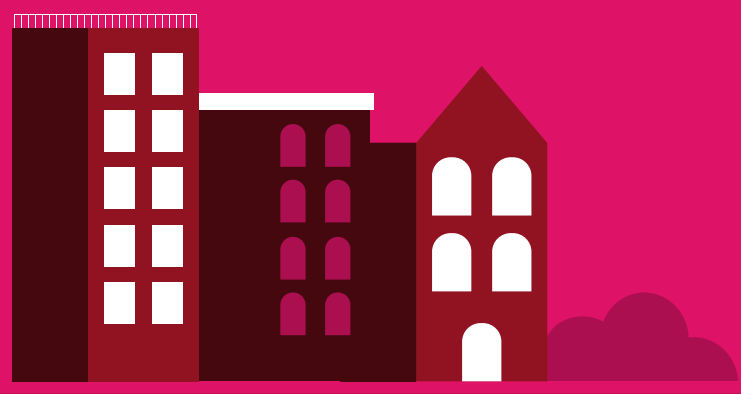
- Map existing UN system evaluation evidence on SDG 5 and its targets. Identifying what evaluation evidence had been collected and where evaluation gaps remain across the nine SDG 5 targets.
- Synthesize evaluation evidence across SDG 5 evaluations, analysing barriers, enabling factors and lessons learned related to SDG 5 policies and programming.
- Develop lessons and recommendations to advance and accelerate progress towards SDG 5 by 2030.

Accordingly, a series of synthesis questions were developed to guide the synthesis initiative:

1. What are the enabling factors and what has hindered progress towards achieving the SDG 5 targets?
2. What interventions and approaches to SDG 5 have worked well and which have not?
3. What policy and programme recommendations have been made to advance and accelerate progress towards SDG 5 by 2030?
4. Where is evaluation evidence the strongest and where are the main gaps in evaluation evidence across the nine SDG 5 targets?
5. What lessons have been learned regarding different UN activities and approaches to advance SDG 5?



SECTION 2: METHODOLOGY



This section presents a brief description of the methodology for the synthesis. Please see Annex 1 for a full description of the methodology.

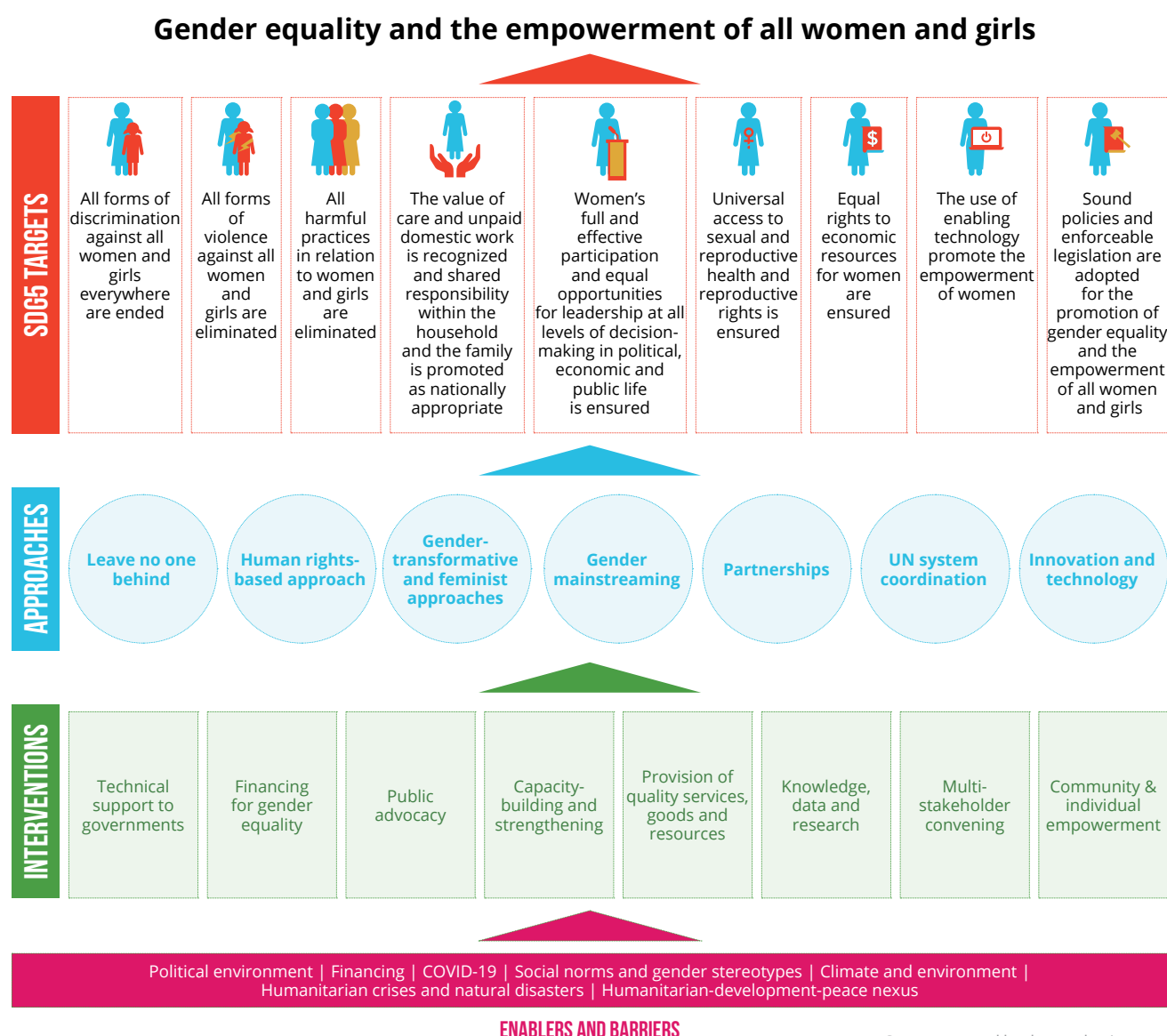
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

To support a cohesive synthesis process, a conceptual framework (see Figure 1) to portray the logic of UN contributions to the achievement of SDG 5 was developed. This was accomplished through review of the strategic plans and theories of change of UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP and identification of commonalities across spheres of activity and programmatic approaches.

The conceptual framework is designed to support the synthesis analytical framework and will inform the analysis process. The framework was designed to be adapted in response to the data and evidence that arose through the synthesis; however, the framework was found to be comprehensive and no modifications were made.

Figure 1

Conceptual framework for the SDG 5 evaluation synthesis



Source: created by the synthesis team

INCLUSION CRITERIA

A number of criteria were used to determine the inclusion of evaluations into the synthesis. These eight criteria are depicted in Figure 2 and fully defined in Annex 1.

SEARCH STRATEGY AND REPORT SCREENING

The primary source of evaluations came from publicly available UN agency evaluation databases.¹¹ The general search strategy consisted of applying broad search terms and categories/tags, followed by more specific search terms related to specific SDG 5 targets (see Annex 1). However, given the different search functionalities of different UN evaluation databases, the general search strategy

was modified to suit each database's functions. The specific search strategies for each database were recorded to allow for replication.

Following dissemination of the synthesis inception report, a list of identified evaluations was shared with relevant agencies' evaluation offices. Each evaluation office had the opportunity to identify any further evaluation reports that potentially met the inclusion criteria, which had not been identified through the evaluation mapping process. The evaluations identified were screened against the inclusion criteria to make the final eligibility determination. Figure 3 depicts the search and screening process leading to the final number of evaluation reports included.

Figure 2

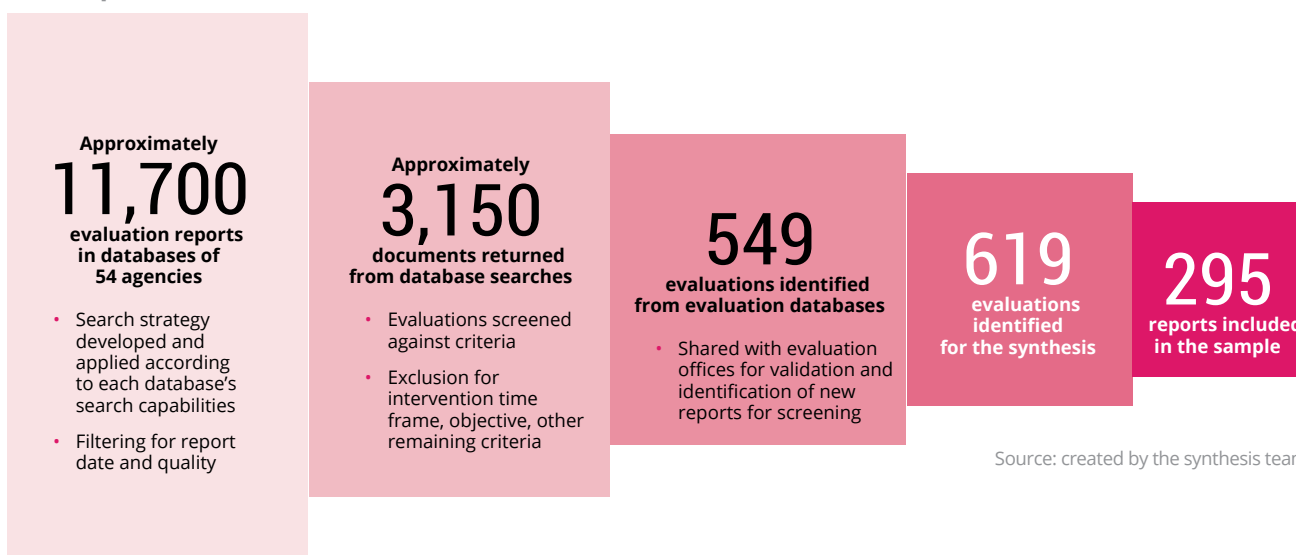
Evaluation inclusion criteria

<p>Objective</p> <p>Strong evaluative or programmatic focus on an SDG 5 target</p>	<p>Evaluation publication year</p> <p>Between 2018 and 2022</p>	<p>Intervention time frame</p> <p>Majority of programme within SDG period</p>	<p>Quality</p> <p>Meet UN quality assurance criteria</p>
<p>Geographic scope</p> <p>Global, regional, national and subnational</p>	<p>Evaluation type</p> <p>Programme, country, regional, thematic, impact</p>	<p>Implementing agencies</p> <p>UN agencies and economic commissions</p>	<p>Language</p> <p>English, French, Spanish, Arabic and Russian</p>

Source: created by the synthesis team

Figure 3

Search process and result



Source: created by the synthesis team

SAMPLING METHODOLOGY

The evaluation search and screening process yielded 619 evaluations that met the inclusion criteria. As stated by the Cochrane Effective Practice and Organisation of Care group, “the inclusion of a large number of primary studies with a high volume of data in a qualitative synthesis can threaten the quality of the synthesis” by making it difficult to undertake the level of detailed analysis often required in a qualitative synthesis.¹² As a result, and to complete the synthesis within the given time frame, the synthesis employed a sampling methodology to sample from the evaluation reports identified during the mapping process.

A target sample size of 300 evaluations was selected based on feasibility, time frame and the desire to reflect insights from as many evaluations as possible without posing a risk to the analysis. The achieved sample was 295 reports (several duplicates were found and removed, and one report was re-assessed against the objective criterion and removed). Evaluation reports were sampled across two strata: geographic region and evaluation type. Stratifying by region was designed to ensure geographic representation and to include a variety of programmatic contexts. Stratifying by evaluation type was designed to ensure representation of different evidence sources which each provide unique evidence towards the synthesis questions. There were two exceptions to the sampling methodology: first, evaluations conducted at the global level ($n = 87$) were all included in the sample;¹³ and second, each agency from which an evaluation was identified will have at least one evaluation report in the sample.¹⁴

A full description of the sampling methodology and results are presented in Annex 1.

LIMITATIONS

There are certain limitations to the comprehensiveness and validity of the results. First, as demonstrated by the evaluation mapping results, some targets have limited evaluative evidence. Evidence for these targets is included in the synthesis but impacted the ability to draw firm conclusions.

The evidence base is discussed in the evaluation mapping section and at the start of each target section in the results. Additionally, across all targets, recent innovations, interventions and influencing factors (such as the effects of pre and post COVID-19) may not be fully explored in evaluations within the time period covered by the synthesis.

Second, the scope of the synthesis does not encompass evaluations outside of the UN system, such as those conducted by governments, academia, think tanks or civil society. Consequently, the results may not reflect the evidence or perspectives from non-UN actors or be able to draw on these sources to potentially fill evidence gaps within the UN system. The voices of beneficiaries and partners, including grassroots organizations, are captured to the extent that they are captured within the identified evaluations.

Third, it is possible that not all relevant evaluations from the UN system have been discovered through the search methodology. Reaching out to relevant UN agencies to validate the identified evaluations and suggest additional reports that may have been missed helped mitigate this limitation.

Fourth, few impact evaluations with scientific designs including counterfactuals were discovered, limiting the rigour of the evidence available to draw conclusions about intervention impact. Evidence from impact evaluations is highlighted under the relevant targets and contribution towards outcomes is described where evidence is available.

Finally, while necessary to manage the scope of the synthesis, the use of a sampling methodology limits the comprehensiveness of the synthesis as not all relevant pieces of evidence will be reviewed. This was mitigated through a representative sampling methodology and large sample size, but there is a risk that a potentially salient report will not have been sampled.

Please see Annex 1 for the full methodology, which includes additional information on the screening process, quality assurance, sampling methodology and the thematic coding approach.



SECTION 3: EVALUATION MAPPING



Overall, a total of 619 evaluation reports from 33 different UN entities met the inclusion criteria. Predictably by their mandate, UN Women contributed the most to the evaluative evidence on SDG 5 programming, followed by UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and WFP.

Inter-agency evaluations were recorded as a distinct category and made up 10 per cent of the evaluation universe (see Table 2). Five agencies/economic commissions are only captured under the inter-agency evaluation category: ECA, ESCAP, ESCWA, OCHA and UNDRR.

Table 2

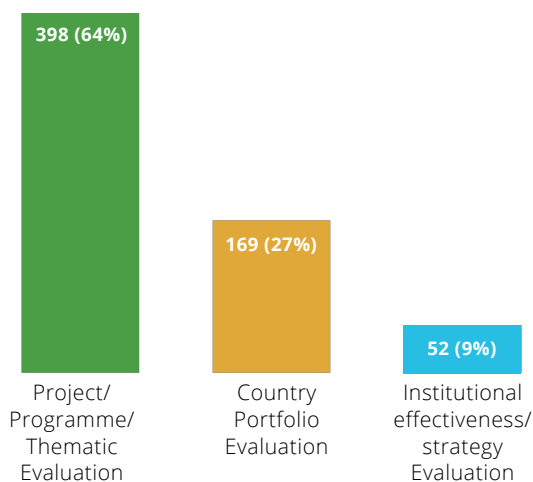
Number (and per cent) of evaluations per agency

Agency	Total		Agency	Total	
UN Women	142	22.9%	UNRWA	4	0.6%
UNDP	100	16.2%	UNCTAD	3	0.5%
UNICEF	87	14.1%	UNEP	3	0.5%
UNFPA	80	12.9%	UNHCR	3	0.5%
Inter-agency Evaluation	62	10.0%	ECLAC	2	0.3%
WFP	23	3.7%	WHO	2	0.3%
UNODC	21	3.4%	Green Climate Fund	1	0.2%
ILO	20	3.2%	IFAD	1	0.2%
IOM	14	2.3%	International Trade Centre	1	0.2%
OHCHR	14	2.3%	UN AIDS	1	0.2%
FAO	10	1.6%	UN DPI	1	0.2%
UN Habitat	7	1.1%	UNCDF	1	0.2%
UNESCO	6	1.0%	UNIDO	1	0.2%
OIOS	4	0.6%	UNV	1	0.2%
UNECE	4	0.6%	Total	619	100%

EVALUATION TYPE, GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION, YEAR AND LANGUAGE

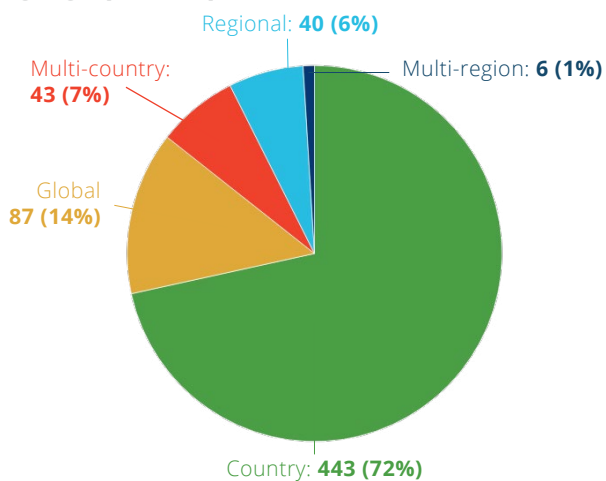
The majority of the evaluations were project/programme/thematic evaluations (64 per cent), while country portfolio evaluations accounted for 27 per cent, and institutional effectiveness/strategy evaluations accounted for 9 per cent. Among all evaluations, only three were impact evaluations and all were published by UNICEF (see Figure 4).

Figure 4
Number (and per cent) of evaluations by type of evaluation



Most of the evaluations had a country focus (72 per cent), followed by a global/headquarters focus (14 per cent), multi-country (7 per cent), regional (6 per cent) and multi-region (1 per cent; see Figure 5).

Figure 5
Number (and per cent) of evaluations by geographic scope



All regions are well represented in the evaluations included in the sample. Asia and the Pacific had the highest coverage at 111 reports (18 per cent) followed by the Americas and the Caribbean (105 reports, 17 per cent) and East and Southern Africa (94 reports, 15 per cent). For the Arab States, 51 evaluations (8 per cent) covered the region. Figure 6 shows the number of evaluations per region, including a breakdown of multi-regional evaluations.

When looking at single countries, Colombia had the highest number of evaluations with 15 reports published, followed by Ecuador and Malawi (14 reports) and Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Uganda (13 reports; see Figure 7).

Table 3 shows the distribution of evaluations by year of publication and language.

Figure 6
Number of evaluations by region, including multi-region evaluations

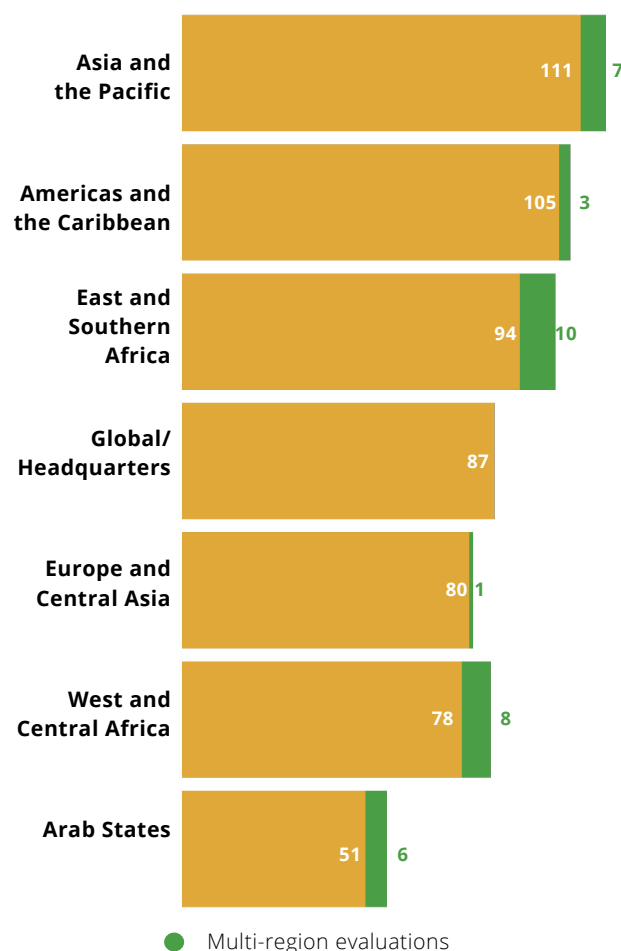
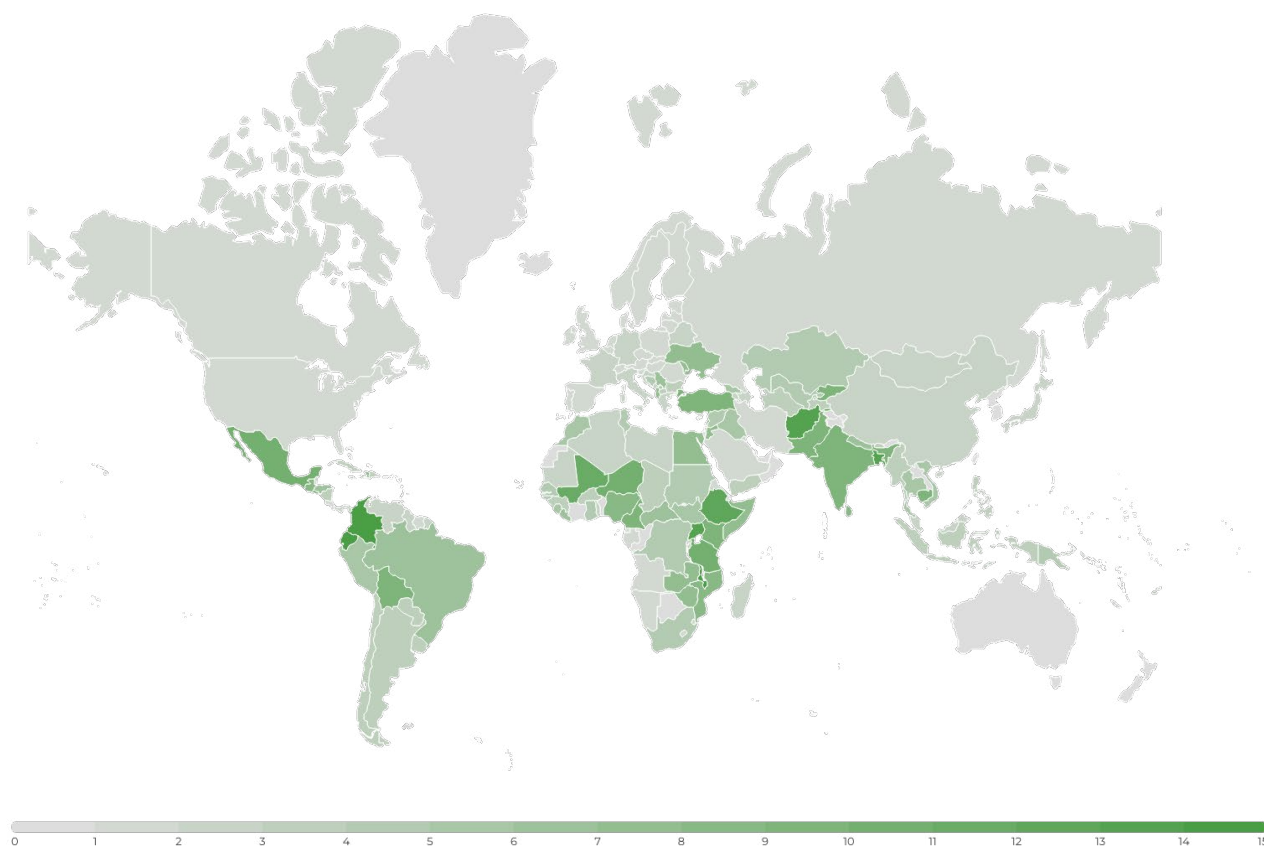


Table 3**Number (and per cent) of evaluations by publication year and language**

Year	Number (and per cent) of evaluations		Language	Number (and per cent) of evaluations	
2018	76	12.3%	English	521	84.2%
2019	116	18.7%	Spanish	52	8.4%
2020	118	19.1%	French	45	7.3%
2021	160	25.8%	Russian	1	0.2%
2022	149	24.1%			

Figure 7**Map - evaluations by country¹⁵**

Disclaimer: The designations employed and the presentation of material on the map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

EVALUATIONS BY SDG 5 TARGET

All evaluations that met the inclusion criteria were tagged with up to three SDG 5 targets. The most covered target was SDG 5.2: Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls, with 274 evaluations. Another three targets, namely SDG 5.5 (174 evaluations), 5.a (158 evaluations) and 5.6 (116 evaluations), also exceeded 100 evaluations (see Figure 8).

