



UN WOMEN SOUTH AFRICA MULTI-COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION 2017-2023



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INDEPENDENT EVALUATION, AUDIT AND INVESTIGATION SERVICE (IEAIS)

Independent Evaluation Service (IES)

UN Women

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ACRONYMS

AWOME	Accelerating Women Owned Micro-Enterprises
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
IEAIS	Independent Evaluation, Audit and Investigation Services
IES	Independent Evaluation Service
ILO	International Labour Organization
M-CPE	Multi-Country Portfolio Evaluation
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
SADC	Southern African Development Community
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UN WOMEN SOUTH AFRICA MULTI-COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION 2017–2023

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The UN Women Independent Evaluation Service (IES) conducted a multi-country portfolio evaluation (M-CPE) of the South Africa Multi-Country Office to provide an independent and systematic assessment of UN Women’s contributions to advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women in South Africa, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho and Namibia between 2017 and 2023, which covers the period of the Multi-Country Office’s Strategic Note. The evaluation’s purpose is to support enhanced accountability for development effectiveness and learning to inform the Multi-Country Office’s next Strategic Note.

OBJECTIVES

The evaluation objectives were to:

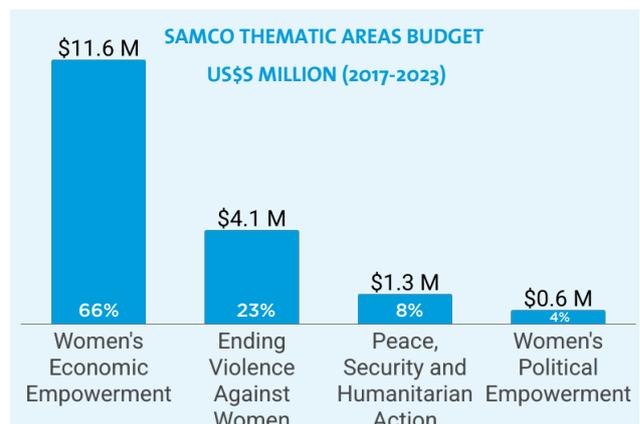
1. Assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, sustainability, and gender equality and human rights of the multi-country portfolio.
2. Identify lessons learned and good practices that can be scaled.
3. Provide actionable recommendations to inform development of the Multi-Country Office’s new Strategic Note.

INTENDED USERS

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

BACKGROUND ON THE MULTI-COUNTRY OFFICE

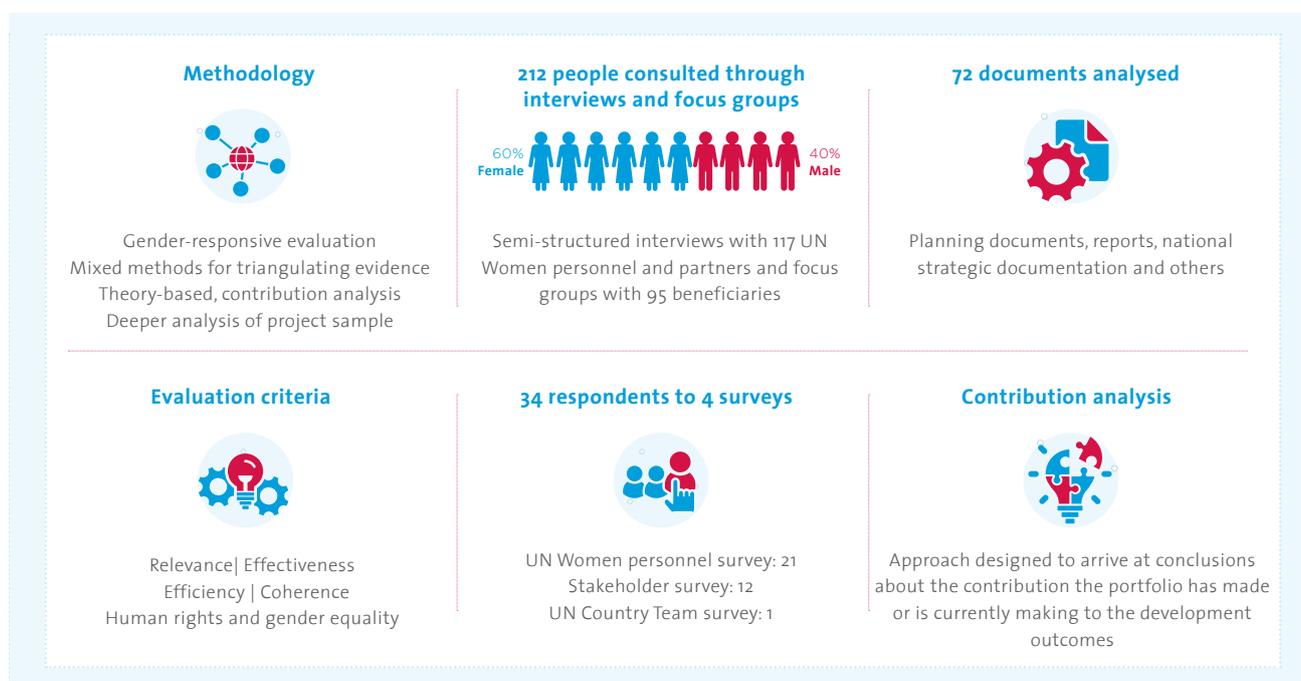
The South Africa Multi-Country Office covers the five countries of Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia and South Africa. The Strategic Note is the main planning tool for the office to articulate how it will implement UN Women’s triple mandate across normative, coordination and operational work in the five countries it covers. The Multi-Country Office’s budget between 2017 and 2023 was US\$ 17.6 million. The largest area of work was Women’s Economic Empowerment, accounting for 66 per cent of the budget during 2017–2023; followed by Ending Violence Against Women, with 23 per cent of the budget; then Peace, Security and Humanitarian Action at 8 per cent; and Women’s Political Empowerment at 4 per cent.



METHOD

This M-CPE employed a theory-based, gender-responsive approach. In consultation with the Multi-Country Office, the evaluation team reconstructed the theory of change and used this as the basis for contribution analysis. Evaluation questions were developed using the theory of change and assessed Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria. The evaluation team

obtained multiple sources of data and consulted 244 stakeholders through interviews, focus groups and surveys. The M-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

EFFICIENCY

How efficient are organizational structures and management processes?

The Multi-Country Office has faced challenges in terms of insufficient personnel capacity to deliver its mandate and Strategic Note across the five countries it covers due to misalignment between the office's size and its function as a Multi-Country Office. While these resource challenges have affected the efficiency and effectiveness of the Multi-Country Office's systems and processes, the office is moving in the right direction, with key investments in capacity across support and programmatic functions. The Multi-Country Office's systems and processes have significantly improved to support efficient implementation and resource mobilization, including in areas such as monitoring and reporting, communications and operations. Opportunities remain to strengthen recruitment timelines; resource mobilization and donor management; greater use of baselines and the tracking of behaviour and norms change; and in reviewing workflows to identify where processes can be streamlined and a more proactive approach taken.

COHERENCE AND RELEVANCE

Do the interventions selected maximize the Multi-Country Office's comparative advantage?

The Multi-Country Office's comparative advantage includes its mandate and specific focus on gender; its convening power; brand name; and areas of focus. The office's mandate and focus on the most vulnerable and less represented women are highly relevant to the needs of the subregion and to government priorities. The Multi-Country Office takes a locally driven approach to ensure relevance to local needs.

However, the Multi-Country Office has not yet been able to fully deliver against its mandate and leverage its comparative advantage in the four countries outside of South Africa due to capacity and structural issues. The middle-income status of these countries also raises challenges for resource mobilization. Increased efforts should be made to move away from small, donor-driven projects to more consolidated projects, focusing on building models and developing proof of concepts for scaling projects rather than direct implementation, to ensure better links to UN Women's coordination and normative work.

COHERENCE AND RELEVANCE**Are the Multi-Country Office's interventions coherent with the work of UN Country Teams and other key stakeholders across all five countries?**

The Multi-Country Office's interventions align well with the efforts of UN Country Teams and other stakeholders working on gender equality and women's empowerment across the five countries, with strong synergies observed within the office's thematic areas. Opportunities exist to enhance these collaborations by exploring additional UN joint programmes, improving information-sharing and integrating national structures into programming.

Stakeholders, including civil society, government and donors, appreciated the Multi-Country Office's collaborative approach, technical expertise and convening power, though improvements are needed in communication, managing expectations, the timeliness of reporting, efficiency and supporting cross-learning and capacity-building.

While the Multi-Country Office has made key contributions to UN system coordination on gender equality and women's empowerment, resource challenges have led to the perception of inconsistent engagement in gender coordination mechanisms. The priority request from Resident Coordinator Offices and Gender Theme Group members in the five countries was for more active leadership/participation from the Multi-Country Office in the Gender Theme Groups.

EFFECTIVENESS AND SUSTAINABILITY**Are interventions contributing to target outcomes set out in the Strategic Note?**

The Multi-Country Office has supported governments to monitor global gender commitments; developed tools for progress tracking; and facilitated youth participation in policy discussions. It has also supported institutions and communities to promote gender equality, working with municipal health centres, public services and taverns¹, and facilitated gender-based budgeting and planning. Economic empowerment initiatives have enabled women to access markets, grow businesses and achieve financial independence. For example, partner reports noted that the Stimulating Equal Opportunities programme reached over 6,000 women entrepreneurs, with 40 per cent reporting increased revenue and assets.

The Multi-Country Office reported that it had supported the passing of gender-responsive procurement legislation in South Africa, with a target of 40 per cent of procurement from women-owned businesses and training of 252 supply chain officials on gender-responsive procurement.

The Multi-Country Office's support for coordinated gender-based violence response frameworks, capacity-building for law enforcement and behaviour-change campaigns have fostered a favourable environment for ongoing commitment in these areas.

While there were some challenges to sustainability due to short-term projects, lack of exit plans and lack of sustainable funding and limited government linkages, overall the Multi-Country Office's initiatives show good potential for sustainability, e.g. evidence of strengthened capacity, ownership of programmes, financial commitment, local accountability systems and changes in social norms.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY**Are interventions supporting structural changes in gender equality and women's empowerment?**

The Multi-Country Office's interventions are supporting structural changes in gender equality and women's empowerment by addressing the root causes of gender inequality and challenging social norms and power structures. Programmes have targeted patriarchal norms and promoted shifts in community attitudes, especially through partnerships with justice systems, local authorities and community leaders.

The Multi-Country Office's interventions were well targeted and accessible to vulnerable communities, including young people, women with disabilities, LGBTQI+ populations and those living in underserved areas. A number of interventions have targeted inclusion at the normative level.

Opportunities for improvement include systematizing the Multi-Country Office's approach to inclusion; being more intentional about undertaking vulnerability assessments; and tracking the participation of identified vulnerable groups.

¹ places where alcohol is sold and drunk

CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSION 1: The Multi-Country Office has insufficient resources to deliver its mandate across all five countries, especially in its coordination and normative work, in part due to structural issues. There is a mismatch between external stakeholders' expectations of the Multi-Country Office and the Regional Office's direction to focus mainly on South Africa. The amount of core funding the Multi-Country Office receives is affecting the level of coordination work it can deliver across its geographic area. Resource constraints have also affected the office's ability to deliver effectively and efficiently.

CONCLUSION 2: Efficiency issues arising from resource constraints have affected delivery rates and consistency of engagement, impacting the Multi-Country Office's reputation with partners and donors.

The Multi-Country Office had insufficient capacity to fulfill its normative and coordination mandates, which external stakeholders saw as the office's key value add across all five countries. A more focused, strategic approach would help to balance the heavy expectations on the office and its broad thematic focus with resource realities.

CONCLUSION 3: Overall, the Multi-Country Office's interventions align well with its mandate and comparative advantage, although a few smaller, donor-driven projects and areas outside its core expertise diluted its focus. Relevance and coherence would be enhanced by focusing on larger, scalable models and programmes delivered in partnership with governments.

CONCLUSION 4: Despite resource constraints, the Multi-Country Office has delivered key results across its target outcomes through effectively leveraging partnerships. Many of its results show potential for sustainability, which could be strengthened by more consistently developing exit plans and moving to longer-term programming in partnership with governments.

CONCLUSION 5: The Multi-Country Office effectively integrated the "leave no one behind" principle across its portfolio in terms of its targeting. By targeting the root causes of gender inequality, the office's interventions have the potential for transformative impact. The Multi-Country Office could strengthen this area by incorporating vulnerability assessments and tracking the participation of vulnerable groups in its programming.

RECOMMENDATIONS



RECOMMENDATION 1: Ensure alignment between the Multi-Country Office's commitments, mandate and stakeholder expectations (country coverage, presence, role in cooperation frameworks and coordination, thematic coverage) and its resources and capacity, including the financial and technical support required from the Regional Office.



RECOMMENDATION 2: Strengthen programme and partner management to enhance the efficiency of programme delivery, including through an internal staffing level review to determine a structure that fits the budget and business model.



RECOMMENDATION 3: Invest in resource mobilization by strengthening relationships with current donors and building relationships with potential donors by scaling efforts that have proven effective and encouraging donors to pool funds to support larger programmes.



RECOMMENDATION 4: Enhance programming by looking to consolidate thematic areas; moving to longer and larger programmes and joint programmes that cover multiple thematic areas, where funding permits; and by increasing normative and coordination work in the countries outside of South Africa.



RECOMMENDATION 5: Enhance the Human Resources function to support more strategic and timely human resource planning and recruitment.



RECOMMENDATION 6: Strengthen monitoring and reporting systems through data verification and retention, increased investments in baselines and tools to track changes resulting from Multi-Country Office initiatives in order to support donor and corporate reporting.



RECOMMENDATION 7: Strengthen approaches to disability inclusion and intersectionality by taking a more systematic approach, building on the UN Women Strategy on Disability Inclusion to support the gender equality and empowerment of women and girls with disabilities.

1. EVALUATION PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

The purpose of the Multi-Country Portfolio Evaluation (M-CPE) is to deliver a systematic assessment of the work undertaken by the UN Women South Africa Multi-Country Office. The intended uses of the evaluation include:

- Learning from effective approaches to support improved decision-making.
- Accountability for UN Women's contribution to gender equality and women's empowerment.

The primary intended users of this evaluation are Multi-Country Office personnel who will use the findings to develop, design and implement the new Strategic Note. Secondary users are expected to be the UN Women East and Southern Africa Regional Office, headquarters colleagues, national partners and others working in Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia and South Africa.

The scope of the M-CPE is the Multi-Country Office Strategic Note, including the Development Results Framework and the Operational Efficiency and Effectiveness Framework for the period from January 2017 to December 2023. All activities included in the Strategic Note were considered, including joint programming.

The specific objectives of the M-CPE were to:

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

EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

The evaluation had the following objectives:



Assess the **relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, sustainability, and gender equality and human rights of the multi-country portfolio**, including between the normative, coordination and operational elements of UN Women's triple mandate, and the extent to which human rights and gender equality have been addressed.



Identify **lessons learned and good practices** that can be scaled.



Provide **actionable recommendations** to inform development of the new Strategic Note.

2. COUNTRY CONTEXTS

This section provides a summary of the country contexts in the five countries covered by the South Africa Multi-Country Office, namely: Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia and South Africa. All five countries are signatories of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development and to CEDAW.² CEDAW concluding observations set out some common findings across all countries, e.g. the persistence of adverse cultural practices and patriarchal attitudes, and deep-rooted stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women. Government strategies are not always accompanied by operational plans and sufficient resource allocation.³

All countries, with the exception of Lesotho, have specific strategies and policies on gender equality.⁴ However, Lesotho has established a Law Reform Commission, with the mandate of reviewing discriminatory laws to promote gender equality and protect women's rights.⁵

In terms of the socioeconomic context:



Marriage legislation: The legal age of marriage is at least 18 across all countries. However, some instances of child marriage remain across all five countries. In recent years, all countries have repealed common law practices of patriarchal marital power.⁶



Economic inequality is high in the subregion.⁷ Agriculture remains the backbone of the subregion's economy, at 35 per cent.⁸ Societal discrimination makes it difficult for women to claim independent land rights, affecting women across Namibia, Botswana and South Africa.⁹ Despite legislation protecting economic rights and non-discrimination in employment, gender gaps remain across the five countries in terms of financial inclusion and access to credit.¹⁰



Gender-based violence: There are high levels of gender-based violence across the five countries. All countries except Botswana have signed the protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol).¹¹



Political participation: The SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2008) requires a 50 per cent representation of women in political leadership. However, no government has equal gender representation. Limited measures have been introduced to promote political participation.¹²



Climate change risk: All five countries are affected by critical constraints arising in the water-energy-food nexus, largely due to an increasing regional population and the impacts of climate change.¹³ The INFORM climate change risk scale rates the countries a mix of medium and low risk: Botswana (2.9); Eswatini (3.3); Lesotho (3.0); Namibia (3.2); and South Africa (3.7).¹⁴

² [Protocol on Gender and Development 2008 | SADC](#)

³ CEDAW conclusion observations: [Botswana](#), [Eswatini](#), [Lesotho](#), [Namibia](#), [South Africa](#)

⁴ [South Africa National Policy Framework; UN Women summary of the National Policy, citing a Statement made by the Government of Botswana on 27 September 2015; Eswatini National Gender Policy](#)

⁵ [Lesotho CEDAW concluding observations](#)

⁶ [Ending Child Marriages in Southern Africa: Domesticating the SADC Model Law on Child Marriage - Equality Now](#)

⁷ [World Bank Document](#)

⁸ [World Bank. \(n.d.\). Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing, Value Added \(per cent of GDP\).](#)

⁹ [African Commission. Extractive Industries, Land Rights and Indigenous Populations' / Communities' Rights. 2017.](#)

¹⁰ [FinMark Trust, 2016](#)

¹¹ [UN Women. Gender based violence against women and girls in southern Africa. 2024.](#)

¹² UNDP Human Development Report – Gender Inequality Index and [UN Women. Gender Gap Report. 2024.](#)

¹³ [SADC Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan](#)

¹⁴ [INFORM Climate Change Brochure.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

Due to structural barriers and systematic exclusion, across all five countries women are more likely to be poor, excluded from participating in and benefit from economic opportunities, unemployed, face gender-based violence and have a higher prevalence of HIV than their male counterparts. Poor women-headed households are vulnerable and are more at risk from food insecurity. Across all five countries, the risk of gender-based violence is particularly high for lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons, refugee women, women with disabilities, women and girls with albinism, women and girls with HIV and AIDs, and sex workers.¹⁵

Across the subregion, youth unemployment is a significant challenge, disproportionately affecting young women. In Southern Africa, in 2023, the youth unemployment rate was 44 per cent for men and 52 per cent for women.¹⁶

The UN Country Teams (UNCTs) in all five countries are implementing the Delivering as One Initiative with the aim of harnessing the combined resources and capacity of UN agencies in a coherent manner. UN Gender Theme Groups in all five countries have been mandated to support gender mainstreaming in the UN development system. Common Country Analysis documents are in place for all five countries. All existing United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks across the five countries have a specific outcome on gender, and gender also cuts across the other outcomes.¹⁷

Annex 13 sets out further details on the contexts across the five countries, along with additional references.

¹⁵ [Botswana](#), [Eswatini](#), [Lesotho](#), [Namibia](#) and [South Africa](#) Common Country Analyses.

¹⁶ [ILO](#). *Global Employment Trends for Youth: Sub-Saharan Africa. August 2024*.

¹⁷ [Botswana](#), [Eswatini](#), [Lesotho](#), [Namibia](#) and [South Africa](#) Common Country Analyses; [Botswana](#), [Eswatini](#), [Lesotho](#), [Namibia](#) and [South Africa](#) United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks.



Photo: ©UN Women South Africa

3. PORTFOLIO ANALYSIS

STRATEGIC NOTE OVERVIEW

At the end of 2023, the mobilized budget for the Strategic Note period was US\$ 31 million.¹⁸ The Strategic Note covers the period 2017–23 and the five countries of South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho and Eswatini. It targets women, especially the poorest and most excluded, as well as the institutions and communities (including men and boys) that can contribute to strengthening women's empowerment and gender equality.

