



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION OF RWANDA

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The UN Women Independent Evaluation Service (IES) conducted this country portfolio evaluation (CPE) to provide an independent and systematic assessment of UN Women's contributions to advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women in Rwanda between 2019 and 2024, which covers the Strategic Note period. The purpose of the evaluation is to support enhanced accountability for development effectiveness and learning to inform the next Strategic Note.

OBJECTIVES

The evaluation objectives were to:

1. Assess the effectiveness, efficiency and coherence of the country portfolio
2. Identify lessons learned and good practices that can be scaled.
3. Provide actionable recommendations to inform the development of the new Strategic Note.

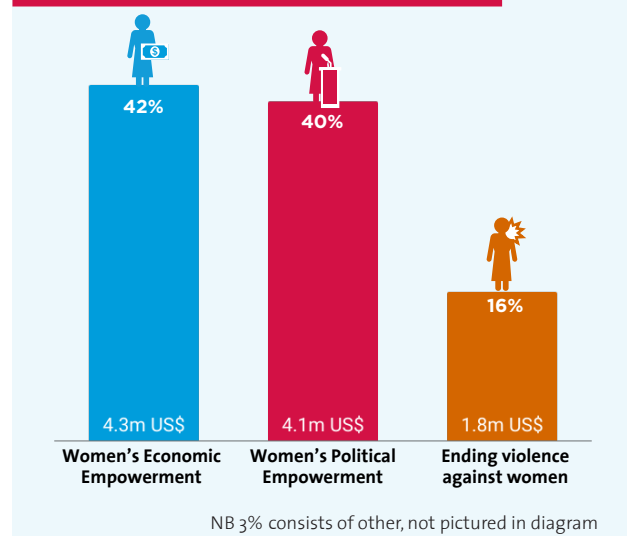
INTENDED USERS

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

BACKGROUND ON UN WOMEN IN RWANDA

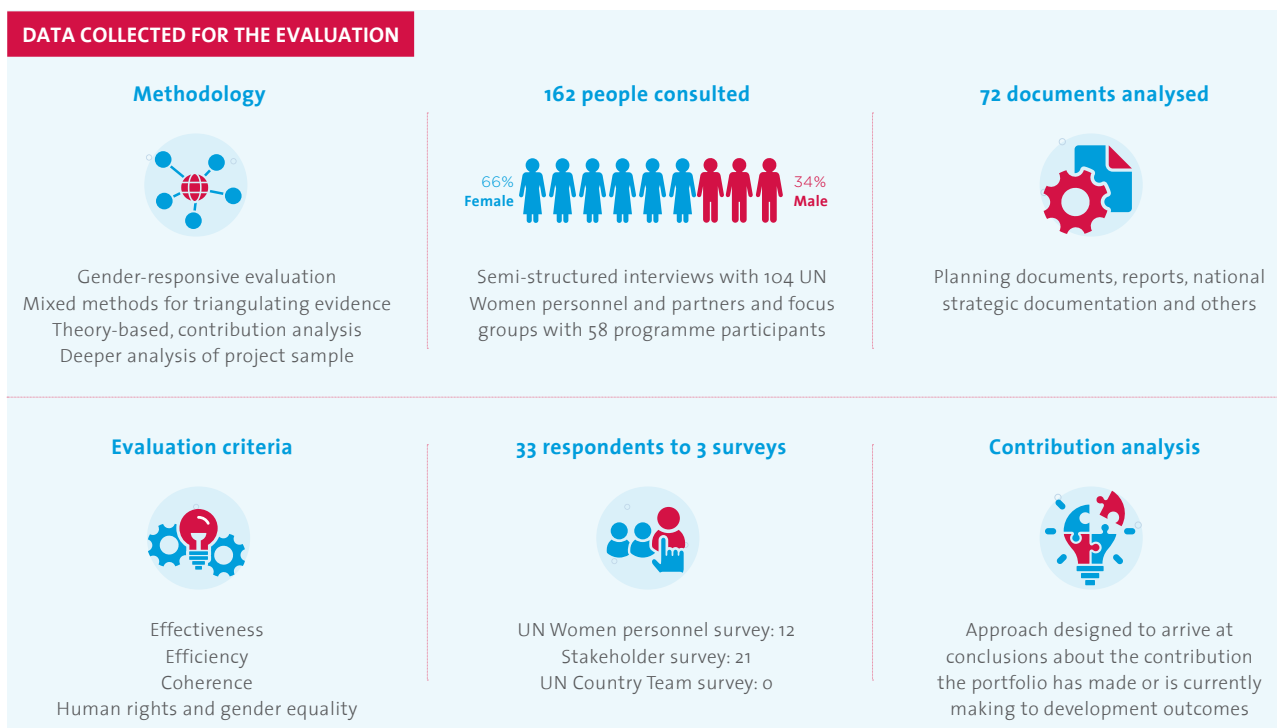
The Strategic Note is the main planning tool for the Country Office to articulate how it will implement UN Women's triple mandate across normative, coordination and operational work in Rwanda. The Country Office's budget between 2019 and 2023 was US\$ 16.2 million. The largest area of work in terms of financial investment is Women's Political Empowerment, accounting for 42 per cent of development results framework expenditure during 2019–23. This is followed by Women's Economic Empowerment (38 per cent) and Elimination of Violence Against Women (16 per cent).