Overall, evaluations concentrated on each agency's mandate. UN Women and UNDP covered all SDG 5 targets, with at least a few evaluations touching on each. While both agencies had a similar focus by target, with the highest number of publications in SDG 5.5, 5.2 and 5.a, UN Women and WFP had a broader focus, with the highest number of publications assigned to "All targets" in SDG 5.

UNICEF focused on SDG 5.2 and 5.3, which address violence against children and harmful practices, mainly child marriage and FGM. UNFPA produced the most evidence on SDG 5.6, which aims to improve reproductive health. Table 4 shows the results across ten agencies and inter-agency evaluations; the full table with all agencies is presented in Annex 2.

Table 5 shows the number of evaluations by target across each region. Overall, Target 5.2 is well represented across all regions, as are Targets 5.5 on leadership and participation, 5.6 on SRHR and 5.a on economic resources. Evaluations on Target 5.3, harmful practices, are concentrated in Africa and Asia and the Pacific.

Figure 8

Number (and per cent) of evaluations by SDG 5 Target¹⁶ (N = 619)

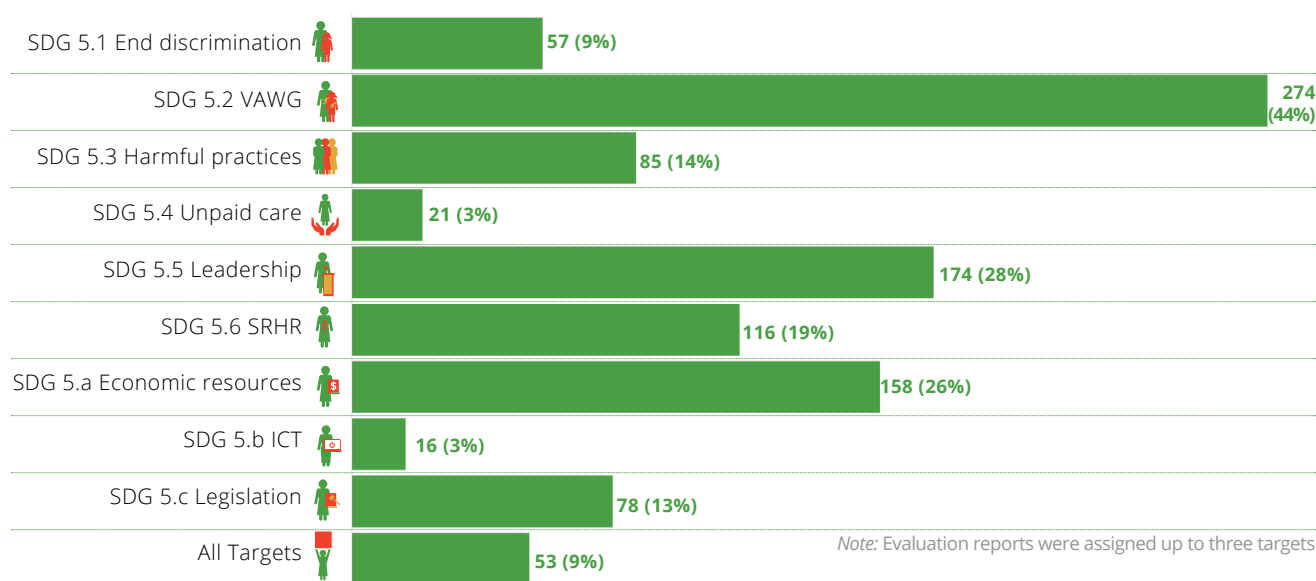












Table 4

Number of evaluations by agency and SDG 5 target (n = 573)

Agency	 SDG 5.1	 SDG 5.2	 SDG 5.3	 SDG 5.4	 SDG 5.5	 SDG 5.6	 SDG 5.a	 SDG 5.b	 SDG 5.c	 All
UN Women	20	56	7	4	56	2	42	5	21	14
UNDP	10	38	3	8	53	4	48	7	30	2
UNICEF	8	41	26	2	5	18	2	0	2	7
UNFPA	0	73	42	0	0	77	0	0	4	0
Inter-agency Evaluation	6	21	4	3	22	8	14	0	11	2
WFP	0	0	0	0	2	0	10	0	0	13
UNODC	1	18	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0
ILO	0	1	0	1	15	0	19	0	1	0
IOM	0	6	0	0	4	0	0	0	6	3
OHCHR	4	10	2	0	3	2	0	0	1	0
FAO	0	0	0	1	1	0	9	0	0	0

Note: Evaluation reports were assigned up to three targets; this table shows the ten agencies with the most evaluations and inter-agency evaluations.











Table 5

Number of evaluations by region and SDG 5 target (n = 619)

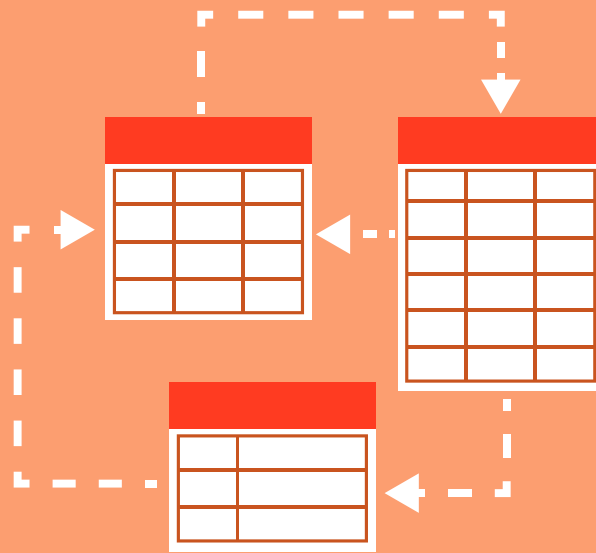
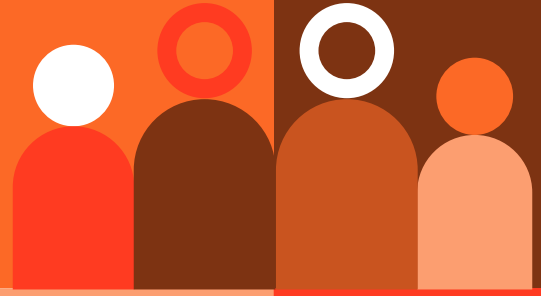
Region	SDG 5.1	SDG 5.2	SDG 5.3	SDG 5.4	SDG 5.5	SDG 5.6	SDG 5.a	SDG 5.b	SDG 5.c	All
Asia and the Pacific	22	42	13	5	31	21	33	6	20	6
Americas and the Caribbean	5	60	6	8	32	17	23	0	11	5
East and Southern Africa	11	46	24	3	28	19	37	2	14	6
Headquarters	8	24	6	1	15	11	16	7	7	25
Europe and Central Asia	7	37	7	3	28	19	18	1	20	4
West and Central Africa	2	37	21	0	25	15	23	2	5	6
Arab States	8	31	8	6	15	14	18	1	9	1

Note: Evaluation reports were assigned up to three targets

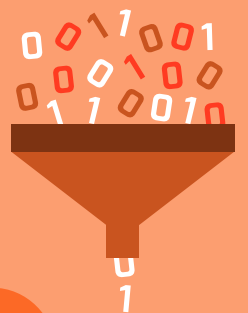
Legend

 SDG 5.1 End discrimination
  SDG 5.2 VAWG
  SDG 5.3 Harmful practices
  SDG 5.4 Unpaid care
  SDG 5.5 Leadership
 SDG 5.6 SRHR
  SDG 5.a Economic resources
  SDG 5.b ICT
  SDG 5.c Legislation
  All Targets





SECTION 4: RESULTS



The sections below present the synthesis results across each SDG 5 target. These sections do not need to be read in order and readers are encouraged to jump to the targets that are most relevant for their work. Each section follows the same structure:

- Evidence provides information on the sampled evaluation reports for the target. These reports serve as the evidence base for the presented results. References to specific reports are provided when examples are given.
- Background and context provide an overview of the core issue addressed by the target and its current status.
- Interventions and approaches describe the work undertaken within the target area.
- Enabling and hindering factors describe the main enablers and barriers found in the synthesized reports.
- Evidence on what works and does not work explores the effectiveness of identified interventions and approaches. Following the evidence base, effectiveness is often described

in terms of influencing outputs, processes and approaches. However, where evidence is available, contribution towards outcomes is included.

- Lessons presents a set of key lessons for advancing the target.

Following the results for each target, a discussion of recurring recommendations is presented in a separate sub-section with further information in Annex 3. Finally, the results section ends with a discussion of evidence on gender mainstreaming within UN agencies.

Table 6 shows the evidence base for each target following the sampling methodology (see Annex 1). This evidence base is also cited at the start of each target section below. In addition to the sampled evaluations per target, evaluations assigned to other targets at times provided minor content related to the target in question. These data were tagged to the relevant target and the number of reports providing minor additional information is also mentioned at the start of each section.

Table 6
Evidence base for each SDG 5 target

SDG 5 Targets	Sample Frame (N= 619)	Sampled Reports (N = 295)
Target 5.1 – End discrimination against women and girls	57	30
Target 5.2 – Eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls	274	122
Target 5.3 – Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child marriage and FGM	85	43
Target 5.4 – Value unpaid care and promote shared domestic responsibilities	21	10
Target 5.5 – Full participation in leadership and decision-making	174	75
Target 5.6 – Universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights	116	54
Target 5.a – Equal rights to economic resources, property ownership and financial services	158	78
Target 5.b – Promote empowerment of women through technology	16	12
Target 5.c – Policies and enforceable legislation for gender equality	78	43

TARGET 5.1



End discrimination against women and girls

End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

EVIDENCE

Fifty-seven evaluations had strong relevance to Target 5.1. Of these, 30 were included in the sample for analysis. Another 43 evaluations from the sample had minor content relevant to the target and were also used in the analysis. The Asia and Pacific region had twice as many evaluations as any other region for this target. West and Central Africa had the least number of evaluation reports. UN Women had double the number of evaluations as any other agency, followed by UNDP, UNICEF, OHCHR and several inter-agency evaluations.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The indicator for Target 5.1 covers four areas of law: overarching legal frameworks and public life; violence against women; employment and economic benefits; and marriage and family. Many countries have yet to develop holistic legal frameworks to protect and empower women and girls. The Gender Snapshot of 2023 reports that, of 120 countries with data available, 28 countries still lack laws granting women equal rights to enter marriage and initiate divorce; 67 countries do not have laws that prohibit direct and indirect discrimination against women; and, in 53 countries, the law does not mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value. Overall, 54 per cent of countries and areas are missing relevant laws in one or more of the four areas of the indicator.¹⁷ Even when laws are in place, enforcement can be a major challenge.

INTERVENTIONS AND APPROACHES

Evaluated programmes worked to strengthen policy and legislative frameworks for ending gender-based discrimination in a range of areas. Evaluations captured programmes to influence family law, such as raising the age of marriage; labour law, such as better working conditions; protections for women; sexual and reproductive health and rights, such as rights-based family planning and abortion access; land rights; parity and quotas in women's representation; and other areas.¹⁸ In instances of relatively good legislation, but poor knowledge of it by key stakeholders,

programmes raised awareness of the law and its implications. For example, UNODC trained government actors and legal aid providers in gender-sensitive legal services. In Sierra Leone, UNODC focused on printing copies of the law and distributing them to judges, prosecutors, law enforcement and others in the justice system.¹⁹ The most ambitious programmes were multi-national initiatives to coordinate frameworks across countries, such as for safe migration.²⁰ For example, the Joint Programme of the African Union, ILO and IOM on Migration Governance for Development and Integration in Africa produced the Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers and formed the Labour Migration Advisory Committee to facilitate coordination between African Union nations as well as with non-African Union states in the MENA region.²¹

The modalities of engagement in legislative advocacy were primarily technical support and the capacity strengthening of government and civil society partners in international standards, commitments and agendas. These efforts were often complemented by broad communication campaigns through social media, days of observance and private sector partnerships, which help build constituencies for policy change to end gender-based discrimination. These efforts were also furthered by new international standards, such as the first international labour standards on violence and harassment in the world of work in 2019 and the Gender Responsive Standards for industry, which provide benchmarks for regional and national level direction setting.²² High-quality

evidence, research and knowledge products served to clarify issues and focus attention, sometimes through primary data collection, but more often drawing on global evidence and information produced by other UN agencies, partners or academics. For example, UNDP's ATENEA project is a research initiative in the Latin America and Caribbean region that created a political parity index and contributed to legislative debate on gender political parity in at least five countries.²³ Another example is UN Women's efforts to conduct rapid gender assessments of the impact of COVID-19 in early 2020 to influence the direction of governments' responses to the pandemic.²⁴

ENABLING AND HINDERING FACTORS

Perceived neutrality in politically polarized moments enables the continuity of advocacy.

For example, UN Women in Zimbabwe was able to convene diverse political groups, media, women in leadership, government agencies and civil society despite the environment of suspicion and mistrust between these actors.²⁵

Dual governance systems, i.e. when legal and customary frameworks differ which can complicate policy improvements.²⁶

When multiple systems of law exist, crafting legislation to accommodate them is challenging. Creative solutions were sometimes employed to address discrepancies between competing systems. For example, in an area of Kenya where land is traditionally controlled by men, FAO demonstrated that both men and women benefit by giving women access to land for production of vegetables (for women's consumption and sale) and fodder (for men to feed their pastoral animals).²⁷ However, these are temporary measures that should not replace an equal footing in law for women and men, including that constitutional law prevails over traditional rules that put women at a disadvantage. Reports also noted challenges in multinational and regional projects related to misalignment between laws on labour migration across countries.²⁸

EVIDENCE ON WHAT WORKS AND DOES NOT WORK

The UN's work has been effective in several areas of policy and legislative reform to promote, enforce and monitor gender equality and non-discrimination, through advocacy, constituency building, convening of experts and evidence collection.

Advocacy for parity laws and quotas on women's representation has been successful in several African and Latin American and Caribbean countries. Global partnerships that unite UN agencies and civil society were effective tools, such as FP2020, a consortium focused on family planning. FP2020 played an important role in bringing about legal changes for rights-based family planning and safe abortion services in several countries.²⁹ The EU-UN Spotlight Safe and Fair Programme brought together experts from gender equality, trafficking and labour migration to convene ministries and stakeholders. Their work resulted in 24 legal and policy instruments on safe migration in ASEAN nations that, for example, facilitate reporting of violence by undocumented female migrants. UN Women's rapid gender assessments of the impact of COVID-19 in early 2020 are an example of how timely data collection and dissemination can substantially influence the direction of government policy, as awareness of increased violence against women drove enforcement and service provision during lockdowns.³⁰

The contribution of regional actors, including regional UN offices, to positive results is highlighted in several evaluations of policy initiatives.

An evaluation of UN Women's policy advocacy work found that knowledge products at the regional level were key drivers of policy advocacy, especially when further localized in country settings.³¹ In Asia and the Pacific, OHCHR formed important partnerships with regional CSOs for outreach to grassroots voices and to build capacity in international human rights reporting.³² The EmPower programme collaborated with the Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development to produce the Regional Manual on Gender and Climate Resilience, designed to strengthen the role of CSOs, especially those working on gender and women's rights, in mainstreaming gender into climate policies, programmes and budgets at regional, national and local levels.³³

Approaches that compare a country's legal frameworks against discrimination with international standards or similar countries' frameworks were often effective, e.g. tailored knowledge products targeted at policymakers.³⁴

For example, OHCHR compiled best practices in laws on violence against women and girls for distribution to parliament during debate on Tunisia's draft law, in addition to providing detailed commentary on the alignment of the draft law with CEDAW. The law was enacted in 2017.³⁵

Partnerships with the media have been a productive strategy to raise the visibility of important policy issues.

Beyond direct use of social media platforms, UN agencies in several countries expanded their reach through training of women journalists, media organizations and journalism competitions. For example, OHCHR conducted training on trans-border issues in Thailand with women journalists, which focused on issues facing women, girls and LGBTIQ+ persons.³⁶ A media competition hosted by UN Women in Tanzania contributed to the government's commitment to co-lead the Gender Equality Action Coalition for Economic Justice and Rights.³⁷

Box 1

OHCHR's support for legislation meeting international standards

OHCHR's work covers a broad spectrum of human rights issues. In Kenya, OHCHR intervened in the drafting of the Community Land Act 2016 to address the status of women as community members in the areas where they were born, as well as areas they married into, and ensured that women were given seats in the community land boards. It similarly lobbied for improved rights and access to land for women during passage of Malawi's Land Act 2016. Also in Malawi, OHCHR successfully advocated for the expansion of exceptions to the prohibition on abortion in 2017. In Libya, OHCHR reviewed the country's prison laws from a gender perspective. Sometimes, the focus is on preventing the passage of bills that are contrary to human rights standards and anti-discrimination, such as compulsory HIV testing or restrictions on civil society. OHCHR works closely with UN partner agencies for technical expertise across sectors.

Source: OHCHR, Evaluation of OHCHR's Support to Legislation in Conformity with International Standards (2018).

LESSONS



There is evidence of successful advocacy when multiple UN agencies are involved and aligned in their messaging, whether through a joint programme or less formalized collaborations. For example, OHCHR made coordination with other UN agencies a priority and, as a result, was able to mainstream gender and human rights into legislation on which other agencies had taken the lead, including abortion penalties, land rights, anti-torture statutes, prison law and penal codes, justice reform and surrogacy. OHCHR was also able to expand campaigns into countries where it did not have a presence through other agencies.³⁸ Inter-agency cooperation in advocacy work gives smaller agencies the backing of the UN Country Team for legitimacy and, for all agencies, protection from being singled out when engaging with controversial topics.³⁹ Conversely, the absence of inter-agency cooperation (or cooperation between global, regional and local levels of an agency) can undermine efforts to encourage nations to follow internationally agreed conventions. This is especially true for human rights and discrimination issues, as mixed messages have a detrimental effect on progress.⁴⁰



Policy work requires both a cohesive approach and quick adaptation to new opportunities. The reported challenges in building coherent agendas for change at the national level include agencies' overreliance on operational budgets and staff to support advocacy work in an ad hoc way, rather than longer-term strategies with dedicated funding. Yet when holistic agendas are articulated, they must be flexible enough to respond to rapidly changing contexts and emerging opportunities in a timely manner.⁴¹



It is important to complement small-scale initiatives for women with national-level reform in the enabling environment. Several evaluated programmes included small-scale initiatives with a handful of women at a local level. Evaluations of these components often mentioned a lack of commensurate work at the policy level.⁴² Without structural reform, such programmes remain unsustainable, although they may provide important testing grounds for innovative approaches. For example, women's economic empowerment efforts in Bolivia focused on training women and matching supply to demand, overlooking the need for policy changes to reduce barriers for women in the informal sector, as well as the lack of quality jobs open to women.⁴³ Conversely, high-level engagement on an issue does not ensure widespread impact.⁴⁴



Public sentiment must be aligned with anti-discrimination law for sustainable change. Equality and protection may be codified, but without shifts in social norms and perspectives, rights remain unfulfilled.⁴⁵ This has proven true in the outlawing of FGM, which has continued in less public or disguised ways in some localities to avoid detection.⁴⁶ Similarly, marriage equality or abortion access enshrined in law risks being undermined without broad constituencies supporting these rights.⁴⁷ Human rights education and campaigns are therefore essential.⁴⁸



It is difficult to measure the impact of advocacy and technical support. Legislative change is typically a very long process, and the signs of progress and momentum towards passage of a law for gender equality, such as shifts in the national dialogue or the development of political will, are generally invisible. Many evaluations noted that this complicated their assessment of programme effectiveness. Tools to measure the results of public advocacy that go beyond the number of media hits are not widely used.⁴⁹

TARGET 5.2



Eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls

Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

EVIDENCE

A total of 274 evaluations were closely related to Target 5.2. Of these, 122 were selected in the sample for in-depth analysis, and an additional 43 from the sample provided limited data relevant to the target. These evaluations were predominantly conducted at the country level but, notably, 23 were conducted at the headquarters level of UN organizations. Regionally, 25 evaluations related to the Americas and the Caribbean and 37 to Africa. UNFPA, UN Women, UNICEF and UNDP conducted the majority of the Target 5.2 evaluations included in the sample, but reports also came from UNODC, OHCHR, IOM and other agencies along with a number of inter-agency evaluations.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a global issue and a grave violation of human rights, encompassing physical, sexual and psychological forms of violence. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the risk factors for VAWG – economic insecurity, increased social isolation, and lower availability and accessibility of support services for survivors – resulting in a global “shadow pandemic” of VAWG and setbacks on progress towards SDG 5.2.⁵⁰

One of the primary underlying causes of VAWG is gender inequality, which includes unequal power relations between men and women. Traditional patriarchal structures can perpetuate violence and generate deeply ingrained cultural and social norms that often normalize violent behaviours towards women and girls.