The Strategic Note covers the **thematic areas** of 1) Ending Violence against Women; 2) Women's Political Participation; 3) Women's Economic Empowerment; and 4) Women, Peace and Security.

THEORY OF CHANGE

The theory of change sets out goals, outcomes, outputs and assumptions across three results areas, summarized in Table 1 below. The full theory of change is set out in Annex 2.

Common assumptions include: sufficient political will of relevant stakeholders; sufficient resources; uptake of approaches and outputs of interventions; effectiveness of approach in leading to target change; and the removal of barriers that hinder gender equality and women's empowerment.

RESULTS FRAMEWORK AND RESULTS DATA

The Development Results Framework sets out indicators against the target outcomes and outputs, as summarized in the theory of change section above.

The Operational Effectiveness and Efficiency Framework includes the following goals to support intended development results:

1. The MCO advances delivery of its mandate, including coordinating and promoting accountability for implementation of gender equality and women's empowerment commitments across the UN system;
2. Leverages its partnerships and communications capacity to increase support for financing the gender equality agenda; and
3. Manages its finances and other resources to deliver its target objectives.

The **results-based management system** involves quarterly reporting against output indicators, biannual reporting against outcome indicators and annual reporting. No mid-term review was undertaken during the 2017–23 Strategic Note. A summary of the main results from the Results Management System and Annual Reports is set out in Annex 3. Data from these systems was validated during the evaluation, see Annex 4 for the sampling approach.

TABLE 1: Theory of change

RESULT AREA 1: GENDER-RESPONSIVE NORMS	RESULT AREA 2: WOMEN ARE ECONOMICALLY EMPOWERED AND BENEFIT FROM DEVELOPMENT	RESULT AREA 3: WOMEN AND GIRLS LIVE A LIFE FREE FROM VIOLENCE
<p>Outcomes: Gender equality tools and skills to monitor and measure progress on global commitments under the normative framework.</p> <p>Outputs: Governments and civil society report and monitor implementation of global normative frameworks; regional knowledge management for HIV / sexual and reproductive health and rights/ gender-based violence; UN, regional bodies, governments and civil society implement HIV/AIDs prevention and management strategies focused on addressing gender inequalities; and more women in the informal economy access social protection.</p>	<p>Outcomes: Procurement is gender responsive and the capacity of women's businesses and entrepreneurs is strengthened.</p> <p>Outputs: Advocacy leads to public procurement laws and policies that support women's business enterprises; women's capacity to respond to procurement calls and businesses are strengthened to move up the value chain.</p>	<p>Outcomes: Gender-based violence prevention strategies and action plans are implemented; favourable social norms, attitudes and behaviours are promoted; and an enabling environment for Women, Peace and Security is created.</p> <p>Outputs: Community is mobilized to support ending violence against women; South Africa adopts accountability frameworks to ensure delivery of the national action plan on Women, Peace and Security; and SADC adopts a regional framework and action plan on Women, Peace and Security.</p>

¹⁸ Quantum

STRATEGIC NOTE INTERVENTIONS

Annex 5 lists the programmes (including joint programmes) undertaken during the Strategic Note period, mapped against normative, coordination and operational mandates, and whether the programmes were delivered at the national, regional or global level, along with the timeline of implementation.

CHANGES DURING IMPLEMENTATION

There were a few key changes over the course of the Strategic Note implementation. In 2021, Outcome 2 (Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems) was removed as a standalone outcome area and integrated into other outcome areas, to enable the office to focus its resources on Women's Economic Empowerment, Ending Violence against Women and normative work. Covid-19 also required the adaptation of programmes to meet the needs of programme participants affected by disruption of HIV/AIDS services and increased incidences of household poverty, gender based violence and harmful practices such as child marriages.

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATIONS

The MCO delivers programming across all five countries. These include: Cape Town, Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Sobantu, Mamelodi, Blueberry (South Africa); Gaborone (Botswana); Windhoek (Namibia); Mbabane, Manzini, Lubombo (Eswatini); and Butha-butha, Maseru (Lesotho).

FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES ANALYSIS

The evaluation's financial and human resources (HR) analysis covers the period from January 2017 to December 2023 (see Figure 1 for more detail).

The Multi-Country Office has achieved its resource mobilization target and has doubled the resources mobilized from US\$ 2.3 million in 2017 to US\$ 7.5 million in 2023. It has successfully fundraised from the private sector, with the largest private sector donor contributing 33 per cent of the office's total funding. However, implementation has not managed to keep pace with resource mobilization. The financial disbursement/utilization rate over the Strategic Note period (2017–23) was 74 per cent (US\$ 23 million compared to an actual budget of US\$ 31 million).

The timeliness of donor reporting has been poor, with 52 per cent of reports submitted late during 2017–23. However, there has been significant improvement since 2021, with the percentage of late reports reduced to 25 per cent in 2023.

The Multi-Country Office's largest area of work is Women's Economic Empowerment, accounting for 66 per cent of the budget during 2017–2023, followed by Ending Violence Against Women (SP3), with 23 per cent of the budget; then Peace, Security and Humanitarian Action (SP4) at 8 per cent; and Women's Political Empowerment (SP1) at 4 per cent. As of December 2023, according to the OneApp HR dashboard, the Multi-Country Office employed 23 people in total, of which 39 per cent are staff, 13 per cent consultants, 39 per cent service contractors and 9 per cent UN Volunteers. With the exception of one personnel in both Botswana and Namibia, all personnel are based at the Pretoria office in South Africa.

STAKEHOLDER MAPPING AND ANALYSIS

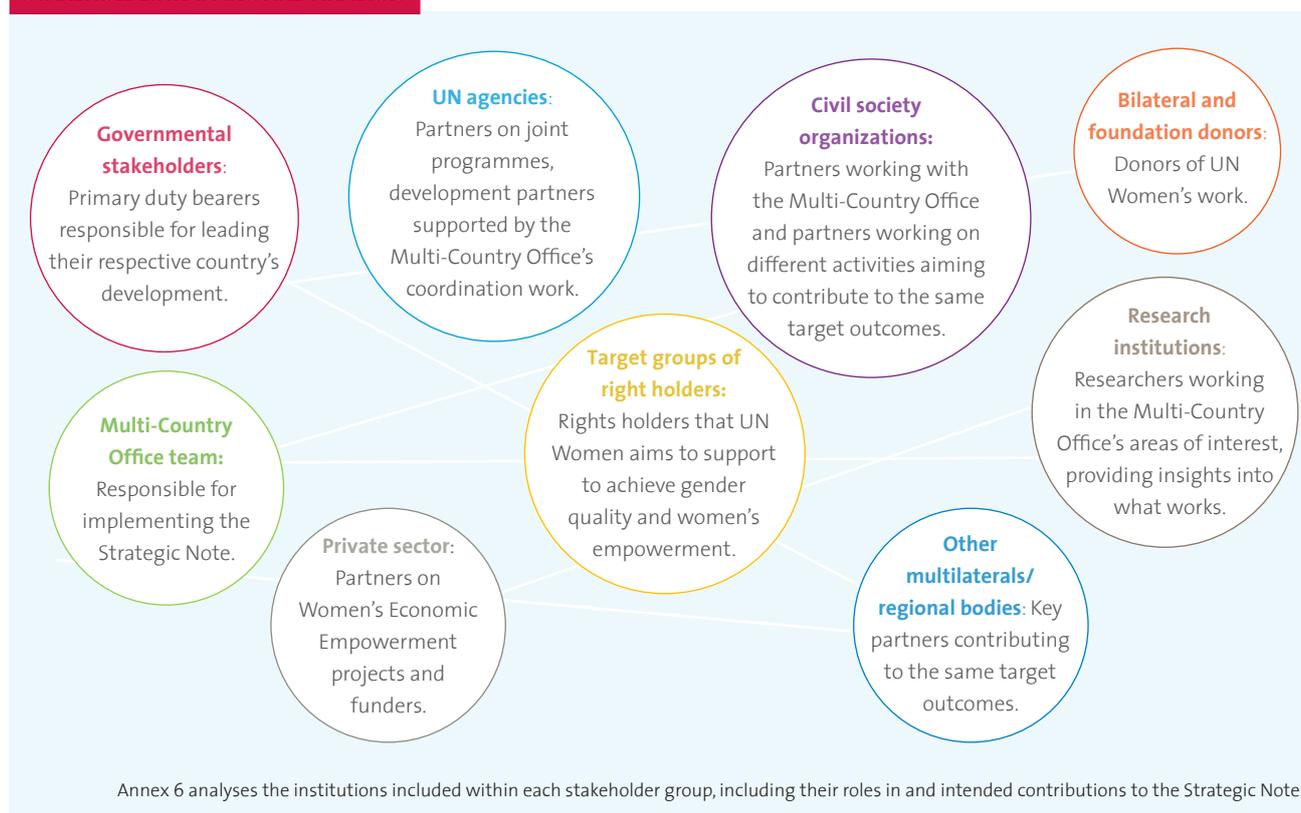


FIGURE 1: Human and financial resources analysis Multi-Country Office 2017–2023

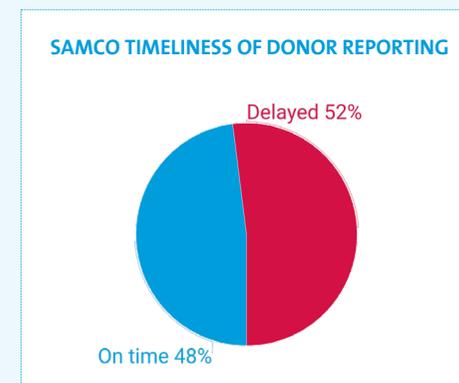
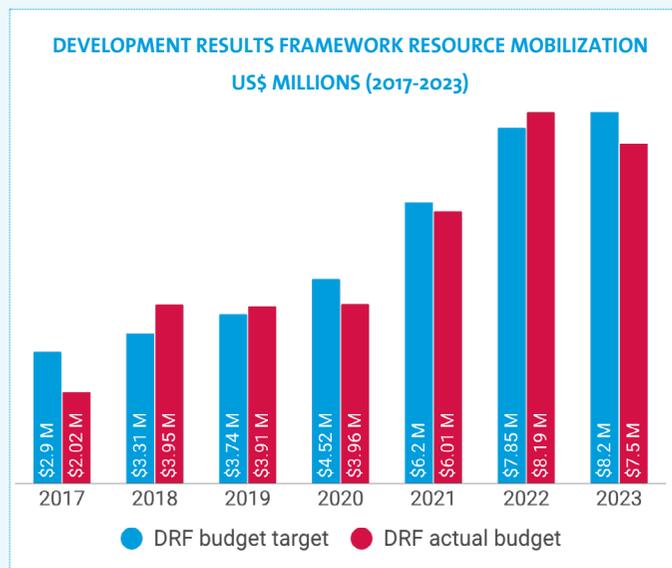
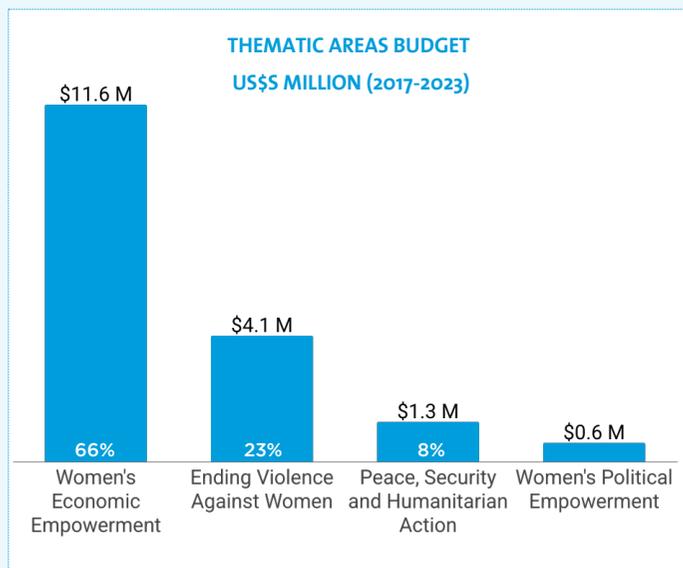
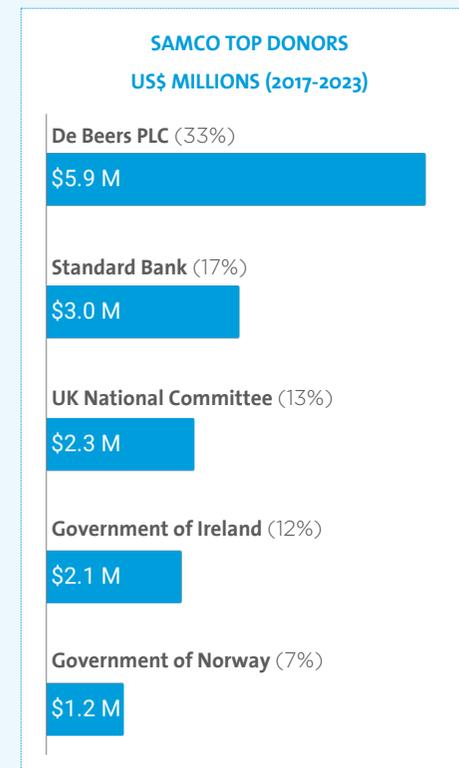
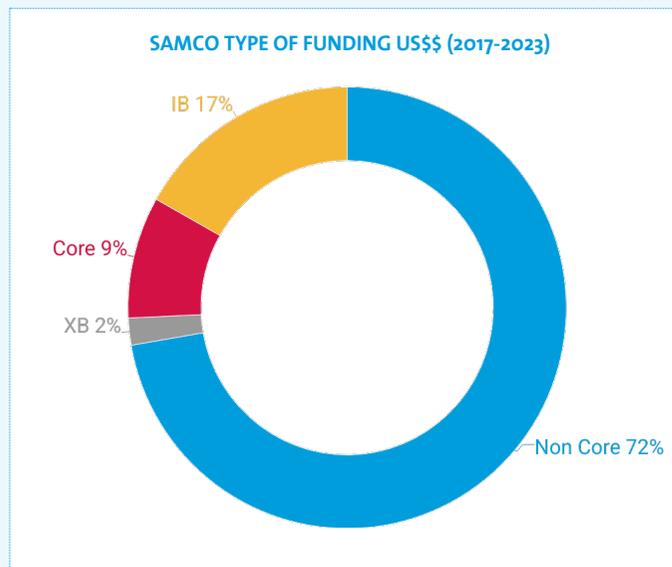
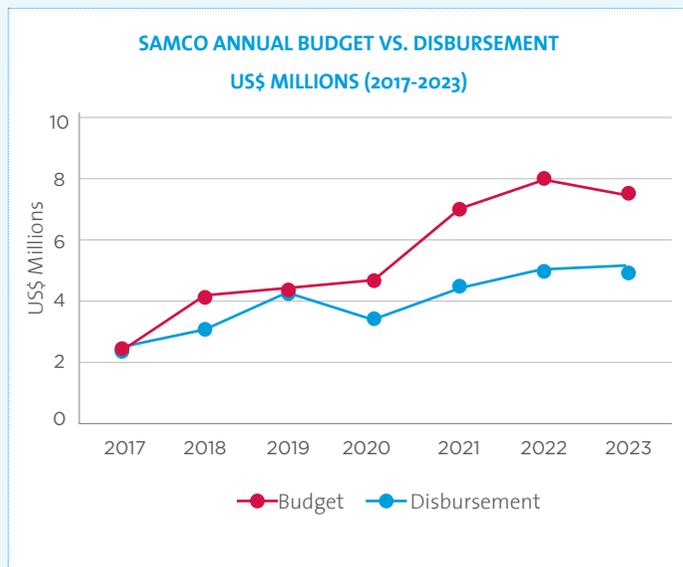




Photo: ©UN Women South Africa

4. METHODOLOGY

EVALUATION APPROACH

The evaluation approach was theory based and contribution analysis was used to assess the Multi-Country Office's contribution to target outcomes as set out in the theory of change (see Annex 2). The evaluation used mixed methods, drawing on both quantitative data (primarily financial and from the survey) and qualitative data (from document review, interviews and focus groups). Gender equality and human rights formed a critical component of the evaluation as detailed below.¹⁹

Stakeholder analysis and methodology: Stakeholder analysis was used to select a diverse group of stakeholders to engage in the evaluation, including women and men, and those who are marginalized and difficult to reach. Data was triangulated across different sources and stakeholders.

Evaluation criteria and questions: An evaluation criterion on gender equality and human rights was added, and associated evaluation questions developed. For the project review sample, the evaluation team assessed outcomes against the Gender Results Effectiveness Scale.

Reporting: Human rights and gender equality issues are covered in all sections of the report (findings, lessons learned, recommendations).

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The evaluation sought to answer the following overarching questions.²⁰

Relevance and coherence

- Are the Multi-Country Office's interventions coherent with the work of UN Country Teams and other key stakeholders across all five countries?
- Do the interventions selected maximize the Multi-Country Office's comparative advantage?

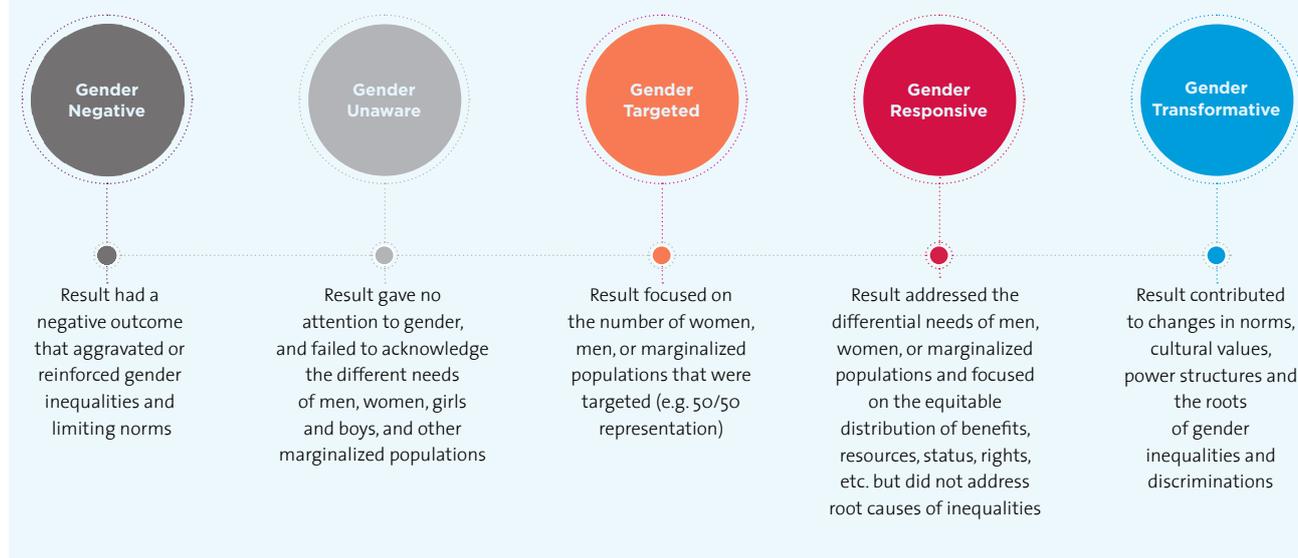
Effectiveness, human rights and gender equality, and sustainability

- Are interventions contributing to target outcomes set out in the Strategic Note, and addressing the root causes of gender inequality and supporting structural changes in gender equality and women's empowerment?

Efficiency

- How efficient are organizational structures and management processes?
- Additional details are set out in the evaluation matrix in Annex 8. Annex 4 sets out the sampling approach used across projects and stakeholders.

FIGURE 2: Gender Results Effectiveness Scale



Source: UNDP Gender Results Effectiveness Scale²¹

¹⁹ Building on the Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in 26 Evaluation Towards United Nations Evaluation Group Guidance

²⁰ As per the Terms of Reference, M-CPs do not assess the achievement of impacts.

²¹ [The Gender Results Effectiveness Scale](#)

DATA COLLECTION

The evaluation team conducted a document review of UN Women and national documents on progress against gender equality and women's empowerment during the inception phase of the evaluation (March and May 2024). Annex 1 sets out the list of documents reviewed.