DISBURSEMENT BY THEMATIC AREAS (2019–2023)



METHOD

This CPE employed a non-experimental, theory-based, gender-responsive approach. In consultation with the Country Office, a reconstructed theory of change was developed and used as the basis for contribution analysis. Evaluation questions were developed using the theory of change and assessed against the criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, sustainability, gender equality and human rights, and organizational efficiency. Multiple sources of data were obtained, and 197 stakeholders were consulted through interviews, focus groups and survey. The CPE was delivered in accordance with the UN Women Evaluation Policy and Evaluation Handbook. All evaluation products were subject to quality review by IES management, a peer reviewer, the Evaluation Reference Group and the Evaluation Management Group.



KEY FINDINGS

RELEVANCE

Are UN Women’s activities (normative, coordination, and operational) in Rwanda, including its thematic focus, relevant for advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment in Rwanda?

UN Women Rwanda’s comparative advantage in advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment, compared with other UN entities and key partners was its (1) gender expertise and extensive experience in-country; (2) mandate, positioning and convening power as an independent voice; and (3) relationships with the government gender machinery and civil society. The Country Office’s normative, coordination and operational activities are aligned with its comparative advantage, generally well aligned with national strategies and government priorities, and mostly responsive to rightsholders needs. However, some short-term projects were less relevant to national priorities and to addressing rights holders’ needs. There are opportunities to strengthen its relevance by scaling up its normative and coordination work, its support to the women’s movement, increasing work with other ministries beyond the gender machinery, working more closely with sister agencies to achieve scale and focusing its operational work on areas that integrate UN Women’s triple mandate.

EFFECTIVENESS

Is the Country Office contributing to the target outcomes set out in the Strategic Note to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment in Rwanda?

The Country Office effectively contributed to target outcomes through its operational, normative and coordination work. In the area of Women’s Participation, Leadership and Governance, the Country Office contributed to forming a cohort of women leaders at local and national levels and changing perceptions of women as effective leaders and contributed to strengthened capacity of the national gender machinery to implement gender equality and women’s empowerment commitments. In the area of Women’s Economic Empowerment, the Country office contributed to women being able to access new economic opportunities, resulting in higher income streams for many participants, noted by interviewed participants. In the area of Ending Violence Against Women, the Country Office contributed to communities and service providers better able to prevent and respond to violence; communities changing their norms, attitudes and behaviours on gender equality and public safety; and stronger frameworks and procedures in place to address violence. UN Women contributed to these outcomes through capacity building, technical and financial support, supporting partners to provide legal services for Gender Based Violence victims, convening forums, holding awareness raising campaigns, linking women cooperatives to business opportunities, influencing policies, and providing inputs such as time-saving technologies.

The Country Office also effectively contributed to its target outcomes through its normative work. Key outcomes were achieved through UN Women's contributions, in terms of revising national laws and policies to strengthen gender equality; development of gender mainstreaming strategies across different sectors; reporting against international human rights conventions; and increasing the gender sensitivity of the COVID-19 response. There is opportunity for the Country Office to be bolder in strengthening policy advocacy on strategic and challenging issues.

In terms of coordination, the Country Office has effectively provided support to gender mainstreaming across the UNCT, including through the strengthened gender theme group, and has supported national gender coordination. While there are some synergies between UN Women Rwanda and other UN agencies across their gender work, there is room for UN Women to support stronger coherence across UN agencies' gender work and supporting more integrated joint programmes. The Gender Theme Group co-convened by UN Women with UNDP is a key UN structure that can be leveraged to strengthen systemwide accountability for gender mainstreaming within the UNCT. There is also a need to strengthen sector coordination at the national level: UN Women could achieve this by strengthening the national gender and family cluster's planning and coordination capacities to enhance collaborations across sectors and stakeholders

The Country Office's interventions were well targeted and accessible, reaching vulnerable communities, including specific interventions targeting People With Disabilities (PWD), People Living With HIV (PLWHIV) and teen mothers. However, disability inclusion is not yet mainstreamed across all UN Women interventions and work with youth and LGBTQI+ groups remain limited to date.

The Country Office's partnerships were mixed in their effectiveness. Its strengths as a partner include its smooth operations, capacity-building, collaborative approach, and flexibility. However, in certain cases, UN Women's partnerships were affected by last minute planning, miscommunication, limited engagement and information-sharing.