The UN system’s approach to ending VAWG has been guided by several normative standards and frameworks, including the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993) and the 1995 Beijing Platform of Action, which identifies specific actions for national governments to prevent and respond to VAWG.

In more recent years, UN development system reform has provided opportunities for the UN system to strengthen system-wide coordination through the Common Chapter, where UN agencies aspire to promote shared methodologies and ensure that their strategic plans are complementary and include references and commitments to gender equality, especially around ending VAWG.

INTERVENTIONS AND APPROACHES

In the SDG era, UN interventions to end VAWG have been multisectoral, addressing the complexities of VAWG through a diverse set of approaches that includes: promoting laws and policies that prevent violence through advocacy at all levels of government and providing technical assistance and capacity-building; strengthening national governments to develop National Action Plans to end violence against women, promote gender-responsive ministries and better inform decision makers; promoting social norms and attitude changes through communication campaigns, community-based prevention strategies, programming in education settings, and engaging men and boys; improving essential services for survivors of violence by building service provider capacity, ensuring global standards are met and improving service provider coordination and coverage;

enhancing the quality, accuracy and availability of data on VAWG by improving the capacity of national statistics offices and how data is used to guide programming; and promoting strong and empowered civil society and autonomous women's movements mainly through funding and capacity strengthening.

Among UN interventions and approaches to address VAWG, four distinct joint programmes stand out. The Joint Global Programme on Essential Services for Women and Girls Subject to Violence is a partnership between UN Women, UNFPA, WHO, UNDP and UNODC which supported countries to design, implement and review services for all women and girls who are victims and survivors of violence. The Global Programme on Violence Against Women Data (UN Women, WHO) is a five-year programme working to strengthen the collection, measurement, analysis, reporting and use of data worldwide. The Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces for Women and Girls global initiative has been operating for more than ten years to illustrate what governments, grassroots movements, women's organizations and other community partners can do to implement interventions that prevent and respond to sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence against women and girls in public spaces. Finally, the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative is a partnership between the EU and the UN to eliminate all forms of VAWG, including harmful practices. Spotlight is the world's largest VAWG effort, with a seed funding commitment of EUR 500 million from the EU.

ENABLING AND HINDERING FACTORS

Political will at the highest level is a critical enabler of progress towards eliminating VAWG.⁵¹

Yet, as national political environments have changed over the years, from hostile to favourable to often unpredictable, commitment and government engagement on ending VAWG has wavered. Interventions have often faced problems with consistency and results over time; and actions without clear resources attached, agreed to on the

basis of individual rather than institutional political will. The lack of political will and recognition of gender equality and women's empowerment issues at the country level have impeded progress towards Target 5.2.

Community cultures are frequently cited as a challenge to VAWG interventions.

Some cultural beliefs and gender norms are contrary to gender equality and are resistant to ending VAWG interventions which are seen as seeking to change local cultural practices or beliefs. Cultural factors affect the success of sexual and gender-based violence (GBV) response and prevention activities and are often cited as a barrier to people's willingness to identify as survivors or take up specialist services, such as medical care, or pursue legal options.⁵²

EVIDENCE ON WHAT WORKS AND DOES NOT WORK

The UN system has effectively leveraged its expertise at the country level through joint programming, breaking down sectoral silos and encouraging a more holistic approach to complex political and cultural barriers.

In coordination, UN agencies have designed multisectoral strategies that include institutional advocacy, service delivery enhancements, public campaigns and high-level political engagement, among other interventions, with promising results. For example, programmes such as the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative created a platform for enhanced collaboration and brought greater attention to ending VAWG in some countries.⁵³ Joint programming has often promoted efficiencies across UN agencies as interventions are better harmonized, and each entity draws on its strengths to efficiently execute activities. However, at times, coordination among UN agencies has proved challenging as differing operational and bureaucratic procedures among agencies were reported to have led to significant programme implementation delays.⁵⁴

Joint advocacy has played a key role in raising awareness of VAWG.

Evaluative evidence suggests that UN advocacy generates momentum at national and community levels for the adoption or revision of key pieces of legislation, plans and policies to end GBV.⁵⁵ The UNiTE by 2030 to End Violence Against Women campaign is probably the UN's biggest advocacy effort to raise awareness of VAWG. It is a multi-year effort calling on governments, civil society, women's organizations, young people, the private sector, media and the entire UN system to join forces in addressing VAWG. The campaign works to synergize the efforts of all UN offices and agencies working to end VAWG and includes the 16 Days of Activism initiative and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.⁵⁶ However, advocacy work often faces challenges, as it is time and resource intensive and may not lead to legislative reform, changes in norms or new investment in programmes. Additionally, evaluative evidence suggests public advocacy has experienced a lack of continuity in communication campaigns and insufficient outreach to men.⁵⁷

Advocacy has also contributed to expanding civic space and strengthening women's movements.

UN agencies have developed programming to build the institutional capacity of CSOs and women's rights organizations, including grassroots organizations, human rights campaigners and front-line community service volunteers. CSOs deliver gender-sensitive and victim-centric services to traditionally excluded vulnerable groups. Through UN support and funding, a number of local CSOs have increased their capacity to plan, implement their strategic goals and improve the quality of services provided.⁵⁸ However, there are also challenges in engaging civil society effectively. For example, some potential partners, particularly small grassroots organizations, may not have the opportunity or capacity to apply to one of the UN's partnership modalities. This is mostly due to local and grassroots organization's limited human resource capacity, lack of legal recognition (most of these groups are not formalized as organizations and may not have legal recognition as organizations or official bank accounts), or knowledge capacity on how to apply for funding and report back to UN organizations.⁵⁹

Box 2

Addressing gender-based violence in humanitarian settings

The Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Emergencies represents a collaborative effort involving various stakeholders with the goal of changing how GBV is tackled during humanitarian crises. Members of the Call to Action, which include states, donors, international organizations and NGOs, structure their individual and collective efforts based on commitments outlined in a five-year road map. This road map identifies key objectives and areas of action.

It is acknowledged that all humanitarian actors have a role to play in addressing GBV. By working together cohesively, being accountable and consistently allocating the necessary resources, it is believed that the humanitarian system can effectively reduce the risks of GBV and provide comprehensive, high-quality GBV services to women and girls throughout all stages of humanitarian response.

Source: IAHE, Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Girls, (2020).

UN programmes have increased the capacity of law enforcement actors and the judiciary to handle cases of VAWG in a more survivor-centric, rights-based and effective way to increase survivors' access to justice.

Often, capacity strengthening entails developing manuals and training sessions for police officers and helpline workers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, agencies successfully conducted rapid assessments to understand the needs of women and girls and often supported government efforts in the creation of mobile teams, launching toll-free hotline services that provided crucial support to victims of GBV. Many of these services are still functioning and play a key role in the number of people reporting cases of GBV.⁶⁰ Capacity strengthening training programmes have often recognized the challenges imposed by the high rotation of staff in institutions, and therefore have developed training of trainer programmes, instead of direct training modules, to improve the sustainability of results and multiply impact.⁶¹

While the quality of services provided to victims of GBV has improved, complementary support such as financial assistance and economic empowerment have been limited.

Through partnerships with CSOs, UN agencies have often increased access to impactful legal aid for some women. For example, the evaluation of UNODC's programme for improving access to legal aid for women in Western Africa found users particularly valued legal aid in criminal matters, where women require these services to access justice. The project covered legal representation in criminal cases and helped direct sexual violence cases to criminal courts as opposed to traditional courts, which tend to respond to patriarchal and men-dominated norms.⁶² Through CSOs, UN agencies have been able to improve shelter facilities, where other services such as psychological and legal assistance are often offered. For example, in Tajikistan, UNFPA established 'Victim Support rooms' in maternity clinics, which served as a comprehensive multisectoral service point for VAWG survivors, and also offered temporary shelter.⁶³ However, evidence from the evaluations suggests that VAWG survivors often require financial support and economic empowerment services. Victims/survivors may be ready to leave an abusive situation but often lack financial support to facilitate such action.⁶⁴ As a UNICEF evaluation of a programme targeting pregnant adolescent girls and young women in South Africa found, "girls and women are often reluctant to follow through with referrals because they are afraid of partner response and financial implications of leaving their partners."⁶⁵

Technical support to governments to develop VAWG legislation, National Action Plans and protocols has demonstrated successes.⁶⁶

For example, in Tanzania, UN Women worked with relevant partners to develop anti-VAW laws and policies that align with international standards and provide financial and technical support to the relevant ministries to develop and implement a National Action Plan on VAW. These National Action Plans or strategies often harness participation and mobilize efforts from all sectors, including local CSOs, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and women's rights organizations. Limited resource allocation is a challenge to implementing such policies and action plans.

Progress in developing and collecting data on the prevalence and characteristics of VAWG has strengthened the knowledge base; however, measurement of the UN's contribution towards eliminating VAWG is weaker in project-level monitoring and evaluation.

A substantial amount of research has been undertaken on the intersection of VAWG and other thematic issues such as migration, COVID-19, political participation, drugs and women's empowerment. Additionally, UN agencies have contributed to the design of data collection methods on the prevalence of GBV and the effectiveness of programming. However, evaluations frequently point to challenges in tracking the effectiveness of VAWG interventions due to the poor quality of available monitoring data and the lack of an articulated logic on how activities achieve change or outcomes. Monitoring data often only reports indicators at the activity and output level, reporting on the number of people who have been reached, and does not include any indicators that capture actual changes in attitudes or behavioural change.⁶⁷

Involving men and boys and former male perpetrators of sexual and GBV as change agents in the prevention of VAWG has contributed to some shifts in the perspectives of men.

Evaluations consistently mentioned the need to strengthen outreach to men and boys across all types of interventions and enhance evaluation of male engagement. Some programmes have successfully documented initiatives in this regard. For example, some ending VAWG programmes have structured discussions with men designed to explore existing understandings of masculinity and create more positive models of what it means to be a man, promoting self-reflection and pushing men to analyse and engage their power and privilege in positive ways. Short-term interventions such as these have found positive signs of some shifts in the perspective of men regarding women's roles.⁶⁸

LESSONS



Joint UN programming demonstrates the importance of addressing VAWG through a holistic and multisectoral approach and successful leveraging of technical expertise across the UN development system.

This has led to improvements in legislation and increased investments in prevention of violence and provision of quality, essential, multisectoral services to survivors. Given the complexity of ending VAWG, multisectoral strategies also include institutional advocacy, service delivery enhancements, effective public campaigns and high-level political engagement, among other implementation areas. These inter-agency strategies have contributed to UN reform as agencies have leveraged their expertise and mandates to work in an articulate and coherent manner. Coordination mechanisms developed under UN reform have been strengthened through the implementation process of GBV inter-agency programming and strategies at a country and regional level. For example, under the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative, the convening and coordinating role of the UN Resident Coordinator created greater synergies between implementing UN agencies at the country level, as each agency leveraged its expertise and mandate to create more coherent GBV programming.⁶⁹



Government commitment and engagement weigh heavily on the success of country-level programming. Given VAWG is considered both a politically and socially sensitive issue, political will is key to achieving outcomes. However, obtaining government buy-in is often time-consuming. Elections and subsequent government changes have led to implementation delays and challenges. In humanitarian contexts, obtaining government buy-in has proven even more challenging. In some countries, the UN has encountered cultural sensitivities and reluctance of authorities to engage on protection concerns linked to women and children.⁷⁰



Strengthening women-led movements and CSOs through capacity strengthening and financing is necessary to support the elimination of VAWG.

The UN has strengthened CSOs mainly through direct funding and capacity-building. For example, in Montenegro, UNDP's Gender Programme invested in the capacity development of 12 CSOs to provide specialized GBV-related services.⁷¹ However, UN procedures and requirements were often reported to be too demanding for CSOs, particularly grassroots organizations. In certain funds, setting a requirement for a percentage of resources to be implemented by women-led organizations proved to be a good practice.



Outreach to men and examination of masculinities within GBV programming is seen as an impactful strategy to drive social change and address VAWG.

Engaging with men and boys raises awareness, promotes behavioural change and addresses the root causes of violence. This approach not only engages men as active participants in the fight against VAWG but also challenges harmful gender norms and stereotypes, reflecting on masculinities and preconceived notions of "being a man."



Most programme time frames are insufficient to create lasting change on such a complex issue as ending VAWG.

This requires long-term actions and significant resources. The financial sustainability of interventions has proven challenging, and staff turnover and external setbacks (such as the COVID-19 pandemic) have frequently threatened programming gains.

TARGET 5.3



Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child marriage and FGM

Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and FGM

EVIDENCE

Eighty-five evaluations related to Target 5.3: the elimination of all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and FGM. Of these, 43 were included in the sample for analysis and an additional 22 evaluations in the sample provided additional data relevant to the target.⁷² A fair number of the evaluations were of programmes operating in Africa (21) and Asia and the Pacific (5), and the sample included seven global evaluations conducted at the headquarters level of UN organizations. Most of the Target 5.3 evaluations included in the sample were conducted by UNICEF, UNFPA and UN Women, including some inter-agency evaluations conducted jointly by UNICEF and UNFPA.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

SDG Target 5.3 focuses on two distinct harmful practices: FGM and child marriage. It is estimated that over 200 million girls and women alive today, spanning more than 30 countries, have undergone some form of FGM.⁷³ The rationale behind practising FGM encompasses sociological, cultural, religious and socioeconomic factors, in addition to perceptions related to hygiene and aesthetics. However, at its core, FGM is rooted in deep-seated gender inequality and the desire to exert control over women's sexuality. The practice violates the basic human rights of women and girls, including their bodily autonomy, health and protection against violence and degrading treatment.

Child marriage, characterized by marriages occurring prior to the age of 18, is another globally acknowledged harmful practice. Despite legal prohibitions, 21 per cent of young women globally find themselves married before reaching 18.⁷⁴ This phenomenon, much like FGM, stems from deep-rooted gender inequality and discriminatory attitudes that place lesser value on girls and women compared to their male counterparts. Various factors, including societal norms, cultural and religious beliefs, and economic and contextual influences, contribute to the persistence of child marriage.

INTERVENTIONS AND APPROACHES

UN efforts to combat FGM have primarily centred around advocacy and capacity strengthening. UN advocacy efforts have emphasized the use of public declarations of abandonment as intermediate milestones in reshaping social norms towards the elimination of FGM. Public declarations of abandonment signify a readiness to openly denounce and discuss FGM, acting as a critical taboo breakpoint in fostering broader societal change. Additionally, and at the national level, UN initiatives have advocated for anti-FGM legislation that aligns with international human rights standards.

UNICEF and UNFPA have designed and implemented a Joint Programme on the Abandonment of FGM. The programme has coverage across 17 countries and has been operating since 2008: Phase IV of implementation launched in 2022. The programme has collaborated with governments, civil society and communities to provide legal and policy reform; support service provision; and work with communities to abandon the practice. The programme has also focused on strengthening capacities for long-term data collection.⁷⁵

When addressing child marriage, interventions have also taken a multifaceted approach, primarily implemented jointly by UNICEF and UNFPA. The UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage has generated momentum towards ending child marriage. In its first phase (2016–2019), the programme helped nine countries develop action plans and advocated for greater government investment. Overall, the

programme's strategy (operating in 12 countries) involves empowering girls through education, skills development and support networks. Simultaneously, programme efforts are directed towards educating and mobilizing parents and communities, providing economic incentives, enhancing access to quality education and healthcare, shaping legal frameworks and expanding the knowledge base regarding child marriage. These joint programme interventions have also noted the importance of community dialogues as an intervention to reduce child marriage. Community dialogues aim to increase understanding between women and men to promote sustainable gender equality behaviour change.⁷⁶

ENABLING AND HINDERING FACTORS

Momentum generated by social movements enables progress in eradicating harmful practices such as FGM and child marriage.

This momentum plays a vital role in cultivating new shared beliefs that drive altered behaviours. The evaluations reviewed suggest support for a critical mass theory, positing that once a tipping point is reached, behaviours can change. Multiple evaluations highlight substantial shifts in social norms, including communities undergoing a break in taboos related to FGM. This juncture is pivotal, serving as both an indicator of social norm transformation and a catalyst for further societal shifts. It signifies that community members no longer fear social repercussions for discussing or opposing FGM. However, outcomes are not uniform across FGM initiatives, and social norm modifications do not invariably translate into behavioural shifts. Some evaluations document alterations in how FGM is carried out, with the practice going underground and becoming harder to detect. Changes include secretive implementation without public acknowledgement, seeking services in neighbouring villages, crossing borders into adjacent nations and performing the procedure on younger girls. In these scenarios, those who oppose the practice within families and communities are less likely to be informed.⁷⁷

Discord between legal and social norms creates barriers to reduction of harmful practices.

While the enactment or reinforcement of laws against FGM and child marriage constitutes a societal stance, these laws and associated penalties might not be consistently enforced. Legal actors (judges, prosecutors, lawyers) are sometimes disinclined to uphold a law they personally disagree with. Evaluation reports draw on broader literature, revealing a complex interplay between legal and social norms. This interaction is shown to be exceptionally delicate, carrying a notable risk of being counterproductive and causing these practices to go underground, making its practical eradication harder to observe.

EVIDENCE ON WHAT WORKS AND DOES NOT WORK

Joint UNFPA-UNICEF programmes have successfully advocated for the amendment of laws to increase penalties and prohibit FGM and built capacity for their enforcement.

In Kenya, for example, the UN successfully advocated for the enactment of the Prohibition of FGM Act. In Egypt, Mauritania and Uganda, the amendment of laws increased penalties for FGM-related actions. Yet the effectiveness of legislation has hinged on UN contributions to build the capacity of the judiciary, law enforcement, healthcare workers, educators and community leaders to enforce laws, provide care and raise awareness. For example, by training health professionals on the negative health effects of FGM in Sudan, health services have been used as an entry point to raise awareness and change perceptions among mothers concerning FGM. The UN system's commitment to capacity strengthening has also extended to government ministries responsible for implementing FGM abandonment programmes.

Efforts to end child marriage have benefitted from a multisectoral approach.

This often entails simultaneously empowering adolescent girls, enhancing education opportunities and offering appropriate health and protection services, as well as fostering gender equality more broadly, addressing a number of child-marriage drivers at the local level.⁷⁸ This multisectoral approach was adopted by the Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage. Given the nature of these multisectoral strategies, it is important for UN agencies to leverage diverse resources and expertise. Country Offices engaged in ending child marriage and FGM have delivered programme results with limited funds drawing on the strategic use of pool funding and leveraging complementary resources. Insecure and insufficient funding and limited capacities among implementing partners in many countries pose challenges to furthering the agenda. Continuous efforts to mobilize resources, support governments and convene stakeholders will be necessary to sustain the agenda. Additionally, evaluations note that joint operationalization at the subnational level remains a key priority and challenge for the future.

Box 3

An impact evaluation on improving adolescent lives in India

In 2022, UNICEF completed an impact evaluation of its Adolescent Empowerment Programme in four districts of four states in India, set out to cover 50 per cent of the adolescent population in each of these districts. The programme's goal was to "empower adolescents and make them agents of change for themselves and their communities, simultaneously making their surrounding aware of and responsive of their rights and needs." The programme worked on a multisectoral, three-pillar approach, which included the formation of adolescent groups to encourage dialogue with peers to enable an understanding of issues particular to their age group; work with community leaders and parents of adolescents; and the enhancement of public services for adolescents' physical and mental well-being. Activities were implemented between 2017 and 2019.

UNICEF conducted an impact assessment of its programme using a mixed-method approach that incorporated a randomized control trial in its quantitative component. The evaluation of the entire programme revealed no indication that it had led to a reduction in the occurrence of child marriage. Qualitative interviews with respondents indicated a general decline in child marriage rates over the past decade. However, these interviewees, in agreement with the quantitative findings, suggested that this decline might not necessarily be attributed to the programme. Despite the observed reductions in child marriages, participants expressed the belief that extending the programme's duration could have produced further reductions in child marriage rates. Financial factors were identified as a significant driver of child marriage, as supported by both qualitative and quantitative data. On a broader scale, the quantitative data suggested that the programme had not substantially influenced the social norms related to child marriage or the promotion of gender equality for girls and boys.

Source: UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, *Improving Adolescent Lives in India: An Impact Evaluation* (2022).

Joint UN programmes have effectively invested in capacity strengthening of service providers in relevant sectors to prevent and respond to FGM, including training of social workers in child protection centres to provide psychosocial support to girls at risk or victims of FGM.

However, staff turnover limits sustainability. In the health sector, Guinean midwives from different health facilities were trained on emergency obstetric and neonatal care, family planning, GBV and FGM. In Kenya, capacity strengthening to doctors and midwives culminated in these service providers becoming members of the “Doctors and Midwives against FGM” initiative. However, a common challenge reported was the high staff turnover of health professionals, security personnel and teachers.⁷⁹

Community dialogue and public declarations of abandonment are promising interventions for addressing FGM and child marriage, although more evidence is needed on their behavioural impact.

Qualitative evidence suggests that community discussions have been effective in engaging men and boys to shift gender dynamics, fostering inter-generational dialogues and promoting mutual understanding between genders regarding the benefits of abandoning these harmful practices.⁸⁰ Public declarations of abandonment are often a useful indication of progress; however, there is no clarity across countries on how these declarations relate to actual behaviour change.⁸¹

Strategic positioning of programmes with key religious institutions has had positive effects on redefining social norms and behavioural change.

Strategic collaboration with key religious institutions can reshape social norms and behaviours. Supporting religious leaders to articulate religious arguments against FGM and child marriage has proven impactful, facilitating community-level access and message dissemination. Despite this, challenges in working with religious leaders have been noted, especially pertaining to religious interpretations of patriarchal notions of gender roles.⁸²

LESSONS



To prevent the continuation of harmful practices, it is important to engage boys and girls in their early childhood to counter social norms, gender stereotypes and the discriminatory socialization of children.