Interviews and focus groups with key informants were identified through the stakeholder analysis, most of which were conducted in person, between July and September 2024. Locations visited include: Cape Town, Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Sobantu, Mamelodi, Blueberry (South Africa); Gaborone (Botswana); Windhoek (Namibia); Mbabane, Manzini, Lubombo (Eswatini); and Butha-buthe, Maseru (Lesotho).

A survey of Multi-Country Office personnel, UNCT partners and other stakeholders (donors, civil society, private-sector partners and government) was undertaken as a pilot with one individual surveyed from each category. The survey was open between July and September 2024.

The data collection tools are set out in Annex 9.

In total, the evaluation team targeted a sample of 250 stakeholders, with 244 stakeholders reached. All data was disaggregated by gender where relevant. Programme

participant data were further disaggregated by geographical region, age and socioeconomic background. Six rights holders with disability and 15 young people were consulted as part of the evaluation. The evaluation also consulted organizations representing and working with vulnerable communities, including the Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals of Botswana. Annex 1 sets out the list of stakeholders consulted. Data was managed as per the data management plan, set out in Annex 10.

ANALYSIS

The evaluation matrix forms the framework for analysis. Qualitative data were analysed in a tabular analysis framework, developed based on the evaluation matrix. Quantitative data were analysed in Stata to identify trends.

The evaluation team presented the preliminary findings to the Multi-Country Office on 20 September 2024 to validate the findings and identify other perspectives and information to be incorporated in this report.

Contribution towards each target outcome was analysed using the format in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2: Contribution Analysis Table

TARGET OUTCOME		
Evidence for achievement		
Achievement – strength of evidence		
Strong	Moderate	Weak
Corroborated by multiple sources and different types of stakeholders, with detailed examples	Corroborated by more than one source, but limited examples and/or general examples only	Only cited by one source, or by one type of stakeholder. No specific examples provided
Evidence for UN Women contribution		
UN Women contribution – strength of evidence		
Strong	Moderate	Weak
Change explicitly attributed to specific UN Women activity, detailed explanation of how it contributed	General and non-specific link between outcome and specific UN Women activities	Link between the outcome and UN Women activity unclear, limited explanation of how the activity supported change
Contribution of other factors; testing of theory of change assumptions		

ETHICS

The evaluation complied with the relevant United Nations Evaluation Group and UN Women standards on ethics.²²

Integrity

The evaluators complied with the Code of Conduct and delivered the evaluation with honesty, professionalism and impartiality. The evaluators are independent from programme delivery. The evaluators documented changes to findings made as a result of discussion between the evaluation team and the Multi-Country Office and following additional data collection.

Accountability

The evaluation took a transparent sampling and analysis approach, using an analysis framework and Stata. Evaluation findings were mapped to the evaluation questions, referencing the underlying evidence.

Beneficence

The evaluation team sought informed, oral consent from those participating in the evaluation. The team clearly explained the purpose of the evaluation and how the information would be used. The evaluators highlighted the potential benefits and harm in participating, and that participants could stop the interview or focus group discussion at any point. All responses have been anonymized; there is no expected harm to participants.

Respect

The evaluation meaningfully engaged evaluation stakeholders not only as subjects of data collection. The evaluation team will share the evaluation brief with all evaluation stakeholders. To ensure fair representation of different voices, the sampling approach took into consideration coverage of different stakeholder categories, including those hard to reach.

LIMITATIONS AND MITIGATIONS

Survey response rate: Despite several follow-ups, there were limited responses to the UNCT survey. The evaluation team supplemented this by extensive interviews with key UNCT partners as identified by the Multi-Country Office.

Institutional knowledge on Ending Violence Against Women and Women, Peace and Security: The thematic lead for Ending Violence Against Women and Women, Peace and Security left during the period of data collection planning. This affected stakeholder outreach. The evaluation team mitigated this by contacting partners to seek additional information on programming and contact information to support data collection.

DISSEMINATION AND USE

Table 3 sets out the dissemination plan for the targeted primary and secondary users of the evaluation.

The Multi-Country Office Representative will lead the follow-up process to facilitate use of evaluation findings and is responsible for issuing a management response within six weeks of the evaluation report being finalized.

EVALUATION MANAGEMENT AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

The Director, Independent Evaluation, Audit and Investigation Services (IEAIS) and Chief, Independent Evaluation Service (IES) reviewed and signed off on all evaluation products. Supported by international and national consultants, the Team Lead was responsible for the M-CPE, including data collection, analysis and reporting. The evaluation will be subject to the Global Evaluation Report Assessment and Analysis System process to assess report quality.

The Evaluation Reference and Management Groups (see Annex 11) provided technical reviews to ensure a high-quality, transparent process. The peer reviewer also reviewed the report.

TABLE 3: Evaluation dissemination plan

DISSEMINATION APPROACH	HOW THIS WILL BE TRACKED
South Africa Multi-Country Office Two-page brief and host a meeting to discuss next steps.	Uptake of findings and concrete, actionable next steps.
UN Women Regional Office and headquarters colleagues Two-page brief and webinar.	Number of stakeholders the brief is shared with. Number of webinar attendees
National partners and others working in the sector Two-page brief.	Number of stakeholders the brief is shared with.

²² The evaluation adhered to United Nations Evaluation Group and UN Women Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct, and United Nations Evaluation Group guidance on integrating human rights and gender equality in evaluations with gender-responsive and human rights approaches integrated into the evaluation.

FIGURE 3: Summary of methodology

General objective

The evaluation is a systematic analysis of UN Women’s contributions to development results in gender equality and women’s empowerment in Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia and South Africa, with a focus on strengthening learning, decision-making and accountability.

Evaluation Process

- 1 Design
- 2 Inception and portfolio analysis
- 3 Data collection
- 4 Data analysis and reporting
- 5 Monitoring and use

Methodology



Gender-responsive evaluation
Mixed methods for triangulating evidence
Theory-based, contribution analysis
Deeper analysis of project sample

212 people consulted through interviews and focus groups



Semi-structured interviews with 117 UN Women personnel and partners and focus groups with 95 beneficiaries

72 documents analysed



Planning documents, reports, national strategic documentation and others

Evaluation criteria



Relevance
Effectiveness | Efficiency
Coherence
Human rights and gender equality

34 respondents to 4 surveys



UN Women personnel survey: 21
Stakeholder survey: 12
UN Country Team survey: 1

Contribution analysis



Approach designed to arrive at conclusions about the contribution the portfolio has made or is currently making to the development outcomes

Strategic Note 2017-2023

US\$
17.6
million

Total resources between 2017 and 2023
Evaluation was conducted between March and December 2024

Evaluation scope: programmatic and organizational result areas



Women’s Political Participation



Women’s Economic Empowerment



Ending Violence Against Women



HIV/AIDS and the effectiveness and efficiency framework



Photo: ©UN Women South Africa

5. FINDINGS

EFFICIENCY

How efficient are organizational structures and management processes?

Is the right organizational structure and personnel mix across countries in place to achieve target outcomes across all countries?

FINDING 1

Challenges with the Multi-Country Office's organizational structure and capacity have affected the office's ability to deliver its mandate and Strategic Note across the five countries it serves. However, key investments in support and programmatic functions indicate progress in the right direction.

There were some structural issues in understanding of the Multi-Country Office's role in the countries outside of South Africa, where it has limited personnel. Previous direction from the Regional Office had been to focus on South Africa, with antennae in the other countries for specific programme delivery, thereby functioning as a non-resident agency in the other countries. However, this created tensions between the allocation of core resources from the Regional Office and the expectations on the MCO's participation in UNCTs from other UN agencies (as the office was signatory to all five cooperation frameworks).

The level of core resources contributed to capacity constraints. The Business Transformation team within the Strategy, Planning, Resources and Effectiveness Division undertook a functional analysis of the office in 2020. Subsequent funding constraints affected the Multi-Country Office's ability to implement the recommendations arising from the functional analysis. While classified as a "medium" office, the Multi-Country Office operates with "small" office resources yet covers five countries, four thematic areas and cross-cutting issues. The percentage of core funding received as a percentage of total funding is comparable to that of other multi-country offices. However, in real terms, it is much smaller, as the Multi-Country Office's level of overall resources is smaller than those of the other multi-country offices. The Multi-Country Office's level of core funding is similar to other countries in the region which only cover one country. Therefore, the core funding allocated is insufficient to cover coordination personnel across all five countries. Historically, it has also been difficult for offices to mobilize resources for coordination. Capacity in terms of personnel numbers was affected by recruitment delays and resource mobilization challenges, see Finding 2.

The Multi-Country Office had insufficient personnel to deliver on its mandate and Strategic Note across the five countries it covers. Over the Strategic Note period, the Multi-Country Office employed an average of 23 personnel. There were personnel gaps throughout the period – including the Multi-Country Office Representative and in the Monitoring and Reporting function, in coordination, the Ending Violence Against Women and Women, Peace and Security Specialist, and personnel presence in the other countries outside South Africa. The results of the evaluation survey revealed that 75 per cent of Multi-Country Office personnel disagreed that the office had sufficient personnel to deliver, and 46 per cent disagreed that the office had sufficient skills to deliver the portfolio.²³ This affected the Multi-Country Office's ability to resource its coordination, operational and normative mandate in countries outside South Africa, as signatory to the cooperation frameworks.²⁴

Resource limitations meant that the Multi-Country Office had to rely on short-term contract modalities, resulting in gaps between post holders, affecting some institutional knowledge management and partner relationships. Multi-Country Office personnel explained they had to recruit using the best contractual modality they could offer, in some cases offering non-ideal contracts for certain positions, such as consultancy and UN Volunteer contracts. The turnover in personnel has led to some loss of institutional knowledge²⁵ and affected relationships with partners. Some interviewed partners said they did not receive clear communications when their contact point left the office. Multi-Country Office personnel reflected that management of institutional knowledge was also challenging in some cases, when there was no-one to handover to, i.e. to replace the colleague leaving the office.

²³ 24 Multi-Country Office personnel responded to the survey.

²⁴ Interviews with Multi-Country Office personnel, UNCT and government stakeholders across all five countries.

²⁵ Interviews with Multi-Country Office personnel.

Capacity constraints have affected the efficiency and effectiveness of delivery, including financial delivery rates, programme and partner management and the office's reputation in the subregion.²⁶ Examples are further detailed in this report. The Multi-Country Office noted that additional personnel are needed in each thematic area to properly resource the work.

The Multi-Country Office is moving in the right direction, making key capacity investments across support and programmatic functions and standardizing contractual terms and modalities. Effectively working within existing resources, the Multi-Country Office has invested in improving capacity in its support functions – including

monitoring and reporting, communications and data analysis, and is also building capacity in programmatic areas, including coordination. The Multi-Country Office is also tactically using programme funding to place programme analysts in all the countries outside South Africa and plans to recruit UN Volunteers in these countries to support the Coordination Specialist, despite limited core resources. The Regional Office has supported the Multi-Country Office to migrate its service contracts to new contracts, to support more standardized contractual terms. A number of programme personnel have recently been trained in media, results-based management and procurement.

Does the Multi-Country Office's organizational structure, systems and processes support effective resource mobilization and efficient implementation?

FINDING 2

The Multi-Country Office has improved its systems and processes for implementation and resource mobilization, including monitoring, reporting, communications and operations. However, challenges with insufficient capacity persist, impacting efficiency. For greater efficiency, opportunities exist to enhance recruitment timelines, resource mobilization, donor management, baselines and the tracking of behaviour and norms change, streamline workflows and take a more proactive approach to planning.

The Multi-Country Office has improved its systems and processes in response to recommendations from the internal audit finalized in 2022. A plan to manage target population information is under way; partner management systems are being strengthened; a data consultant has been recruited through non-core funding to support centralized electronic filing for better knowledge management; and a resource management strategy has been developed. New communications personnel are enhancing advocacy efforts and donor visibility, an area noted for improvement by several donors. Some recommendations still require further action, as detailed below.

There have been some challenges with the efficiency and timeliness of the Multi-Country Office's HR support, especially in terms of recruitment. For example, Multi-Country Office personnel noted that recruitments can take more than nine months, which affects programme delivery.²⁷ Personnel noted that more efficient, in-person support is required, along with more strategic, forward-looking

planning to ensure personnel are recruited at the right times and to deliver most effectively against specific projects. Personnel also highlighted the importance of an appropriate contract modality being offered, rather than defaulting to using the consultant modality due to the relative speed of recruitment. Multi-Country Office personnel noted that overuse of consultants resulted in delays in programme delivery, due to consultants' restricted quantum access rights.

The effectiveness of resource mobilization has been mixed. There have been key successes, i.e. securing significant funding from the private sector and the Multi-Country Office has effectively leveraged its work with the Women's Economic Principle signatories²⁸ in South Africa, engaging companies on women's empowerment and translating this commitment into funding.²⁹ Due to visibility from its coordination work, three businesses funded work on the gender-based violence strategy and a project on women's economic assembly.³⁰

²⁶ Interviews with Multi-Country Office personnel, civil society organizations, UN agencies and donors across all five countries.

²⁷ For example, budget for the Ending Violence Against Women and Women, Peace and Security Temporary Appointment was available at the beginning of 2024, but recruitment is still ongoing as the time of reporting in December 2024. The Climate Smart Agriculture evaluation noted issues with recruitment timelines and contracts not aligned to project timelines.

²⁸ www.weps.org

²⁹ For example, the partnership with De Beers originated through the Multi-Country Office's work with the Women's Empowerment Principles signatories.

³⁰ Interviews with Multi-Country Office personnel and businesses.

The effectiveness of the Multi-Country Office’s resource mobilization efforts was affected by capacity constraints:

42 per cent of Multi-Country Office personnel surveyed agreed that the office’s management structure supports efficient resource mobilization.³¹ For example, one consultant manages the Acceleration of Women Owned Micro-Enterprises (AWOME) programme³² and supports resource mobilization and partnership management; and Programme teams are responsible for fundraising in their thematic areas. These capacity constraints affected fundraising efforts. The new Resource Mobilization Strategy for 2024–26 commits to strengthening team capacities for fundraising and recruitment of additional personnel across thematic areas and is also expected to support fundraising.

The subregional context also raises specific challenges, in terms of the funding available for middle-income countries and the tendency for bilateral donors to directly fund the government. The Multi-Country Office has committed to exploring opportunities with the private sector, foundations and governments.

There is the need to strengthen relationships with existing donors. Donors recognized the need for UN Women’s programmes in the subregion and agreed there was a case to build on gender equality statistics to advocate for larger budgets.³³ However, donors pointed out that the case for future funding is affected by issues such as the Multi-Country Office’s delivery rates and late reporting. They encouraged the Multi-Country Office to hold more project visits and strengthen stewardship of existing resources (see Finding 6).

There are also opportunities to do more to nurture potential donors. Personnel suggested that management should continue to engage in development partner meetings and meetings with government stakeholders, such as the Office of the Presidency, host events and increase the Multi-Country Office’s visibility through normative work (see Findings 3 and 7). Multi-Country Office personnel also suggested that the office could strategically position itself as a thought leader and use research on certain key areas to mobilize resources.

Private-sector funding across the subregion continues to represent a huge opportunity that could be better leveraged by moving more quickly to build on momentum and private-sector interest, which can potentially wane. There is also interest from the private sector for financially sustainable models, for example, women’s entrepreneurship programmes that provide a return that can be reinvested to reach more participants.³⁴

There is a need to encourage donors towards more consolidated programming and away from small projects that are difficult for the Multi-Country Office to deliver.

Currently, the Multi-Country Office’s portfolio includes larger, strategic programmes and smaller programmes. The smaller initiatives tend to be determined by donor interests rather than Multi-Country Office strategies,³⁵ e.g. delivery of small-scale training and work on greenhouses. Multi-Country Office personnel reflected that, in the past, the office had too easily accepted small projects, despite higher transaction costs and sometimes unrealistic expectations. One private-sector donor provided personnel time to deliver entrepreneurship training, but did not provide funding to the Multi-Country Office. This resulted in the donor being disappointed that the Multi-Country Office was not involved in training or syllabus development. In another case, the programme relied heavily on partnering with the government, and challenges here affected programme delivery. Multi-Country Office personnel reflected that a key lesson was the importance of negotiation during the programme delivery phase to ensure activities and outcomes were realistic.

The Multi-Country Office is repackaging the Strategic Note as an investment package and encouraging donors to pool funds for larger programmes, such as the Just Energy Transition project.

There are opportunities to scale collaboration with partners to deliver at greater scale. Private-sector stakeholders noted some issues with duplication, with the Multi-Country Office seen to be competing with other organizations. One private-sector donor said, “We cannot continue to pump in money for the same results”. Donors suggested that the Multi-Country Office introduce a community of practice across the sector to avoid repeating the same programmes, and instead scale and augment effective opportunities by pooling resources, bringing together different donors and partners to achieve impact at scale.

Monitoring and reporting have been significantly strengthened. The new Monitoring and Reporting Analyst has strengthened the Multi-Country Office’s systems. There has been a significant improvement in the quality and timeliness of reporting.³⁶ The results framework in the new Strategic Note has addressed the weaknesses identified in the previous Strategic Note, including too many indicators, overambitious targets and lack of representation of key areas of work (such as HIV/AIDS). With the support of data analysts, the Monitoring and Reporting Analyst is currently strengthening data management to improve data quality and validity.

³¹ N=24

³² Programme funded by De Beers, renamed EntreprenHER as at the time of reporting.

³³ Aligned with the Multi-Country Office’s upcoming Nation of Women report focusing on the number of women living in the subregion in countries with least developed country status.

³⁴ Interviews with private-sector stakeholders

³⁵ Internal audit, review of programmes and interviews with civil society and Multi-Country Office personnel.

³⁶ Interviews with donors and Regional Office review.

Areas to strengthen in monitoring and reporting include the timeliness of donor and corporate reporting and greater use of baselines and behaviour change tracking and impact evaluations. Investing in more baselines would support target setting and the tracking of change.³⁷ Governments and donors also suggested investing in more rigorous tracking of norms and behaviour change to generate evidence for UN Women's models and to fully capture the outcomes achieved.³⁸ As such tracking can be expensive, it could be prioritized for pilot initiatives. Private-sector donors also suggested investing in impact evaluations and return on investment assessments to supplement qualitative data and strengthen the case for additional funding.

There have been some challenges with the Multi-Country Office's financial delivery rate and the timeliness of its disbursement of funds due to limited Multi-Country Office capacity in terms of personnel numbers and implementing partner capabilities. Fifty-eight per cent of Multi-Country Office personnel surveyed agreed that systems are in place to ensure efficient use of resources; and 46 per cent agreed that effective systems are in place to support results delivery.³⁹ Against several areas of the results framework, the Multi-Country Office noted it could not achieve meaningful progress due to limited resources and capacity (see Finding 1). Annex 3 shows a mixed performance in terms of target indicators.

The introduction of Quantum, the enterprise resource management system, has improved efficiencies in some areas but introduced new challenges. While Quantum has encouraged closer collaboration between Programme and Operations staff, user rights have been an issue, especially for consultants who lack access despite needing to use the system for their roles. This has led to a reliance on colleagues to process transactions. Personnel also indicated a need for more training and support. Additionally, the consistency of figures during Quantum roll-out has impacted donor relationships, with one donor expressing concern about fiduciary management due to different figures apparently being presented in the same meeting.

Efficiency challenges have affected financial delivery rates, timelines for fund disbursement and partner liquidation.⁴⁰ Regional Office reports highlight high levels of aged outstanding partner advances, a large number of projects that need to be closed and low financial delivery rates. Interviewed programme personnel and implementing partners cited challenges with late disbursements, little notice to partners about expected disbursement dates⁴¹ and tight delivery timelines, which affected delivery effectiveness. Programme personnel noted that the Multi-Country Office can take more than six months to contract partners after receiving donor funds, making it difficult to deliver one-year programmes. The evaluation of the Climate Smart Agriculture project also noted issues with procurement timelines and delayed invoice processing, which affected delivery in South Africa.⁴²

Implementing partner financial and programmatic reporting challenges have affected efficiency. While the Multi-Country Office addressed this issue in its 2023 workplan and committed to building partner capacity, further action is needed based on key delivery indicators.⁴³ Strengthening partner onboarding on UN Women processes, liquidation and reporting requirements, as well as ongoing capacity support, is needed to improve delivery and timely liquidation of advances.⁴⁴ Delays in fund disbursement particularly impact smaller partners who cannot use alternative funding to start delivery, potentially limiting the range of partners the Multi-Country Office can engage.