EFFICIENCY

Did the Country Office have appropriate organizational structures, systems and capacity in place to ensure the efficient use of resources to maximize results?

The Country Office had the right technical capabilities to deliver results, although a more intentional approach to capacity-building is needed. However, Country Office capacity was insufficient to fully deliver its portfolio, especially in the areas of resource mobilization, human resources function and coordination. This was exacerbated by the number of projects and high personnel turnover. The resources mobilized have not been fully sufficient to deliver against the Strategic Note. The Country Office's resource mobilization capacity, structures and systems need to be strengthened to more efficiently and effectively raise funds to support portfolio delivery. Strong systems and structures were in place to manage resources to deliver results and manage risks. Some systems, such as the management of institutional knowledge and planning systems, need to be strengthened to support efficient delivery. Weaknesses in the management and delegation structure and the broad nature of the portfolio have affected the Country Office's efficiency and its ability to focus on strategic issues.

SUSTAINABILITY

How sustainable are the positive outcomes supported by the Country Office's programming?

The Country Office instituted good practices to support sustainability through anchoring its interventions within government priorities; working with local leaders and communities; supporting policy and norms change; and designing exit plans in some interventions. However, there are also weaknesses which affect the sustainability of outcomes, including short-term and small-scale projects with no exit plans; limited post-project monitoring; and capacity and funding gaps in UN Women's implementing partners. Across the Country Office portfolio there is some positive evidence that outcomes are likely to be sustained due to evidence of strengthened capacity; national, regional and local ownership; financial commitment; and systems such as local accountability and oversight mechanisms to support the continuation of activities.

CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSION 1: The Country Office's country portfolio activities and thematic focus has mostly been very relevant to national priorities and the needs of rightsholders. The Country Office has effectively delivered key results across its thematic areas of focus. The Country Office's cross-thematic work and piloting of new approaches have been particular strengths. A key weakness has been that some projects have only been able to deliver on outputs due to the short time frame.

CONCLUSION 2: Interventions empowered vulnerable populations. In terms of addressing the root causes of gender equality, most of the sampled projects were gender responsive (targeting the specific needs of women) or with the potential to be gender transformative (where projects involved an element of policy or norm change to tackle the root causes of gender inequality).

CONCLUSION 3: As a result of the Country Office's good practices to support sustainability, there are positive indications that many of the outcomes achieved will be sustainable. However, the short duration and limited scale of some projects, lack of exit plan in certain initiatives, limited post-project monitoring, and some capacity and funding gaps for implementing partners hinders the likelihood of sustainability.

CONCLUSION 4: For the most part, the Country Office has delivered efficiently. Weaknesses in the Country Office's resource mobilization; certain systems, such as the management of institutional knowledge and planning system; management of partners; and the management and delegation structure have affected the level of resources mobilized and efficiency of delivery.

CONCLUSION 5: As a *Delivering As One* country, the Rwanda context provides great opportunities for strong coherence across the UNCT's gender programming. The Country Office has supported gender mainstreaming across the UNCT. There is an opportunity for the Country Office to further capitalize on this by strengthening the coherence of joint programmes, especially those it is leading, supporting other agencies with gender mainstreaming; strengthening the planning and coordination of gender advocacy, policy and normative work, including through the Gender Theme Group and other UN coordination structures; and convening and advocating for better information-sharing and greater links across the UNCT's gender work.

CONCLUSION 6: A significant proportion of the Country Office's capacity and resources are focused on operational work. The Country Office is delivering too many scattered, small, short-term projects across many partners. There are opportunities for the Country Office to further leverage its comparative advantage by rebalancing its work across UN Women's triple mandate and scaling its normative and coordination work. There is a need to better define the Country Office's focus areas and boundaries. This would also be supported by further consolidating its partnerships into more strategic, longer-term collaborations and increasing its work with grassroots organizations and the women's movement.

RECOMMENDATIONS



RECOMMENDATION 1.

Develop longer-term, more strategic partnerships aligned to the new Strategic Note objectives and time frame.



RECOMMENDATION 2.

Maximize comparative advantage by scaling up the Country Office's convening role around gender equality and women's empowerment issues and coordination of stakeholders advance gender responsive norms and policies at all levels.



RECOMMENDATION 3.

Build on the strong capabilities of the Country Office team and systems by further strengthening resource mobilization and the office's management structure; and review the strategies and systems in place for enhanced knowledge management, learning and the human resources function.



RECOMMENDATION 4.

Strengthen the relevance and sustainability of the Country Office's work by consolidating and focusing on targeted areas of work, moving away from short and scattered projects. These areas should build on UN Women's comparative advantage (integrated triple mandate), and lead to tangible impacts on the lives of women and girls.