This is important because by age 10 children have already learned the gendered roles and relationships that perpetuate existing gender bias.⁸³ An increased emphasis on boys as gender equality envoys and supporters of ending child marriage is a strategic requirement to ensure equitable and safe access and uptake of services. Additionally, there is a need to enhance engagement with parents and communities.



Programming must address the extreme heterogeneity of FGM and child marriage.

Acknowledging the vast heterogeneity of FGM and child marriage is key for effective programming. While effective strategies for FGM abandonment have been identified, contextual variations demand a more precise approach. Shifting from predefined strategies to address FGM and child marriage to contextually informed causality models allows for better adaptation at national, subnational and community levels. A flexible overarching framework should guide country-specific design.



There are significant practical challenges in reaching the most marginalized.

Programming aims to reach marginalized populations, yet practical hurdles remain. Despite focusing on vulnerable geographic areas, challenges in accessing the most marginalized persist due to logistical issues, security concerns and shifts to clandestine FGM practices. Additionally, procedural and administrative barriers to partnership with local CSOs can impede the grassroots engagement needed to reach those left furthest behind.



CSOs play a key role in eliminating harmful practices by performing a range of grassroots and community-based functions. Beyond implementation, CSOs can

function as advocates, holding governments accountable and become champions for women and girls' rights in their communities. Capacity-building initiatives within CSOs for lobbying and advocacy are important. For instance, in Guinea, training empowered local CSO representatives to advocate against GBV, FGM and child marriage, leading to increased involvement of the authorities and community leaders in promoting their abandonment.⁸⁴



Evidence gaps remain, especially related to the importance of working with boys and men as beneficiaries and decision makers/gatekeepers.

Targeting boys and men as beneficiaries and decision makers requires more attention. While some programmes engage boys and men to varying degrees, there is a lack of focus on child marriage among boys, despite the fact that consensual marriage between children may comprise over one-third of all child marriages globally.⁸⁵ Engaging adolescent boys systematically is crucial for empowering girls. Notably, certain programmes have formed men's clubs comprising influential community members, providing them with tools to combat FGM and child marriage within their spheres of influence.⁸⁶



Overall, child marriage is influenced by complex factors that require broad social collaboration to change.

Evaluations identify child marriage as stemming from a diverse spectrum of determinants.⁸⁷ While certain drivers can be mitigated through long-term strategies that align with the expertise of UN agencies, others, such as poverty, conflicts and inequality, lie outside the agencies' immediate influence. The capacity to address these structural factors varies among programme countries. The success of child marriage eradication efforts hinges on the commitment of governments and development partners to tackle these pivotal drivers. However, it is important to acknowledge that addressing these challenges is a long-term endeavour that demands sustained engagement.

TARGET 5.4



Value unpaid care and promote shared domestic responsibilities

Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate

EVIDENCE

Target 5.4 had one of the smaller evidence bases in the synthesis: 21 reports related to the target, of which 10 were included in the sample; an additional 40 evaluations provided minor additional data relevant to the target. Reports came from a range of agencies including UNDP, ECLAC, ILO, IFAD and a joint programme between WFP, ILO, UNDP, UNICEF and UN Women.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Women disproportionately perform unpaid care and domestic work within the household, and the inequitable distribution and inadequate valuation of this work remains a barrier to achieving SDG 5. Unpaid care work – including childcare, elder care and domestic work – takes up a significant portion of time; limits participation in other activities; and is a barrier to accessing the labour force. For many women engaged in paid employment, their combined paid and unpaid workloads remain disproportionately high compared to men. Paid domestic workers, who are predominately women, often face low wages and benefits and have limited access to economic rights. Target 5.4 recognizes the importance of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies to valuing unpaid care work and reduce the time spent on unpaid care and domestic work. This can include improvements to essential services and infrastructure such as water and sanitation, energy, health and transportation, as well as social protection policies that support unpaid care workers, reduce the care burden, remove barriers to entering the labour force and support the rights of paid domestic workers.

INTERVENTIONS AND APPROACHES

The UN initiatives evaluated within this target primarily included efforts to mainstream gender equality and care considerations into social protection systems.⁸⁸ These initiatives occurred at different levels, such as municipal level programmes to develop or enhance local level care policies.⁸⁹ For example, a regional programme by ECLAC in several cities across Latin America aimed to inform gender and urban planning policies on unpaid care. There was also work on national social protection initiatives. For example, the development of the National Social Security Strategy of Bangladesh, which aimed to create an inclusive life cycle-based social protection system, brought together over 140 social programmes across 35 ministries.⁹⁰ There was also an example of social protection programming integrated with resilience to disasters programming designed to support communities' ability to respond to and recover from shocks (see Box 5).⁹¹

There was limited evaluative evidence on larger-scale infrastructure programmes; however, there were some evaluation reports of household-level infrastructure improvements in the energy and agriculture sectors to reduce the time and burden of domestic work. For example, programmes by IFAD, UNEP, UNDP and others provided improved cooking equipment, access to improved energy and agriculture machines.⁹²

Work has also been undertaken to support legislation or conventions that promote the rights of domestic workers. For example, ILO's work to strengthen Convention 189 on domestic work and Convention 156 on workers with family responsibilities.⁹³

Work within this target included collaborative, technical support alongside advocacy and knowledge-sharing with national and municipal stakeholders to develop social protection policies and promote social care infrastructure. Investment in knowledge products to understand gender implications, barriers, harmonization of existing policies, transfer modalities, monitoring systems and other aspects of system design were also central activities to support the development of social protection systems. Capacity strengthening with stakeholders on implementation of gender-responsive services was also undertaken. Male engagement activities and broader public campaigns have been used to influence social norms regarding the distribution of domestic responsibilities.

ENABLING AND HINDERING FACTORS

Political commitment is an important enabler of social protection systems, social care infrastructure and public services that support care work.

Many evaluation reports highlighted the presence of strong political commitment and the need for bipartisan support to put and maintain unpaid care work on the political agenda and to develop and commit to a plan of action. Depending on the scale of the system, coordination among many ministries and stakeholders may be required, further raising the need for strong government commitment and institutions to manage the process. In one report, government stakeholders underlined the role that building gender equality into their internal institutional culture and processes played in driving work on their jurisdiction's care policies.⁹⁴

The financial barriers to implementing social protection systems and social care infrastructure are a critical hindrance, with significant investment required for effective social protection and infrastructure initiatives.

Evaluation reports noted budget cuts or insufficient budgets as a key constraint, and in humanitarian or disaster situations, national social protection systems may struggle to cope with the increased number of beneficiaries and demand for increased support per beneficiary.⁹⁵ The ILO estimated that, in 2020, the financing gap for achieving a basic level of social protection was US\$ 77.9 billion for low-income countries, US\$ 362.9 billion for lower-middle-income countries and US\$ 750.8 billion for upper-middle-income countries.⁹⁶

The persistence of harmful social norms perpetuates the unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work between women and men.

Even where men demonstrate a stronger commitment to supporting domestic work, women continue to perform a higher proportion of domestic responsibilities.⁹⁷

Timing policy work with national and local politics can accelerate or hamper progress.

A multi-country programme in Latin America supporting unpaid care at the municipal level demonstrated both sides: in Mexico City, partners adapted to changing contexts and navigated the planned activities well; however, in Santiago, a change in government affected the momentum of the project, while in Montevideo, political dynamics between national and municipal levels affected progress when a national care system was being launched.⁹⁸

EVIDENCE ON WHAT WORKS AND DOES NOT WORK

UN agencies made strong contributions to framing issues, influencing public social protection agendas and encouraging commitments from policymakers on unpaid care.

There were several examples of UN agencies elevating unpaid care and domestic work within social protection policy development and creating space and interest among policymakers to engage in the issue. For example, in Latin America, political and civil society stakeholders felt that having a UN agency at the table, advocating for gender equality and care work, demonstrated the importance of the issue, alignment with international agendas and made it easier for officials to advance care initiatives. One report noted that UN agencies had the “power to legitimize issues.”⁹⁹

Advocacy was also central to the development of the National Social Security Strategy in Bangladesh, where multiple strategies were used to raise awareness of the initiative among government stakeholders to promote national ownership and support for the strategy. However, the evaluation found that the lack of an advocacy and communication strategy led to sporadic advocacy work and limited visibility of the strategy among government stakeholders.¹⁰⁰

Box 4

Enhancing social protection through integrated information systems in Montenegro

In Montenegro, UNDP provided technical assistance and institutional capacity strengthening to support development of the National Integrated Social Welfare Information System. The system provides processing, record keeping, payments, audit and monitoring functions within the social welfare system. As part of the shift to digitization of social welfare, the system also serves as a “one stop shop” for families applying for social protection cash transfers, greatly reducing the time required for applicants to apply. It also collects socio-demographic data on beneficiaries and family members which is utilized for targeting, identifying vulnerable individuals and policy planning. Government stakeholders felt the system reduced exclusion errors, increased coverage and improved transparency. Overall, the report found that the information system improved the distribution of benefits, increased the availability of services to families and improved transparency in the administration of social welfare disbursements. The system was used as a model for a national health information system, and the evaluation suggested the approach could be an example for other countries in the region to follow.

Source: UNDP, Independent Country Programme Evaluation Montenegro (2021).

Knowledge products produced by UN agencies have been influential in work on unpaid care and social protection.

In several reports, influencing public agendas and policymakers was successful when coupled with knowledge creation and sharing to demonstrate the importance of recognizing unpaid care and the interlinkages between care work, social protection and other sectors such as urban planning, resilience to disasters and economic empowerment and decent work.¹⁰¹ For example, the ILO has produced a number of knowledge products on decent work for care workers and domestic workers.¹⁰²

Knowledge generation and sharing were also successfully applied to support the development of social protection policies. In Bangladesh, 13 research papers were commissioned to support implementation of the National Social Security Strategy, including a paper on gender policy and strategy with individual gender action plans for 29 ministries and divisions.¹⁰³ A political economy analysis was also undertaken to map the level of support across political stakeholders and to provide short-term implementation strategies.¹⁰⁴ The reports drew on lessons from international experiences and were found to be highly relevant given their quality and contextualization to Bangladesh. The specificity and comprehensiveness of research reports highlight the complexity of the design and implementation of national social protection systems and the necessary role contextualized, high-quality and relevant research has in social protection policy design.¹⁰⁵

Given the specificity of social protection models to national contexts, having regional or peer-country examples to draw on may support policy development and implementation. A strong example

of South-South exchange arose in Latin America. Through exchange with counterparts in Uruguay, Mexico City's care system was modelled on the national care system in Uruguay. The system in Montenegro was noted as an example for other countries in the region to potentially emulate.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, much of the research developed in Bangladesh was being assembled in a book to support dissemination.

The scale of UN programmes providing direct provision of cash, goods or services to beneficiaries was often limited, with mixed results.

Several of the initiatives evaluated did include household-level targeting as part of their programmes, with a variety of interventions: stipends for childcare, vocational training, counselling, referral services, cash transfers for children with disabilities or in foster care, cash transfers to single parents, and provision of clean energy, agriculture equipment and cooking equipment. While well received by beneficiaries, the scale of these initiatives was often small or served as a pilot to test and refine the broader protection system.¹⁰⁷

The provision of clean energy through improved cooking equipment was found to relieve drudgery, although the scale of the initiatives evaluated was again small. In other initiatives, the provision of clean energy and improved cooking equipment was not found to automatically translate into adoption of the new tools or time savings (for example, the use of collected biomass fuels can continue even after cleaner energy is provided). More research is needed to understand how women's work shifted in response to electrification and use of the improved cooking equipment.¹⁰⁸

Effective coverage of social protection programming, including accurate beneficiary identification and targeting, has been a limiting factor, but some promising practices were identified.

Gaps in coverage were noted as a concern in Bangladesh's National Social Security System with an evaluation finding high exclusion errors and insufficient transfer values. Despite recognizing that the majority of those in the middle-income bracket or lower would benefit from the range of services provided by the system, the report found that many were not benefitting from the system. One response by the initiative was an increased focus on administration and new management information systems.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, UNDP supported the government in Montenegro in developing a national social welfare information system with the goal of creating more equal distribution of benefits between women and men (see Box 4).¹¹⁰ To support transfers in the Eastern Caribbean, new vulnerability and targeting tools were deployed in several countries to improve government processes for identifying those eligible for transfers or increased transfers. For example, a vulnerability index was piloted in response to Hurricane Elsa and built upon in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹¹¹

Evaluations identified a range of activities aimed at changing social norms and household dynamics regarding unpaid care; however, evidence of longer-term change was limited.

Reports cited examples of capacity strengthening with men on household responsibilities and other elements of gender equality in a variety of sectors, including agriculture, economic empowerment/livelihoods and social protection. There were also broader public campaigns, such as HeforShe, which support greater recognition of unpaid care. However, changes in attitudes and longer-term changes in social norms (e.g. changes in time use) are not frequently or adequately measured.¹¹²

Box 5

Adaptive social protection in the Eastern Caribbean

A joint programme in the Eastern Caribbean combined elements of social protection, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation to support the design of community-based adaptive and shock-responsive services, referred to as adaptive social protection. The programme aimed to produce a scalable model and framework for implementation in other Caribbean countries. A pilot within the programme targeted women-headed households through support for unpaid care work to enable them to attend vocational training and access services.

Source: WFP, ILO, UNDP, UNICEF and UN Women. Final Evaluation of Joint Programme 'Enhancing Resilience and Acceleration of the SDGs in the Eastern Caribbean' 2020-2022 (2022).

LESSONS



Expanding social protection systems provide a distinct opportunity to recognize the value of unpaid care work, but this connection is not automatic. Integrating unpaid care considerations within social protection systems requires commitment and a strong contextual understanding of unpaid care issues and appropriate response mechanisms. Evaluation reports highlight that even well-designed social protection policies can miss opportunities to expand recognition of unpaid care work through appropriate transfers and services. This is supported by external data. For example, the COVID-19 Gender Response Tracker has recorded over 1,700 social protection and labour market measures across 219 countries. However, only 11 per cent address unpaid care.¹¹³ UN agencies can play a key role in advocating for the inclusion of unpaid care on political agendas and action plans.



Institutional readiness is critical for developing social protection systems and infrastructure initiatives. Given the complexity of implementing a social protection system, the capacity, infrastructure and organizational culture need to be in place to drive implementation and foster ownership. Collaboration among many ministries and different levels of government is often needed, requiring strong coordination and administrative capacity. UN agencies can help build capacity and support coordination, provided that ownership and commitment to implement the social protection system remain strong among policymakers.



Social protection systems can be adapted and utilized to reach specific populations. The development of strong targeting and identification tools can support transfers and services to specific marginalized populations. Evaluation reports contained examples of social protection systems targeting parents, women-headed households, elderly, people with disabilities, transwomen, adolescents, children in foster care, women living with HIV, sex workers and others. Identification of vulnerable populations remains a key challenge, particularly those that are most marginalized and least visible within formal systems.



Greater measurement of the outcomes and impact of social protection systems, infrastructure and male engagement is needed. Investment in gender-responsive national data systems that disaggregate data appropriately and track gender-equality outcomes (e.g. time use) are necessary to assess the effectiveness of care policies and initiatives. At the programme level, greater emphasis on measuring outcomes, particularly around male engagement, is required (i.e. the shorter and medium-term expected changes in men's attitudes). This work can be supported through the use of theories of change at the project development stage through to evaluation.

TARGET 5.5



Full participation in leadership and decision-making

Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

EVIDENCE

There were 174 evaluations related to Target 5.5. Of these, 75 evaluations were included in the sample for analysis; and an additional 28 evaluations in the sample provided more limited data relevant to the target. The evaluations included in the sample were published primarily by UNDP, UN Women and ILO. An additional eight evaluations were classified as inter-agency evaluations, and two were published by Economic Commissions. Other UN agencies with at least one publication on women's leadership in the sample included FAO, IOM, OHCHR, UNCTAD, OIOS, UNV, UN Habitat, UNESCO, UNICEF and WFP. Most evaluations related to SDG 5.5 were country-level evaluations; a minority of evaluations from the sample were conducted at headquarters/global, regional and multi-country levels.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Women continue to be underrepresented at all levels of leadership in every region of the world. As of 1 January 2023, only 26.5 per cent of the world's parliamentarians are women, 9.8 per cent of heads of state are women, and 11.3 per cent of heads of government are women.¹¹⁴ Women who aspire to be in leadership roles and those who are elected to office face several barriers inside and outside of the home, many of which are deeply rooted in harmful social norms, patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes.¹¹⁵ Violence against women, particularly in politics, continues to be widespread, and only recently has the issue been acknowledged as a deliberate tactic to prevent women from participating in leadership capacities.¹¹⁶ Changes in leadership and the COVID-19 pandemic have also led to regressions in the number of women participating in leadership roles as restrictions related to the pandemic impacted women differently to men in several countries. However, some positive gains such as women's representation in local governments; progress in the number of women selected for managerial positions; and temporary special measures have helped more women gain power. Target 5.5 is comprised of two indicators 5.5.1 (Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments) and 5.5.2 (Proportion of women in managerial positions) to track women's participation in leadership at all levels.

INTERVENTIONS AND APPROACHES

UN agency interventions and approaches to advance women's participation and opportunities for leadership include capacity strengthening and technical support; constitutional and legislative reforms; addressing violence against women in politics; engaging in dialogues, advocacy and peace talks to inform policies; and developing and implementing temporary special measures and key knowledge products. For example, UN agencies have increased the capacity of a wide range of stakeholders, including women political candidates; elected office bearers; national and state level government institutions, leaders and staff; parliamentarians; and civil society and women's organizations.

UN agencies have also fostered women's participation and leadership outside of political office. For example, several programmes conducted capacity strengthening of women's organizations for participation in community-based disaster risk management, disaster risk reduction and climate resilience groups and activities.¹¹⁷ Women, Peace and Security initiatives have sought to elevate women's roles in peace talks, early warning systems and community conflict resolution and dialogue through the formation of community mechanisms and networks with women at the centre, as well as training and technical support to their operation.¹¹⁸ UN entities, particularly UN Women and UNDP, are also working in partnership with local organizations and human rights defenders to define the issues and agenda on women's rights and gender equality.¹¹⁹

ENABLING AND HINDERING FACTORS

Support systems can empower women to take on more decision-making roles at community, subnational and national levels.

In contexts where women have been encouraged to take on leadership and decision-making roles by their spouses, families, communities and other leaders, there has been an increase in the number of women who strive for and participate in leadership roles.¹²⁰

Harmful social norms, patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes continue to block progress towards women's participation and leadership in decision-making.

Many evaluation reports cited the need to change mindsets and attitudes of individuals at the household, community and institutional levels for women to effectively engage in leadership roles. For example, an evaluation covering the period 2012–2017 highlighted that, in the past, political parties in Albania were ready to pay fines before they were willing to apply the quota system to candidate election lists.¹²¹ In Viet Nam, UNDP has been actively campaigning to different audiences through public communications to break gender stereotypes that can help women in their leadership journey.

Periodic changes in leadership have deterred progress through technical support and capacity strengthening activities.

For example, in India, during the span of a single programme period, two national elections took place that resulted in changes to the national and state department personnel that the programme team had engaged with during implementation.¹²² Nigeria saw many of its hard-earned successes in women aspirant and candidates' rights to vote and participate suddenly rolled back in both the upper and lower houses of parliament during the 2019 elections.¹²³

EVIDENCE ON WHAT WORKS AND DOES NOT WORK

Building capacity of aspiring women candidates; elected office bearers; national and state level government institutions, leaders and staff; parliamentarians; and civil society and women's organizations has been effective in advancing progress on women's leadership and participation.

Building the capacity of aspiring women candidates through training and technical support has enabled more women to stand for office and contributed to increased representation in political, economic and public life. For example, a training course for women and youth candidates in Guinea-Bissau contributed to the 2019 elections having the highest number of female candidates running for elected office for the national parliament to date.¹²⁴ In Turkey, local-level training for women political candidates and newly elected political representatives from across political parties led to strong, trusting relations between UN Women and the Parliament of Turkey.¹²⁵ Similarly, in El Salvador, training for municipal women who participate in different areas of the public space resulted in the formation of a women's network of defenders of women's human rights who work to bring issues to the national agenda.¹²⁶ These efforts have enabled UN agencies to increase dialogue around gender mainstreaming and highlight issues relevant to women to inform policies and practices. However, funding and training opportunities for women often occur close to election cycles, making it challenging for women to apply their knowledge and effectively participate in campaigning and leadership roles.¹²⁷

Box 6

Technical support and training in Tanzania

UN Women developed and implemented technical support and training workshops to address gender gaps in electoral laws in Tanzania. The workshops were designed to enhance the capacities of members of the electoral management bodies, National Assembly and Zanzibar House of Representatives prior to the 2020 general elections. The workshops enabled women's rights groups to engage with political parties and election management institutions and discuss how to develop and validate gender-responsive policies and cultivate a gender-responsive environment.

Source: UNDP, Independent country programme review - Tanzania (2021).

Successful collaborations among UN agencies at headquarters, regional and country levels and key partners have generated hundreds of knowledge products and key metrics to support the progress of women as leaders.

In Brazil, UN Women provided legislative actors with timely knowledge and technical input to help the government participate in international political forums and amend and adapt electoral processes and codes to promote women's leadership.¹²⁸ Through the UN Free & Equal campaign, OHCHR used the presidential elections in Ecuador as an opportunity to engage young scholars in a study that drew attention to the limited political participation and representation of LGBTIQ+ people in political processes.¹²⁹

Constitutional and legislative reforms, reviews of electoral codes and frameworks, and temporary special measures have contributed to increasing women's representation in leadership.

For example, UNDP supported Afghanistan's Women's Policy and Planning Directorate in the Ministry of Women Affairs in carrying out policy reviews and frameworks for monitoring and evaluation of the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan and increased the capacity of government staff on gender mainstreaming.¹³⁰ In collaboration with CSOs in the Central African

Republic, the UN successfully lobbied to remove property, literacy and numeracy requirements to run for office (which disproportionately affected women) from the 2019 electoral law.¹³¹ A strategic partnership between the EU, ILO and UN Women in Chile supported the development of the first national constitution to be drafted in equal parts by women and men.¹³²

Temporary special measures to increase or maintain the percentage of women candidates and elected officials have been one of the most effective strategies for increasing women's representation around the world.¹³³ Quotas are one type of temporary special measure which, when adopted into electoral codes or local levels of leadership, require a certain number of seats to be held for women. For example, UNDP's advocacy efforts with electoral management bodies and Members of Parliament during the revision of Tunisia's electoral legal framework produced parity provisions which helped to increase the proportion of women elected to parliament and municipal governments in the country.¹³⁴ While quotas have been useful to increase women's representation, they are often under threat of removal. For example, in 2021, UN Women's Country Office in Brazil and its Regional Office for the Americas and the Caribbean worked closely with the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs to inform the debate on four bills that would have resulted in setbacks for women's political participation: the bills were ultimately rejected by the parliament.¹³⁵

Advocacy, dialogue and peace talks have been effective precursors to women's political participation at the community and household level.