Limited operational capacity has also affected efficiency. The Multi-Country Office only has one Operations Manager covering all five countries. Programme personnel highlighted that operational support to programmes needed to be strengthened, for example, in terms of finalizing liquidations. To improve delivery rates and ensure timely fund disbursement, the Multi-Country Office plans to engage additional Programme and Operations personnel.⁴⁵ Multi-Country Office and Regional Office personnel also emphasized the need for greater cohesion between Programme and Operations teams. The team-building initiatives have gone some way to improve inter-office dynamics.

³⁷ Civil society and government interviews in Eswatini, Lesotho and South Africa.

³⁸ For example, the Multi-Country Office is delivering proof-of-concept HIV programming. Community dialogues and economic empowerment is intended to improve resilience to gender-based violence and HIV. A range of individual and community-level outcomes have been observed, including in HIV transmission, attitudes to gender-based violence, economic empowerment, but these have not yet been adequately tracked.

³⁹ 24 Multi-Country Office personnel responded to the survey.

⁴⁰ Interviews with Multi-Country Office and Regional Office personnel, Multi-Country Office 2023 workplan.

⁴¹ One partner in Lesotho noted they were expected to deliver the programme within a month.

⁴² Procurement of the greenhouses was secured near the end of the programme; partners noted that invoices were only processed after four months.

⁴³ See above

⁴⁴ Highlighted in the internal audit and mentioned by Multi-Country Office personnel and civil society partner interviewees.

⁴⁵ Resource Mobilization Strategy 2024-26.

There is opportunity for the Multi-Country Office to review workflows to identify and address bottlenecks, streamline processes, adopt a more proactive approach and strengthen oversight and accountability. The 2022 internal audit recommended clearer workflows with defined responsibilities to improve operational timeliness. Private-sector stakeholders noted the Multi-Country Office’s “red tape” as a key barrier to effective delivery and suggested identifying areas where delays occur and how to navigate processes more efficiently, including leveraging partner systems where needed. Multi-Country Office personnel suggested an internal review of bottlenecks was needed to identify where processes could be streamlined; where additional capacity (in terms of personnel or outsourced services) is required; and could

be used to develop target time frames against key workflows. Regional and Multi-Country Office personnel also suggested enhancing agile project management skills and taking a more proactive approach, e.g. by starting tasks such as calls for proposals, prequalification, partner identification, code setup in Quantum and recruitment earlier in the project process, in advance of signing donor agreements. Personnel noted that higher levels of management oversight through more regular check-ins and monitoring, where there are risks to the delivery of certain programmes, would strengthen programme delivery. However, due to current capacity constraints, management’s ability to further increase oversight and accountability is limited.

COHERENCE AND RELEVANCE

Do the interventions selected maximize the Multi-Country Office’s comparative advantage?

What was the Multi-Country Office’s comparative advantage and value add vis-à-vis other development actors?

FINDING 3

The Multi-Country Office’s comparative advantage includes its mandate and specific focus on gender, its convening power, brand name and areas of focus.

The Multi-Country Office’s comparative advantage in the subregion includes its specific gender mandate and focus; expertise and robust tools for gender mainstreaming; and its brand name as the key player on gender in South Africa.⁴⁶ Its technical support to government stakeholders, including sharing learning from UN Women’s work in other countries, was highly valued.⁴⁷ The Multi-Country Office’s mandate, expertise and relationships with stakeholders working on gender equality served as the foundation for its convening power. The office built a strong relationship with the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities in South Africa, which facilitated strong collaboration on gender mainstreaming. It nurtured strong relationships with SADC, working closely together particularly on issues such as HIV/AIDs and gender-based violence across the subregion. In South Africa, the Multi-Country Office worked with the Black Women’s Council in South Africa to highlight the issue of gender-based violence with the President’s office, which contributed to the President pronouncing his

commitment to the gender-based violence strategy.⁴⁸ The office also worked with the Presidential Task Team on the Women’s Economic Empowerment Programme to coordinate public and private-sector organizations to support women-owned businesses.⁴⁹

UN agencies across the five countries also pointed to the Multi-Country Office’s niche as the main agency working in key areas affecting gender equality, including Women’s Economic Empowerment and Women’s Political Participation. The Multi-Country Office’s strengths included taking a holistic approach to gender issues; addressing social norms and tackling the socio-economic determinants of HIV/AIDs; and its willingness to fund sensitive advocacy work, for example, on the forced sterilization issue in South Africa, that other agencies were unwilling to fund.⁵⁰ Civil society partners and governments recognized the Multi-Country Office’s innovative programming approaches, such as its community dialogues.

⁴⁶ Civil society, government, private sector and UN agencies across the five countries

⁴⁷ For example, SADC stakeholders highlighted the Multi-Country Office’s support to their preparations for CSW, introducing them to UN Women Angola (the chair) and the UNAIDs office in South Africa.

⁴⁸ Interviews and survey responses from UN agencies, government and civil society partners across all five countries.

⁴⁹ The programme is a national initiative focusing on promoting 40 per cent women-led businesses delivering public procurement.

⁵⁰ Interviews with civil society partners.

Were the Multi-Country Office's focus areas and strategy for implementation the most relevant for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment, considering its comparative advantage?

FINDING 4

The Multi-Country Office's focus on the most vulnerable and underrepresented women and use of locally driven approaches align with government priorities and the needs of the subregion. However, capacity and structural challenges hindered the office's ability to fully deliver on its mandate in countries outside South Africa. To further increase its relevance and leverage its comparative advantage, there is an opportunity to shift from small, donor-driven projects to consolidated, scalable models that link coordination, normative and operational programming.

The Multi-Country Office's focus on the most vulnerable and underrepresented women aligns well with the needs in the subregion: 75 per cent of the Multi-Country Office personnel and stakeholders surveyed were satisfied with the office's responsiveness to women and girls' needs.⁵¹ Donors, governments and UN partners highlighted a strong need for UN Women's role in coordination, normative and operational efforts to address gender inequality. The Multi-Country Office's approach is also relevant and targeted to local needs. Multi-Country Office personnel and partners noted that programme design involved community consultations and varied based on community needs. For example, the office's HIV/AIDS work targets areas with the highest infection rates based on national data.

The Multi-Country Office's mandate is aligned to government priorities and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks. Interventions are well aligned to government and national priorities in terms of gender-equality driven national development plans and ministries, departments and agencies' priorities.⁵² The work of the Multi-Country Office also directly supports delivery of the South Africa cooperation framework, though the office's contribution to the cooperation frameworks in the other four countries was less clear to the respective UNCTs. Eighty-four per cent of the Multi-Country Office personnel and external stakeholders surveyed were satisfied with the office's alignment to government priorities.⁵³

The Multi-Country Office faces challenges in fully delivering its mandate and leveraging its comparative advantage in the four countries outside South Africa due to a Regional Office decision to focus on South Africa, given limited capacity, as set out in Finding 1. The Multi-Country Office and UNCTs across the five countries agree

that the Multi-Country Office's presence, programming and UNCT support is limited outside South Africa (see Finding 4 on coordination).

The Multi-Country Office needs to shift from small, donor-driven projects to more consolidated, scalable programmes that leverage its strengths in coordination and normative work. Donors and civil society across all countries noted that the Multi-Country Office's resources are spread too thinly, recommending a more focused engagement strategy rather than being too responsive to donor priorities, which has led to numerous small, scattered programmes, making them challenging to staff effectively. In response, the Multi-Country Office is moving towards larger, coherent projects that better align with its expertise and can serve as scalable models, connecting coordination, normative and operational functions. The projects that external stakeholders highlighted as the most effective, such as Young Women for Life, HeforShe and AWOME, demonstrate the value of longer-term initiatives, delivered at greater scale. These programmes have also generated most stakeholder interest for scale-up. Key successes noted by external stakeholders include areas of work where the Multi-Country Office has effectively linked its coordination, normative and operational work. For example, the Multi-Country Office supported the South Africa government on gender-responsive procurement and its National Strategic Plan through convening stakeholders. The Multi-Country Office advocated with the South African President's office on gender-based violence. Following the President's commitment to the Gender-Based Violence Strategy, the Multi-Country Office supported development of a project on the Women's Economic Assembly under pillar 5 of the National Strategic Plan focusing on economic power, and also brought in the private sector, including MTN, De Beers and Standard Bank, to deliver women's economic empowerment and gender-based violence programming.

⁵¹ N=32

⁵² Interviews with government partners.

⁵³ N=32

To maximize its impact and leverage its triple mandate, the Multi-Country Office could further scale its coordination and normative work. Donors and UN agencies see the Multi-Country Office's key value add as convening government and civil society to support policy change and its implementation. Government partners and donors suggested that the Multi-Country Office could strengthen its convening work by supplementing the events it holds with conducting research to support policy implementation; issuing statements and holding briefings aligned to key policy developments; facilitating dialogues; and bringing together action coalitions on key gender priorities to facilitate national collaboration. Donors noted a number of missed opportunities where the Multi-Country Office could demonstrate this added value, for example, during the South African presidential summit on gender-based violence and South Africa's role as chair of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). The Multi-Country Office's plans for convening stakeholders and advocating on gender issues during the upcoming G20 was seen as very promising and well aligned with what UN Women's role should be.

Overall, donors in South Africa highlighted a gap in leadership for coordinating gender equality efforts, such as Generation Equality Forum commitments. While this sits within UN Women's mandate, given the Multi-Country Office's capacity constraints, donors are exploring options to engage civil society. Recognizing this need, the Multi-Country Office has committed to leverage its convening role to support multi-partner advocacy platforms and dialogues among governments, civil society and other stakeholders.⁵⁴

Focusing normative and coordination work on areas where there is significant national interest presents a valuable opportunity to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. For example, UNCT stakeholders mentioned that South Africa is prioritizing women's economic empowerment and combatting gender-based violence, which provides an opportunity for UN Women to lead the UNCT response. Stakeholders in Eswatini noted the Deputy Prime Minister has created significant momentum to tackle gender-based violence and has requested UN support on gender-based violence and training on gender-responsive budgeting.

What contribution is the Multi-Country Office making to UN system coordination on gender equality and women's empowerment?

FINDING 5

The Multi-Country Office provided important inputs to UN coordination on gender equality, enhancing system accountability, mobilizing joint advocacy with governments and regional bodies, and developing joint programmes. However, limited resources, especially outside South Africa, led to perceptions of inconsistent engagement in gender coordination mechanisms. The priority request from Resident Coordinator Offices and Gender Theme Group members was for the Multi-Country Office's more active leadership and participation in the Gender Theme Groups. Secondary priorities include stronger involvement in reviewing workplans against gender markers and supporting coherence across UN gender programmes.

The Multi-Country Office supported UN system accountability on gender and provided technical support for gender mainstreaming. Across all five countries, UNCTs agreed that the Multi-Country Office had provided some important support to the UNCT, resulting in good quality gender scorecards and workplans, and in some instances supporting gender mainstreaming across cooperation framework outcomes. UNCTs also cited the Multi-Country Office's support on reporting against gender output areas in joint workplans, strengthening reporting against the gender indicators in cooperation frameworks.

In South Africa, UN agencies pointed to the Multi-Country Office's contribution to mainstreaming gender across the cooperation framework outcomes, joint workplans and specific results groups. Agencies also cited the Multi-Country Office's capacity-building of inter-agency groups on gender mainstreaming. Sixty-three per cent of Multi-Country Office personnel surveyed (n=24) thought that the office had very or somewhat effectively provided technical support to the UN system for gender mainstreaming; and 58 per cent thought the same regarding the Multi-Country Office's support for accountability on gender.

⁵⁴ Multi-Country Office 2023 Annual report

The Multi-Country Office effectively mobilized the UN system to advocate with national governments and regional economic communities. The office produced gender equality profiles in all five countries, which supported national planning, the Common Country Analysis and cooperation framework development in Botswana, Lesotho and South Africa. In Eswatini, the Multi-Country Office worked with the Deputy Prime Minister to disseminate and use the gender equality profiles in national strategies.⁵⁵ UN agencies noted that the Multi-Country Office had strengthened the Common Country Analyses in these countries through close collaboration with national statistical offices and national planning commissions.

The HIV Specialist has been an active member of the regional HIV/AIDS coordination team, contributing valuable input to the SADC and the CSW resolution a resolution focused on advancing the rights and empowerment of women and girls as part of efforts to end AIDS.

In South Africa, the Multi-Country Office worked with UNFPA, UNODC and UNICEF to contribute to development of the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide. The office also supported the Gender Theme Group in assisting the gender-based violence symposium.⁵⁶ Seventy-one per cent of Multi-Country Office personnel surveyed (n=24) thought that the office had very or somewhat effectively mobilized the UN system to advocate with governments.

The Multi-Country Office supported the conceptualization of joint programmes. Fifty per cent of Multi-Country Office personnel surveyed (n=24) thought that the office had very or somewhat effectively supported the conceptualization of joint programmes. UN agencies in South Africa highlighted the Multi-Country Office's effective convening of UN agencies in developing the South Africa component of the subregional proposal on the Spotlight Initiative. Agencies in Lesotho highlighted the Multi-Country Office's key role in supporting the UN system to develop joint programmes on gender-based violence and peace and security. The UN Women gender equality profiles informed joint programmes on Women, Peace and Security in Eswatini and Namibia.

The Multi-Country Office supported more coherent gender programming in South Africa. As Chair of the Gender Theme Group in South Africa, the Multi-Country Office developed a tool for agencies to share areas of work, which streamlined efforts and strengthened coordination on gender-based violence programming, reducing duplication.

The Multi-Country Office has faced resourcing challenges for coordination work due to limited core funding and high demands as a signatory to the cooperation frameworks across the five countries.⁵⁷ In 2022, the Regional Office decided to withdraw coordination officers in countries outside South Africa, and there was no coordination focal point in 2023–2024, further reducing capacity. Regional Office trainer of trainers coordination training has not yet yielded fruit, due to lack of confidence in delivering this training to UN agencies.⁵⁸ As of Q4 2024, a coordination focal point has been recruited in South Africa, who will be supported by national UN Volunteers in the other four countries to assist Gender Theme Groups, implementation of SWAP scorecards and UN coordination.

Due to capacity constraints, the Multi-Country Office strategically prioritized South Africa, selectively engaging in Gender Theme Groups and UNCTs in other countries. However, UN agencies outside South Africa expected the office's consistent representative engagement in UNCTs and Gender Theme Groups, as outlined in the cooperation framework configuration exercises, and expressed frustration over unmet expectations.⁵⁹ The Multi-Country Office stated it had sought to carefully manage visibility, to not raise undue expectations because of the office's limited capacity. However, there was also some miscommunication. While the Multi-Country Office had previously agreed to fund a cost-shared gender focal point in Botswana, Eswatini and Namibia, the office had to step back due to Regional Office guidance in 2022 to focus on South Africa and withdraw coordination personnel from the other countries. UN agencies felt this decision was not well communicated, putting a strain on relationships.

Clarity is required, both internally and externally, on what the Multi-Country Office can cover in South Africa and the other four countries. The Strategic Note coordination outcome covers all countries without distinction, committing the Multi-Country Office to support Resident Coordinator Offices, Gender Theme Groups, Common Country Analyses and UN-SWAP reporting. UN agencies have advised the Multi-Country Office to clearly communicate its capacity constraints and set realistic expectations for engagement, given that it cannot feasibly participate fully in all five UN processes. The focus on South Africa is not fully reflected in the new Strategic Note nor the Multi-Country Office's status as a signatory to all five countries' cooperation frameworks

⁵⁵ Interviews with Multi-Country Office personnel, government and UN agencies.

⁵⁶ Interviews with UN agencies in South Africa.

⁵⁷ In comparison, the countries covered by the other two Multi-Country Offices do not all have cooperation frameworks and UNCTs.

⁵⁸ Interviews with Multi-Country Office personnel.

⁵⁹ Around SWAP scorecard workplan development, supporting gender mainstreaming of UN programming, supporting coherence of UN gender work.

The Multi-Country Office has engaged more consistently with the UNCT and Gender Theme Group in South Africa, though challenges remain. Some UN agencies noted the absence of a meeting in the first half of 2024 and suggested that the Multi-Country Office assess its capacity to lead, and collaborate with others where necessary.

Resident Coordinator Offices and Gender Theme Group members in all five countries prioritized the need for stronger Multi-Country Office leadership in the South Africa and Eswatini Gender Theme Groups, with active participation in the other countries to support SWAP scorecard implementation and ensure gender mainstreaming in upcoming Common Country Analyses and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks. Additionally, when capacity allows, UN agencies requested that the Multi-Country Office review workplans and projects against the gender equality markers and engage more systematically with UNCTs and

results groups to bolster gender prioritization. Resident Coordinator Offices suggested that the Multi-Country Office could support more frequent Gender Theme Group reporting to the UNCTs, so that UNCTs can support prioritization of gender issues.

To improve the coherence of UN gender programming, the Multi-Country Office could facilitate information-sharing and build a coherent platform to engage with governments. UN agencies stated that better information-sharing on what agencies are doing would support synergies across programming. There is also room for the Multi-Country Office to convene UN agencies to support government priorities. For example, agencies suggested the Multi-Country Office could leverage its strong relationships with key government partners in South Africa⁶⁰ to support other agencies in also working with these departments, and to work together as the UNCT to advocate on key platforms, such as gender-responsive budgeting.

Are interventions achieving synergies between the Multi-Country Office's portfolio and the work of UN Country Teams and other stakeholders working on gender equality and women's empowerment?

FINDING 6

The Multi-Country Office's portfolio shows strong synergies with other UN agencies and stakeholders, as well as internal coherence across its thematic areas. To enhance these synergies, there are opportunities for the Multi-Country Office to pursue more joint UN programmes; improve information-sharing across the UN; strengthen links between its programming and cooperation frameworks in countries outside South Africa; increase linkages between its programming and national structures; and scale collaboration among thematic leads to effectively deliver cross-thematic, holistic programming.

WITH OTHER UN AGENCIES

There was good synergy between the Multi-Country Office's portfolio and the work of other UN agencies across the five countries. As Chair of the Gender Theme Group in South Africa, UN agencies said that the Multi-Country Office supported coordination among UN agencies, starting with a mapping of all UN gender programming and effectively convened agencies to prepare a joint proposal on the Spotlight Initiative. Other areas of joint work include:

With the South African Development Community: The Multi-Country Office developed a gender-responsive oversight model with UNAIDs and UNFPA; in partnership with

the UNDP Regional Service Centre for Africa, advocated for accelerated implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda; undertook research with UNFPA, UNAIDs, WHO and UNESCO on harmonizing the age of consent to access sexual and reproductive health and rights; and developed strategies for domesticating regional commitments on HIV and gender-based violence in the region.

Lesotho: The Multi-Country Office delivered the Joint Programme on Peace and Security and the Joint Programme on Gender-Based Violence, and worked with UNDP and OHCHR to support the Lesotho Security Sector in developing a Gender Mainstreaming Strategy for Security Sector Reform as part of the National Dialogue and Stabilization Programme.

⁶⁰ E.g. Department of Women, Youth and People with Disabilities, Presidency, National Treasury.

South Africa: The Multi-Country Office delivered technical support to the Department of Women, Youth and People with Disabilities on the impact of COVID-19 on violence against women with UNFPA, UNDP and UNICEF; the Joint Programme on Social Protection with ILO, UNICEF, UNDP and OHCHR; and joint work on the Just Energy Transition with ILO, UNIDO, FAO and WFP.

Across all five countries: The Multi-Country Office leveraged UN advocacy campaigns such as HeforShe, the Secretary General's UNiTe to End Violence Against Women and 16 Days of Activism.

