UN WOMEN · Independent Evaluation Office

Management Response to the Corporate Formative Evaluation of UN Women's Approach To Innovation [24 March 2022]

OVERALL COMMENTS

Management would like to thank the IEAS team for their comprehensive evaluation on UN Women's approach to innovation. The evaluation systematically captures many of the issues and shortcomings of the overall organizational approach to innovation since 2017. It also provides a useful assessment of some innovation initiatives that have been considered promising but require a serious review and stock-taking of effectiveness before further expansion. The recommendations are well received and well taken.

Overall, we consider this a good timing to learn from and apply the insightful findings of this evaluation. UN Women's Strategic Plan 2022-2025 offers several opportunities to integrate digital transformation and social innovation as a cross-cutting lever to help us deliver on our normative, programmatic and coordination work. Innovation and technology can play a key role in accelerating results across the Strategic Plan's seven Systemic Outcomes, including on social norms change.

We acknowledge, as pointed out in the evaluation, that UN Women has not invested in a systematic approach to innovation or in the human and financial resources and organizational structures necessary to provide a cohesive framework across the organization. Innovation efforts have been sporadic and often driven by individuals, a few interested offices or donor priorities. We will invest in driving clarity on UN Women's comparative advantage in technology & innovation, alongside the appropriate organizational structure that brings together country, regional offices and headquarters under a clear responsibility framework address the recommendations of the IEAS team. We will develop systems to capture lessons learned and generate evidence-based guidance for UN Women offices grappling with designing and implementing innovation solutions, including through digital technology.

We recognize the critical need to advance a common and actionable definition of 'innovation', and how that is differentiated from 'digital technology' and integrated within a strategy that clarifies UN Women's approach to both of these often overlapping yet distinct areas of work. Further, we recognize the value of advancing a concrete strategy, clarifying UN Women's strategic advantage and concrete priorities, alongside an accountability framework aligned with our Strategic Plan. This will equip UN Women to not only to set our objectives and priorities but also to be more effective and efficient and better measure our results. By clarifying the value add of our work in the normative and coordination space related to innovation & technology, we will likewise clarify which areas UN Women is best poised to advance, with a bias towards digital technology given its strategic value. While we acknowledge the importance of social innovation initiatives highlighted by the evaluation, the rapid development and ubiquity of digital technologies in every aspect of socio-political and economic life, make it paramount for UN Women to clarify our role, both to capitalize on and address the risks brought by the digital revolution. We align with the IAES Evaluation findings on the potential role that UN Women can play to focus on incubating innovative solutions, and on influencing other actors to adopt and scale up the solutions that present the greatest opportunities for impact at scale. Research and evidence will be core to this effort. Consequently, the innovation & technology strategy will clarify the long-term, strategic partnerships that would be best poised (including from the private sector) to complement our role to generate solutions for gender equality and scale up. The UN Secretary General's Quintet of Change framework outlined in his "Our Common Agenda", which includes innovation and digital transformation, behavioural science and strategic foresight as critical drivers of progress, offers an opportune framework for UN Women to shape its innovation approach.

Through clarifying UN Women's concrete value addition of our work related to innovation & technology will then dictate the funds to be mobilized, and to ensure that UN Women is ready to undergo its own digital transformation. This entails the use of digital technologies to respond to gender equality and women's empowerment challenges, in service of efficiencies and higher impact and scale. It also requires to be accompanied by organizational culture shifts around strategy, human resources, internal processes, programming and partnerships, adopting non-linear, iterative, co-creative and human-centered approaches. Sufficient resources should be devoted to problem diagnosis and analysis, programme design and testing phases as well as to regular monitoring for iterative adaptation. This way, the organization will be able to avoid the challenges observed in the Buy from Women and Building Blocks/Cash for Work projects (eg: ethical/legal risks related to data collection and storage; IT/security-related risks related to technical implementation; etc).

Regarding the recommendation to prioritize UN Women's normative and coordination work on gender and innovation, we note the momentous opportunity that the upcoming 67th Commission for the Status of Women in 2023 will bring, its priority theme being on *"Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls."* We believe this will allow UN Women to consolidate its position in the gender and innovation space, strengthen the knowledge base on gender-

responsive innovation and technology, and contribute to the development of a – hopefully game-changing – inter-governmental normative agreement on gender, technology and innovation. UN Women can also leverage existing partnerships and platforms in service of this purpose. This includes the Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation, which offers a platform for multi-stakeholder coordination on gender and digital innovation; the many inter-agency bodies that address issues around new and emerging technologies (such as the HLCP Interagency Working Group on Artificial Intelligence) and the informal UN Innovation Network – all of which UN Women is an active member.