For example, in Pakistan, UN Women led a public awareness campaign focused on encouraging religious and community leaders to support women to register and vote.¹³⁶ In Haiti, UNDP established dialogue spaces for youth associations, political parties and leaders, and municipal officials to discuss public policies and the challenges encountered when participating in local governance.¹³⁷

UN Women has provided productive technical assistance for the development and implementation of Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans, which support the translation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (and its nine subsequent resolutions) into action in situations of conflict.

Evidence from the UN Women 2021 corporate evaluation on support to Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans references the OECD's finding that when women participate in peace processes it can contribute to wider stability, recovery and development goals.¹³⁸ The evaluation found that UN Women's efforts support the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment through inclusive processes; supporting women's empowerment and leadership; and building the capacity of partners on gender equality. However, despite the knowledge that women contribute positively to peacekeeping processes, they remain underrepresented, and it is challenging to assess transformative changes in the lives of women and girls because transformation is dependent on local actors and takes time.¹³⁹

UN agencies have been an active force in empowering women as leaders in efforts to end violence against women and promote peacebuilding.

Women who enter politics and stand for elections face both physical violence and online violence such as smear campaigns that many men do not encounter; however, mechanisms for conflict resolution that place women in leadership roles can be effective at preventing violence. For example, UN Women in Burundi focused on women's leadership in conducting community consultations, which prepared them to participate in the Arusha Talks for Peace. Through the female peace and security mediators, conflicts of various kinds have been addressed at community level, with a majority reported as fully resolved. These include conflicts between community factions as well as cases of VAWG.¹⁴⁰ In Liberia, UN Women, IOM and UNDP provided training for women on organizing and holding stakeholder dialogues and the early warning emergency response system. Peace huts provided a space for dialogue, lending legitimacy and authority to the women participants, who began identifying and reporting signals of insecurity and community-wide conflicts to the early warning mechanism. At the same time, their mediation skills were employed to resolve conflicts at the peace huts and in households. The Liberia programme also worked with men: through the use of semi-structured questionnaires and analysis during the interviews, group discussions and field visits the evaluation team found that 77 per cent of male respondents who had stereotypes regarding women in the security and justice sectors had changed their mindsets after participating in the training.¹⁴¹

Box 7**Women's leadership in women, peace and security in Iraq**

Strong leadership and coordination mechanisms are required for National Action Plans to be successful, but they often encounter challenges due to the high turnover of government officials and/or reorganization of government structures. In Iraq, UN Women was able to successfully establish a cross-sectoral national coordination mechanism within the Prime Minister's Office to oversee the Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan and to open dialogue among government, civil society and national stakeholders on issues related to gender equality. UN Women facilitated an inclusive process for drafting the second Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan, which involved the government and CSOs leading and taking account of regional and ethnic diversity in the country. UN Women also worked with the women and children's committee of the Iraqi parliament to build their capacity on legislation against domestic violence. However, there are still opportunities to include voices from rural populations, youth, the private sector and academia to strengthen ownership and accountability of National Action Plans in Iraq.

Source: UN Women, Corporate evaluation of UN Women's support to national action plans on women, peace and security (2021).

Support to women who are marginalized and women with disabilities has had mixed results.

UN agencies consider the needs and interests of marginalized communities that they are attempting to reach, resulting in some positive gains. However, complex contexts make it challenging to achieve concrete results for women who are marginalized and women with disabilities. For example, in Brazil, UN Women contributed to the black women's movement which led to dialogues with key government actors and offered support to black and indigenous women, particularly Afro-descendent women.¹⁴² In South Africa, UN agencies have supported women with HIV/AIDS in running for office. At the local level, FAO has developed an innovative gender-transformative model through Dimitra Clubs across Africa (e.g. Burundi, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Niger, Ghana and Senegal) to empower rural populations and women's leadership through community mobilization and dialogues, resulting in more women as decision makers at village level.¹⁴³ However, in some countries, such as Iraq, women-headed households and women with disabilities, in particular, continue to lack political representation and unequal or substandard access to opportunities.¹⁴⁴

LESSONS



Capacity strengthening can contribute to meaningful change in institutional structures, organizational culture, technical mechanisms, and networks and alliances with partner organizations. Several evaluations offered evidence of how strengthening the capacity of staff and officials in government, women's organizations and communities has advanced progress on issues related to gender equality and women's rights. However, high rates of turnover and organizational changes have led to regressions, stalls and the need for more sustainable efforts to cultivate lasting change. Beyond traditional training programmes, alternative approaches could include developing civil servant education programmes; establishing communities of practice and/or mentorship programmes within organizations; and offering learning platforms and knowledge-sharing sessions to encourage adoption of the latest frameworks and best practices.



Women's lack of access to the necessary skills, conditions and resources to participate in formal political and decision-making processes remains a key barrier to overcome in many countries. Women in many parts of the world would benefit from the technical capacity to effectively engage in leadership roles. Therefore, UN agencies must often begin by intervening with programmes and approaches that build women's knowledge and skills, which delays women's entry into politics and other official capacities and contributes to their underrepresentation in leadership roles.



Pervasive social norms, patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes hinder progress towards achieving SDG 5.5 at all levels of leadership. Social norms, attitudes and stereotypes continue to drive much of the behaviour and engagement of women in political, economic and public life. For example, an evaluation of UN programming in Georgia highlighted that the ability to influence change is highly dependent on shifting societal norms, public campaigns and the will of political parties.¹⁴⁵ Evidence from UN Women's 2018 corporate evaluation on women's political participation also highlights the need for changes in social norms to enable the sustained political empowerment of women.¹⁴⁶



UN entities require better strategies to engage and empower women from different populations to participate in leadership roles. While there are successful examples of engaging women from rural or marginalized populations, efforts to engage women from marginalized, vulnerable and socially disadvantaged groups (i.e. leave no one behind) in leadership roles have had varying degrees of success.



Addressing violence against women in politics continues to be a major barrier for women's participation in leadership, and it requires further system-wide attention. Few UN agencies specifically contribute to addressing and ending violence against women who choose to participate in leadership roles, particularly in politics. Taking a UN system-wide approach could potentially help to reduce the level of physical, sexual and online violence women are subjected to when trying to participate in leadership and decision-making roles.

TARGET 5.6 Universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights



Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences

EVIDENCE

There were 116 evaluations with strong relevance to Target 5.6. Of these, 54 were included in the sample for analysis. Another 27 evaluations from the sample had minor content relevant to the target and were also used in the analysis. Most of the reports came from UNFPA, followed by UNICEF. Reports were identified from UNDP, UN Women, OHCHR, UN AIDS and inter-agency evaluations. There was an equitable distribution of evaluations across all regions.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The indicators for Target 5.6 encompass: (i) proportion of women aged 15–49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care; and (ii) the number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee full and equal access to women and men aged 15 years and older to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education. Data spanning from 2007 to 2022 across 68 countries reveals that only 56 per cent of married or in-union women aged 15–49 are able to exercise their agency in determining matters related to their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). This percentage varies considerably, with sub-Saharan Africa averaging 37 per cent, while some countries in Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean exceed 80 per cent. Among the 115 countries with data from 2022, on average, countries have implemented 76 per cent of the necessary legal frameworks and regulations required to guarantee full and equal access to sexual and reproductive health services and rights for all.¹⁴⁷

INTERVENTIONS AND APPROACHES

UN agencies have employed a diverse range of interventions, from advocacy efforts to strategic partnerships. Examples included advocacy for the inclusion of individuals, especially girls and women living with HIV, within social protection programmes; activities to influence legislative and policy changes on SRHR; and awareness campaigns and efforts to reshape societal norms, including menstrual hygiene management. Capacity strengthening programmes have promoted SRHR and HIV awareness among government ministries, service providers, law enforcement, the judiciary, sex workers and midwives. Knowledge, data, research, and monitoring and evaluation support have been key interventions. The development of centralized gender dashboards, as well as implementation of the Stigma Index,¹⁴⁸ has captured and shared data on SRHR and HIV. Furthermore, examples of service provision, including the introduction of comprehensive SRHR education into school curricula, have been captured. Initiatives such as the establishment of gender clubs and “husbands’ schools”¹⁴⁹ are designed to foster gender equality awareness, extending to SRHR and family planning.

Technical support to governments has been another core pillar, involving guidance on laws, policies, national strategies, commitments, collaboration with civil society, and monitoring and assessments. Finally, strategic partnerships with the UN, government ministries, civil society and foundations have been established, including initiatives such as South-South learning and experience exchanges, which focus on addressing GBV, harmful practices and related SRHR concerns.

Several joint programmes have been implemented to enhance access to SRHR, including the UN Joint Programme on AIDS (UNAIDS, UNHCR, UNFPA, ILO and UNESCO) on preventing and responding to violence against women and girls; the UN Joint Programme on AIDS's work with key populations (2018–2021) by UNAIDS, WHO, UNODC and UNESCO; and the Afya Bora ya Mama na Mtoto Project (2015–2019) in partnership between UNFPA and UNICEF.

ENABLING AND HINDERING FACTORS

Political and cultural sensitivities surrounding SRHR topics, and related stigma and taboos related to SRHR and sexuality education, have consistently emerged as the primary impediments to advancing the SRHR agenda.

Reports consistently highlighted the culturally and politically sensitive nature of SRHR and sexuality education in countries, particularly those with conservative majorities. Moreover, the civic space for these fundamental rights is progressively narrowing, putting women's rights at risk in several countries. Social norms and taboos continue to surround issues such as menstruation and contraceptive use, impeding open discourse and education on such topics. Furthermore, the wording of certain initiatives, particularly those incorporating a rights-based approach to SRHR, is often perceived as too sensitive or taboo, resulting in hesitant collaboration among national entities.¹⁵⁰

Affordability and accessibility issues have compounded limitations on the provision of essential SRHR services.

Restricted availability and difficulties in accessing safe and affordable sanitary products consistently surfaced as significant barriers in evaluations. Additionally, the challenges associated with reaching remote areas, where the most disadvantaged groups often reside, compounded difficulties in delivering comprehensive SRHR services.¹⁵¹

Data gaps have proven to be a substantial obstacle to evidence-based decision-making in the field of SRHR.

Information regarding specific groups, notably transgender individuals, remains limited. Furthermore, obtaining reliable population data is a persistent challenge. Accessing data concerning youth, women and girls from sexual and reproductive and GBV services, particularly in hard-to-reach and conflict-affected areas, remains challenging.¹⁵²

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated many challenges, adding further complexity to efforts to address SRHR issues.

The pandemic disrupted and hindered the timely delivery and distribution of SRHR-related services and supplies, particularly impacting girls. School closures also resulted in girls losing access to essential SRHR services.¹⁵³

Constraints related to limited resources, including financial and human resources, have hampered the effective implementation of comprehensive programmes.

Frequent budget reductions for SRHR initiatives and a shortage of essential supplies were noted to have had a particularly adverse impact, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups, including people living with HIV and disadvantaged groups.¹⁵⁴

EVIDENCE ON WHAT WORKS AND DOES NOT WORK

Advocacy has been pivotal in driving policy changes and fostering programme enhancements towards SDG 5.6.

Advocating for SRHR for women, girls and youth, including marginalized groups with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, has yielded positive outcomes. This approach has notably included advocating for the inclusion of people living with HIV in cash transfer programmes, for example in Argentina and Cambodia, framed within a culturally sensitive, human rights-based framework.¹⁵⁵ UN advocacy has also led to the creation of working groups and district committees in which sex workers were represented. For example, the increasing involvement of sex workers in decision-making for HIV prevention at both district and national levels in Malawi was reported to have contributed to the decriminalization of sex work and reductions in arrests of sex workers – from as high as 50 per cent of sex workers being arrested on charges of sex work in 2015 to zero arrests in 2017.¹⁵⁶ High-level policy and advocacy achieved national policy changes, including reduced taxes on menstrual hygiene products in Ethiopia,¹⁵⁷ adoption of the health law to include youth SRHR in Algeria,¹⁵⁸ incorporation of comprehensive sexuality education into the educational curriculum in Nigeria¹⁵⁹ and protection of abortion rights.¹⁶⁰ Additionally, family-friendly policies, such as maternity, paternity and parental leave, were advanced through legislative amendments. High-level advocacy also led to an increase in government spending on contraceptives in Lao.¹⁶¹

Technical support has demonstrated effectiveness in affecting policy changes, delivered through national plan development and the endorsement of key resolutions such as the Commission of the Status of Women Resolution 60/2 on Women, the Girl Child, and HIV/AIDS and the UN Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS.¹⁶²

As a result of UN technical support, the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (2021) recognizes the importance of providing access to SRHR, HIV and GBV services for Venezuelan refugees and migrants, including those in Argentina and other affected countries.¹⁶³ In the East and Southern Africa region, contributions have been made to eliminate laws and policies that posed barriers to HIV prevention, treatment and care for key populations by the UNFPA regional office.¹⁶⁴ Technical support given to the Ministry of Health in Zanzibar to strengthen the Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health Technical Working Group was recognized as a best practice for integrating project coordination within existing government structures.¹⁶⁵ Despite such advances, a common challenge has been the lack of systematic monitoring and reporting of these changes.¹⁶⁶

Innovative approaches, particularly to influence social norms and implement public awareness campaigns, have emerged as promising tools for reaching diverse stakeholders and, in some cases, achieving changes in attitudes.

This included a pilot project in Georgia, conducted as a partnership between UN Women, UNFPA, UNDP and the World Bank, seeking to understand the impact of communication campaigns on altering parental perceptions about the value of daughters, and campaigns against early and child marriage by engaging community leaders, police officers, parents and schools. Campaigns addressing the roles of men and fathers, as well as youth engagement through education, have fostered dialogue and empowerment. Gender transformative programming by the MenCare Georgia campaign and partnerships with non-traditional actors, such as the Georgia Football Federation and FC Locomotive, were found to have increased engagement with men and shifted perceptions about their role in household responsibilities and child-rearing.¹⁶⁷

Utilization of technology, such as solar-powered radios, virtual referral networks for GBV, social media campaigns on COVID-19, HIV, GBV and SRHR, the Text4life app and the Tech4Youth regional platform, facilitated the sharing of essential information on SRHR and reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health services in Nigeria.¹⁶⁸ However, challenges with public advocacy efforts persist. In Jordan, UN programming efforts to engage men in family planning have yet to significantly alter attitudes.¹⁶⁹ Efforts to increase voice and leadership for midwives within ministries of health and other forums have faced persistent gender disparities and have not yielded substantial results.¹⁷⁰

The UN has effectively supported ministries and local governments with capacity-building activities leading to the expansion of facility and community-based HIV treatment programmes for adolescents and enhancements in SRHR programming.

Examples included developing a national training package for health workers on adolescence, HIV and SRH¹⁷¹ and assisting the National Gender Assessment of the national HIV response in Tanzania.¹⁷² The UN also played a role in building national capacity to integrate population dynamics, SRHR and gender equality into sectoral policies in Haiti.¹⁷³ In Tanzania, training programmes for service providers, particularly to address stigma and discrimination within government-run one-stop centres, were facilitated.¹⁷⁴ Mentorship programmes have improved competencies, including respectful care, and enabled health workers to provide counselling on family planning and reproductive health services.¹⁷⁵ In Eswatini, training of nurses in long-lasting reversible contraceptives contributed to increased uptake of implants and IUDs.¹⁷⁶ However, challenges were reported: in Sudan, delays in introducing a new midwifery course due to the suspension of the old

approach resulted in a shortage of skilled birth attendants;¹⁷⁷ and in Benin, curriculum reforms caused conflicts between older midwives with certificates and newer degree-holding midwives, impacting motivation and retention.¹⁷⁸ Some training content could be improved, such as in Tajikistan, where training healthcare providers on recognizing sexual violence or intimate partner violence should be integrated alongside efforts to address vertical transmission among women and girls living with HIV.¹⁷⁹

Knowledge, data and research activities have played a pivotal role in improving the monitoring of national HIV indicators and incorporating a gender perspective into national programmes.

Notable examples of effective practices came from Uganda and Ukraine. In Uganda, the development of a centralized gender dashboard enabled civil society networks to monitor national HIV indicators within the AIDS Strategic Plan. In Ukraine, the UNAIDS Secretariat and UN Women supported women living with HIV by incorporating a gender perspective into the draft National Programme on HIV prevention. This was achieved through the enhancement of the Gender Assessment Tool, empowering national AIDS coordinating bodies to review and enhance their HIV strategies.¹⁸⁰ One innovative approach was the Stigma Index. Argentina's country report on the Stigma Index served as an example for other countries to integrate specific questions about HIV and violence into the study, addressing the diverse experiences of women and girls.¹⁸¹ However, challenges persisted, particularly in the areas of data disaggregation¹⁸² and ensuring gender responsiveness in research and evaluation projects.¹⁸³ Furthermore, there is no agreement among international humanitarian actors on global indicators to track SRHR service delivery in humanitarian settings, contributing to challenges in assessing performance.¹⁸⁴

High-quality services enhancing awareness and behaviours in SRHR and maternal health offer promising practices.

Comprehensive sexuality education, including its incorporation into school curricula, has positive effects at both systemic and individual levels.¹⁸⁵ Gender clubs played a vital role in enhancing awareness of gender-related vulnerabilities faced by adolescent girls and those living with HIV. These clubs also facilitated a better understanding of the risks associated with early marriage, pregnancy, and sexual and reproductive health.¹⁸⁶ An improved supply of contraceptive products has been important in supporting coordination in reproductive health and ensuring commodity security at the country level.¹⁸⁷ Efforts to engage men in promoting reproductive health, particularly through the “husbands’ schools” intervention, have yielded positive results at the community level (see Box 8).¹⁸⁸

Integrated approaches to SRHR, HIV, VAWG and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) have demonstrated effectiveness in advancing target outcomes.¹⁸⁹

In Tanzania, the UN supported the Ministry of Health in developing a national training package for health workers on adolescence, HIV and SRH, which led to the expansion of facility and community-based HIV treatment support programmes for adolescents.¹⁹⁰ VAWG and HIV services were integrated using a one-stop approach in health facilities in Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tajikistan and Zimbabwe, contributing to holistic support to survivors of sexual violence and

integrated medical, psycho-social, legal, protection and economic support.¹⁹¹ UNFPA has made an important contribution to achieving quality and integrated services in SRHR, HIV and SGBV, particularly through the “2gether 4 SRHR” programme in East and Southern Africa, which was reported as an effective approach in meeting the needs of adolescent girls and young women and other vulnerable groups.¹⁹²

Partnerships and coordination have strengthened the provision of comprehensive SRHR support.

A notable case was the coordination of Afya Bora¹⁹³ at the national level in Tanzania, which serves as a model for UN joint initiatives. The collaborative efforts of two UN agencies (UNICEF and UNFPA) successfully leveraged their respective strengths to deliver comprehensive support: their well-defined division of labour, combined with their presence in the same facilities and communities, enabled a feat neither agency could have achieved independently. Another illustrative example is the support provided by UNFPA to UNICEF in the realm of SRHR and family planning for Community Health Volunteers. This collaboration significantly enhanced SRHR and family planning in the programme, which had been lacking in the initial design.¹⁹⁴ Moreover, effective South-South exchanges facilitated by the UNFPA East and South Africa Regional Office enabled the sharing of knowledge, expertise, experiences and digital resources, particularly for 2gether4SRHR, in countries such as Eswatini, Ethiopia, South Africa and Zambia.¹⁹⁵

Box 8

Husbands’ schools intervention, a strong example of peer-to-peer learning

This approach raised husbands’ awareness and knowledge of reproductive health; encouraged dialogue within families about important decisions; and established connections between schools and local health centres in areas with poor reproductive health indicators. NGOs supervised these schools, offering technical support, counselling, information on reproductive health services, and conducting capacity-building and community work. Evaluations have shown evidence of positive changes in men’s awareness and behaviour regarding maternal health and family planning. The initiative exemplified peer-to-peer learning and South-South cooperation among countries sharing common socioeconomic, institutional, policy, geographic and cultural backgrounds. The success of the Niger initiative prompted its adoption by countries including Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo, where it was easily adapted due to shared cultural contexts and social norms.

Source: UNFPA, Formative evaluation of UNFPA approach to South-South and triangular cooperation (2020).

LESSONS



Integrated approaches encompassing areas such as HIV, VAWG, SRHR, reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health, GBV and economic empowerment should be prioritized. These approaches have consistently demonstrated their effectiveness in achieving positive outcomes, leading to the expansion of facility and community-based HIV treatment support programmes for adolescents; contributing to holistic support to survivors of sexual violence; integrated medical, psycho-social, legal, protection and economic support; and meeting the needs of adolescent girls and young women and other vulnerable groups. Promising examples have been reported in Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tajikistan, Zimbabwe, and East and Southern Africa countries. Integrated approaches strengthen programming at the country level, enhance SRHR knowledge among young people and increase access to sexual and reproductive health services.



UN collaboration to pursue joint programmes addressing interconnected SDGs is vital. Valuable lessons from evaluations in East and Southern Africa highlight the benefits of joint efforts that bolster integrated services for HIV, SRHR and SGBV. Moreover, collaboration enables comprehensive support at both facility and community levels, a task no agency can achieve alone, leading to an enhanced focus on holistic services. A clear understanding of the unique roles each development partner plays is important to ensure effectiveness and to avoid misunderstandings.



Progress on SDG 5.6 can be advanced with increased knowledge-sharing, particularly in disseminating lessons learned, among key SRHR stakeholders. Effective examples of South-South knowledge exchange, webinars and meetings to foster the exchange of experiences and best practices in SRHR among various countries can be replicated.