Coherence with the work of other agencies could be improved through joint programmes and better information-sharing (see Finding 4 on coordination). UN agencies noted that limited funding within the countries the Multi-Country Office covers, due to their middle-income status, has meant there are generally fewer joint programmes. However, specific areas suggested by UN partners include working with UNICEF on the effects of gender-based violence on women, adolescent youth and girls and with UNFPA on gender-based violence, drawing on the Multi-Country Office's strength in working with the women's movement and other agencies' experience on system strengthening and service provision.

Resident Coordinator Offices outside South Africa also requested clarity on how Multi-Country Office activities contribute to their cooperation frameworks. As the new UN Women Planning, Monitoring and Reporting policy requires the use of outcomes verbatim from the cooperation framework, the Multi-Country Office will need to coordinate with the corporate Strategic Planning Unit to understand the implications for its new Strategic Note and its coverage over the five countries.

WITH OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

There was also good evidence of synergies between Multi-Country Office and government initiatives across the five countries. Government stakeholders in Namibia and Botswana noted good synergies between the Multi-Country Office's AWOME project and national development plans and gender policies. In South Africa, there were good synergies between the Stimulating Equal Opportunities initiative (gender-responsive procurement) and other

local government initiatives to support women business owners. HIV projects had good synergies, with cross-referrals between the Multi-Country Office's implementing partner and other non-governmental organizations and government stakeholders (such as social workers, health clinics, social protection, legal advisers) to provide more holistic support to participants. In South Africa, the Multi-Country Office also delivered gender-based violence programming as part of the 100-Day Challenge Capacity-Building Programme, a national programme led by the End Gender-Based Violence and Femicide Collective.

ACROSS THEMATIC AREAS

The Multi-Country Office's programmes often span multiple thematic areas, a noted strength of the office. For instance, many HIV programmes across the five countries included entrepreneurship, along with community dialogues on gender-based violence and HIV. National Aids Councils emphasized the importance of economic empowerment components to support sustainability. Multi-Country Office personnel noted that participants of HIV/AIDS initiatives had also been integrated into Women's Economic Empowerment programmes.

There is opportunity to strengthen linkages across thematic leads. Multi-Country Office personnel noted that the extent of collaboration between thematic leads varied depending on the postholder but could be enhanced, through sharing expertise; identifying synergies between programmes and opportunities for more holistic programming; and where common participants can be used across programmes.

The Multi-Country Office is prioritizing development of cross-thematic programmes, such as incorporating a climate smart agricultural component into the De Beers EntreprenHER project.⁶¹ The new Turn the Tide programme, currently in development, aims to address the interlinkage between HIV/AIDS transmission, violence against women and economic empowerment. The Multi-Country Office's Generation Equality work also supports thematic areas such as women's political participation, where there are no separate programmes.

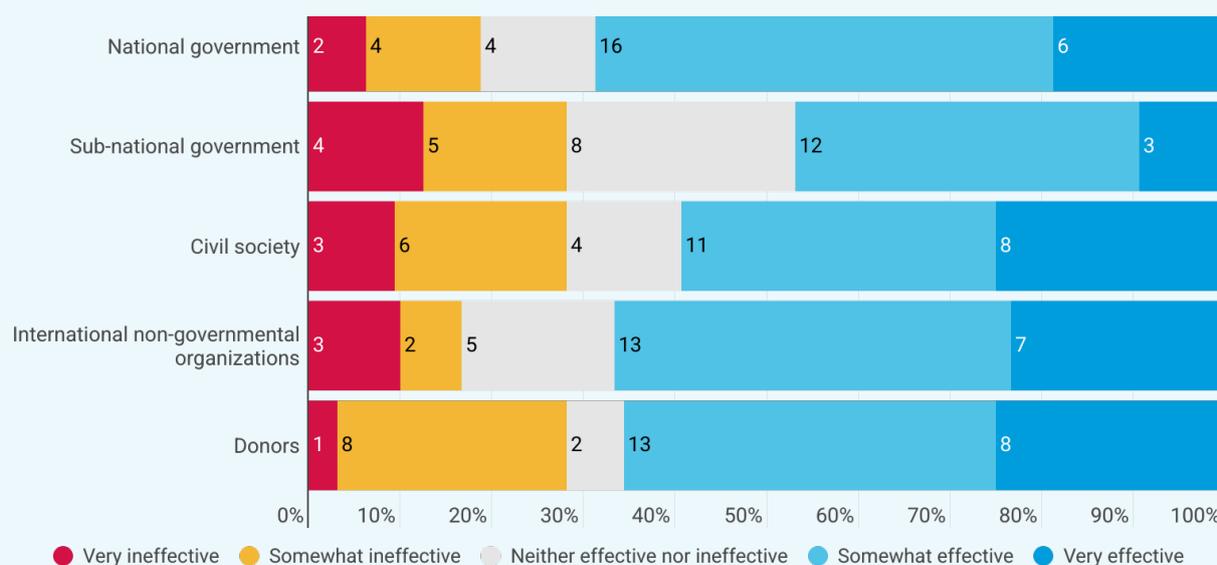
⁶¹ Renamed from AWOME

How effective is the Multi-Country Office's approach to stakeholder engagement and partnership?

FINDING 7

Stakeholders appreciated the Multi-Country Office's collaborative approach, technical support and convening power. To enhance engagement, the Multi-Country Office should improve communication, manage expectations, ensure timely and high-quality reporting and boost efficiency. Additional priorities include capacity-building for civil society partners, sharing learning with government partners and strengthening monitoring systems.

FIGURE 4: Effectiveness of partnerships



Source: Evaluation online survey July – September 2024, n = 32 (external stakeholders and personnel)

In terms of the effectiveness of the Multi-Country Office's partnerships, 69 per cent of the stakeholders surveyed thought the partnerships with national governments were very effective or effective; 66 per cent thought the same of donors; 63 per cent for international non-governmental organizations; 60 per cent for civil society; and 47 per cent for sub-national governments.⁶² Of the eight external stakeholders who were surveyed, three were very satisfied with the partnership, three were somewhat satisfied, one somewhat dissatisfied and two were very dissatisfied.

Civil society partners in all five countries appreciated the Multi-Country Office's collaborative approach and support but suggested improvements were needed in communication, extended delivery timelines and more online capacity-building support. They valued the Multi-Country Office's technical expertise; opportunities to attend thematic retreats to exchange experiences; and assistance in strengthening financial, monitoring, communications and reporting systems. Some partners

requested clearer communication on funding timelines, as short notice and tight deadlines sometimes impacted effectiveness.⁶³ Partners also noted that although the Multi-Country Office identified capacity needs in pre-partnership assessments, no budget was allocated to address the issues identified. Partners noted that additional support to build organizational capacity, for example through webinars, would be highly beneficial.

Government stakeholders in all five countries appreciated the Multi-Country Office's technical support and expertise, and suggested opportunities for furthering partnerships in sharing learning from other regions, strengthening monitoring systems and sharing learning from community initiatives to support scaling projects at the national level. Government and inter-governmental partners at both the national and local levels interviewed across the five countries valued the Multi-Country Office's consistent and responsive support and its convening power to support gender coordination.⁶⁴

⁶² n=32, 24 personnel, 8 external stakeholders

⁶³ One partner noted that for a two-year programme, two tranches of funding were received which required reporting and spending within two months.

⁶⁴ Partners interviewed included National Aids Councils, Gender Ministries, Social Development Ministries, Agriculture and Rural Development Ministries and SADC.

Several government stakeholders across the five countries suggested that they would benefit from Multi-Country Office sharing best practices from other countries, for example through webinars; support in terms of strengthening monitoring systems around gender and HIV; a learning event on HIV/AIDS community initiatives to explore how other departments can continue this work; and support to build the capacity of Department of Social Development grantees to design gender-transformative programmes.

The Multi-Country Office successfully mobilized private-sector resources and influenced companies to strengthen gender responsiveness. Private sector partners also contributed technical expertise and business connections.⁶⁵

However, working with private-sector entities posed challenges, particularly around timeline expectations. Private-sector partners, with annual board reporting requirements, sought timely results. After funding the Multi-Country Office for one cycle, one funder requested connections with civil society partners who could deliver more quickly. Private-sector partners felt the Multi-Country Office needs to have a better understanding of private-sector working styles and the need for consistency and efficiency. One partner noted that the Multi-Country Office's current capacity and structure is not "fit for purpose" to work with the private sector, and that lost momentum had eroded impact of programming.

Both private sector and bilateral donors valued the Multi-Country Office's convening power, brand name and technical expertise. However, donors also noted challenges around delivery and stewardship, affecting collaborations. One bilateral government donor said that it had ended the contract 11 months early, due to low delivery and reporting issues. The donor noted that challenges with closing the contract also affected the status

of the much larger global partnership. Multi-Country Office personnel noted that other donors decided not to renew their partnerships due to similar delivery concerns.

To strengthen donor relationships, the Multi-Country Office should improve communication, set clearer expectations on timelines, clarify UN Women's procedural requirements and seek to align delivery to meet donor priorities. Interviewed donors felt there was room for the Multi-Country Office to enhance efficiency, turn-around times and responsiveness, including consistent attendance at meetings and prompt email responses. Multi-Country Office stakeholders felt this was in part due to lack of understanding of the Multi-Country Office's procedures. The Multi-Country Office reflected it needed to be clearer about its procedures from the start and work more collaboratively with donors to problem solve. In a review of the partnership, one donor noted that "there are many lessons to be learned by [the Multi-Country Office] about how they respond early to concerns from the donor". The Multi-Country Office should also endeavour to be more proactive in project management (see Finding 2 on efficiency).

Donor relationships were impacted by issues with the quality and timeliness of reporting and limited opportunities for programme visits, though this has improved. Some donors expressed concerns about inconsistent financial reporting, particularly during the Quantum launch, and donors not being able to undertake project and partner visits. Both donors and Multi-Country Office personnel agreed that reporting has been strengthened, with increased flexibility to meet donor requirements. There is further opportunity to enhance partner engagement by increasing the number of field visits.

⁶⁵ Private-sector donors included Absa, De Beers, MTN, Standard Bank, Nokia and Facebook, among others.

EFFECTIVENESS, HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Are interventions contributing to target outcomes set out in the Strategic Note, addressing the root causes of gender inequality and supporting structural changes in gender equality and women's empowerment?

Across Findings 8, 9 and 10, contribution analysis tables summarize findings and rate the strength of evidence for the outcome achievement and the Multi-Country Office's contribution. Discussion on the contribution of other factors is set out in Finding 13.

What contribution is the Multi-Country Office making against target outcomes and towards gender-responsive normative frameworks, policies and institutions? (Result Area 1: Gender-responsive norms and policies)

FINDING 8

The Multi-Country Office supported governments to monitor global commitments and developed reporting tools to measure progress; facilitated young women to influence key decision platforms; and supported institutions and communities to promote gender equality. It worked with public services and taverns to promote gender equality in South Africa; supported development of social protection for informal workers in South Africa; and facilitated gender-based budgeting in South Africa, Botswana and Namibia.

TABLE 4: Contribution analysis – Gender-responsive norms

OUTCOME	EVIDENCE OF OUTCOME AND STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE	MULTI-COUNTRY OFFICE'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE OUTCOME (AND STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE)
Gender equality tools and skills to monitor and measure progress on gender commitments	Strong evidence for this outcome – in terms of governments supported to monitor global gender commitments; reporting tools and action plans developed to measure progress; young people supported to influence key decision platforms; advocacy work leading to global and national recognition of human rights violations.	Strong evidence for the Multi-Country Office's contribution – through convening, technical and financial support, and advocacy and outreach.
Institutions and communities promote gender equality and implement gender-responsive frameworks	Strong evidence for this outcome – in terms of changes at the municipal and community level, and gender-based budgeting and planning at the national level, including around social protection and mainstreaming gender in national HIV/AIDS responses.	Strong evidence for the Multi-Country Office's contribution – through community dialogues, technical support, research, convening and advocacy work, building on existing political commitment.
Other contributory factors	Political will and commitment from institutions and communities to prioritize gender equality and be held accountable to commitments. Sufficient resources to implement and successfully complete initiatives.	

Against the target outcome of “gender equality tools and skills to monitor and measure progress on global gender commitments under the normative framework,” the Multi-Country Office supported the following outcomes:

Governments were supported to monitor global commitments on gender across all five countries. Interviewed government stakeholders across all five countries appreciated the Multi-Country Office’s support on setting up consultations in preparation for CSW, reporting against CEDAW and reviewing implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Multi-Country Office also supported SADC to monitor implementation of CSW resolution 60/2, and to advocate for recommitment of the resolution during the CSW 66 session, where it was unanimously adopted.

Governments were supported to develop reporting tools and action plans to measure progress on global commitments in South Africa. Government stakeholders noted that the Multi-Country Office worked with UNAIDS, UNFPA and the SADC Parliamentary Forum to develop an accountability tool which is being used to hold governments accountable for implementing the CSW resolution 60/2 on “Women, the Girl Child and HIV/AIDS”. The Multi-Country Office also supported youth from the South African Institute for International Affairs to develop the South African Youth Gender Action Plan, which identifies gaps and highlights next steps to include intersectional, youth voices. The Multi-Country Office supported the Department of International Relations and the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities to implement South Africa’s commitments under the Generation Equality Forum. Government partners noted the Multi-Country Office had supported them to track resources used to support this initiative; hold national localization consultations to develop a Global Acceleration Plan; and establish seven Action Coalitions to support frameworks for localizing commitments. Partners also noted the Multi-Country Office had effectively implemented a social media strategy and outreach to youth, with the aim of holding governments to account.

Young women living with HIV/AIDS were supported to influence key decision platforms in Eswatini and South Africa. Partners in Eswatini noted the Multi-Country Office mentored young women, who then actively participated in different national processes on HIV/AIDS and are currently challenging components of the sexual and domestic violence act. In South Africa, partners noted the Multi-Country Office had effectively brought women affected by HIV/AIDS to key conferences⁶⁶ to discuss with governments how to strengthen policies to address gender inequalities and the impact on vulnerability to

contracting HIV. Partners in South Africa supported young women to inform the domestic violence bill and National Plan on Gender-Based Violence, for example, by specifically advocating for better recognition of single parent families in the plan. The Multi-Country Office also facilitated youth organizations to participate in the SADC review of its gender-based violence strategy.

Global and national recognition of human rights violations, as a result of advocacy work in South Africa. The Multi-Country Office supported a civil society organization to make a submission on forced sterilization to the South Africa Universal Periodic Review and to make a complaint on human rights violations through the UN special procedures within the OHCHR. This has resulted in the South African government acknowledging this human rights violation and mandating that the department of health provide compensation. CEDAW took up the recommendation and called on South Africa to review the sterilization act.

Against the target outcome of “bias-free institutions (district, provincial and national parliaments, as well as traditional institutions) and community level organizations promote gender equality and implement gender responsive legal/ policy frameworks,” the Multi-Country Office supported the following outcomes.

Supported municipality-level health centres and public services and taverns to promote gender equality in South Africa. Programme partners reported that the Heforshe taverns reached 10,000 participants and 65 taverns. Female and male participants confirmed that these taverns became safe spaces for women, where men were also able to have frank discussions about gender equality and relationships between men and women. Municipal officers noted that the Multi-Country Office programme supported them by reporting illegal taverns and taverns not complying with regulations around opening times and underage serving, and making small changes in clinics to reduce discrimination against people with HIV/AIDS. Through this, partners reported that the Multi-Country Office contributed to key HIV/AIDS results, including 2,000 men resuming HIV/AIDS treatment in Sobantu and 6,000 men maintaining treatment in Phahameng.⁶⁷

Supported development of social protection for informal workers in South Africa. The Multi-Country Office worked with UNICEF, UNDP and OHCHR on a joint programme to strengthen social protection in South Africa. Working closely with the Department of Social Development, the programme effectively researched, convened and advocated on three promising tools to strengthen social protection for domestic workers and self-employed workers.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ South African AIDs conference and International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa

⁶⁷ Partner reports.

⁶⁸ Specifically, the Unemployment insurance Fund, Compensation for Occupational Injury and Diseases Act and extension of maternity protection to workers in the informal economy.

The programme led the Department of Labour to constitute a working group to sit with member organizations within networks of domestic workers and informal traders to discuss bottlenecks to the policies.

Gender-based budgeting and planning in Botswana, South Africa and Namibia. Government partners, including the National Planning Commission and Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation noted that the Multi-Country Office supported them with gender-based budgeting and planning. The Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities noted that the Multi-Country Office contributed to strengthening the gender responsiveness of its National Strategic Plan. The Multi-Country Office also supported the South African Presidency to develop a conceptual framework – “the Gender Squeeze” – calling for women’s financial inclusion to be strengthened, which has been used for advocacy both nationally and internationally. SADC noted that the Multi-Country Office supported strengthening the gender responsiveness of its Monitoring and Evaluation framework, resulting in the addition of two indicators focused on gender equality, and provided technical support to the SADC Gender PS regarding CSW 60/2 on Women, the Girl Child and HIV.

The Multi-Country Office supported the Department of Energy in South Africa to develop a five-year Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Sector Strategy. In Namibia, the Multi-Country Office worked with the government to mainstream gender in national policies, including the Namibia 2030 vision. According to the government stakeholders interviewed, Botswana has developed a road map for institutionalization of a gender-responsive budget and committed financial resources, in part due to the Multi-Country Office’s financial and technical support. In South

Africa, the Multi-Country Office also supported development of the Gender-Responsive Planning Budgeting, Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, adopted by the Cabinet in 2019.

Gender-responsive HIV response across all five countries. Government departments noted the Multi-Country Office’s extensive support to their HIV/AIDS response. Lesotho government stakeholders noted that the Multi-Country Office supported development of the National Strategy 2023–28, ensuring a strong focus on tracking inequalities. Botswana government stakeholders noted the Multi-Country Office supported development of the HIV/AIDS strategic plan. The Multi-Country Office worked with the Namibia Omaheke District to include gender equality in its local HIV/AIDS response. In South Africa, the Multi-Country Office worked with the National Aids Council to ensure the women’s sector was included in HIV/AIDS National Strategic Plan preparations and supported the Department of Social Development to develop a comprehensive HIV strategy. The Multi-Country Office supported the South African Department of Women, Youth and People with Disabilities, to undertake a gender assessment in HIV response and develop an implementation framework for gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS policies. Finally, the Multi-Country Office also supported SADC to mainstream gender equality in its 2024 HIV/AIDS strategy. Government stakeholders noted the Multi-Country Office added value by bringing in experiences of other countries’ HIV/AIDS response, to strengthen their own strategies and plans.

The Multi-Country Office supported institutions to implement gender-responsive frameworks in the areas of Women’s Economic Empowerment and Ending Violence Against Women, see Findings 9 and 10.

What contribution is the Multi-Country Office making against target outcomes? (Result Area 2: Women's Economic Empowerment)

FINDING 9

The Multi-Country Office contributed to the increased gender responsiveness of public and private procurement and strengthened the capacity of women entrepreneurs to participate in the economy through its research, convening, technical support and capacity-building. Key results include the passing of gender-responsive procurement legislation; more gender-responsive procurement; better linkages of women entrepreneurs to markets; and increased incomes for women entrepreneurs.

TABLE 5: Contribution analysis – Women's Economic Empowerment

OUTCOME	EVIDENCE OF OUTCOME (AND STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE)	THE MULTI-COUNTRY OFFICE'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE OUTCOME (AND STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE)
Public and private procurement is gender responsive	Strong evidence for this outcome – in terms of gender-responsive procurement legislation, companies and municipalities delivering more gender-responsive procurement and better linkages of women to markets.	Moderate evidence for the Multi-Country Office's contribution – through research, convening, technical support, capacity-building and platform development. Another key factor was government commitment to gender-responsive procurement and decisions taken to launch new legislation.
Capacity of women-owned businesses and entrepreneurs to participate in the economy is strengthened	Strong evidence for this outcome – in terms of women entrepreneurs creating new businesses, accessing more opportunities and employment, growing businesses and securing land leases.	Strong evidence of the Multi-Country Office's contribution through information-sharing; linking women entrepreneurs to support, guidance, mentoring and coaching; linking entrepreneurs to financing and markets; and supporting business registration.
Other contributory factors	Political will and commitment, and a supportive legal and policy framework for women's participation in the economy. Commitment and interest of women entrepreneurs to actively participate. Partnering with effective partners who bring complementary expertise, experience and networks.	