True innovation and transformational change requires the capabilities to modify processes, systems and collective mindsets. This necessitates a whole-of-organization effort, starting from a clear leadership commitment and direction. PPID looks forward to engaging with different parts of the house in implementing this evaluation's recommendations so that we can do things differently and leverage innovation and digital technology to drive more impactful results across our Strategic Plan.

RECOMMENDATION 1
UN Women should develop and disseminate a clear definition of innovation. This should cover what constitutes an innovative solution and how innovation happens. It should be accompanied by a concrete strategy, priorities and an accountability framework. The organization should develop a clear structure with allocated resources for leadership and accountability on innovation.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE	SELECT ONE OF THE BELOW
Management agrees with this recommendation while noting that the development, dissemination, and follow-through will require mobilization of resources dedicated to innovation & digital technology to advance clarity of UN Women's core value proposition, and with authority to enforce corporate standards (and definitions) throughout the organization.	Accepted.

KEY ACTION [Indicates the concrete measures or actions to be taken including the key partners to be involved in carrying out the actions.]	TIME FRAME	RESPONSIBLE PARTY FOR IMPLEMENTATION [Where the implementation of a key action depends upon other factors such as policy changes or further donor funding, this should be made clear in the comments section.]	STATUS [Initiated, not initiated, completed, no longer applicable (requires justification in comments section); to be updated on quarterly basis]	COMMENTS [A justification must be provided if "no longer applicable" was selected; any other pertinent information regarding the plan for implementation or budget should be noted here]
1. Draft a detailed plan/strategy for innovation and technology at un women including a clear conceptual framework and setting of priorities in support to the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025	Q3 2022- Q4 2022	PPID Research & Data Innovation team & relevant ROs	Not initiated	The strategy on innovation and technology may include: - A corporate definition of what UN Women understand both by 'innovation' and 'technology' as distinct yet often overlapping areas of work; - An articulation of how these areas intersect with gender equality and women's empowerment and how they can support UN Women's SP outcomes and impact areas, and

				the SGDs; - A clear external & internal landscape analysis, profiling the opportunities for UN Women's role; - A Theory of Change & Action, based on UN Women's comparative advantage and concrete value proposition (including level of ambition) on innovation & digital technology - Clear and realistic objectives and a results framework aligned with UN Women's Strategic Plan; - A clear approach to knowledge management and learning; - Recommendations on implementation modalities/menu of services; - Resource & staffing structure plan - This will require investment of sufficient resources, including the placement of a dedicated Innovation Lead, to prepare this strategy and follow-through on implementation.
2. Adequately resource the Innovation Facility as the organization's focal unit to lead and coordinate UN Women's innovation work. This includes recruiting a dedicated innovation leader (P-5 level) with a supporting team to implement critical activities to address the evaluation recommendations	Q2 2022- Q3 2022	PPID with support of Change Management	Initiated	UN Women does have the Innovation Facility housed within PPID which acts as the organization's focal point on innovation work. However, the Innovation Facility has been without dedicated human resource to lead or to coordinate UN Women's innovation & technology work for the past few years. We are proposing to house the Innovation & Technology facility within the Research & Data team, with RO-based staffing placements as a coherent way to connect the development of this work with the field. Donor funding for an Innovation & Digital Technology Lead (P5) level is currently being pursued, to set the strategic direction and coordinate innovation work in UN Women. Options for alternative housing of the Innovation Facility are being explored with a view to maximize effectiveness and efficiencies, including the use of a decentralized or matrixed approach with a focus on field-based staffing. With the necessary human resource in place, the resourcing of the Innovation Facility will determine

				the ability for UN Women to respond to Recommendation #6, which cuts across many functions and units.

RECOMMENDATION 2
UN Women should identify the value added of its work in the normative and coordination space related to innovation. UN Women should ensure that innovation is thoughtfully integrated into gender equality initiatives and that UN Women's work in innovation is positively influencing the normative sphere.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE	SELECT ONE OF THE BELOW
This is accepted and should form a central pillar of any future innovation strategy/framework. Management concurs on the importance of sustaining and strengthening UN Women's advocacy and coordination efforts to influence the normative sphere in issues related to innovation and technology. UN Women will continue its collaboration with and support to the UN Innovation Network, which plays a key coordination and norm-setting role in the UN system (including for the presentation and report to the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, the UN Innovation principles, or the development of the first UN Guidance on Behavioral Science.). We will continue to participate in relevant inter-agency initiatives, such as: the IANWGE's working group on frontier issues (incl. artificial intelligence); the UN Secretary General's Task Force on Digital Financing of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); the SG's Digital Cooperation work, including by leading the development of an authoritative definition of digital inclusion, which is going to be incorporated in the work around the SG Common Agenda and the Global Digital Compact.	Accepted

