



IN BRIEF



# REGIONAL EVALUATION: WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN THE AMERICAS AND CARIBBEAN

November 2020

Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

## Background

UN Women supports Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) in the Latin America and Caribbean region within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals. UN Women advocates for investment in WEE as a driver for gender equality, poverty eradication and inclusive economic growth.

In the last 25 years, women have achieved greater autonomy through increased access to economic resources across the region. However, cultural attitudes and norms related to traditional gender roles and stereotypes persist and pose a critical challenge to women's rights.

The poverty, discrimination, and exploitation that women continue to suffer disproportionately affect their capacities to

participate equally in all aspects of public and private life, encumbering the exercise of their rights and opportunity to live with dignity.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, UN Women's work in WEE is committed to reversing the root causes of gender inequalities, focusing its efforts on two priorities:

- Promotion of policies and legal frameworks that promote decent work, social protection and the recognition, redistribution, and reduction of unpaid care work; and
- Promotion of increased access of women to productive and financial resources.

## EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY



Formative evaluation



Utilization-focused evaluation



**16 countries covered** in the Americas and Caribbean region through portfolio reviews of the 2015-2019 period



**2 online surveys**

- UN Women Country Office survey (13 responses)
- Partner survey (81 responses)



**185 stakeholders consulted** through semi-structured interviews



**3 case studies**

- Women domestic workers (Paraguay and Guatemala)
- Rural Women (Guatemala)
- Care work (Paraguay)



**Document review** at country, regional and global levels

## List of Findings

### RELEVANCE

**FINDING 1:** UN Women's work on WEE is carried out within the framework of its Strategic Plan 2018-2021, international human rights treaties, as well as other international agreements and commitments. It equally supports the development and implementation of national norms and policies related to economic empowerment. Within this framework, UN Women's ability to capitalize on its triple mandate has been a key asset.

**FINDING 2:** UN Women interventions related to decent work and social protection linked to domestic workers, rural and indigenous women, and migrants, are highly relevant to the regional context and needs vulnerable women's groups. UN Women has responded to inequality gaps affecting women as well as the mandate of the SDGs to *leave no one behind*.

**FINDING 3:** National and regional partners value UN Women's specialization and legitimacy to address WEE issues, and both Country Offices and partners recognize the substantive contribution that the Regional Office offers in this respect. This provides favorable conditions to further consolidate the relevance of UN Women at regional and national levels.

**FINDING 4:** The Regional Office's increased commitment, knowledge and technical contribution to the work of Country Offices work is recognized.

**FINDING 5:** The 2017 Report on the Progress of Women in Latin America and the Caribbean is widely known, although not to the same degree by all sectors. It is valued and is considered useful due to its significant conceptual, analytical and strategic contributions. Internally, it could be further utilized to articulate the regional Theory of Change (ToC).

### EFFECTIVENESS

**FINDING 6:** Important contributions to agenda-setting related to WEE were evidenced and recognized by partners, such as capacity strengthening, the development of strategies and drafting of norms and evidence-based public policies, as well as the empowerment of rights holders. Challenges persist in several countries in effectively implementing the legislation and norms developed.

**FINDING 7:** UN Women has developed various strategies and actions to specifically address the inequality and discrimination gaps that affect the most disadvantaged and vulnerable women with different degrees of effectiveness. Increased attention on the importance of targeting is vital to achieve more significant results.

**FINDING 8:** Quality evidence has been relevant in guiding working strategies. Henceforth, the promotion of knowledge management and the strategic use of information, should be enhanced.

**FINDING 9:** Having a regional Theory of Change will serve as the basis for a regional strategy to guide decisions related to priorities and orientation towards impact.

**FINDING 10:** The legitimacy of UN Women accentuates its advocacy capacity.

**FINDING 11:** Partnerships and interactions with other stakeholders inside and outside the UN system have resulted in concrete initiatives for the integration and strengthening of gender-focused interventions aimed at enhancing WEE.

Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown



**FINDING 12:** UN Women has introduced issues, approached new actors, and implemented innovative strategies, approaches and methodologies at different scales within countries in the region. The replication and/or scaling of innovations requires further analysis.

**FINDING 13:** Working with macroeconomic sectors is fundamental and requires further strengthening, which in turn entails strengthening of internal capacities in this area.

**FINDING 14:** Progress has been made at the country level and, to a lesser extent, at the regional level towards a WEE programmatic approach, integrating the area of work with interventions in other areas addressed by UN Women.

**FINDING 15:** Despite valuing the technical assistance of the UN Women Regional Office to both the Caribbean Multi-Country Office and Haiti Country Office, there is a general perception of the need to promote and strengthen a broader regional approach. However, the challenges that this entails, such as language barriers and diverse socio-cultural contexts, are equally recognized.

## EFFICIENCY

**FINDING 16:** With a limited budget of regular funds, the Regional Office increased and diversified its sources of WEE funding and maintained efficiency in budget execution, while delivering quality technical support. At the regional level, there has also been a budget increase based on non-regular funds.

**FINDING 17:** The regional EEM teams' efforts to strengthen capacities in national offices stand out, although financial and administrative aspects had a negative impact on the scope in some cases.

**FINDING 18:** The significant differences in Country Office budgets point to unequal opportunities and capacities, as well as the need to identify and clarify, in a more explicit way, the criteria for budget allocation both at the regional and country office levels, as well as the promotion of joint and innovative financing strategies.

## SUSTAINABILITY

**FINDING 19:** Using its high-quality research-based knowledge products and technical assistance, UN Women is contributing to the action of partners towards WEE.

**FINDING 20:** UN Women has implemented and validated relevant intervention models, replicable in other countries, and scalable to public policy. Further strengthening of the Regional Office's strategic role and the capacities of WEE focal point in knowledge management and innovation is needed.

**FINDING 21:** UN Women has been able to engage a strong and diverse group of partners, laying the foundations for more structured and medium-term agreements, as well as validating its credibility and legitimacy with potential new strategic allies and partners.

**FINDING 22:** UN Women's commitment to sustainability is positively valued. Financial issues are presented as the largest future threat.

**FINDING 23:** Sustainability will depend on the ability to design and implement innovative financing models.

**FINDING 24:** There is inadequate clarity regarding cross-cutting approaches, which reduces relevance of interventions, as well as limiting effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability.



Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown



## Main conclusions

The UN Women Regional Office has moved towards **greater clarity about its role** and greater relevance of its contribution. Its support to a **strategic vision of WEE** in the region will be further reinforced by the regional Theory of Change outlined in the framework of this evaluation.

UN Women is recognized by national and regional partners as an **actor with a unique position and legitimacy** in the region to promote WEE and establish strategic alliances. This legitimacy has been strengthened with initiatives such as the 2017 Progress Report, which together with the Strategic Plan, provided a **conceptual framework**, promoted a **programmatically approach** and provided guidelines for the work of the offices (see box below).

The topic of unpaid care work illustrates a good regional practice of a collective, **visionary, and pioneering** effort, although still with a margin of greater strategic alignment.

### A key milestone: The Report on the Progress of Women

*"It is one of the most global efforts that UN Women have made to have a multidimensional and coherent interpretation of women's economic empowerment in Latin America." (Key informant interview)*

The publication in 2017 of the report [Progress of Women in Latin America and the Caribbean](#) marked a turning point in the regional positioning of UN Women as a key player in promoting WEE as a central issue on the public agenda. The report marks a milestone in the region with regard to the knowledge and appreciation of the contribution of women to the economy, while showing the conditions of inequality and injustice that women in the region endure - in particular across socioeconomic, geographic, ethnic and racial groups - thus perpetuating poverty.

Through this report UN Women demonstrates that **gender-based inequalities can be avoided**. The report also shows that economic and social policies can contribute to creating stronger economies and more sustainable and gender-equitable societies, provided that they are designed and developed with women's rights at the heart of their priorities. 47% of partners consulted during the evaluation

priorities. 47% of partners consulted during the evaluation reported that they knew the report, of whom 92% reported having used it, mainly for the preparation of programs and the development of knowledge products and advocacy.