Against the target outcome of “public and private procurement is gender responsive,” the Multi-Country Office made key contributions through its research, convening, technical support, capacity-building and platform development, contributing to key outcomes set out in the following paragraphs.

The Multi-Country Office contributed to gender-responsive procurement legislation in South Africa. As part of the National Strategic Plan's pillar on addressing gender equality, the Multi-Country Office produced a research report and brief which was used to inform policy discussions on the proposed new legislation and facilitate women's associations to participate in policy consultations. With the Multi-Country Office's financial and technical support, the bill was passed into legislation in July 2024.⁶⁹ Government partners noted that the Multi-Country Office also supported the Presidency's commitment to operationalize the 40 per cent procurement target for women-owned enterprises through

piloting a mentoring and coaching programme and supporting the President's Women's Economic Assembly and National Task Team, and multi-stakeholder initiatives involving government and the private sector to meet this target.

Government stakeholders reported that the Multi-Country Office supported municipalities and government departments to deliver more gender-responsive procurement in South Africa. As a result of the Multi-Country Office's capacity-building through the National School of Government, 15 municipalities, including 252 supply chain officials, strengthened their gender-responsive procurement. For example, through the Multi-Country Office's support, the Amathole District Municipality increased its procurement spend on women-owned businesses from 4 per cent in 2018 to 45 per cent in 2022. The Multi-Country Office is supporting the South African Local Government Association to explore how to replicate this model in other municipalities.

⁶⁹ [South Africa government website.](#)

The Multi-Country Office also worked with the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition to secure commitments and action plans from other ministries and departments to commit to the 40 per cent procurement target.

The Multi-Country Office supported the Agriculture Development Agency to build a value chain linking small-holder producers to agri-processing initiatives at scale with an export focus, and is targeting 50 per cent women participation in its commercialization of farms.⁷⁰

The Multi-Country Office supported women's networking and linkages to markets through the BuyfromWomen platform, managed in partnership with the Small Enterprise Development Agency. The platform reportedly links 8,000 women entrepreneurs to markets and networks, and also enabled 853 women to access e-learning.⁷¹

The Multi-Country Office supported companies to deliver more gender-responsive procurement in South Africa using the Women's Empowerment Principles as a starting point and through events, such as the gender awards with key partners, e.g. Business Engage. As at the time of evaluation, there were 132 signatories to the Women's Empowerment Principles, and a strong community of practice facilitated by the Multi-Country Office, with a focus on the principle on preferential procurement.⁷² Through the Women's Empowerment Principles, the Multi-Country Office has encouraged signatories to implement changes within their own companies. Four companies completed a gender gap analysis which will enable them to develop strategies on implementing gender-responsive procurement. Through Multi-Country Office support, interviewed partners noted that several companies have set targets for women-owned enterprises, including the Barloworld gender bond.

Against the target outcome of "capacity of women entrepreneurs to participate in the economy is strengthened," the Multi-Country Office contributed by delivering targeted training and coaching to women entrepreneurs and government officials; sharing market information; linking entrepreneurs to financing and markets; setting up business improvement groups; and supporting women businesses with registration and legal processes. The Multi-Country Office effectively partnered with a diverse

range of partners to leverage their experience, expertise and networks.⁷³ The Multi-Country Office also supported women-owned businesses to target high value chains in the transport and energy sectors. For example, the office provided technical and financial support to the African Women in Energy Association and the Women's Economic Assembly to advocate for gender mainstreaming with government and industry leaders and provided granular information on existing opportunities in the electricity sector.

These Multi-Country Office initiatives contributed to women entrepreneurs setting up new businesses, growing and registering existing businesses, increasing employment opportunities, increasing income and assets, and strengthening their leadership abilities. Interviewed women entrepreneurs in Botswana, Eswatini, Namibia and South Africa reported that with Multi-Country Office support through the AWOME project and HIV/AIDS project, they were able to set up business ventures ranging from agribusinesses, processing, animal husbandry, restaurants and education. For example, one woman entrepreneur set up a kindergarten in Botswana and another women entrepreneur set up a trade centre in Namibia that facilitated trade among women businesses and buyers. Women participants of the Young Women for Life movement in South Africa reported participating in a 300-women strong self-sustaining community farm business. Other women-owned businesses reported being able to grow their businesses through selling to large chains, such as Spar in South Africa and Choppies in Botswana. In Botswana, Namibia and South Africa 2,246 women micro-entrepreneurs secured jobs for themselves through their participation in the AWOME programme.

Through Multi-Country Office support, women entrepreneurs also saw their incomes increase. For example, in South Africa, 30 mentored women entrepreneurs reported an increase in their turnover of 166 per cent and women-owned enterprises saw their turnover increase by 16 per cent.⁷⁴ In addition, 404 South African enterprises were registered with regulatory bodies.⁷⁵ Women also reported strengthened confidence and leadership ability as a result of the capacity-building initiatives they had participated in, with one young businesswoman offering conferencing facilities and hosting Presidential and business events in Botswana.

⁷⁰ Triangulated using Multi-Country Office annual reports, donor reports and interviews with government stakeholders

⁷¹ According to [Buy from women](#) website, Multi-Country Office annual reports and interviews with partners

⁷² Women's empowerment principles [website](#)

⁷³ For example, the Multi-Country Office partnered with UN agencies such as UNIDO and FAO, government partners such as the Department of Energy and agricultural extension workers, networks such as South African Women in Farming and African Farmers' Association of South Africa and independent power producers, and private sector organizations such as the Vodacom Foundation.

⁷⁴ Interviews with women entrepreneurs, implementing partner progress report to the South African Parliament.

⁷⁵ Annual report, donor report, corroborated by interviews with partner and women participants.

According to donor and partner reports, **the support to women entrepreneurs was provided at scale.** The Multi-Country Office strengthened the capacity of 8,794 women-owned enterprises from five provinces in South Africa. The AWOME programme reached 1,645 entrepreneurs in South Africa, Namibia and Botswana.⁷⁶ The Stimulating Equal Opportunities programme reached 6,763 women entrepreneurs, and 40 per cent of participants reported increased revenue, assets and/or staff. The Multi-Country Office supported 149 women entrepreneurs to enter into the logistics and transport industry: at the end of the programme, 10 per cent of participating entrepreneurs had acquired new contracts.⁷⁷

There were also good linkages between this outcome and the outcome targeting gender-responsive procurement, with many interviewed women entrepreneurs reporting being able to secure procurement contracts through local municipalities. For example, through the Stimulating Equal Opportunities programme, of the 1,240 women supported to produce PPE, a total of 1,000 were able to sell their products to the Amathole Local Municipality.⁷⁸

The Multi-Country Office worked with financial institutions to address barriers experienced by women entrepreneurs in accessing finance. The Multi-Country Office partnered with Standard Bank South Africa to support women entrepreneurs to access financial

products⁷⁹ and services, and supported insurance companies to create tailored climate insurance packages for rural women farmers. The companies also increased financial products available for farmers. For example, Makwande Capital made US\$ 5 million available for small-scale farmers between 2020 and 2023.⁸⁰

The Multi-Country Office supported women farmers to participate in value chains and secure land leases, and trained extension officers to support women farmers. In partnership with the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Multi-Country Office supported 448 women farmers to adopt climate smart agricultural practices and participate in value chains. Interviewed partners noted that farmers were able to improve farming practices, work in cooperatives to reduce costs and increase profits, and better access buyers. According to partner reports, 20 participants signed partnership agreements with multinationals such as Nestle and Pioneer Feeds as a result of Multi-Country Office support. The Multi-Country Office also trained 185 extension officers to better understand farmers' needs. Interviewed partners reported that this led to strong support and services for women farmers. The Multi-Country Office assisted 883 women farmers to secure land leases on state land and supported them to raise concerns about secure land tenure to government, according to partner reports.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Donor report and partner reports.

⁷⁷ Donor report and partner reports.

⁷⁸ Donor report and partner reports, interviews with programme participants.

⁷⁹ Multi-Country Office Annual Report and D=donor report.

⁸⁰ Evaluation of Climate Smart Agriculture Project. 2022.

⁸¹ Evaluation of Climate Smart Agriculture Project. 2022. Multi-Country Office Annual Report and interviews with partners.

What contribution is the Multi-Country Office making against target outcomes and towards gender-responsive normative frameworks, policies and institutions? (Result Area 3: Ending Violence Against Women and Women, Peace and Security)

FINDING 10

The Multi-Country Office effectively contributed to target outcomes in the area of Ending Violence Against Women and Women, Peace and Security. There was evidence of improved coordination between government and civil society organizations and strengthened delivery of gender-based violence prevention and response plans. The Multi-Country Office also played a key role in shifting harmful gender norms through outreach campaigns and fostering women’s participation in decision-making processes related to the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

TABLE 6: Contribution analysis – Ending Violence Against Women and Women, Peace and Security

OUTCOME	EVIDENCE OF OUTCOME (AND STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE)	THE MULTI-COUNTRY OFFICE’S CONTRIBUTION TO THE OUTCOME (AND STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE)
Gender-based violence prevention strategies and action plans are implemented by the UN, government and civil society in a coordinated manner and are informed by voices of women survivors of violence	Strong evidence for this outcome , with government and civil society partners reporting strengthened delivery of gender-based violence prevention and response policies and plans at the national and municipal level in South Africa, Lesotho and through SADC.	Strong evidence of the Multi-Country Office’s contribution through convening government and civil society organizations; supporting implementation of plans; providing training to police; supporting young women to participate in policy revision; and supporting the development and revision of policies.
Favourable social norms, attitudes and behaviours are promoted at community and individual levels to prevent gender-based violence	Strong evidence for this outcome in all five countries in terms of changes in attitudes, norms and behaviours of men and women – as reported by participants and captured in research studies.	Strong evidence for the Multi-Country Office’s contribution through outreach and advocacy campaigns, hosting community dialogues, building women’s movements, providing entrepreneurial support to strengthen women’s independence, developing toolkits, linking communities with government support, and supporting justice system, traditional men’s parliament and media to influence social norms on gender-based violence.
An enabling environment for implementation of Women, Peace and Security commitments is created in South Africa and the SADC region	Moderate evidence for this outcome in Namibia, Lesotho and South Africa in terms of women’s participation in decision-making processes and strengthened gender mainstreaming in security sector reform.	Strong evidence for the Multi-Country Office’s contribution through technical support to governments and facilitating women’s engagement in decision-making processes.
Other contributory factors	Government commitment and leadership across the five Multi-Country Office countries, and commitment to international standards and conventions on gender equality, was critical for the success of gender-based violence prevention strategies. The active participation of civil society organizations in Lesotho and South Africa, particularly those focused on women’s rights and survivor support, fostered grassroots involvement in gender-based violence prevention.	

Against the target outcome of “gender-based violence prevention strategies and action plans are implemented by UN, government and civil society in a coordinated manner and are informed by voices of women survivors of violence”, there was evidence of improved coordination and more unified gender-based violence responses. Implementing partners and government stakeholders interviewed in Lesotho indicated that the Multi-Country Office had fostered a collective implementation approach between the government and civil society organizations,

effectively breaking down barriers that had previously hindered participation in the development discourse. In South Africa, the Multi-Country Office supported the government’s 100-Day Challenge Capacity Building Programme in five districts, which resulted in frontline workers implementing stronger processes and compliance with standard operating procedures to prevent gender-based violence and support gender-based violence survivors.⁸²

⁸² Annual report and partner reports.

The Multi-Country Office contributed to increased gender-sensitive delivery of gender-based violence prevention and response plans. Interviewed members of the South Africa Police Service indicated that the training provided to 171 of its members on gender-sensitive policing for gender-based violence survivors, especially how to handle traumatized and violated women as first responders, had contributed to improved confidence in the justice system. Focus group discussion participants reported that the holistic support provided to gender-based violence survivors in South Africa, including psychosocial support, social and financial independence, legal aid and court accompaniment has contributed to justice for survivors and their families, helped them cope with trauma, achieve self-realization and improve relationships.

The Multi-Country Office contributed to the development and implementation of a number of policies and strategies on gender-based violence. Partners noted that they used findings from working with young women to advocate for revision of the gender-based violence strategy to better reflect the prevalence of single parent families in South Africa. Government partners in South Africa acknowledged the Multi-Country Office's important role in supporting development of the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide and improved coordination among organizations to deliver the plan; amendment of key gender-based violence legislation;⁸³ frameworks for addressing online gender-based violence and discrimination; and support to the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities for an emergency referral pathway for survivors and those at risk of gender-based violence during COVID-19. Lesotho government stakeholders noted that the Multi-Country Office supported the application of the General Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act and the Lesotho Domestic Violence Act, enabling women to access justice more effectively. The SADC Gender Secretariat noted that the Multi-Country Office supported the Parliamentary Forum to develop a model law on gender-based violence and provided technical support to SADC to develop guidance for gender-responsive COVID-19 responses.

Against the target outcome of "Favourable social norms, attitudes and behaviours are promoted at community and individual levels to prevent gender-based violence," across all five countries the Multi-Country Office has played a pivotal role in shifting harmful gender and social norms and encouraged behaviour change. The Multi-Country Office effectively worked with partners to tailor the approach to different contexts. Approaches

ranged from leveraging UN advocacy campaigns; building supportive women's dialogues and movements; providing entrepreneurial training and livelihoods support; working with health clinics, social workers, police and churches; and developing toolkits.⁸⁴

According to partner reports in South Africa, **the Multi-Country Office worked in more than 60 taverns with more than 10,000 participants to host community dialogues.** All interviewed tavern owners, health workers and community workers noted significant changes in behaviour, with patrons taking their HIV treatment in taverns; lower rates of alcoholism and gender-based violence; reduced drug use; and fewer incidences of young women engaging in risky sexual behaviours. The partner reported that the project supported 13,000 people to be tested for HIV/AIDs. A research study on social norms that surveyed 1,000 male project participants across five sites in South Africa before and after the project found significant decreases in the number of respondents who felt violent behaviour is acceptable, men are entitled to sex, decision-making should be left to men, men have the right to control women and who agreed with toxic masculinity views.⁸⁵ A case study on HIV/AIDs and behaviour change undertaken in three project sites also found that 4,000 men had resumed HIV treatment; 78 per cent of male respondents were no longer abusing partners; and 93 per cent were engaged in peer dialogues to encourage other men to test for HIV.⁸⁶ Interviewees attributed these changes to the community dialogues resulting in more openness in discussing gender issues, tracking of HIV treatment and supporting community members to access government support. The safe space provided to young men to share their experiences with gender-based violence was much appreciated, as they often face ridicule or abuse from law enforcement.

In South Africa, the Multi-Country Office supported a young women's movement through support group dialogues addressing safer relationships and providing entrepreneurial support. According to partner reports, in South Africa, leadership empowerment dialogues reached 7,000 young people and 293 young people in Botswana, who are now reaching out to their communities for HIV prevention and AIDS management.⁸⁷ Young women interviewed in South Africa reported reduced risky sexual behaviours and had decreased reliance on financial support from sexual partners. A case study found that 87 per cent of surveyed participants had reduced to one sexual partner and 66 per cent were in education or employment and not relying on male support.⁸⁸

⁸³ (i) Domestic Violence Amendment Bill (B20-2020); (ii) Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters Amendment Bill B16-2020); and (iii) Criminal Matters Amendment Bill (B17-2020)

⁸⁴ Donor reports (Ireland, UBRAF, Nokia and FCDO), Multi-Country Office Annual Reports and interviews with partners and communities

⁸⁵ University of Johannesburg. Heforshe social norms barometer. 2022.

⁸⁶ N = 60, University of Johannesburg, A case study on HIV/AIDs and behavior change. 2019.

⁸⁷ Partner report and Multi-Country Office Annual Report.

⁸⁸ N = 40, University of Johannesburg, A case study on HIV/AIDs and behavior change. 2019.

Contributions to changing norms in the other countries

included Lesotho, where participants noted that as a result of community dialogues which reached 350 participants,⁸⁹ there was reduced sexual harassment of women and gender-based violence and more positive discussions on how men could further support ending violence against women. The partner reported community commitment, as evidenced by the request for a manual and training on gender-based violence. Community members also noted that the campaigns and days of reflection on HIV/AIDs and gender-based violence conducted by the Multi-Country Office in Lesotho were eye-openers and had contributed to changing gender norms. In Eswatini, young women were trained on reporting mechanisms for gender-based violence and joined support groups. Interviewed young women participants reported they were able to support each other, resulting in a decrease in teenage pregnancy and greater family planning. Community leaders were also supported to work with the business community to engage more women in their projects.⁹⁰ In Namibia, interviewed community leaders stated that advocacy training delivered by the Minister of Sport, Youth and National Service, Omaheke Youth Directorate had empowered them to discuss reducing gender-based violence in their communities and to engage young women in developing policies and programmes.

There is opportunity to strengthen measurement of the impact of community dialogues on shifting social norms, both at individual and community levels, as the full breadth of changes is not yet fully captured.

The Multi-Country Office contributed to changes in social norms through supporting media, the traditional men's parliament⁹¹ and the justice system. The office strengthened the capacity of media houses in South Africa and Lesotho to raise awareness on gender-based violence and influence social norms.⁹² In South Africa, with the Multi-Country Office's support, the traditional men's parliament piloted gender awareness-raising sessions and committed to rolling this out to 882 traditional courts across the country. Partners and focus group discussion

participants in South Africa noted that the Multi-Country Office effectively changed norms and behaviours around gender-based violence. Local communities reported strengthened awareness and reporting of gender-based violence as a result of awareness-raising campaigns led by trained police officers. Police officers in South Africa noted that training received from the Multi-Country Office had contributed to strengthened working relationships with social workers and the Department of Social Development.

Against the target outcome of "An enabling environment for the implementation of Women, Peace and Security commitments is created in South Africa and the SADC region,"

in the SADC region, the Multi-Country Office created opportunities for women to actively engage in national and regional decision-making processes, including regional consultations and dialogues on the Women, Peace and Security agenda.⁹³ The Multi-Country Office supported governments to develop national action plans and undertake mid-term reviews.⁹⁴ It also supported women's movements to take part. In South Africa and Lesotho, the Multi-Country Office and SADC Secretariat enhanced the capacity of women mediators in conflict prevention and mediation, enabling them to effectively prevent and manage social and political conflicts within and between states.⁹⁵ In Lesotho, the Multi-Country Office strengthened the women's movement, and supported women to have a voice in national reforms, including the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. The Multi-Country Office also supported the Lesotho Security Sector in developing a Gender Mainstreaming Strategy for Security Sector Reform as part of the National Dialogue and Stabilization Programme, implemented by UNDP Lesotho in collaboration with UN Women, OHCHR and other UN agencies.⁹⁶ Interviewees opined that the impact on Lesotho's reform architecture has been profound, aligning the seven thematic areas with the interests of Basotho women. In South Africa, according to partner reports, the Multi-Country Office supported 1,690 youth in Delft, Cape Town, to form peace programmes and clubs focused on social justice, reconciliation and resilience.

⁸⁹ Number of participants reported by partner.

⁹⁰ FCDO donor report.

⁹¹ The [traditional men's parliament](#) is a government initiative that seeks to promote social and behavioural changes among men to address gender-based violence, social cohesion and crime.

⁹² Multi-Country Office 2021 Annual Report and donor reports.

⁹³ Donor report and partners report

⁹⁴ South Africa (2020); Namibia (2019); Lesotho's National Action Plan is still under development.

⁹⁵ Annual Report and partners reports.

⁹⁶ Donor report.

What unexpected outcomes have been achieved?

FINDING 11

Unexpected outcomes included stronger national ownership of the gender-responsive procurement initiative in South Africa; participants applying skills beyond Multi-Country Office programmes; and increased media presence boosting visibility and funding.