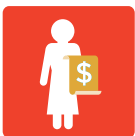


Continued, deliberate efforts to engage conventional and non-traditional partners, including religious leaders, who are often male, in reproductive health and child-care are essential. The “husbands’ schools,” an intervention engaging men in promoting reproductive health, has yielded positive results at the community level, which could be replicated in other contexts. Moreover, partnering with non-traditional partners, such as sports teams, has proved effective in shifting public perceptions about men’s roles in child-rearing. Additionally, implementing a systematic approach that grounds gender inclusion in a comprehensive gender analysis of project components is equally important.



It is important to maintain engagement, advocacy and communication with donors regarding SRHR. Some donors may only support specific technical areas within SRHR, such as fistula treatment, while others are drawn to comprehensive SRHR and maternal, newborn and child health integration. Recognizing the varying priorities of donors and tailoring approaches accordingly is key.

TARGET 5.a Equal rights to economic resources, property ownership and financial services



Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws

EVIDENCE

There were 158 evaluations strongly related to Target 5.a. Of these, 78 were included in the sample for analysis; and an additional 17 evaluations in the sample provided more limited data relevant to the target. Most of the Target 5.a evaluations included in the sample were conducted by UNDP, WFP, FAO, UN Women and ILO. Overwhelmingly, the evaluations in the sample were conducted at a country level.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Women, especially rural women, have long faced unequal access to economic resources. Target 5.a focuses on giving women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources. Although being major contributors in the agricultural sector, rural women have continued to face significant barriers that limit their ability to fully participate in and benefit equally from profitable economic activities. Restricted access to resources and services, such as land, finance, market information, agricultural inputs and technology are further compounded by broader systematic barriers women face, such as unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work and exclusion from decision-making structures.¹⁹⁶

Land is an important asset in providing economic resources and food security. Globally, less than 15 per cent of all landholders are women.¹⁹⁷ The lack of formal land ownership limits women's capacity to borrow money and invest in agriculture or other economic activities. Women's lower access to collateral for loans and property ownership than men is due partly to discriminatory laws as well as social norms.

INTERVENTIONS AND APPROACHES

In regard to Target 5.a's focus on undertaking reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, FAO has undertaken advocacy efforts for the operationalization of the Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT). These guidelines seek to promote the land rights of women farmers, among others, who face serious gender discrimination. As the traditional land-tenure systems of FAO Members generally do not recognize women's title to land, FAO has also piloted VGGT-related interventions in various regions to promote the tenure rights of marginalized groups, particularly women farmers and pastoralists.¹⁹⁸

Women's access to economic resources is also heavily tied to their participation in the labour market. In that regard, ILO's international labour standards conventions have been important in promoting and achieving gender equality. ILO's Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, adopted in June 2019, constitutes a milestone in women's economic empowerment. The declaration states that ILO must direct its efforts towards achieving gender equality at work by ensuring equal opportunities, equal participation and equal treatment, including equal remuneration for women and men for work of equal value, to enable a more balanced sharing of family responsibilities; better work-life balance; and to promote investment in the care economy.¹⁹⁹

To achieve women's equal rights to economic resources, UN programming has also focused on women's economic empowerment. For example, UNDP, UN Women and UNCDF jointly implemented the Inclusive and Equitable Local Development programme, a global initiative that operated between 2016 and 2020 with the main goal for governments and the private sector to design, plan, implement and sustain local public and private investments that unlock barriers to women's economic empowerment.²⁰⁰ Its longer-term aim was to overcome discriminatory attitudes and inequitable economic structures to expand women's economic opportunities. The programme strategy took a systems-based approach that focused on three areas: building capacity of partner organizations and partnerships for women entrepreneurs to grow their businesses; creating a policy and institutional environment that supports women's economic empowerment; and enhancing public and private financing of gender-focused local economic development by demonstrating replicable and scalable approaches to public and private investments that favour women.

ENABLING AND HINDERING FACTORS

Positive social norms on men's participation in unpaid care work are necessary to enable women's employment.

In contrast, in certain countries, women's mobility outside their homes is restricted. Various obstacles stand in the way of women's employment. Even when women have skills and qualifications that the labour market needs, the underutilization of female talent is linked to a culture that discourages men from participating in unpaid work in the home, together with inadequate public provision of care for children and dependants.²⁰¹ Women shoulder a disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic responsibilities, including childcare, tending to the elderly and ill, cooking and cleaning. Time available for income-generating activities is further restricted when essential public services such as water, sanitation, energy, healthcare and childcare are deficient. This, in turn, restricts the range of employment opportunities available to the women and diminishes the rewards they can reap from their work.

Patriarchal beliefs and norms create significant obstacles for women in accessing financial resources and other critical assets.

These biases impede women from pursuing education and employment in non-traditional fields and undermine their ability to own land and other assets. Evaluative evidence highlights how men are sometimes hired for jobs or enterprises simply because it is "men's work", apparently without consideration of whether women could be trained to do the work.²⁰² Additionally, women face discriminatory challenges rooted in inheritance and marital assets practices. Discriminatory social norms such as early marriage and exclusion from remunerated economic activity within family businesses have also hindered women's economic empowerment.

EVIDENCE ON WHAT WORKS AND DOES NOT WORK

At the national level, UN agencies worked effectively with policymakers to advance economic rights and remove discriminatory barriers through gender-sensitive legislation and policies.

Several evaluations highlighted the technical support provided to government stakeholders to identify discriminatory clauses, revise legislation or develop new gender-responsive policies. For example, UN Women supported the Ministry of Labour in Viet Nam to review the labour code. This resulted in the inclusion of multiple provisions in support of female workers' rights, equal parental leave and a reduction in the retirement eligibility age gap. Allowing government stakeholders to lead the policy process was cited as critical for fostering their sense of ownership.²⁰³ Other policy initiatives focused on ensuring women's rights to own and control assets and expand women's access to finance.

Providing women-led microenterprises and entrepreneurs with a combination of technical assistance and financing has shown promise; however, more support to early-stage enterprises is required.

Women have received training and technical assistance from the UN and its partners to improve their production and access to the markets. Programmes have sought to provide women entrepreneurs with role models, networks and mentoring opportunities as well as enhance women's business, leadership, management, information technology and financial skills. Often these programmes offer small loans. While multiple sources of support for women's income generation and microenterprises exist, and some international programming supports small to medium-size organizations, little technical support has been available to help early-stage micro to small enterprises grow. The growth of these small enterprises partially relies on having access to appropriate technical assistance.

UN agencies have provided productive technical support to governments to develop gender-equitable governance of land tenure and promote women's access to and control of economic resources.

For example, FAO launched "Governing land for women and men", a capacity development programme to support countries implementing land gender equality principles. To date, Liberia,

Mongolia, Sierra Leone and South Africa have participated in the programme and developed action plans for providing gender-equitable governance of land tenure. However, an evaluation of FAO's work on gender found that although FAO has made considerable strides towards meeting its gender-equality objectives at policy and field level, results vary from country to country and depend on local staff capacities to mainstream gender into programming.²⁰⁴

UNEP and UN Women have also documented an initially successful practice regarding women exercising rights to access and control of economic resources, through renewable energy to build resilient and transformative livelihoods. UNEP and UN Women partnered with provincial stakeholders in Cambodia and Viet Nam, through the EmPower programme, and strengthened their institutional capacity and understanding of the linkages between renewable energy and women's entrepreneurship, as well as leveraging funding for renewable energy-based women's entrepreneurship projects. Pilot work with 18 small and micro enterprises was conducted, and local CSOs were connected with companies working in the renewable energy sector. Initial case study evidence pointed towards the pilot initiatives beginning to show changes in gender roles, behaviours and attitudes; however, success in this area requires long-term commitment.²⁰⁵

Box 9

FAO's work in Kenya to improve women's access to land and resources

FAO selected Kenya as one of the countries to implement the Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests in the Context of National Food Security. Kenya's 2010 Constitution recognizes women's rights, even concerning communal land. However, effectively implementing this constitutional provision poses a challenge considering existing community norms where land ownership is traditionally vested exclusively in men. The approach taken in Kenya has received acclaim. It involves both men and women in dialogue with authorities to facilitate participatory and transparent land planning. Moreover, it strives to challenge gender stereotypes by aligning the interests of women and men through support for a crucial resource: water. Women express interest in water for irrigating vegetable gardens (in line with conservation agriculture), while men engaged in pastoral activities require pasture. By providing water for vegetable cultivation (for both consumption and sale) and fodder for livestock, the intervention effectively demonstrated to communities the benefits of granting women access to land.

Source: FAO, Evaluation of FAO's Work on Gender (2019).

LESSONS



The implementation of gender-responsive legislation and policies, such as land and labour laws, parental leave and investment in the care economy is foundational to women's economic empowerment.

Aligned with lessons learned regarding SDG Target 5.4, integrating unpaid care considerations within social protection systems is critical to facilitating women's participation in the labour market and simultaneously promoting their economic empowerment.



There is a need to boost the availability of and access to funding for women-led enterprises and female entrepreneurs.

Supporting greater access to finance for women entrepreneurs and women-led enterprises requires facilitating partnerships with investors and financial institutions. It also requires providing assistance to financial institutions to improve their ability to identify and serve gender-sensitive investable projects that can have a positive impact on women's economic empowerment and livelihoods.²⁰⁶



It is important for partnerships to be built with traditionally male-dominated sectors, such as energy, the green economy and technology.

Other emblematic and context-relevant partnerships, including those with women's networks, are also needed. Some good practices have been documented by evaluations. For example, UNEP partnered with provincial stakeholders in Cambodia and Viet Nam to strengthen their institutional capacity and understanding of the linkages between renewable energy and women's entrepreneurship, as well as leveraging funding for renewable energy and women's entrepreneurship projects.



Women entrepreneurs play a large role in empowering other women.

These women are well placed to empower others by sourcing their products from them, employing them or advising on business topics. This implies the need to expand the network of women entrepreneurs. As women increase their ability to network, they gain a range of work-related skills, increase their confidence and boost their self-esteem.



The approach of working through groups that can become legally recognized (such as cooperatives) and increasing women's participation in these groups is important to provide legitimacy and recognition.

These groups have proven to become formal platforms for women to claim their rights, approach local government for support and have more visibility with other economic actors. For example, a programme in Sri Lanka strengthened cooperatives with the formation of a change-agent network: through this network, women in the cooperatives were trained to facilitate the process of finding appropriate solutions to issues affecting women and their households by referring them to relevant stakeholders and government authorities.²⁰⁷

TARGET 5.b



Promote empowerment of women through technology

Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.

EVIDENCE

There were 16 evaluations related to Target 5.b. Of these, 12 were included in the sample for analysis; an additional 18 evaluations from the sample provided more limited data relevant to the target. The evaluations included in the sample were published by ILO, UNCTAD, UN Women, UNDP and UNESCO. Over half of the evaluations related to SDG 5.b were global evaluations conducted by UN agencies at the headquarters level. The remaining evaluations from the sample were multi-country or country-level evaluations conducted in the Asia-Pacific region.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Technology is rapidly evolving, as is the UN system's focus on information, technology and communication. Indicator 5.b.1 (proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone, by sex) is the sole indicator for Target 5.b, as phone ownership has been suggested to promote autonomy and independence, and while innovation and technology do not always benefit men and women equally, they can be leveraged for women's empowerment.²⁰⁸ The Generation Equality Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality – a group of governments, the UN system, private sector bodies, foundations and CSOs – aims to reduce the gender digital divide across generations by half by accelerating access to digital technologies and universal digital literacy by 2026.²⁰⁹ While the sample of evaluations reviewed did not provide a definition of what technology refers to precisely, the term was used to capture reports that included programmes or processes related to ICT, STEM, digitization coding, automation and internet-enabled devices.²¹⁰

INTERVENTIONS AND APPROACHES

Recent UN approaches and interventions to enhance the use of enabling technology to empower women have included increasing women and girls' coding skills; forming partnerships with telecommunications companies to offer discounted rates for services; and introducing technological initiatives, with most interventions being implemented at the country level.

UN agencies have designed and implemented capacity strengthening initiatives to support women and girls in their skills development. For example, ILO initiated the Women in STEM Workforce Readiness Programme (Women in STEM) in December 2017 in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand as a means of responding to the needs of women who were underserved by the existing skills system and the needs of the labour market. Because female employment is concentrated in low-skilled occupations in Indonesia, females are 20 per cent more likely than males to lose their job because of automation.²¹¹ The African Girls Can Code initiative was designed as a means to bring coding camps, digital literacy and personal development skills to women and girls aged 17–25 throughout Africa, and reached approximately 600 girls from 32 Member States through coding camps held in South Africa and Ethiopia during the first phase of the programme.²¹² Phase two of the initiative began in April 2022 and aims to provide training in 11 African countries with a target of reaching 2,000 girls.

Some interventions have been designed to introduce innovative and technological solutions. For example, in Uruguay, in collaboration with the Banco de Previsión Social – the State entity that provides subsidies for parental leave and informs parents about their rights to that leave – UN Women researched, designed and tested a behaviourally informed text messaging system to encourage men to take parental leave to support implementation of Uruguay's parental leave policies.²¹³

Other initiatives have focused on digitization as a means of empowerment. UNICEF's Child Protection Programme in Cambodia, for example, converted paper-based inspections to digital inspections housed on a tablet to create more effective, efficient and accurate systems; reduce the time required to conduct inspections; and enable the collection of more comprehensive, detailed and disaggregated data on facilities, staffing and children. UN Women also approached WFP to help to digitize UN Women's existing Cash for Work project in the refugee camps situated in Jordan which made blockchain technology work for women and girls in crises, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic where restrictions affected cash disbursements for most humanitarian actors.²¹⁴ OHCHR has offered training on digital and data protection for environmental activists, human rights defenders and journalists, many of whom are women.²¹⁵

ENABLING AND HINDERING FACTORS

The lack of stable infrastructure and connectivity in many parts of the world remains a barrier to sustainable progress.

For example, evaluations of the UN Women Buy from Women platform implemented in multiple countries concluded it is unlikely that poor or marginalized women will be able to effectively use the platform because they lack connectivity, electricity and digital literacy skills. Women who receive mobile devices to utilize during the initiatives are often not equipped to pay the ongoing costs for internet connectivity or maintenance of their devices if they break.²¹⁶

Box 10

Leveraging ICT to increase the safety of activists, defenders and journalists

In the Asia and Pacific region, OHCHR is working to enhance digital safety for environmental activists, human rights defenders and journalists who regularly face safety threats. The project involves strengthening the capacity of changemakers with knowledge, skills, abilities and resources so that they can use communication tools to advocate and communicate safely.

Source: OHCHR, Evaluation of the OHCHR project: Strengthening the capacity of regional actors to promote human rights, accountability, democratic space, and gender in the Asia-Pacific region (2022).

EVIDENCE ON WHAT WORKS AND DOES NOT WORK

There were indications that UN agencies successfully leveraged information, communications and technology to reach marginalized groups during the COVID-19 pandemic.

ICT was used to communicate information to communities, conduct virtual training, and support women and girls facing domestic violence. For example, to advance the work in ending child marriage in Bangladesh, UNICEF trained adolescents on COVID-19 messages with the aim of protecting themselves, their families, peers and community members from COVID-19 through a mobile phone application called "Digital Application for Adolescents." The messages also included content to empower adolescents to stay vigilant against GBV, child marriages and violence against children during the pandemic.²¹⁷ Similarly, UNHCR was able to address communications problems created by COVID-19-related lockdowns by providing new ICT equipment and SIM cards for mobile phones to extremely vulnerable groups in camps in Thailand, and COVID-19-compliant physical meetings with community leaders in Kenya to strengthen communication channels through WhatsApp trees and community radio. These activities enabled focal points to communicate directly with the UNHCR operations.²¹⁸

Key gaps in UN technical expertise in information, communications and technology programming have hindered progress in the development of coherent project designs and effective contextualization of technology-related programming to local circumstances.

For example, the International Telecommunication Union initially approached UN Women with an idea and proposal for an African Girls Can Code initiative to be implemented in multiple countries across Africa, but an evaluation of the project found that UN Women crafted a problem statement and theory of change for the project based on limited technical expertise. As a result, the programme design failed to account for the need to translate course material into local languages; issues related to internet connectivity; appropriate budgets to buy equipment such as laptops; and the need for underage participants to travel to the coding camps with a chaperone, which precluded some girls from participating.²¹⁹

Partnerships with the private sector have led to some successes in UN agencies advancing technology for women.

Private sector partners often possess relevant expertise, resources and capacity to support UN agencies with implementation of the necessary technology and scale up. For example, UNICEF's Country Office in Uganda partnered with the National ICT Authority Uganda to support the transfer of Technology for Development (T4D) initiatives and leveraged its authority with telecommunication companies to reduce SMS and data rates, which enabled the national scale up and sustainability of T4D. The UNICEF Uganda Country Office also built nationwide partnerships with 20 media agencies and outlets to raise public awareness on issues affecting children, such as school enrolment and violence against children, which has helped to reach millions of people, but requires re-strategizing to maintain pace with changing media trends and the requirements of real-time reporting that are characteristic of online media outlets.²²⁰ UN Women's Empower Women Knowledge Gateway allocated most of its financial resources to implement ICT outreach activities, as well as research and content development. It also formed valuable partnerships with private technology companies to facilitate the use of technology and reach broader audiences by leveraging social media for outreach, communication and advocacy campaigns and by establishing a community of followers on Facebook (now Meta) and Twitter (now X), where Global Champions for Change can regularly engage in discussions.²²¹

LESSONS



The UN system requires investments in its internal capacity and strategic partnerships to advance Target 5.b. Based on the evaluative evidence, in general, UN personnel currently lack the skills and expertise to influence the rapidly evolving technology sector. However, investing in capacity strengthening for staff and personnel at all levels and partnering with organizations and the private sector who are further embedded in the latest technological advances could potentially provide a good avenue for the UN to leverage the influential role it has earned through other work in areas of gender equality and women's empowerment. For example, UN Women co-leads the Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation and the EQUALS Global Partnership – a group of over 100 corporate leaders, governments, businesses, not-for-profit organizations, academic institutions, NGOs and community group partners – to close the digital gender divide.



The lack of stable infrastructure and connectivity in many parts of the world remains a barrier to sustainable progress for SDG 5.b. Aside from technical expertise, infrastructure and access to technology remain key factors hindering progress towards leveraging technology to advance progress on Target 5.b. The most marginalized women face multiple barriers in accessing and connecting to the technological platforms that are introduced through various programmes and initiatives. Poor and marginalized women are unlikely to be able to use the platforms because they lack Internet connectivity, electricity, literacy and digital literacy, as noted in

evaluations of the Buy from Women initiative. For example, in Malawi, Buy from Women personnel reported that smart phone penetration in the country is at 14 per cent, and women represent the minority of this group. Girls who participated in the African Girls Can Code initiative are unlikely to be able to use the technology they received during the programme once they leave the coding camps and return home due to a lack of Internet access in their communities, the cost of connectivity and the inability to repair or replace broken laptops.²²² Building technology infrastructure and the identification of new solutions for development problems will be critical to accelerate progress towards SDG 5.



It is important for UN agencies to adopt clear definitions, strategies and best practices to maintain pace with rapid advancements in technology. UN agencies have entered and engaged in the information, communications and technology sector to promote the empowerment of women; however, few have developed overarching strategies and clear approaches on how they will engage in the sectors. For example, as noted in UN Women's corporate evaluation on the approach to innovation, it is important to have a clear understanding of commonly conflated terms around the use of technology and innovation to make significant progress in empowering women and ensuring their online safety through this rapidly evolving area of work.

TARGET 5.c



Policies and enforceable legislation for gender equality

Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

EVIDENCE

There were 78 evaluations strongly related to Target 5.c. Of these, 43 were included in the sample for analysis; an additional 30 evaluations in the sample provided more limited data relevant to the target. The evaluations were overwhelmingly at the country level and primarily from UNDP, although UN Women and inter-agency evaluations were also well represented. There were only two institutional effectiveness/strategy evaluations, and project/programme/thematic evaluations counted for more than double the number of country portfolio evaluations. Many of the evaluations were of programmes in Asia and the Pacific or Europe and Central Asia, which mirrors progress in this target (see below). A fair number of evaluations were also completed in East and Southern Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, with very few in West and Central Africa or the Arab States.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Target 5.c focuses on policies and legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, measured in Indicator 5.c.1 in terms of systems for tracking and making public budget allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment. Achieving the target requires countries to be transparent in the financial management cycle from budgetary debates to policy and programme implementation through to evaluation of the impact of expenditure. It also calls for production of sex-disaggregated data and other gender statistics for policy decision-making; the execution of gender impact assessments of policies and programmes; and monitoring by women's organizations and parliamentarians.

All world regions are "very far" from this target except for Central and South Asia, which is a "moderate" distance from the target. Only 27 countries have comprehensive systems to track and make budgetary allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment,²²³ and yet an additional US\$ 360 billion per year²²⁴ beyond current levels – and its effective expenditure – is needed for developing countries to achieve gender equality in key areas.²²⁵

INTERVENTIONS AND APPROACHES

Interventions under this target spanned a range of activities towards development and implementation of policy and legislation, including gender-responsive budgeting. Capacity strengthening and technical support for gender-responsive budgeting were common and often paired with interventions to increase female representation in policymaking bodies or training of women parliamentarians in a range of issues. Many programmes also included training for CSOs to monitor policy and budget fulfilment, such as UNDP in Haiti, which raised the understanding of youth associations in the functioning of national institutions in conflict prevention and management.²²⁶ UN agencies have also contributed to the integration of gender equality considerations into a wide variety of national sectoral plans, including National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security, climate change, biodiversity loss, land use, disaster risk reduction, violence against women and girls and others. For example, UN Women in Zimbabwe supported development of the financial sector strategy to include women and the creation of a security sector think tank to advise the National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325.²²⁷

Evaluation reports discussed development and capacity strengthening of information systems for gender statistics and data use for policy development and implementation.²²⁸ A variety of UN agencies have collaborated with national statistics institutions to expand the range of data gathered, analyse data in new ways, or improve web portals that serve as repositories. In some programmes, these activities were linked with training for CSOs in navigating online databases and using data for advocacy. UN programmes in some countries have also benefitted from working groups that bring together several ministries or departments for prioritization and joint interpretation of gender statistics for policy dialogue and planning. Other initiatives contributed to policy improvements through direct support to research on key gender issues. For example, ECLAC's Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean funded studies on a range of topics that led to a technical statistical analysis of the region's data.²²⁹

Programmes also built capacity in more general topics in gender equality and women's empowerment with policymakers and civil servants. These programmes are designed to improve the capacity of stakeholders to design and implement gender-responsive policies. Examples include UN Women's programme in Ukraine with the National Agency for Civil Service and FAO's work (in partnership with UN Women) with the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment in the Dominican Republic.²³⁰

ENABLING AND HINDERING FACTORS

The support of broad constituencies on an issue facilitates thorough policy implementation.