*"In general, UN Women has shown a capacity to introduce and consolidate new issues (unpaid care work, equal pay, etc.), influence the agendas of regional and national organizations, generate evidence, construct a narrative about the importance of the theme, articulate strategies and methodological routes; this is supported by its legitimacy and great communicational strength; it is the great awareness-raiser." (Partner interview)*

UN Women has had an impact on the introduction of issues into **public agendas**, including by: promoting **statistics with a gender perspective** to highlight the situation of women; promoting **legislative and public policy frameworks** for WEE; **developing capacities** of both state institutions and right holders; promoting linkages and alliances; developing **knowledge** to support the need for changes towards WEE; and involving the **private sector** by promoting changes also within companies. Considering the priorities of the Decade of Action, issues related to **science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM) and innovation** are considered strategic investments to increase capacities and opportunities of women in the future.

Further noteworthy results highlighted in the evaluation include: the approval of Convention 189 in several countries, as well as **legal reforms and public policies** in favor of domestic workers; the establishment of an **unpaid care agenda** in the region; and the strengthening of the **entrepreneurial competencies of rural women** and their access to productive resources. An important area for improvement refers to the **explicit and systematic** integration of cross-cutting issues and an **intersectional approach**, which would enhance attention to the most disadvantaged groups and strengthen capacity to provide differentiated responses.

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*“UN Women’s interventions to promote the women’s economic empowerment take special account of the specific demands and needs of indigenous women in the country.”*  
(Partner survey)

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The Regional Office’s **technical support** to Country Offices is valued, which translates into greater efficiency and strengthening of the strategic vision. Moreover, progress has been made through a **regional mapping of knowledge products** and the exchange and learning between the Regional Office and national focal points. However, the fact that most knowledge products are in Spanish limits their **relevance and usefulness for Caribbean countries**.

It is considered essential to strengthen an **orientation towards impact generation**. In relation to transformative strategies, a special focus on gender norms and the need to reinforce work on **masculinities**, as well as with the **education sector**, is required.

Partnerships with diverse actors constitute **one of the most important value added** of UN Women, including with women’s movements, UN agencies, and other regional and global organizations.

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*“The main added value of UN Women recognized by partners refers to its relationship with women’s organizations in countries, which certainly relates to its actions conducting consultation processes with civil society.”* (Partner interview)

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Increased attention to macroeconomics, as well as to thematic trends, should promote new regional and country partnerships, including among key actors, such as, ministries of **finance, economy, entrepreneurship and rural development**; the **financial sector**; women’s economic networks; **academic institutions**, technology and innovation centers, and **think-tanks**.

## Recommendations

1. Review and adapt strategic priorities based on new needs resulting from the pandemic, strengthening regional learning, coordination, and collaboration between Country Offices, to enhance response to the crisis.
2. Promote WEE themes and strategies linked to future trends in the fields of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and innovation with a view to strengthen the capacities and competitiveness of women.
3. Strengthen the orientation towards impact at regional and country office level.
4. Increase strategic focus on key macroeconomic issues, seeking to accelerate economic transformation with a gender perspective that benefit the most disadvantaged women "without leaving anyone behind."
5. Strengthen a regional approach that combines the integration of all countries, with an emphasis on Caribbean countries and Haiti, so as to better manage contextual diversity across the region, improve orientation of scarce regular funds, and seek synergies with donor-funded programmes.
6. Develop an innovative, integrated and ambitious financing strategy to optimize the use of limited regular resources and the joint mobilization of resources with donors, while considering alternative sources of financing from the private sector and impact investors.
7. Strengthen the strategic nature of regional and national partnerships for WEE, and expand their scope to actors linked to macroeconomics, STEM, innovation, and academia, whilst bearing in mind that each partnership must be seen as an investment towards greater impact.
8. Operationalize cross-cutting approaches and strengthen systematic implementation of an intersectional approach of interventions.