Multi-Country Office personnel and government stakeholders noted that the Multi-Country Office's work to support 40 per cent procurement for women-owned businesses is now fully owned by the South African government and has become a national programme with direct support from the President. Interviewed partners in Eswatini noted that young women engaged in Multi-Country Office programmes had gained the confidence to speak out in regional World Aids Day events, in parliament and as part of the development team for proposals to the National Global Fund on HIV/AIDs. Partners reported that members of parliament had positively commented on the confidence of these young women. Interviewed trainers of the women entrepreneurs who received training from the Multi-Country Office in South Africa, Botswana and

Namibia said that they were sensitized to provide psycho-social support, even though this was not an explicit focus of the training. Finally, increased media presence raised the Multi-Country Office's visibility in South Africa. The Multi-Country Office and We Will Speak Out South Africa's statement of commitment to end gender-based violence and femicide reached 16 million people and generated significant commitment from diverse faiths to work together to address harmful social norms.⁹⁷ Media mentions increased significantly in 2023, with dedicated communications personnel employed in the Multi-Country Office. In particular, the African Girls Can Code Initiative attracted media attention, which resulted in additional donor interest and funding to the project.

Are interventions designed to support sustainable change?

FINDING 12

There is good potential for sustainable change due to evidence of strengthened capacity, ownership of programmes, financial commitment, local accountability systems and changes in social norms. However, in some cases, project duration, lack of exit plans, sustainable funding or government linkages posed a risk to sustainability.

There is good evidence of sustainable change across the thematic areas. Many of the programme participants interviewed reported strengthened capacity that they were able to apply after the end of the programme. For example, women business entrepreneurs in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa reported that the capacity they had developed under the programme enabled them to grow their businesses and increase their incomes. Government stakeholders, such as the South African Police Service, noted they were able to respond to gender-based violence cases with more sensitivity and expertise as a result of capacity-building by the Multi-Country Office. The office has also worked to build the capacity of government institutions. For example, its work with the South African National School of Government to build the capacity of supply chain officials on gender-responsive procurement is expected to support in-built sustainability.

In terms of financial commitment, other funders beyond UN Women were supporting the Young Women for Life programme and the implementing partner aimed to evolve the programme into a self-sustaining movement.

Civil society and governments expressed interest in learning from and scaling the Multi-Country Office's approach to addressing the socioeconomic determinants of HIV across all five countries. For example, in South Africa, the National Aids Council discussed transferring the HIV/AIDs community dialogues to the Department of Social Development.

In terms of local accountability systems, the policies supported by the Multi-Country Office are expected to contribute to sustainability. For example, in South Africa, new gender-based violence legislation is expected to create an enabling environment for continued implementation of gender-based violence commitments. On Women's Economic Empowerment, the Multi-Country Office worked closely with local municipalities on the Gender-Responsive Procurement Bill in South Africa to support ownership and sustainability. Across all five countries, the Multi-Country Office also supported national reforms on Women, Peace and Security.

⁹⁷ <https://www.wwsosa.org.za/interfaith-action-to-end-gbv-statement-and-campaign/> and as reported by partner.

In terms of changing social norms, the Multi-Country Office's community outreach and advocacy contributes to sustainable change in behaviour and relations between men and women.⁹⁸

There was also evidence of ownership of programmes.

Communities reported that the community dialogues to address relationships between men and women, gender-based violence and HIV/AIDs were well embedded within the communities, and well linked to the way the municipality worked in the community to provide services. The Young Women for Life programme and women support dialogues continued to run in South Africa even as programme staff were scaling back their attendance and support to such meetings. Partners and participants noted that by working with a broad range of stakeholders, including women's organizations, communities, parliamentarians, councillors and faith leaders, programmes were effectively building ownership. The involvement of key government stakeholders in South Africa (including the Department Of Agriculture and Directorate of Climate Change) at central and district levels also contributed to reported strong ownership of the Climate Smart Agriculture Project.⁹⁹

Governments in South Africa, Lesotho and Eswatini noted that close collaboration with government, beyond funding, is key to sustainability. The Lesotho government noted that the current UN Women project with the government would support greater sustainability than previous projects delivered through civil society, as the National Aids Council was able to secure the support of the Deputy Prime Minister and ensure the project is well linked to national initiatives.

The Eswatini National Aids Council suggested that the Multi-Country Office's work in-country could be strengthened by further linking its efforts to government work. For example, ongoing mentorship of beneficiaries could involve linking them to other government support services, such as agricultural extension services, and to national systems for gender-based violence case management.

Government stakeholders in South African would appreciate a learning session on the Multi-Country Office's HIV/AIDs projects to discuss how they can be linked with other processes, and for Multi-Country Office support to the Department of Social Development to ensure its programming is gender responsive. Government stakeholders also requested that the Multi-Country Office conduct webinars with other countries where UN Women is working to learn from best practices.

Some Multi-Country Office programmes faced sustainability challenges due to short-term funding, lack of exit strategies and limited partnerships with government. Short-term projects often lacked solid exit plans.¹⁰⁰ For example, Multi-Country Office personnel and partners noted the ending of funding meant that the social protection, advocacy and convening work in South Africa on applying social protection policies for informal workers did not translate into real gains. Multi-Country Office personnel said that smaller, short-term projects made it difficult to establish sustainable government partnerships, which often requires funding. Larger programmes, such as the De Beers-funded AWOME, had enabled such partnerships.

Linking programmes to existing systems and extending the time frame of social norms programmes would enhance sustainability.¹⁰¹ Interviewed government partners pointed to the benefits of increasing linkages between Multi-Country Office programmes and government structures and services, such as agricultural support services and national gender-based violence case management systems. For instance, an important component of the Southern Africa Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) project was in connecting programme participants to municipality provision, which is often fragmented and siloed. Programmes aimed at shifting social norms, such as SACBC's Young Women for Life, also require long-term commitment and, despite years of effort, work in this area is ongoing and is not yet ready for "graduation."

At times, there is tension between the scale and scope of projects and the ambition of outcomes, which affects sustainability. For example, Lesotho's GEM project aimed to improve family relationships, safety for women and reduce gender-based violence through community dialogues. While participants valued the support, they felt the scale and duration of the programme meant it was too early to see meaningful change. They recommended developing community-led, follow-up strategies, listing activities that do and do not require funding, to take forward after programme funding ends. Multi-Country Office personnel emphasized the importance of focusing on results rather than activities and exit planning from the beginning, rather than merely reporting, to enhance sustainability.

Finally, there is opportunity to consider moving to more financially sustainable, social enterprise models. Private-sector donors challenged the Multi-Country Office to explore the possibility of designing programmes with in-built sustainability, e.g. with financial returns from Women's Economic Empowerment programmes that could result in investment streams for future cohorts of programme participants.

⁹⁸ Programme participants in focus group discussions.

⁹⁹ Evaluation of Climate Smart Agriculture Project. 2022.

¹⁰⁰ Interviews with Multi-Country Office personnel and civil society, review of programme documents

¹⁰¹ Interviews with civil society and government across all five countries.

What are the enablers and barriers to achieving target outcomes?

FINDING 13

Outcomes were influenced by internal factors such as stakeholder relationships, partner commitment, personnel consistency, adaptive programming, persistence of advocacy, sufficient resources and leadership within the Multi-Country Office. External factors included government commitment, participant engagement, targeted outreach and social norms.

The evaluation corroborated key assumptions in the theory of change. Other factors identified have been added to the theory of change (see Annex 2).

INTERNAL FACTORS

Strong relationships with key stakeholders: The Multi-Country Office's strong relationship with the South African Presidency spurred the work on gender-responsive procurement. The Multi-Country Office's strong partnership with the statistics offices and national planning commissions provided key data for gender equality initiatives and the Common Country Analyses. A strong relationship with the National Aids Council in Lesotho is enabling the Multi-Country Office to deliver a nationwide programme with strong buy-in from the Deputy Prime Minister's office and is catalysing significant private-sector funds. Strong relationships between the Multi-Country Office and champions of gender equality within the UNCTs were key to effective collaborations.¹⁰²

Effective partners: Selecting suitable partners was critical for programme success. The selection of relevant partners was one of the key successes of the Climate Smart Agriculture Project.¹⁰³ Conversely, in Lesotho, the Multi-Country Office had to drop a partner experienced in working with traditional leaders and HIV coordination structures due to governance issues, affecting the programme's reach and effectiveness.

The Multi-Country Office strengthened partners by supporting cross-learning through workshops.

Personnel consistency: Partners noted that the consistency of personnel fostered long-term partnerships and effective programming in certain thematic areas. However, partners and donors noted that frequent changes in Programme Managers in other thematic areas disrupted communications and programme quality.

Context-adaptation in programming: The Multi-Country Office worked with partners to tailor its approaches to meet needs and leverage expertise. For example, HIV programming assessed the specific barriers to men and women in accessing HIV treatment to determine programming. This included ensuring the means of collecting HIV treatment is discreet and creating mechanisms to track treatment compliance.

Consistency and patience in advocacy work: For example, on forced sterilization, the Multi-Country Office's partner has been working on investigations since 2010 and the office has provided continued support, which has led to significant progress.¹⁰⁴

Sufficiency of resources: Limited resources affected the Multi-Country Office's ability to deliver fully on its Strategic Note and the scale of its initiatives, and limited its coordination capacity across all countries.

Leadership within the Multi-Country Office: Senior-level Multi-Country Office personnel's participation strengthened coordination discussions with agency heads and government partners. However, the limited engagement of senior leadership, especially in countries outside South Africa, affected the political commitment of partners to the Gender Theme Groups and other gender mechanisms.

Focusing on areas of strengths: The Multi-Country Office faced challenges with construction in the Climate Smart Agriculture Project. Internal audit interviews with Multi-Country Office personnel and evaluation of the Climate Smart Agriculture Project identified that UN Women is not yet "set up" for construction work, i.e. there is insufficient expertise within the organization, which affected delivery timeliness and quality. This highlights the need to scale collaboration with specialized agencies such as FAO, and carefully consider how to divide delivery responsibilities to best leverage areas of respective strength.

¹⁰² Interviews with government stakeholders and UN agencies.

¹⁰³ Climate Smart Agriculture Evaluation 2022. The programme worked with FAO; government departments, including the Department of Agriculture and Land Reform and Rural Development and the Directorate of Climate Change; civil society, including farmers' associations and women's organizations; and the private sector, such as Vodacom.

¹⁰⁴ Ongoing class action for appropriate redress for survivors.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

Strong political will: Strong government commitment in all five countries to the Multi-Country Office's thematic focus areas facilitated strong partnerships with government stakeholders to implement effective, complementary programming (see Finding 5). Companies also committed to review their procurement policies and empower women entrepreneurs, facilitating their collaboration with the Multi-Country Office on the Women's Empowerment Principles. This strong commitment translated into governments and other stakeholders delivering complementary programming (see Finding 5).

Commitment of participants: The careful selection of engaged participants was key to achieving outcomes. Across the Women's Economic Empowerment projects, interviewed participants demonstrated their commitment to applying the training they had received to growing their business. However, one private-sector partner noted that in an HIV/AIDS project in South Africa, some young people were selected who were not interested in gaining employment, which affected the achievement of outcomes.

Targeted outreach: Participants noted that holding community dialogues in taverns was very effective, as it enabled greater reach. Participants in the HIV projects in Lesotho suggested that targeting churches was not enough, and that it was also important to target community leaders and other men who do not go to church.

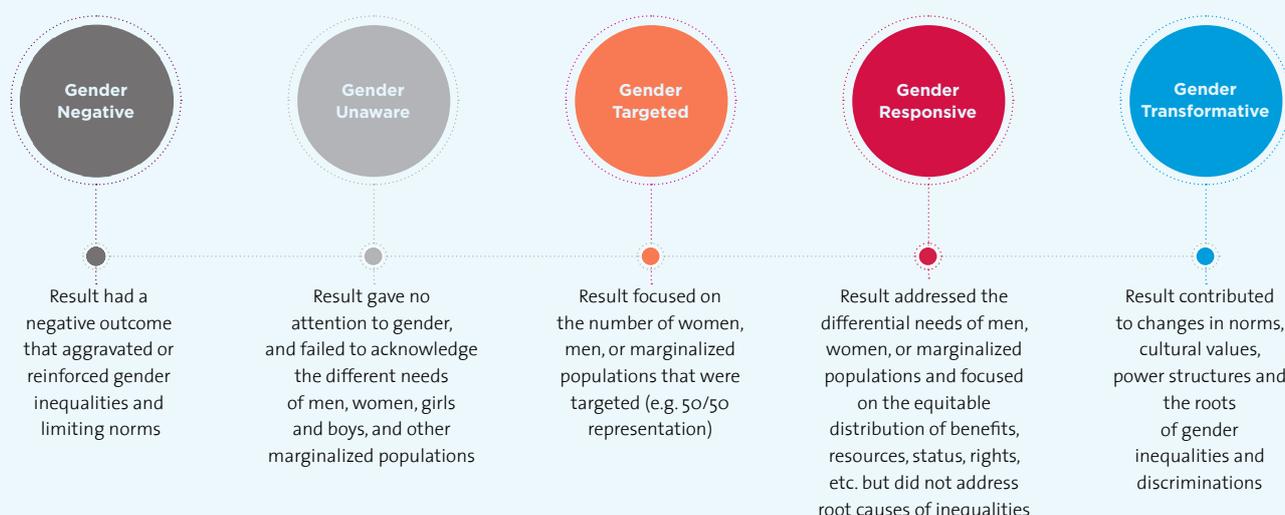
Social norms and practices: The evaluation team did not find any evidence of backlash from male-owned businesses in response to the Multi-Country Office's Women's Economic Empowerment programming. However, across all five countries, in Ending Violence Against Women programming, partners and participants noted that social norms and economic dependency continued to affect rates of gender-based violence and the scale of reporting. Social norms around masculinity also affected the extent to which men could report violence and seek HIV treatment. The Multi-Country Office continues to work to shift these norms.

Are interventions targeting the root causes of gender inequality?

FINDING 14

The Multi-Country Office's interventions targeted the root causes of gender inequality identified in Common Country Analyses. All the sampled projects had the potential to be gender transformative, aiming to change norms, power structures and inequalities through community-based work and partnerships with diverse stakeholders.

FIGURE 5: Gender Results Effectiveness Scale



The Multi-Country Office’s interventions tackled the root causes of gender inequality identified in the UN Common Country Analyses. The South Africa Common Country Analysis highlighted gender-based violence’s link to a culture of silence and impunity, including weaknesses in South Africa Police Service investigations. The Multi-Country Office worked with justice system officials at national, provincial and local levels to build capacity to respond to gender-based violence cases and change the culture. The Common Country Analysis also identified patriarchal social norms and challenges in implementing gender-based violence legislation as key causes of gender-based violence. The Multi-Country Office’s gender-based

violence programmes targeted changing social norms and supported stakeholders with more coherent implementation of policies.

In Eswatini, the Multi-Country Office responded to issues identified in the Common Country Analysis around social norms fuelling sexual exploitation, and the effects of the COVID-19 lockdown by supporting community dialogues and partnering with media houses to raise awareness about the heightened risk of intimate partner violence during lockdown.

Table 7 assesses the gender results effectiveness of the sampled projects.

TABLE 7: Sampled projects – gender results effectiveness

SAMPLED PROJECTS	GENDER RESULTS EFFECTIVENESS
AWOME	Potential to be transformative: The project contributed to changing power structures through promoting women’s access to economic opportunities, contributing to shifts in household decision-making and reducing gender inequalities and discrimination.
Stimulating equal opportunities	Potential to be transformative: The project sought to address the structural barriers that prevent women from accessing procurement opportunities through policy and legislative reforms and working with supply chains and buyers.
Climate Smart Agriculture	Potential to be transformative: The project addressed the specific needs of women in agriculture and set out to change norms around women’s land rights, including through supporting women farmers to apply for land leases.
HIV projects – South Africa, Lesotho, Namibia, Botswana and Eswatini	Potential to be transformative: The projects sought to address social norms and structural drivers of HIV/ AIDs through hosting community dialogues and empowering young women with economic opportunities.
Strengthening institutional response to gender-based violence and femicide	Potential to be transformative: The project contributed to changing norms by educating communities on how to prevent gender-based violence and supporting them to develop action plans to combat gender-based violence and worked with power structures (national and regional institutions) to prioritize gender equality.
Women, Peace and Security advocacy in the Southern African Development Community	Potential to be transformative: The project sought to change power structures and norms on gender equality by facilitating women mediators to participate in consultations on Women, Peace and Security in South Africa and Lesotho.
Strengthening advocacy Ending Violence Against Women	Potential to be transformative: The project contributed to changes in social norms through the HeForShe campaign and engaged religious leaders, encouraging behaviour change. In South Africa, the project sought to address power structures by working with government to implement the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide in a more coherent way.
Women, Peace and Security Global	Potential to be transformative: The project contributed to changes in social norms through community-based interventions that raised awareness about gender-based violence and promoted women’s rights.

Are interventions applying gender and disability inclusion approaches?

FINDING 15

The Multi-Country Office's interventions effectively targeted and were accessible to vulnerable communities, including young people, women with disabilities, LGBTQI+ populations and underserved areas. A number of normative interventions also focused on inclusion. Opportunities exist to systematize inclusion efforts, including by conducting vulnerability assessments and tracking the participation of identified groups.

The Multi-Country Office's interventions prioritized leave no one behind, focusing on vulnerable communities. Across all five countries, programmes addressed the needs of groups including youth, women in the informal sector, underserved communities,¹⁰⁵ women and girls with disabilities, micro-entrepreneurs unable to access business services, poor households and survivors of violence. Interventions were delivered in remote areas, such as Namibia's Okavango and Botswana's Letlhakeng, and targeted high HIV transmission areas. In Botswana, a programme partnered with an LGBTQI+ organization to support LGBTQI+ access to HIV health services and engaged community leaders and healthcare providers on negative stereotypes around the LGBTQI+ community. Seventy-eight per cent of surveyed Multi-Country Office personnel and external stakeholders were satisfied with the office's efforts in identifying vulnerable populations, and 66 per cent were satisfied with engagement efforts.¹⁰⁶ Annex 15 provides more detail on the range of work targeting these vulnerable groups.

Participant selection was inclusive, focusing on individuals with disabilities, from disadvantaged backgrounds and those affected by HIV/AIDS.¹⁰⁷ In Eswatini, a partner worked with local rural health motivators to identify vulnerable participants¹⁰⁸ for an entrepreneurship project. To mitigate risks, the partner selected women who already had alternate sources of income they could fall back on to sustain the business, highlighting the tension that sometimes arises between targeting those hardest to reach and those most likely to benefit from entrepreneurship support.

Multi-Country Office programmes generally ensured accessibility but efforts could be strengthened by increasing collaboration with organizations representing women with disabilities. Programmes accommodated physical disabilities and incorporated sign language. In South Africa, Namibia and Botswana, the Multi-Country Office effectively supported women business entrepreneurs with disabilities.¹⁰⁹ However, several of the Multi-Country Office personnel surveyed noted that some event locations were not fully accessible to individuals with disabilities.

The Multi-Country Office worked at the normative level to seek to transform systems and structures supporting vulnerable groups. In South Africa, to ensure gender and disability inclusion, the Multi-Country Office supported feminist organizations such as the Human Rights Institute and Passionate Unlimited Peers in Action. These organizations work on challenging issues, including lobbying for laws to decriminalize same-sex marriages and for redress for survivors of forced sterilization. The Multi-Country Office conducted research on gender markers to enable transgender individuals to change their gender identity documents. The Multi-Country Office also supported national consultations in South Africa, with youth, the LGBTQI+ community and the disability sector among others, to develop the Comprehensive National Prevention Strategy on the Prevention of Femicide in South Africa.

The Multi-Country Office effectively worked with religious organizations, though this required sensitivity in some cases and a good balance of partners to ensure inclusivity. The Multi-Country Office's partnership with the Christian Council of Lesotho raised concerns that it excluded other Christian denominations and other religions in the country. Originally, the Multi-Country Office had planned to partner with other organizations working with traditional leaders, but governance issues affected these plans. The Multi-Country Office's partnership with the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference was managed well, with the partner working closely with health clinics on all issues related to family planning.

To further enhance the Multi-Country Office's strong focus on leave no one behind, it could systematize its approach, analyse vulnerable groups during intervention design and track the participation of specific vulnerable groups, setting targets on particular groups in its new Strategic Note. Future focus areas include supporting women with disabilities in political participation and rural communities, where they face particular challenges related to education and employment opportunities¹¹⁰ and expanding the office's partnerships to reach these groups more effectively, building on its relationships with the women's movement.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ For example, those living in townships and remote areas and affected by the transition to low-carbon fuels.