This is true for both enforcement of criminal law, such as in the banning of FGM, and compliance with civil mandates such as quotas on women's representation.²³¹ A well-informed and supportive populace is a key component in the execution of gender-responsive budgets, plans and statutes.²³²

Political and social sensitivities can hinder the development of data systems.

When the data collected is politically sensitive or could put vulnerable individuals at risk – such as the incidence of violence against women or the experiences of migrant workers present illegally – high-quality information collection is difficult. The evaluation of the EU-UN Spotlight Safe and Fair programme, a cross-national initiative in violence prevention and response for migrant women workers, concluded that significant investment in time and resources is necessary to strengthen government systems and cooperation across nations for the collection of this information. Special studies such as those conducted by the Joint Programme on Migration Governance for Development and Integration in Africa can fill in data gaps when continuous tracking is not necessary.²³³

The COVID-19 pandemic had a detrimental effect on policy development and implementation.²³⁴

Priorities quickly shifted, and often the momentum that had been built was lost. Some programmes were able to rebuild attention on an issue once conditions had stabilized; others had reached the end of their cycles and concluded with unmet targets. The EU-UN Spotlight Safe and Fair initiative in ASEAN countries was unable to complete work on policy alignment across countries and capacity-building, as service providers were no longer available. However, the programme adapted and studied how the pandemic had changed the needs of women migrant workers and their access to services, not only helping meet workers' needs but also creating knowledge that may be applicable in future crisis events.

EVIDENCE ON WHAT WORKS AND DOES NOT WORK

UN agencies have been instrumental in the integration or strengthening of gender equality in national and regional sectoral plans.

Many evaluations reported that close involvement with the production of sectoral plans enabled technical support for the inclusion of gender equality issues. For example, in Kazakhstan and Bosnia and Herzegovina, technical assistance from the UN was reported to have resulted in the use of specific gender tools in planning, including local gender action plans, in several government departments and municipalities.²³⁵ Gender-related adjustments were included for the first time in Viet Nam's nationally determined contributions to the reduction of emissions plan as a result of EmPower programme capacity strengthening.²³⁶ The UN has also been influential in integrating gender equality concerns into regional plans, such as FAO's support of a gender strategy in the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States' (CELAC) Plan for Food Security, Nutrition and Hunger Eradication 2025.²³⁷

Tools for gender-responsive budgeting and disaggregated data collection advanced the institutionalization of processes and facilitated transparency.

For example, the Gender Inequality of Risk programme integrated gender equality and social inclusion into a damage assessment tool and facilitated technical support for review of data collection by National Plan on Climate subcommittees in the Solomon Islands.²³⁸ WHO created tools for the collection of sex and age-disaggregated data at the country level with the Health Equity Assessment Toolkit, allowing better analysis of health inequities by sex, age, wealth and other stratifiers. However, it is not clear how well the toolkit is being used.²³⁹ Evaluators found that UNECE's Active Aging Index is a useful tool for monetization of social policies. It has been integrated with UNFPA's Generations and Gender Programme in some countries to

ensure that the needs of older women are integrated into budgets.²⁴⁰ UN agencies have also assisted in the creation of mechanisms for transparency in budgeting, such as Cabo Verde's online budget portal.²⁴¹ In Bangladesh, UNDP supported the adoption of gender budgeting in disaster preparedness and risk reduction across five ministries and improved transparency through open budget meetings.²⁴²

Capacity strengthening and technical support efforts with government agencies and ministries on policy implementation were often successful when activities were related to specific tasks or implementation of specific policies.

Conversely, feedback on gender training was often that the content was too theoretical. Some reports highlight struggles with government stakeholder perceptions that an agency's role in gender equality work is ambiguous or misplaced. Formalizing the agency's approach to gender technical assistance for policymakers and implementers may help clarify roles and aims.²⁴³ Evaluations also noted that technical support is most effective when grounded in a thorough knowledge of the recipient organization.²⁴⁴ In some settings where a change in political leadership means the replacement of civil servants or there is frequent turnover in elected officials, multiple election cycles are required before the long-term effectiveness of a capacity strengthening approach can be judged. One solution identified as a best practice to overcome the challenge of turnover is to train new legislators in gender mainstreaming and responsive budget analysis as they are inducted.²⁴⁵

Many evaluations suggest that holistic approaches contributed to success with enacting, budgeting and implementing gender-responsive policy.

This has been achieved through targeting multiple sectors of society (government, civil society, private sector, the public, etc.); aligning policy, planning and budgeting across sectoral plans; or working at multiple levels inside and outside institutions. The UN Joint Programme on Gender Equality in Georgia employed a “wrap-around approach” of

institutional advocacy, service delivery improvements and public campaigns that involved individual awareness building, technical expertise and tools, adjustments to internal human resource processes, protocols for councils and commissions, working groups and leadership modelling across the Parliament, executive, ministries, public service, local authorities and the Public Defender’s Office.²⁴⁶ A similar approach was adopted in Ukraine in Women Peace and Security, as highlighted in Box 11.

Box 11

“Enhancing Accountability for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in National Reforms, Peace and Security in Ukraine” – Institutionalization of Women, Peace and Security

The goal of this project was to ensure that national reforms and government institutions’ planning and budgeting were inclusive of women and informed by the conflict’s impact on gender relations and roles. The project adopted a holistic theory of change recognizing the importance of political will, human and institutional capacity, supportive public attitudes and sufficient financing. It was informed by a capacity needs assessment of selected central executive bodies on gender mainstreaming in reforms, planning and budgeting and an analysis of the governance of the security and defence sector. Although the project was broader, the greatest successes were achieved in Women, Peace and Security. Activities included support to the development of the second National Action Plan 1325, which expanded the rights of women in the military and security sectors, and advocacy for CEDAW’s Optional Protocol and General Recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations. The percentage of women in law enforcement and military bodies has gone up as a result. Strong leverage was built for high-level support of the Women, Peace and Security agenda in Ukraine, including at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Social Policy and the National Agency for Civil Service. In addition, five curricula for gender equality training of civil servants were institutionalized in the Ukrainian School of Governance and the National Agency for Civil Service. Evaluators concluded that sustainability will depend on financed, concrete actions to continue to address the knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of the leaders who guide institutional priority-setting and culture.

Source: UN Women, Final Evaluation of the UN Women Project “Enhancing Accountability for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in National Reforms, Peace and Security in Ukraine” (2021).

LESSONS



Women's organizations are important partners for deepening engagement with policymakers. Working alongside community-based and national groups and networks strengthens their profiles, gives programmes legitimacy, builds in civil society monitoring for government accountability and, when relationships are well managed, ensures the most relevant policy issues are raised. For example, in Tanzania, UNDP training on gender and budgeting led to CSOs being more actively engaged in dialogues with the government about resource allocation.²⁴⁷ Effective partnerships with such groups may require organizational development and capacity strengthening activities, which should have a dedicated line in the programme budget.²⁴⁸ The Gender Inequality of Risk programme evaluation, for example, suggests that training women's organizations in the Sendai Framework Monitor system – which tracks progress in implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction – ultimately led to men in government understanding better why women need to be part of disaster risk reduction decision-making.²⁴⁹



There is a need to more strongly integrate the leave no one behind principle across programmes addressing Target 5.c. Limitations in the application of the approach were primarily attributed to difficulty in accessing vulnerable and invisible populations and a lack of disaggregated data about them. In some cases, the UN enabled the expansion of national sectoral plans to subgroups of marginalized women, such as indigenous women or domestic workers.²⁵⁰ Some agencies were also effective in improving compliance with policy instruments relevant to excluded groups; for example, ILO enhanced the application of Conventions 107 and 169 on indigenous and tribal people and 189 on domestic workers.²⁵¹ To improve access to marginalized groups, organizations that represent the hardest to reach should be sought as partners,²⁵² as did the UN inter-agency programme in Lebanon in consulting eight organizations for people with disabilities in the design of the national social protection programme and National Disability Allowance.²⁵³ In addition, information systems should be built to capture meaningful data about subgroups of women, such as single heads of household, widows, women with disabilities, ethnic minorities, etc.²⁵⁴



An in-depth knowledge of the national machineries and political processes is necessary to follow entire cycles of law-making, policy setting, plan development, budgeting and expenditure tracking. Strong national commitments as reflected in policies and plans do not always translate into greater budgetary allocations. Similarly, greater allocations do not always mean greater expenditure. An evaluation of UN Women's governance and national planning portfolio noted that there has been relatively little emphasis on monitoring and evaluation of the government policy-budget-review cycle.²⁵⁵ For example, evaluators noted that a UN programme in Malawi should seek to influence budget allocation during the estimates stage, before the consolidated budget is brought to parliament.²⁵⁶



Social norm change must happen inside institutions for legislative and policy reforms to be sustainable. Government personnel, elected officials, and local service providers and administrators are members of their societies and cultures and are not immune to social norms and gender stereotypes. Policy implementation is shaped by their assumptions and attitudes. For example, UNCDF had to overcome resistance from local governments in some countries to women in planning and reducing constraints to women's access to financial services.²⁵⁷ In contrast, an evaluation noted that municipal officials in Mexico City recognized the importance of integrating gender equality within their institutional culture to develop and implement city-wide care policies.²⁵⁸



Service providers and duty bearers (such as registrars, health workers, school officials, etc.) may need training and support in the mechanisms of policy implementation. New expectations or tasks for local level actors are most effectively integrated when those actors understand their purposes and how to meet new demands. For example, evaluators found that UNDP's training of prosecutors, judges and law enforcement in Zanzibar on completing reporting forms on SGBV was transformative in improving violence response services.²⁵⁹ The Joint Programme of FAO, IFAD, UN Women and WFP on Economic Empowerment of Rural Women provided training that was successful in increasing the responsiveness of agricultural and veterinary service providers to women in Niger.²⁶⁰

RECURRING RECOMMENDATIONS

Recurring recommendations from the sampled evaluation reports were analysed to identify opportunities for advancing SDG 5. Overall, most recommendations were very programme specific and therefore it was not easy to extrapolate target or SDG-wide lessons. Nonetheless, a number of recurring themes common across targets emerged, which are discussed here. The analysis of recurring recommendations was also used to inform the results found above and incorporated into lessons where appropriate. A description of recurring recommendations across each target can be found in Annex 3.



Prioritizing the needs of those at risk of being left behind was a recurring theme within evaluation recommendations. For example, there were recommendations on increasing support and expanding services to vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations, engaging vulnerable populations in policy development and providing capacity strengthening and skills development.



Strengthening and leveraging inter-agency collaboration through clearly defining roles and responsibilities and fostering information exchange between agencies was another common theme.



Recommendations around investing in capacity strengthening and local ownership were found across multiple targets. In particular, these recommendations highlighted the need to institutionalize training and strengthen initiatives for duty bearers and other stakeholders; strengthen the capacity and institutional readiness of national governments; and empower local actors, particularly women's organizations.



Recommendations on generating knowledge, data and research, closing evidence gaps and knowledge-sharing were common. Utilizing communities of practice, enhancing knowledge exchange between agencies and fostering learning among countries were several suggested methods.



The need to address underlying social norms in programming was another common theme within evaluation recommendations. For example, adapting interventions to local contexts and engaging men in advocating for women's participation in leadership, ending violence against women and supporting access to services were key recommendations.



Forming partnerships, particularly fostering long-term relations with partners, was suggested in several recommendations. Typically, these recommendations focused on civil society or government stakeholders. However, engaging the private sector in areas such as innovation and technology to complement UN capacity was recommended in several reports.



The synthesis also found many recommendations related to monitoring and evaluation, advising greater use of theories of change and other evaluation methodologies to enhance the measurement of outputs, effectiveness and impact.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING

The inclusion of several agency-wide gender, human rights, inclusion strategy and strategic plan evaluations allowed certain patterns and observations regarding gender mainstreaming at strategic levels to be captured in the data. It should be noted, however, that the synthesis did not automatically include evaluations of programmes that mainstreamed gender at output level (see inclusion criteria in Annex 1) which prevents a comprehensive look at gender mainstreaming at all levels within UN agencies and programming. The following findings are drawn from 17 evaluations which were coded to gender mainstreaming.

Mechanisms for mainstreaming gender

Across UN agencies, there is great variation in the degree of gender mainstreaming in internal and programmatic operations.

Many agencies are reported to have made great strides in gender awareness, analysis, guidance and reporting, as well as in internal parity and equality across genders. A few smaller agencies continue to rely on the interest of individuals to drive mainstreaming, although gender plans and the gender marker may be nominally in use.²⁶¹ Others have systems in place, but they are under resourced, not well understood or left to gender focal points.²⁶² There are also examples of cohesive gender units, tools and systems at the headquarters level that are only partially implemented at the country or regional office level due to inconsistent support from headquarters, vacant positions or burdensome reporting requirements.²⁶³ Three evaluations commented on how gender is represented in UN communications products or guidance. Conclusions for two of these were that men are more often depicted in positions of power and gender is equated to women's stories.²⁶⁴ UNESCO respondents perceived that compliance criteria for publications had improved gender awareness inside the organization.²⁶⁵

In programming, a number of evaluations recommended strengthening transformative approaches that incorporate women's strategic gender interests such as legal rights, equal employment, domestic violence and control over one's own body.²⁶⁶

Gender working groups have been widely used as an effective instrument for internal gender advocacy and policy in UN agencies.

Those coordinated at senior management levels have had considerable influence, in some cases, producing an agency's first gender strategy, overseeing gender training programmes, or producing guidance for gender analysis and project design. For example, ECLAC's gender working group was coordinated at a high level and supported the internalization of gender concepts through mandatory and optional training; production of information beyond sex disaggregation, such as time use measurements and unpaid work in economic analysis; innovative studies on gender and climate change and women and energy; and the prominence of gender topics at events.²⁶⁷

Recognizing that gender equality is the responsibility of all personnel is a key strategic approach for some agencies.

Evaluations of gender strategies and strategic plans indicated that for some agencies, it is important that gender mainstreaming is the responsibility of all personnel, not just gender officers or advisers. Collective responsibility helps facilitate the inclusion of gender equality considerations across an agency's areas of work. To effectively mainstream gender, evaluations indicate the following conditions need to be met: strong managerial commitment; an understanding of gender issues by personnel; and adequate capacity and resources for personnel to address the issues identified in their respective technical areas.

Other strategies for better gender mainstreaming drawn from the evaluations include the following:

- Incorporating gender in theories of change, especially at outcome or impact levels²⁶⁸
- Undertaking gender needs assessments to inform programme design²⁶⁹
- Direct, specific feedback on reports, plans, analyses, etc.²⁷⁰
- Mentoring between more senior and junior women staff members (for improving parity in the organization)²⁷¹
- Regional gender strategies.²⁷²

Box 12

WFP's Gender Action Plan

Under its Gender Action Plan (2015–2020), WFP has adopted several best practices for gender mainstreaming, including locating the Gender Office at the executive level; establishing minimum standards; requiring and funding regional gender strategies; and applying the IASC Gender with Age Marker. In addition, the Gender Office developed the Gender Transformation Programme to provide support for the delivery of the plan's objectives at country level. It focuses on leadership and accountability, programming and organizational change. Participating country offices complete a baseline assessment, implement an improvement plan and conduct a final assessment against 39 benchmarks. As of March 2020, 25 country offices had joined the Gender Transformation Programme (30 per cent of all WFP country offices), and 12 had graduated.

WFP also demonstrated innovation by including a theory of change in its Gender Action Plan, linking programme processes and organizational change initiatives with four objectives in gender equality and women's empowerment. The evaluation suggested some improvements to strengthen the relevance and impact of the theory of change, namely to better articulate pathways between WFP's actions and the theorized results, and to ensure the conceptual framework was contextualized by all country offices to ground the design and development of programmes in a gender perspective, translating gender equality and women's empowerment concepts into clear actions tailored to their country plans.

Source: UN Women, Corporate evaluation of UN Women's support to national action plans on women, peace and security (2021)

SWAP and the Gender Equality Marker (GEM)

The Gender Equality Marker (GEM) does not necessarily track expenditure or changes in activities; it therefore represents intentions at the programme design phase rather than actual implementation.²⁷³

The GEM is a mandatory tool across UN agencies that tracks allocations according to their contribution to gender equality and women's rights. It uses a four-point scale, from GEM 0 (no contribution) to GEM 4 (gender equality and women's empowerment is a principal objective). Evaluators noted that the GEM has become an important driver of reporting on gender equality in programming, although it is not used everywhere consistently.²⁷⁴ For example, not all corporate versions of the GEM trace actual expenditure in a project against planned budgets; similarly, they do not record changes in planned activities that might produce a concomitant change in the GEM value. The evaluators of UNDP's Country Programme in Tanzania noted the possibility that an output might be GEM 2 in 2017 and become GEM 1 in 2018, and "the Gender Marker would not detect this, unless someone critically analyses the work plans and results for each project each year."²⁷⁵ In another evaluation, the requirement to perform a gender analysis was said to have resulted in personnel keeping the gender marker at neutral.²⁷⁶

UN System-Wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) reporting is most beneficial when well integrated with planning and accountability processes.

The SWAP on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women requires UN entities to report against 17 indicators of performance in implementation of the system-wide gender equality and the empowerment of women policy. Some evaluations of agency gender policies and actions commented on the relationship of UN-SWAP reporting to progress in gender mainstreaming. For example, a 2021 evaluation of WHO's integration of gender, equity and human rights concluded that, although the UN-SWAP process provided an annual check

on progress in mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment, at the time of the evaluation, it had remained largely disconnected from planning and accountability cycles, with no clear follow-up on the actions recommended.²⁷⁷ In contrast, WFP ensured that its Gender Action Plan was aligned with UN-SWAP, and the resulting plan was found to be more systematic in mainstreaming gender than that of several other global organizations. In this way, UN-SWAP standards facilitated accountability.²⁷⁸

Mainstreaming in humanitarian response

Gender mainstreaming in humanitarian action is weaker and inconsistent across the different phases of response and programme areas.

Evaluation case studies found that gender analyses in emergency response have improved in quality over time. However, there is an over reliance on counting women at events as gendered participation and the needs of women and girls as gender analysis.²⁷⁹ In addition, gender issues appear most clearly in initial situation assessments and programming in GBV, protection and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse; women and girls are least represented in consultations on logistics, housing or refugee camp governance. The reverse is true for adolescent boys, who are seldom asked about GBV prevention and response or hygiene. After the early phase of response, implementation and monitoring and evaluation seldom respond adequately to issues identified in assessments. The nature of humanitarian staffing also affects gender mainstreaming: gender specialists are often deployed later than other experts, and high turnover means that individuals trained in gender may not be the same individuals implementing activities.²⁸⁰ Finally, it is not always clear where accountability for gender responsiveness sits within a Humanitarian Country Team and the wider UN Country Team. Strong partnerships between UN agencies are essential in incorporating gender equality.²⁸¹ The Gender Hub pilot in

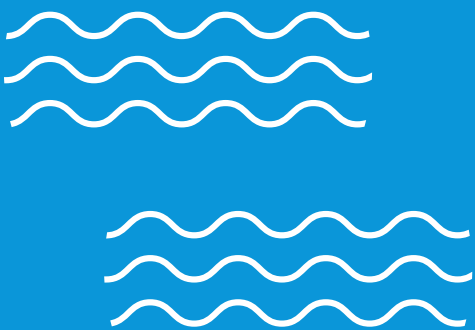
Bangladesh, managed by UN Women, is reported to have overcome many of these weaknesses with four components: influence (being seated at the Inter-Sector Coordination Group Secretariat), expertise (four full-time, dedicated experts), resourcing (a dedicated budget for capacity development and gender analysis) and timing (a three-year cycle versus the one-year cycles of Humanitarian Response Plans).²⁸²

The challenges in mainstreaming gender into humanitarian action reflect differences in conceptual understandings of the UN's role in gender.

The *Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls* notes three conceptual divides borne of the dual mandate laid out in the Beijing Platform for Action and the relative importance ascribed to each. One is the question of meeting people's needs directly versus a rights-based approach that strengthens states' abilities and accountabilities in fulfilling their obligations as duty bearers. Second, a tailored "differentiated population" approach targets different groups, including men and boys and transgender people, with specific programming, in contrast to only targeting women and girls with dedicated programming. Third, is whether gender should be addressed primarily through a protection focus or through broad gender mainstreaming across all activities.²⁸³



SECTION 5: EVIDENCE GAPS



This section presents gaps and weaknesses in the evidence available in the UN system SDG 5 evaluations and provides suggestions on where to focus and how to improve evidence generation in the future.

GAPS IN THE NATURE OF AVAILABLE EVIDENCE

There is an imbalance of evaluative evidence across SDG 5 targets, with nearly half the evaluations (44 per cent) addressing Target 5.2 (VAWG) and only 3 per cent addressing either 5.4 (unpaid care) or 5.b (information and communications technology (see Figure 8 in Section 3)). The distribution of evaluations is certainly shaped in part by the distribution of programming across targets. Regardless, the UN system is missing opportunities to contribute to global evaluative knowledge on issues such as how social protection programmes affect levels of unpaid care or under what conditions technology is effective at empowering women.

There were very few impact evaluations directly related to SDG 5 targets. Just three impact evaluations were identified in the search and screening processes. Similarly, programme and project evaluations were inconsistent at measuring results at a higher level than outputs. Many reports found that the monitoring and evaluation systems of the programme or project were not set up to track contribution to outcomes. Neither did many evaluations use retrospective methodologies to measure outcomes. Therefore, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of activities such as capacity strengthening and training on, for example, the sustainability of women's participation in leadership.

Effective interventions were disproportionately highlighted in evaluations. An analysis of the coding framework and assigned codes showed that ineffective programming was often reported within discussions of barriers and external impediments, whereas positive examples were reported as findings attributed to the programme. This suggests that there may be missed opportunities for learning from what does not work within programming. Agencies and evaluators may need to encourage reporting on less successful interventions.