KEY ACTION	TIME FRAME	RESPONSIBLE PARTY FOR IMPLEMENTATION	STATUS	COMMENTS
3. Influence global normative processes and frameworks on innovation and technology to integrate gender-responsive approaches trough policy briefs or guidance around strategic areas of work based on a policy gap analysis	Q3 2022-Q2 2023	PPID (Research & Data / Innovation & Technology team with support from IGS/Geneva LO, EVAW and other relevant units)	Not initiated	UN Women will strengthen the knowledge base related to the gender dimensions of emerging technologies innovation, and sustain alliances for enhanced policy advocacy, coordination and strengthened partnerships to influence relevant global normative frameworks and standards. This may include the conduction of a policy gap analysis and the development of policy briefs or guidance around strategic areas of work with identified knowledge and gaps, including online violence and emerging technologies' design processes. PPID/ Research & Data Innovation & Technology team will closely collaborate with and support the Geneva Liaison Office to leverage

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				their existing expertise on digital innovation and digital governance and their ongoing policy and normative work within the Geneva-based technology ecosystem, with includes key entities such as the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), Internet Governance Forum, and UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD). UN Women will also strengthen its engagement in key platforms such as the HLCP Interagency Working Group on Artificial Intelligence (IAWG-AI) and the UNSG's Task Force on the Digital Financing of the SDGs.
4. Support the preparations of CSW 67 on "Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls." and development of agreed conclusions	Q2 2022 -Q1 2023	PPID (Innovation team + IGS)	Not initiated	PPID's Research & Data Innovation & Technology team and Inter-Governmental Support section will coordinate among others the background paper for the CSW discussions, the Expert Group Meeting and the SG report and the discussions that will lead to the agreed conclusions.
5. Facilitate the formulation of commitments for gender-responsive norms and policies on innovation and technology and monitor their implementation, via the Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation	Ongoing	Action Coalition on Technology & Innovation	Ongoing	As convener of the Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation, UN Women will foster and monitor the progress made by key stakeholders against the four actions in its global acceleration plan for technology and innovation for gender equality, namely: (1) Bridge the gender gap in digital access and competencies; (2) Invest in feminist technology and innovation; (3) Build inclusive, transformative and accountable ecosystems; and (4) Prevent and eliminate online and tech-facilitated gender-based violence and discrimination.

RECOMMENDATION 3
UN Women should focus on developing, trialing and documenting innovative solutions for challenging gender equality problems or solutions with potential for greatest impact, and on influencing other actors to adopt and scale up solutions that prove effective. This approach would enable un women to develop evidence about what works and to influence larger actors to adopt effective new solutions for maximum scale and impact.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE		SELECT ONE OF THE BELOW	
This is accepted and should form a central pillar of any future innovation strategy/framework.		Accepted	

KEY ACTION	TIME FRAME	RESPONSIBLE PARTY FOR IMPLEMENTATION	STATUS	COMMENTS

6. Trial and document new innovative solutions for learning and potential scaling building on ECARO work on incubation of innovative solutions	Q4 2022-Q3 2023	PPID/R & D Innovation team ECARO	Not initiated	Contingent on resource availability, PPID/ R & D Innovation & Technology team can build on the previous innovation experiences, including in the ECARO, to consolidate a UN Women model for incubating innovative ideas and prototyping and testing innovative solutions to gender-related problems in our programming – all with an intentional investment in documenting and learning from the process, and determining pathways to scale through external partners.
7. Pilot already-tested promising solutions and/or develop pathways for scaling for the most promising pilots. Document this process and produce guidance for piloting and scaling	Q4 2022-Q3 2023	PPID/R & D Innovation team ECARO	Not initiated	Contingent on resource availability, PPID/R & D Innovation team in collaboration with field offices, can build on existing and past solutions supported by the global and regional innovation facilities, including in the ECARO, and support their piloting and/or help develop a pathway for scaling for the most promising one(s), by establishing a scaling model and engaging with partners that will bring it to scale.
8. Consolidate evidence & learning from past and ongoing innovative projects, particularly the Buy from Women platform/programme	Q3 2022-Q4 2023	PPID/R & D Innovation team WCARO ECARO	Not initiated	PPID/R & D will evaluate and document the lessons learnt from ongoing and past initiatives in strategic areas with immediate application in UN Women's work. Specifically, and considering the findings of the evaluation, PPID/evaluation Team together with WCARO will assess the Buy from Women platform/programme with the possible development of a revised, viable model/s grounded on the programme's evidence. PPID/R & D Team will also document and consolidate lessons learned on the use in our programming of innovative approaches such as behavioural insights for increased impact.