¹⁰⁶ N = 24 Multi-Country Office personnel and 8 external stakeholders.

¹⁰⁷ Interviews with programme partners.

¹⁰⁸ Based on characteristics identified in a national survey on vulnerability.

¹⁰⁹ Interviews with programme partners and participants.

¹¹⁰ Interviews with Multi-Country Office personnel and civil society partners.

¹¹¹ Interviews with Multi-Country Office personnel and Multi-Country Office Annual Report.

6. LESSONS LEARNED

This section provides general lessons learned across the operational, coordination and normative areas of UN Women's mandate for potential application to other contexts.

LESSON 1

Strong engagement with the private sector through the Women's Empowerment Principles and national coordination work can be translated into resource mobilization.

Linked to Finding 2

The Multi-Country Office effectively engaged with the private sector to build strong engagement and commitment to gender equality, which translated into businesses working with the office on specific initiatives. The Multi-Country Office's coordination work enabled the Black Women's Council in South Africa to highlight issues of gender-based violence with the President's office, which led to the President committing to a gender-based violence strategy and a project on women's economic assembly. Three businesses were impressed with the strength of the Multi-Country Office's convening work and funded specific initiatives linked to this.

LESSON 2

Selecting programme participants can be challenging if the implementing partners are not intimately familiar with the local context. Approaches need to balance community buy-in and ensuring a fair, transparent process that effectively identifies participants based on parameters outlined during programme design.

Linked to Finding 15

A partner in Eswatini had been working with community leaders to select participants, with the aim of building community ownership. However, the partner learned that the community leaders were selecting their own family members or asking them to pay. The partner then introduced a more formal application process, using rural health workers to identify vulnerable participants, based on a national survey setting out vulnerability factors.

LESSON 3

Advocacy work requires persistence and patience. To ensure women and girls see the benefits, it is necessary to go beyond acknowledgement or policy change, to ensure changes that have an effect on the lives of women and girls are implemented.

Linked to Findings 3, 4 and 8

UN Women has been advocating against forced sterilization for more than 10 years, starting with extensive research. While the South African government has acknowledged this human rights violation, mandating that the Department of Health is required to provide redress, this has not yet translated into real benefits for the women and girls affected. The implementing partner on this project is launching a class action against the Department of Health for adequate redress and compensation.

LESSON 4

Signing a United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework requires a commitment to supporting delivery in that country. UN Women needs to carefully consider whether it has sufficient capacity to deliver before signing cooperation frameworks, especially in countries where it is not resident or has limited resources.

Linked to Findings 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

The Multi-Country Office's limited presence and resources to deliver on its commitments to the four cooperation frameworks signed in Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho and Namibia, and as set out in the configuration exercises, was a source of frustration both for the Multi-Country Office and the respective UNCTs.

LESSON 5

Working on too many thematic areas and small projects can overstretch Country Offices. As needs within countries are always greater than the available resources, the criteria for country presence type provides a helpful framework to review alignment between delivery and staffing levels, and the number of thematic areas/Strategic Plan outcomes.

Linked to Finding 1, 2, 3 and 4

Based on the determining criteria, the Multi-Country Office's delivery level set it as a small office, its staffing level as a medium office and its coverage of thematic areas as a large office, due to guidance from Strategic Note review processes to cover more areas to meet the needs of the countries under its purview. This tension between the different criteria has resulted in the Multi-Country Office being overstretched.



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7. CONCLUSIONS

This section provides the M-CPE's overall conclusions. In its implementation of the Strategic Note, the Multi-Country Office has made important strides in its support to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The size of the countries, scope of challenges and positioning of UN Women in Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia and South Africa provides ample opportunity for the Multi-Country Office's growth to achieve greater impact at scale.

CONCLUSION 1:

Structural issues around the role of the Multi-Country Office in Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho and Namibia have contributed to resource constraints, impacting the Multi-Country Office's ability to deliver its mandate across all five countries, especially its normative and coordination mandates.

Efficiency
Linked to Findings 1 and 2

There is a mismatch between what UNCTs and external stakeholders expect from the Multi-Country Office across all five countries, and the Regional Office's direction to focus primarily on South Africa. This has also affected the amount of core funding the Multi-Country Office receives to support its coordination work and the level of corporate support. While the Multi-Country Office has used programme personnel strategically across all five countries, capacity is thinly stretched across multiple thematic areas, which has affected delivery.

Resource constraints have also affected the Multi-Country Office's efficiency. While the office has made significant improvements in its operational processes, monitoring and reporting, data management, resource mobilization and partner onboarding, challenges remain in terms of the timeliness of contracting, disbursements, recruitments and corporate reporting, as evidenced in key performance metrics.

CONCLUSION 2:

Efficiency issues arising from resource constraints have affected the Multi-Country Office's delivery rates and consistency of engagement, impacting the office's reputation with partners and donors.

Efficiency and effectiveness
Linked to Findings 1, 2 and 7.

Challenges in delivering existing grants have made some donors hesitant to continue to fund the Multi-Country Office. In particular, while the office has been very effective in securing private-sector funding, tensions between different operating models have arisen. Private-sector stakeholders have expressed concerns that the Multi-Country Office does not really understand the private sector and that the office's structure and processes are not fit for purpose for partnering with the private sector. To strengthen its reputation, the Multi-Country Office needs to avoid spreading itself too thinly, moving to a more focused, coherent strategy of where it can realistically engage, managing both donor and partner expectations, while streamlining processes where possible.

CONCLUSION 3:

The Multi-Country Office's comparative advantage lies in its focused gender mandate, convening power, brand recognition and technical expertise. Its focus on leave no one behind was very relevant to the needs of the subregion and to government priorities.

Relevance and Coherence
Linked to Findings 3, 4, 5 and 6

Overall, the Multi-Country Office's interventions align with its mandate and comparative advantage, although a few smaller, donor-driven projects and areas outside its core expertise diluted its focus. Relevance and coherence would be enhanced by focusing on larger, scalable models and programmes delivered in partnership with governments. Stakeholders have expressed an interest in funding larger programmes with pooled resources where the Multi-Country Office works with other partners and UN agencies to avoid duplication of many smaller programmes.

The Multi-Country Office's capacity to fulfill its normative and coordination mandates across all five countries has been limited. External stakeholders see the office's convening and normative role as its key value add. There are strong examples of where the Multi-Country Office effectively leveraged its triple mandate to convene stakeholders to influence policy, supported government to implement this policy and secured private-sector funding for implementation. The Multi-Country Office's recent recruitment of a Coordination Specialist is a step in the right direction to scale efforts in supporting UN coordination on gender equality and to ensure more joined-up UN programming on gender equality. At the national level, the Multi-Country Office can further enhance its convening and normative work by taking advantage of key gender platforms and policy developments to facilitate collaboration across stakeholders working on gender.

A more focused, strategic approach would strengthen the Multi-Country Office's position as a gender equality leader in the subregion, helping it to balance the heavy expectations on the office and its broad thematic focus with resource realities.

CONCLUSION 4

Despite resource constraints, the Multi-Country Office has contributed to target outcomes in the areas of Women's Economic Empowerment; Ending Violence Against Women; Women, Peace and Security; and HIV/AIDs. This was achieved through targeted capacity development of rights holders and duty-bearers, targeting social norms, using community-based approaches, addressing the socioeconomic determinants of HIV/AIDs and influencing normative processes.

Effectiveness and Sustainability
Linked to Findings 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13

Changes include institutions and communities promoting gender equality and meeting gender commitments; more gender-responsive public and private procurement; greater participation of women entrepreneurs in the economy; change in social norms around gender; and more coherent implementation of gender-based violence strategies. The Multi-Country Office has also made key contributions to UN system coordination on gender equality and women's empowerment by effectively leveraging partnerships with UN agencies, civil society, companies, and government and inter-governmental stakeholders, such as SADC.

Many of the Multi-Country Office's results show potential for sustainability, as evidenced by strengthened capacity and changed social norms, financial commitment, local accountability systems and ownership of programmes. While short-term funding remains a barrier, the focus on creating self-sustaining community programmes and government partnerships has increased the likelihood of lasting impacts. Consistently developing exit plans, and moving away from small and short-term programming to longer-term programmes delivered in partnership with governments would further support sustainability.

CONCLUSION 5:

The Multi-Country Office effectively integrated the leave no one behind principle across its portfolio, focusing on vulnerable groups such as individuals with HIV, informal sector workers and LGBTQI+ communities.

Gender Equality and Human Rights
Linked to Findings 14 and 15

By targeting the root causes of gender inequality, such as societal norms and unequal power structures, the Multi-Country Office's interventions have the potential for transformative impact. The office can strengthen this work by systemizing its approach to inclusivity; incorporating vulnerability assessments during project design; and systematically tracking the participation of identified vulnerable groups.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Presentation of the preliminary findings and two discussions on the way forward took place with the UN Women South Africa Multi-Country Office to inform the recommendations and suggested steps presented below. The discussions focused on the development of feasible and realistic actions. Each recommendation is linked to corresponding findings. The level of priority and timeline for implementation are indicated below each recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 1: MULTI-COUNTRY OFFICE STRUCTURE

The Regional Office to liaise with headquarters to review the Multi-Country Office's structure to ensure alignment between the Multi-Country Office's commitments and its resources and capacity.

Based on Findings

1, 3, 4 & 5

Priority

HIGH

Timeframe

MEDIUM-TERM

Suggested steps to be taken:

- The Regional Office to work with the Multi-Country Office to review the financial resources and technical support required from the Regional Office and headquarters in order for the office to continue as a Multi-Country Office and meet its expectations as a cooperation framework signatory in all five countries.
- The Regional Office and headquarters to decide if they will make this additional investment in the Multi-Country Office or support it to transition into a single Country Office.
- Following the Regional Office's decision on the Multi-Country Office's structure, the Multi-Country Office to carefully review commitments in the configuration exercise for any future cooperation framework developments, to ensure expectations concerning UN Women's inputs are clearly set from the start and aligned with available resources.

To be led by: The Regional Director and Multi-Country Office Representative

Rationale and impact: During the previous Strategic Note, there was tension between the expectations placed on the Multi-Country Office and available resources. The Multi-Country Office was a signatory to cooperation frameworks across all five countries but was guided by the Regional Office to focus on South Africa. As a 'small' office in terms of financial resources, its core funding as a percentage of total funding is comparable to that of other Multi-Country Offices, in real terms however it is lower, and comparable to offices covering a single country. Therefore, the Multi-Country Office's core funding was insufficient to cover coordination personnel in all five countries and delivery across four thematic areas. Additional resources and support, or Regional Office support to scale back on its commitments across the five countries, is needed to enable the Multi-Country Office to meet stakeholder expectations.

RECOMMENDATION 2: EFFICIENCY AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

Strengthen programme and partner management to enhance the efficiency of programme delivery, including through an internal staffing level review to determine a structure that fits the budget and business model.

Based on Findings

1 & 2

Priority

HIGH

Timeframe

MEDIUM-TERM

Suggested steps to be taken:

- Strengthen partner management by bolstering induction processes and capacity development plans to ensure partners have the capacity to deliver in a timely manner and provide the necessary documents to facilitate timely disbursements.
- Continue to strengthen data, knowledge and records management systems to ensure internal and external reports are well filed and easily accessible.
- Across Programme and Operations teams, invest in refamiliarization of key processes and workflows that have been challenging (e.g. partner selection, contracting and management, donor reporting). Work together to review performance on key processes to understand the bottlenecks and seek to address these, for example, through additional training or investing in additional capacity.
- Strengthen management of personnel handover processes to retain institutional memory and maintain relationships with partners and external stakeholders.
- Where capacity permits, introduce higher levels of oversight, for example, through more regular check-ins and monitoring, where there are risks to the delivery of certain programmes.
- Explore how future programme proposals can support adequate cost recovery/ contribution to direct project costs to ensure programme teams have sufficient resources to balance strategic delivery and programme administration.

To be led by: Deputy Multi-Country Office Representative, with the support of the Operations Manager and all Multi-Country Office personnel

Rationale and impact: There have been challenges with delivery rates, resulting from issues with programme and partner management, in part due to capacity issues. These need to be resolved to strengthen delivery efficiency and effectiveness. The internal audit raised recommendations around programme partner management, knowledge and records management, and developing workflows to improve the timeliness of operational transactions, which have not yet been fully implemented. Addressing these issues would strengthen the timeliness of programme delivery.

RECOMMENDATION 3: RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

Invest in resource mobilization by strengthening relationships with current donors and building relationships with potential donors by scaling efforts that have proven effective. Continue to encourage donors to pool funds to support larger programmes to reduce transaction costs.

Based on Findings

1, 2 & 7

Priority

MEDIUM

Timeframe

LONG-TERM

Suggested steps to be taken:

- Continue to encourage donors to contribute to larger projects that pool funding across donors and are well aligned to the Multi-Country Office's expertise and strengths to increase efficiency and minimize transaction costs.
- Strengthen relationships with existing donors by organizing project visits, being flexible to requests around donor engagement and holding regular check-ins to ensure objectives and priorities are aligned. Openly communicate about both parties' processes, constraints and expectations to find optimal ways to meet the needs of both.
- Scale resource mobilization efforts that have proven effective
- Explore opportunities to mobilize resources from other stakeholders, including governments, bilaterals and through innovative financing mechanisms

To be led by: The Multi-Country Office Representative, with the support of the Deputy Representative, Partnerships and Resource Mobilization Specialist and all personnel, and with the support of the Regional Resource Mobilization Specialist.

Rationale and impact: The Multi-Country Office has struggled with small, donor-driven projects and issues with donor relations due to miscommunication and operational delays, impacting timely delivery. Private-sector partnerships have also faced challenges with differing expectations, including on timelines. The Multi-Country Office has effectively mobilized resources from the private sector through a number of innovative approaches, including informal gatherings, encouraging Women's Empowerment Principles signatories to fund programming and by raising its profile convening government and civil society on gender equality. However, companies sometimes prefer smaller, more agile organizations for quicker results. Donors agree there is a critical need for UN Women and gender equality programming across the five countries, noting that funding is still available, and that there is a case for additional funding to address inequalities. Further playing on its strengths and added value to retain donors (i.e. its normative and convening power) would enable the Multi-Country Office to raise additional funds.

RECOMMENDATION 4: PROGRAMMING

Enhance programming by looking to consolidate thematic areas; moving to longer and larger programmes and joint programmes, where funding permits; and by increasing normative and coordination work in the countries outside of South Africa.

Based on Findings

2, 3, 4, 5 & 6

Priority

HIGH

Timeframe

MEDIUM-TERM

Suggested steps to be taken:

- Ensure the new Strategic Note and number of outcomes targeted is realistic, based on available personnel capacity and projected funding.
- Continue to move to designing programmes with a focus on results rather than activity, moving towards longer and larger programmes that work across thematic areas (where donor funding allows) ensuring all programmes have exit plans in place and, where possible, are linked to national approaches, systems and structures.
- Continue exploring opportunities to increase joint programming with other agencies and deliver larger, more holistic programmes that work across thematic areas.
- With the support of the Regional Office and coordination consultant, as capacity and funding allows, support in-country based personnel to scale coordination and normative work, especially in the four countries outside of South Africa, to strengthen Gender Theme Groups, the mainstreaming of gender across cooperation frameworks and programmes, and national normative processes.

To be led by: Multi-Country Office Representative (development of the new Strategic Note); Deputy Representative and Programme Managers (development of new initiatives); Coordination Specialist and Programme Managers (coordination and normative work).

Rationale and impact: The small Multi-Country Office team is overburdened by the large number of programmes across multiple thematic areas and countries. Many programmes already include components across thematic areas (for example, the HIV/AIDs programmes include components of Women's Economic Empowerment and Ending Violence Against Women) – this could be further leveraged by working more closely together across thematic teams. For the countries outside South Africa, there is opportunity to strengthen linkages between the Multi-Country Office's programming and respective coordination frameworks and national systems and structures. Due to capacity constraints, the Multi-Country Office has been limited in what it has been able to deliver in terms of coordination and normative work, especially in the countries outside of South Africa. Addressing these issues would strengthen the Multi-Country Office's delivery against UN Women's triple mandate and its target outcomes, and further support national normative-level work, such as the Universal Periodic Review, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

RECOMMENDATION 5: HUMAN RESOURCES

Enhance the Human Resources function to support more strategic and timely human resource planning and recruitment.

Based on Findings

1 & 2

Priority

HIGH

Timeframe

SHORT-TERM

Suggested steps to be taken:

- Review the HR function to facilitate a full-time HR personnel, based in the Multi-Country Office, to better meet the need for strategic and more timely HR planning across all five countries.
- Consider how to obtain additional HR capacity where needed to address current bottlenecks, for example, through HR consultant retainers, to support tasks such as longlisting and conducting interviews.
- Continue team-building initiatives to strengthen cohesion among personnel.

To be led by: Operations Manager, supported by the Multi-Country Office Representative

Rationale and impact: The HR capacity available during implementation of the previous Strategic Note was insufficient and hampered the effective recruitment of personnel required to deliver programmes, which in turn affected programme delivery rates. Strengthening HR capacity would support more effective and efficient delivery. Personnel turnover, contractual issues and other interpersonal issues have affected office dynamics. Continuing to address this would improve the situation.

RECOMMENDATION 6: MONITORING AND REPORTING

Build on progress made to strengthen monitoring and reporting systems to enable more comprehensive and effective tracking of changes resulting from Multi-Country Office initiatives and to support donor and corporate reporting.

Based on Finding

2

Priority

MEDIUM

Timeframe

LONG-TERM

Suggested steps to be taken:

- Continue to strengthen the timeliness of donor and corporate reporting.
- Strengthen use of the partner and grant agreement management system, ensuring all partner reports are uploaded in the system.
- Strengthen systems to verify the quality of data reported as part of donor and corporate reporting through use of spot checks with partners.
- Increase investment in baseline and tools to better track outcome and impacts.

To be led by: Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation Analyst, with the support of the Deputy Multi-Country Office Representative.

Rationale and impact: Monitoring and reporting have significantly improved, particularly in terms of the quality and timeliness of donor reporting and the consolidation and refinement of indicators to reflect the work undertaken by the Multi-Country Office. Further improvements to systems would help strengthen the reliability of monitoring and reporting data and ensure that monitoring systems are set up to comprehensively capture results at the outcome and impact level. In particular, more investment in baselines would enable the setting of realistic targets.

RECOMMENDATION 7: DISABILITY INCLUSION AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Strengthen approaches to disability inclusion and intersectionality by taking a more systematic approach, building on the UN Women Strategy on Disability Inclusion, to support the gender equality and empowerment of women and girls with disabilities.

Based on Finding

15

Priority

MEDIUM

Timeframe

MEDIUM-TERM

Suggested steps to be taken:

- Strengthen disaggregation of programming and reporting data by disability status, whenever possible and relevant, and request that partners include indicators which include multiple and intersecting identities. Implement a target for the number of women and girls with disability reached as a percentage of the total number of programme participants.
- Increase partnerships with organizations of women and girls with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, such as LGBTQI+ groups.
- Consider creating initiatives that specifically target women and girls with disability, especially in areas where there may be limited support for such populations, such as in rural communities.
- Consult organizations and networks of women and girls with disabilities and other identified vulnerabilities during the design, implementation and evaluation of initiatives.
- Consider aspects of accessibility when designing initiatives, including events, and budget for inclusion where relevant.

To be led by: Deputy Multi-Country Office Representative, with the support of Programme teams and the Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation Analyst

Rationale and impact: The Multi-Country Office has effectively focused its programming around leave no one behind principles and targeted women and girls with disabilities in response to the level of inequality in the middle-income countries it serves. Disability inclusion and intersectionality could be further strengthened, in line with UN Women's Strategy for the Empowerment of Women and Girls with Disabilities (2018), to more effectively reach people with disabilities and other vulnerabilities.

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**UN WOMEN IS THE UN ORGANIZATION
DEDICATED TO GENDER EQUALITY
AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN. A
GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN AND
GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS ESTABLISHED
TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON
MEETING THEIR NEEDS WORLDWIDE.**

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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