EVIDENCE GAPS RELATED TO INTERVENTIONS AND APPROACHES

More evidence is needed on how both harmful and positive social norms are impacting women's ability to engage in leadership roles in political, economic and public life. Although social norms have been better examined as they relate to harmful practices and VAWG, the barriers they create to women's leadership are less well explored. For example, when quotas for women's representation or candidacy are not met, it may be due to the weight of social norms at the societal level or the expected role of women in the household, or a combination of both. A better understanding of such factors will enable appropriate strategies to address them.

Multi-stakeholder convening, despite being a clear area of UN engagement, did not feature prominently in evaluation reports as a topic of investigation. One of the most visible UN activities is in bringing together various stakeholders for policy dialogue at national and international conferences and meetings. However, the convening function of UN agencies was rarely evaluated in the synthesis sample and, when it was, it focused on efficiency rather than effectiveness or relevance. It is unclear whether this is due to difficulties in measuring appropriate outcomes, the supposition that conference statements or other outputs are sufficient to demonstrate results, or another reason. However, there are exceptions, such as an OHCHR evaluation that draws a line from a regional seminar to share experiences on abortion law reform to the passage of the Chilean abortion bill.²⁸⁴

Financing for gender equality is another area of work that receives little attention in evaluations but is noted as a serious barrier to achieving SDG 5. Work to mainstream gender within funding mechanisms, influence official development assistance or introduce innovative and sustainable financing for gender equality are potential areas for future evaluation.

Evaluative evidence of information, communications and technology for the empowerment of women is not only quite limited but also disjointed. It was difficult to draw an overall picture of the UN system's work in this area. Clarity on ICT theories of change, distinctions in innovation and technology, what constitutes relevant programming and a mapping of programming related to ICT, would be useful for implementers and evaluators.

Some evaluations did not fully address how the context within which a programme or strategy operated affected its results, preferring to focus on factors internal to the organization. This is particularly true for enablers in the social and political environment, which were rarely identified. Situating UN activities within a given setting is important to understanding why they are more or less successful and, therefore, under what conditions a strategy or approach may be likely to lead to positive change.

Although there were some examples, understanding the effects of engaging men and boys, in-laws and other extended family members would benefit from stronger evaluation. Developing a greater understanding of engaging these stakeholders in connection to longer-term norm change is particularly important. Similarly, as male engagement for gender equality increases in scope through initiatives such as HeForShe, it is increasingly important to test and evaluate engagement strategies.

Not enough is known about the needs and concerns of intersectional groups, such as girls in foster homes, people with multiple disabilities or married boys. Individuals with multiple disadvantages or vulnerabilities deserve inclusive and appropriate programming, but they are among the hardest to identify and engage. The UN can contribute to better understanding of their challenges with clearer direction on applying the leave no one behind principle in evaluations.

ACTIONS TO ADDRESS EVIDENCE GAPS

Conduct additional evaluations in areas of limited evidence.

Evaluation topics are typically dependent on ongoing programming but some key areas that would benefit from further evaluative evidence include social norm change (sub-topics include social norm change in relation to ending violence against women, women's political participation and economic empowerment), male engagement and masculinities, engagement of other family members in relation to ending violence against women, supporting domestic work and eliminating harmful practices. Greater evidence is needed on unpaid care and domestic work, particularly to understand the effectiveness of different baskets of social protection and infrastructure interventions on women's time use. The use of ICT to promote gender equality and women's empowerment is another key target lacking dedicated evaluative evidence.

Conduct additional synthesis on critical topics with sufficient evidence.

With the exception of targets 5.4 and 5.b, each target offers the potential for a dedicated synthesis or syntheses exploring relevant sub-topics. While the choice of topic to explore must involve deliberation with stakeholders and respond to specific demands and needs, a few key areas for future synthesis have emerged. First, Target 5.2 on ending violence against women is a critical topic that not only cuts across SDG 5, but interconnects with many other SDGs. Potential sub-topics include violence against women in humanitarian and/or conflict situations, violence against women in politics, intimate partner violence, CSO engagement, prevention strategies and response services. Second, a dedicated synthesis (or syntheses) on humanitarian action would allow for greater depth in evaluating the unique challenges of pursuing SDG 5 targets in conflict and disaster settings.

Third, Target 5.5 on women's leadership is another significant, cross-cutting target with a rich evidence base. Potential sub-topics include empowering women in national politics, private sector leadership, community-level leadership and women's leadership within the peace and security sector.

Strengthen the measurement of effectiveness and impact using a range of evaluation methodologies.

There are opportunities to more consistently and rigorously measure contributions towards gender equality outcomes, particularly through mixed methods approaches. For example, methodologies such as outcome mapping, most significant change, the bellwether methodology and other participatory approaches can be used to understand what changes are occurring and why. Similarly, a greater use of quasi-experimental methodologies and impact evaluations, where feasible, can produce more rigorous measures of change across key indicators.

Evaluation planning must be incorporated into programme design from the start.

For example, theories of change and performance measurement frameworks should include appropriate, clearly defined and measurable outcomes and indicators and suitable evaluation approaches that are planned and budgeted for. Impact evaluations often benefit from partnerships with universities or research institutions and require sufficient time for planning and integration within the programme.

Future evidence generation would be greatly aided by the development of national information systems that disaggregate by sex and age.

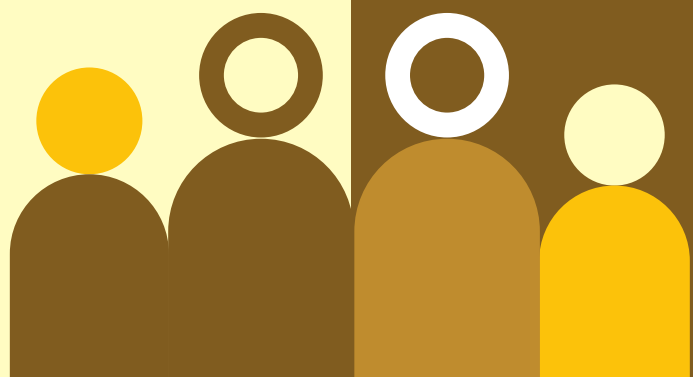
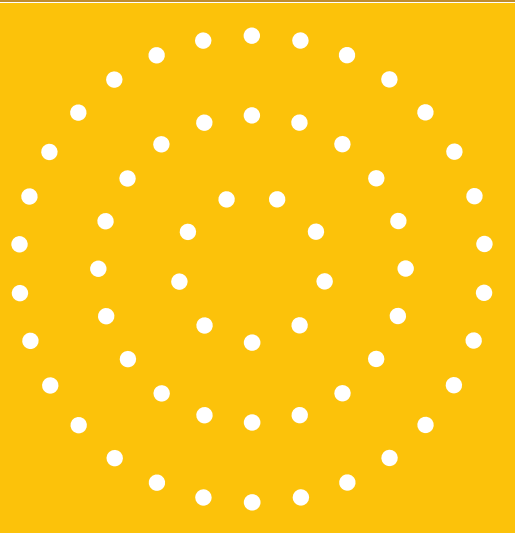
Several evaluations noted that the lack of disaggregated data in national systems hindered their abilities to draw conclusions. This is a concern across sectoral areas, for example, in law enforcement records on cases of violence, labour force participation tracking and health information systems.

More consistent use of theories of change would facilitate programme design and learning from programme results.

In many reports, theories of change had been reconstructed by evaluators to reflect the logic inherent in an intervention or country programme rather than set out by the programme's designers. Because a theory of change provides the basis for what outcomes should be monitored, its absence in programme design and implementation can become a weakness in the monitoring and evaluation system.



SECTION 6: OVERALL LESSONS



Drawing on the available evidence, the synthesis identified key, overall lessons that cut across the SDG 5 targets.

Leveraging the diverse expertise of UN agencies through close collaboration builds effective integrated programmes to address gender equality challenges.

Multisectoral programmes enrich programme development, support knowledge dissemination, and increase awareness and access to essential services. In humanitarian response, multisectoral needs assessments were the most effective way to account for the needs of all population groups across all sectors of an intervention in an inclusive and participatory manner. In addition, there are many examples of the UN system coming together at the country level for joint technical support in policy and public advocacy; improvements in integrated service delivery; and engagement across civil society and government at multiple levels and institutions. The approach could be more deliberately applied to pursue multiple SDG 5 targets or multiple SDGs. Partnerships with several ministries and government departments to tackle complex issues are also sometimes needed.

UN agencies, especially with forward planning, have the power to define issues, frame dialogues and influence policymakers.

Formal as well as informal spaces for dialogue provide opportunities to introduce linkages between issues and explore common priorities. However, several evaluations noted that advocacy and communications plans are essential to maximize opportunities for influence and collaboration with government counterparts.

SDG 5 cannot be achieved without the partnership of CSOs, including grassroots women's organizations.

CSOs play key roles in reaching those furthest behind, advocating for policy change, holding policymakers and duty bearers accountable, and as service providers. Capacity strengthening is more effective with formal rather than ad hoc partnerships. However, UN procedures and requirements are demanding for some CSOs, particularly those at the grassroots level.

UN agencies play an important role as knowledge, data and research producers, curators and brokers.

Knowledge products have provided credible backing to advocacy and policy work, enhanced service delivery and fostered knowledge exchange among stakeholders. Tailored and contextualized knowledge products enhance usability and support localized uptake of research results. UN agencies are well positioned to act as knowledge brokers, for example by connecting users – such as policymakers and civil society – to research and data produced by academic institutions and other knowledge producers, as well as collection of data in investigations and surveys.

Regional programming and South-South cooperation provide essential nodes of knowledge exchange on how to strengthen programmes.

These approaches allow stakeholders to draw on the experiences of similar interventions in comparable contextual environments. By bringing different stakeholders together across countries, regional programmes have provided a platform and a community for knowledge exchange, building networks for information-sharing. Similarly, despite involving some administrative challenges, inter-agency programming has facilitated knowledge exchange between UN agencies.

Intentional strategies are necessary to reach the furthest behind; however, there are insufficient conceptual and operational frameworks for implementing the leave no one behind principle.

Programme designers and implementers need guidance in mapping less visible groups of people, ensuring their participation and addressing intersectionalities. There are many excellent examples of working with marginalized groups at project level to draw from, although these are currently ad hoc approaches. Adult women and youth were reported to be reached by UN programming more often than other age groups, while elderly women were the least engaged age group. People with disabilities were not strongly represented in evaluations.

Greater attention to project monitoring and evaluation is needed for learning how to reach complex goals and longer-term gender equality outcomes, such as in policy advocacy and social norm change.

Most projects focused on reporting outputs rather than higher-level results. Theories of change, which can be effective tools for linking interventions to gender equality outcomes and exploring complex causal pathways within programming, are not always used at the project level.

There may be missed opportunities in working with the private sector.

Private sector engagement is not a common strategy across SDG 5 targets, except for Target 5.b on enabling technology for women's empowerment and Target 5.a on economic empowerment. This pattern suggests that there is considerable room to expand collaboration with businesses, brands and related associations in pursuit of progress on SDG 5. For example, advocacy and technical support to businesses and their associations can facilitate their development of strategies to increase the number of women in leadership roles and showcase why women in power benefit the organization. Additionally, collaboration with private sector actors can provide additional opportunities to enhance financing for gender equality.

Financing for gender equality is a critical gap.

Meaningful and sustained financial commitments and strengthened budgeting processes are fundamental to support implementation of legislation, policies and gender-responsive services to advance gender equality across all SDG 5 targets. An additional US\$ 360 billion per year²⁸⁵ beyond current levels – and its effective expenditure – is needed for developing countries to achieve gender equality in key areas.²⁸⁶ In 2019 UN humanitarian response appeals, only 39 per cent of funds requested for projects targeting women and girls were received, which is significantly lower than for other types of projects (69 per cent).²⁸⁷

Programmes are not effectively engaging men and boys in programming on issues that require them to change their behaviours if SDG 5 targets are to be met.

However, there are innovative approaches to reaching men and boys that have proven effective and others that need rigorous impact evaluation so that successful strategies can be scaled up. Religious institutions and their leaders, or other male reference groups, are especially important to engage on issues requiring societal shifts in norms.

Achieving SDG 5 requires a more sustained and comprehensive prioritization of the targets in humanitarian settings.

Although progress is being made, attention to the needs and rights of women and girls in humanitarian response is focused on a limited number of sectors and tends to reduce after initial needs assessments. Stronger accountability, consistent resourcing and greater expertise from the beginning of a response are necessary as the number of displaced and conflict-affected women and girls continues to increase.

Individual agencies glean greater benefits from UN-wide tools for gender mainstreaming when they are well integrated.

Universal tools and reporting mechanisms such as UN-SWAP and the Gender Equality Marker are used in different ways and with varying degrees of success by different agencies. Integrating these tools with other, agency-specific internal processes in planning and reporting increases their effectiveness in supporting the application of a gender perspective.

Harmful social norms are perhaps the greatest impediment to progress across SDG 5 targets, both in communities and among officials and service providers.

Although results were mixed and measurement of social norms was limited and without consistent methodologies, male engagement, support of religious leaders and other potential champions, and broad communications campaigns have been effective or hold promise for changing social norms.

Major disruptive events such as the COVID-19 pandemic call for agility and flexibility.

COVID-19 interrupted access to and delivery of services (e.g. SRHR services), livelihoods, and policy development and implementation. In addition to its impacts on health, education, economic well-being and other services, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated gender inequalities; further increased the unpaid care and domestic work burden faced by women; and increased rates of GBV. At the same time, collective responses to the pandemic introduced new modalities and tools (e.g. digital payment systems) and brought a renewed focus to social protection systems (to support citizens during the crisis) that can be harnessed to advance SDG 5.

It is necessary to systematize certain approaches to overcome the effects of turnover in government staffing, elected officials and service providers.

This is particularly true in programmes undertaking capacity strengthening, social norms shifting and policy development work. Many successful programmes were designed to institutionalize training and awareness raising for newcomers on topics such as gender budgeting, legal frameworks for gender equality and reproductive rights.



SECTION 7: THE WAY FORWARD



Based on the findings and lessons from across the SDG 5 targets, a number of implications for different stakeholder groups have been identified. These implications are designed to support the interpretation and use of the synthesis results by different stakeholders; however, the implications are not exhaustive, and stakeholders can derive further implications for their work by examining the findings and lessons across relevant targets in the results section above.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

- Integrate gender-equality considerations in the design and development of legislation, policies, infrastructure projects, services, guidelines, protocols and regulations through internal ministerial and cross-ministerial collaboration. Consider the specific needs and impacts on women and men at every stage of planning through to implementation.
- Include the voices and perspectives of civil society, including women's grassroots agencies and national women's machineries, and prioritize leave no one behind principles during the policymaking process to ensure comprehensive and equitable policies. Creating civil society advisory groups that accompany policymakers through the policymaking process contributes significantly to programme effectiveness in reaching the most vulnerable populations.
- Integrate and institutionalize gender into capacity strengthening initiatives for government officials and civil service, duty bearers and service providers to support implementation of gender-responsive legislation and policies and the delivery of gender-responsive services.
- Track commitments to gender equality through budget allocations, expenditure and gender audits to consistently monitor progress.
- Monitor policy implementation down to local levels and address bottlenecks and implementation barriers, specifically when working in remote territories. Often, gender policy implementation will need to be adjusted to the realities of individual contexts. Gender policies should anticipate a certain degree of flexibility in implementation approaches to accommodate for differing contexts.

IMPLICATIONS FOR UN AGENCIES

- Strengthen integrated programmes to include gender equality across sectors and address complex multisectoral issues, such as violence against women and girls, sexual and reproductive health and decent work.
- Undertake inter-agency programming to leverage complementary expertise, facilitate knowledge exchange across agencies and enhance cross-sectoral programming.
- Develop practical leave no one behind operational frameworks that provide guidance on identifying and reaching the most marginalized groups within a larger population. This should include steps to enable their participation and ensure benefits from policies and programmes. Intentional strategies are necessary to reach the furthest behind.
- Prioritize the development and communication of knowledge products that can be contextualized and support specific programmatic needs. Use clear uptake plans to ensure knowledge-sharing reaches relevant stakeholders including government officials, civil society, service providers and other practitioners.
- Integrate theories of change into programme design and, where relevant, include gender-equality objectives at the outcome level.
- Strengthen outcome measurement and commitment to measuring longer-term impacts. Utilize a broader range of mixed evaluation methods to measure effectiveness and impact. Explore innovative monitoring and evaluation approaches to measure complex phenomena such as social norm change and policy advocacy.
- Support humanitarian programming with institutionalized practical gender action plans and gender-responsive monitoring based

on gender assessment findings; consultations with women and girls; and input from local women's organizations. In humanitarian response timelines that are too short for meaningful empowerment, consider what gender work has already been undertaken and build on programming to further empower women and promote a conducive community environment where gender equality is promoted.

- Continue strengthening staff capacities in gender equality and feminist frameworks, and work towards a more widespread understanding of gender transformative approaches.
- Undertake costing exercises to understand the level of investment required to meet SDG 5 targets across different regions and countries.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTERS

- Integrate gender equality into programme design, including within integrated, multisectoral programmes. Where relevant, include gender-equality objectives at the outcome level. Utilize theories of change frameworks to highlight the factors, approaches and interventions that contribute to gender equality, and other programme, outcomes
- Conduct mandatory gender-responsive needs assessments systematically as part of the planning and implementation process, including in humanitarian settings. This will provide insights into the unique challenges and requirements of different gender groups, informing policies and programmes. Where conducting a gender needs assessment is not possible, utilize the assessments of others conducted in the programme location.
- Actively address social norm change and engage men, other family members, religious leaders, cultural figures and other influential leaders in gender equality initiatives. Integrate these elements into programme strategies and establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess changes in beliefs and behaviours.

- Prioritize the design and delivery of gender-responsive services. Ensure that services, such as maternal, newborn and child health, SRHR, social protection, child protection, healthcare and education, are designed and delivered to address the specific needs and realities of women and girls, promoting inclusivity and equitable access. Ensure service providers have the capacity and training to provide these services.
- Develop and share data, evidence and knowledge on key thematic areas and local contexts to support programme implementers and other stakeholders in understanding what works and how to effectively contextualize programming to different environments.
- Continue to amplify community voices, particularly women from marginalized populations, conflict settings and those facing intersectional discrimination. Promote women-led organizations and networks and ensure their participation in validating evidence.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DONORS

- Provide funding to longer-term programmes and initiatives to support the achievement and measurement of intermediate gender equality outcomes and target-level impact.
- Provide flexibility to programme implementers to adjust programme strategies; incorporate real-time feedback and evaluative evidence; respond to evolving circumstances such as backlash; implement multisectoral programming; and pilot innovative approaches aimed at accelerating progress on SDG 5.
- Require programme implementers to incorporate gender equality into proposals, programme documents, reports and evaluations, including through gender analysis.
- Correct the underfunding of programming targeted at women and girls in humanitarian response and support dedicated to gender expertise in emergencies.

ENDNOTES

- 1** UN Women and UNDESA, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2023* (2023).
- 2** UN Women, *Explainer: Sustainable Development Goal 5* (2022). [Explainer: Sustainable Development Goal 5 | UN Women – Headquarters](#)
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- 4** The SDG Actions Platform provides an indication of the range of partners that could use the results of this synthesis. It is a global registry of voluntary policies, commitments, multi-stakeholder partnerships and other initiatives made by a broad range of stakeholders to support acceleration of the SDGs. [Partnerships registry | Sustainable Development \(un.org\)](#).
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- 11** The UN Evaluation Group's database of evaluation reports was an additional search tool; however, given discrepancies between the number of evaluations available in the UN Evaluation Group's database compared to agency databases, UN agency databases were considered the primary focus for the evaluation search.
- 12** Cochrane, *Cochrane Effective Practice and Organisation of Care* (2017).
- 13** Generally, evaluations conducted at the global level focus on multiple region and country contexts, may explore a programmatic theme in great depth and may provide more information on broader approaches such as coordination and partnerships. To preserve this richness in content, the 87 global level evaluations in the evaluation universe were maintained in the sample.
- 14** To accomplish this, following the random selection of evaluations, if an agency was not represented, one evaluation would be randomly chosen and replace a randomly chosen evaluation within the same region and evaluation type. However, the sampling naturally included representation of all agencies so no further steps were needed to accomplish representation across all agencies.
- 15** Evaluations with global, regional and multi-regional scopes are not included. Evaluations with multi-country scope are recorded under each relevant country. Three evaluations with multi-country scope are attributed as Pacific Islands and one evaluation with multi-country scope is attributed as Caribbean.
- 16** The "All Targets" category was used to capture evaluations that met the inclusion criteria but could not be clearly attributed to a particular SDG 5 target. For example, evaluations of gender equality mainstreaming at the strategic level.
- 17** UN Women and UNDESA, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2023* (2023)
- 18** ILO, *Final independent clustered evaluation of outcome-based funding support to ILO projects in the field of employment and skills, social dialogue and labour relations, protection for all at work, gender equality and equal opportunities, and just transition to the green economy for the period 2020-21* (2022); UN Women, UNFPA and UNDP, *United Nations Joint Programme on Gender Equality: Systematization of Final Results* (2021); UN Women, *Country Portfolio Evaluation, Bosnia and Herzegovina* (2021); UN Women, *Corporate Evaluation of UN Women's Contribution to Women's Political Participation and Leadership* (2018); OHCHR, *Evaluation of OHCHR's Support to Legislation in Conformity with*

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- 23** UNDP, *Evaluation of the Regional Programme for Latin America and the Caribbean 2018-2021* (2021)
- 24** UN Women, *Corporate Evaluation on UN Women's Policy Advocacy Work* (2022)
- 25** UN Women, *Zimbabwe Country Program Evaluation Report* (2022)
- 26** OHCHR, *Evaluation of OHCHR's Support to Legislation in Conformity with International Standards* (2018); UN Habitat, *End-Term Programme Evaluation of the Kabul Strengthening Municipal Nahias Programme (KSMNP) 2016-2020* (2021); UN Women, *Evaluation de Portefeuille Pays du Burundi, Cycle 2014-2018* (2018)
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- 31** UN Women, *Corporate Evaluation on UN Women's Policy Advocacy Work* (2022)
- 32** OHCHR, *Evaluation of the OHCHR Project: Strengthening the Capacity of Regional Actors to Promote Human Rights, Accountability, Democratic Space and Gender in the Asia-Pacific Region* (2022)
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