

IN BRIEF

UN WOMEN SOMALIA COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION

STRATEGIC NOTE 2022–2025

PURPOSE

The UN Women Independent Evaluation Service (IES) conducted a country portfolio evaluation (CPE) of the Somalia Programme Presence to provide an independent and systematic assessment of UN Women's contributions to advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women in Somalia between 2022 and 2025, which covers the period of the Strategic Note.¹ The evaluation's purpose is to support (a) enhanced accountability for development effectiveness; and (b) learning to inform UN Women Somalia's next Strategic Note.

OBJECTIVES

The evaluation objectives were to:

- Assess the relevance and added value, coherence, effectiveness, organizational efficiency and sustainability of the UN Women portfolio in Somalia.
- Identify lessons and good practices to be shared.
- Provide actionable recommendations to inform development of the new Strategic Note.

INTENDED USERS

The primary intended users of this evaluation are UN Women Somalia personnel, who will use the findings to develop and implement the office's new Strategic Note. Secondary users are expected to be the UN Women Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office, headquarters colleagues, national partners and other stakeholders working in the region.

BACKGROUND ON THE UN WOMEN PROGRAMME PRESENCE OFFICE

The Somalia office was established in 2015. Based on the Strategic Note for the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office, Somalia has operated as a Programme Presence since 2015.

The UN Women Somalia 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 Somalia. The Strategic Note 2022–2025 is aligned with the Somalia National Development Plan-9 2020–2024; UN strategies and frameworks in the country, specifically the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework; and is consistent with conclusions and recommendations of the Common Country Analysis, Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan and UN Somalia Gender Strategy. The UN Women Somalia budget between 2022 and 2024 was US\$ 9.2 million.

METHOD

The CPE employed a theory-based, gender-responsive approach. In consultation with UN Women Somalia, the evaluation team reconstructed the Strategic Note's theory of change and used it as the basis for contribution analysis. Evaluation questions were developed using the theory of change and assessed against the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee criteria. The evaluation team obtained multiple sources of data and consulted 100 stakeholders through interviews, focus groups and surveys. The CPE was delivered in accordance with the UN Women Evaluation Policy and Evaluation Handbook. All evaluation products were subject to quality review by IES management, a peer reviewer and the Evaluation Reference Group.

¹ The CPE focused on the current Strategic Note cycle (2022–2025) with the understanding that it was yet to be completed. The CPE analysed work completed through Q4 2024.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

RELEVANCE

The UN Women Somalia Strategic Note is highly relevant, as it aligns well with national development priorities, humanitarian frameworks and international commitments on gender equality.

The UN Women Somalia Strategic Note responds to the pressing needs of women and girls in Somalia, particularly in the context of conflict, displacement and climate-related crises. However, to sustain and deepen its relevance, continued engagement with local stakeholders; greater alignment with grassroots priorities; and implementing gender equality and women's empowerment initiatives at scale will be essential to ensure that interventions remain context-specific and responsive to the evolving needs of the target population.

COHERENCE

The UN Women Somalia Strategic Note aligns with Somalia's national policies and strategies on gender equality and women's empowerment, and is coherent with UN Country Team (UNCT) and donor strategies.

The UN Women Somalia Strategic Note has an adequate level of coherence with the country's priorities and the UN system. UN Women Somalia's coordination – strengthened by co-leadership of the UNCT, joint programmes and external coordination mechanisms – has enhanced the alignment of the Strategic Note with UNCT efforts and Somalia's national gender equality priorities, promoting a unified approach to women's empowerment. However, further efforts are needed to strengthen coherence and expand the UN's coordinated approach to advancing gender equality in Somalia. Internal coherence within UN Women Somalia's programmes is also limited.

EFFECTIVENESS

The UN Women Somalia Strategic Note has been an effective tool for advancing policy advocacy for women's empowerment, joint programme delivery and UN coordination, yet its scale to respond to gender equality needs in Somalia is limited.

Although UN Women in Somalia has demonstrated effectiveness in policy advocacy, joint programme delivery and UN coordination, structural, contextual, financial and operational barriers continue to limit its potential for broader impact. The evaluation notes the significant organizational capacity and resource mobilization constraints

that limit UN Women Somalia's operational capability to respond to the needs of the target population at scale.

SUSTAINABILITY

Prospects for the sustainability of UN Women Somalia's interventions appear promising but remain fragile.

The sustainability of UN Women's work in Somalia depends on strengthening linkages to local systems for increased ownership; securing long-term investments; and sustaining efforts to transform deeply entrenched gender norms within a context of persistent humanitarian challenges.

ORGANIZATIONAL EFFICIENCY

UN Women Somalia faces significant structural, financial and operational challenges that hinder its ability to effectively implement programmes at scale.

UN Women Somalia requires strategic commitment to improving the availability of human resources, enabling operational processes and oversight, and addressing security considerations. Given Somalia is a critical country in terms of women's empowerment and gender equality needs, ensuring that the office is well-equipped, adequately staffed and effectively managed is imperative for development and implementation of the next Strategic Note.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

While UN Women in Somalia has made significant progress in empowering vulnerable women and improving the representation of various marginalized groups, there are still critical gaps in including women from hard-to-reach areas.

The involvement of religious and traditional leaders in programmes has been beneficial in promoting gender equality; however, challenges remain, particularly in reaching newly liberated areas of the country, as well as rural and displaced women and securing the resources necessary to ensure programme continuity.

Additionally, the lack of legislative endorsement of the Sexual Offences Bill, which protects women's rights, highlights the need for ongoing advocacy to ensure that all marginalized women access comprehensive support and interventions. There is no evidence to suggest that persons with disabilities at the community level were fully integrated into joint programme activities for example.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1

UN Women should strengthen its personnel capacity in the Somalia office to ensure strategic positioning and long-term programme delivery. UN Women should seek to support the Somalia Programme Presence to strengthen its personnel capacity to maximize its impact and effectively implement its mandate. UN Women Somalia must also enhance its strategic positioning by prioritizing its comparative advantage in the normative and coordination spheres. Together with a tailored resource mobilization strategy, this would help to better equip UN Women Somalia with a sustainable structure to advance its work in the country.

2

UN Women Somalia should devise sustainable strategies to recruit and retain the programme personnel required to implement long-term programmes. The office should consider recruiting gender equality expertise to contribute to the UNCT and other partners in advocating and advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women. UN Women Somalia should prioritize recruitment of technical personnel with long-term contracts to sustain programme present capacities with a view to building trust from stakeholders, as well as invest in monitoring and evaluation capacities and systems to generate high-quality data on programme outcomes.

3

UN Women Somalia should focus on enhancing programming by focusing on leveraging joint programming and improve linking cross-thematic areas. UN Women Somalia should enhance its programming by better linking thematic areas; continuing to implement joint programmes; increasing its focus on normative and coordination work to ensure scalability of outcomes; and increasing its efforts to reach the most marginalized populations.

4

UN Women Somalia should invest in resource mobilization and communication by strengthening its relationships with current donors and building relationships with potential donors.