RECOMMENDATION 4
UN Women should develop long-term, strategic partnerships with the private sector that support innovation through the transfer of ideas, expertise and resources. These should include organizational-level partnerships with private sector actors that can generate new solutions for gender equality and opportunities to scale up, and country- and regional-level opportunities for engagement.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE		SELECT ONE OF THE BELOW		
This is accepted and should form a central pillar of any future innovation strategy/framework and dedicated follow-up efforts.		Accepted		
KEY ACTION	**TIME FRAME**	**RESPONSIBLE PARTY FOR IMPLEMENTATION**	**STATUS**	**COMMENTS**

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9. Conduct a landscape and benchmark analyses about different partnership modalities with private sector utilized by other UN agencies as the basis to identify options for UN Women	Q4 2022- Q2 2023	PPID/R & D Innovation team (lead) MPAS, DMA/Procurement, PPID/PSMU	Not initiated	The analysis will identify existing modalities across the UN that allow to engage with private sector in capacities other than as donors or as vendors of pre-determined services, but rather as project partners or "co-creating vendors" who can help UN Women develop new solutions to UNW programming challenges (especially technology-based ones) or adapting existing market solutions or technologies. The findings will inform UN Women's innovation strategy and will form the basis for additional options for private sector engagement, including through the modification of existing rules and procedures and/or the creation of alternative partnership modalities.

RECOMMENDATION 5
UN Women should invest in more comprehensive and organized systems for capturing and sharing lessons learned in the process of piloting/testing innovative initiatives. This will foster organizational learning and give UN women the knowledge and credibility to influence other actors in the area of innovation for gender equality.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE	SELECT ONE OF THE BELOW
Iterative innovation projects and pilots require by nature specific, intense systems and/methodologies to capture and assess both process and immediate results, to improve the tested model and/or to inform the design of other initiatives. This allows to learn from what works and from what does not work and to turn the focus towards the how as an important factor for success. Based on existing approaches, UN Women can develop a standardized methodology for innovation & technology project teams to systematically document solutions' design and implementation, from idea incubation to solution prototyping, testing, piloting and upscaling (when applicable). The methodology should also include guidance on how to distil, analyze, apply and share the knowledge. Considering the overlaps with recommendation #3 and as the knowledge production will happen hand in hand with solution design and implementation, UN Women's response actions to recommendation #5 will be integrated within those included in recommendation #3. It is important to note that these efforts should not happen in isolation, but rather as part of broader organizational efforts around UN Women systems, data, knowledge and evidence management for better results and learning. In that sense, the response to this recommendation goes well beyond the Innovation Facility and should involve other parts of the organization working in those areas.	Accepted

KEY ACTION	TIME FRAME	RESPONSIBLE PARTY FOR IMPLEMENTATION	STATUS	COMMENTS

[REFER TO ACTIONS #7, 8 AND 9]				

RECOMMENDATION 6
UN Women should decide on the best structure to support innovation, match it with appropriate systems (policy, procedures, measurement frameworks) and embrace a culture of innovation. This decision can be informed by the availability of human resources and evidence from the current instances of working arrangements that support innovation.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE	SELECT ONE OF THE BELOW
This is accepted and should form a central pillar of any future innovation strategy/framework. Please refer also to Key Action #1 under Recommendation #1 for actions to be taken to introduce an organizational structure to support the appropriate role for innovation & technology in the organization.	Accepted

KEY ACTION	TIME FRAME	RESPONSIBLE PARTY FOR IMPLEMENTATION	STATUS	COMMENTS
10. Develop a paper presenting alternative operating and staffing models for the long term to ensure full embracement of innovation, building on existing capabilities, learning from best practices and identifying areas for capacity development/new capacities	Q2-Q3 2023	PPID/R & D Innovation & Technology Team Change Management	Not initiated	The R & D Innovation team will explore options for alternative operating and staffing structures for innovation & technology (incl. networked and distributed models) based on best practices from other organizations, in order to embrace a culture of innovation, maximize organizational talents, facilitate learning, effectively respond to the needs in the field and creating efficiencies. The options paper will assess existing expertise on technology and innovation and other relevant areas of work. It will identify priority areas where there is a need to develop capabilities and/or bring in new ones. Contingent on sufficient resources, UN Women will implement the preferred model(s) by adjusting the existing structure and/or establishing new one(s).