



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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EVALUATION OF UN WOMEN CRISIS RESPONSE IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC



Background

Recent trends show that crises are becoming more frequent and of a more protracted nature, causing vulnerabilities to reinforce one another and create multiple or compounded crises. Asia and the Pacific remains the world's most disaster-prone region. Within this cascading and multiple crisis context, there is evidence that women and girls are more likely to disproportionately experience negative impacts. Gender inequality heightens exposure to risk and increases vulnerability, reinforcing barriers affecting women's ability to prevent and respond to crisis, including COVID-19.

The multidimensional nature of the social and economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic brought to the forefront different types of challenges that were not experienced by international organizations responding to climate-induced disasters or even in other complex emergency situations in the past. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a "new normal" to emerge, affecting the way social interaction and workplace functions across the globe. The COVID-19 pandemic and the compounded crises experienced in the past couple of adaptive, recognizing the dynamic nature of crises and how they can affect the core functioning of an organization. This has resulted in heightened awareness of the need for international organizations such as UN Women to be ready to respond in times of compounded

crises, not only through their humanitarian units but also at an organization-wide level.

Overview of the evaluation

The purpose of this independent evaluation was to conduct a forward-looking assessment to provide information for decision-making and learning. It aims to ultimately strengthen UN Women's ability to respond effectively when confronted with a crisis and to develop high quality, replicable interventions that can be tailored to the operating environment. This requires specific guidelines, operating procedures and strategic principles to enable the Entity's offices to respond quickly and consistently to crisis situations. The primary users of this evaluation are the UN Women Regional Office and field offices in Asia and the Pacific, Headquarters units including the Humanitarian Unit, and UN Women donors and partners in crisis response.

The objectives of this evaluation were to:

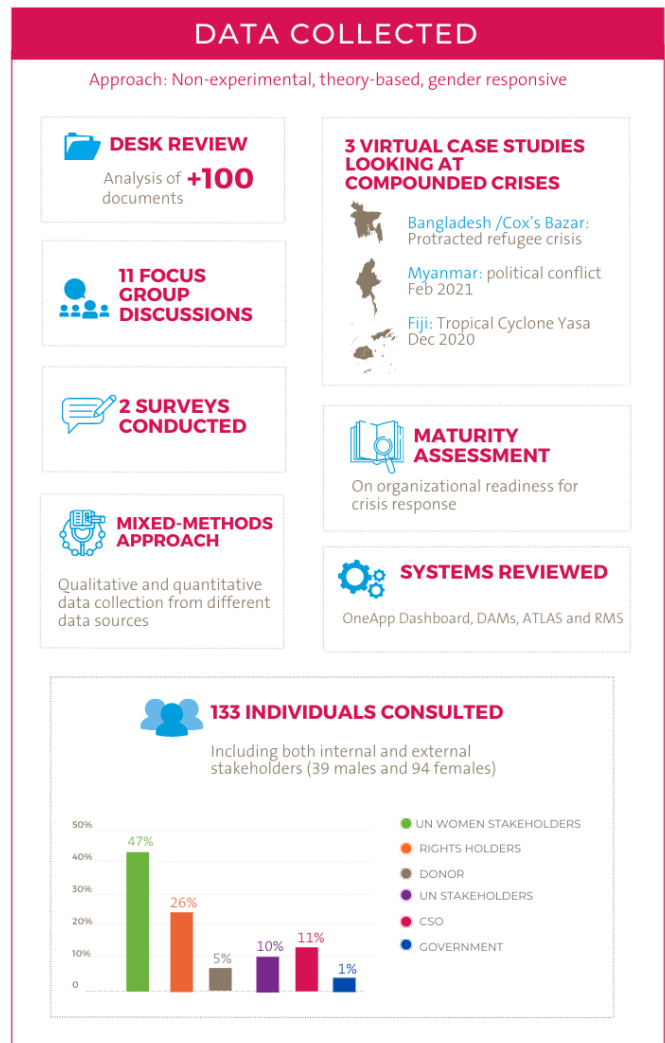
1. Document the basic components of organizational readiness for effective response to crisis based on international standards and in line with key sister agencies compared with

UN Women policies, procedures and practice.

2. Assess the appropriateness, coherence and effectiveness of UN Women’s contributions towards impact, sustainability, connectedness, and organizational efficiency in responding to crises in three country cases in Asia and the Pacific and at regional level.
3. Identify the successes, scope for improvement/gaps and comparative advantages of UN Women’s crisis response and provide action-oriented recommendations to UN Women headquarters, the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific and field presences.

The time frame for the evaluation focused on crises occurring in 2020 or 2021. However, the case studies included a holistic perspective to ensure the pre-existing structures were captured, which required looking further back. The geographical scope is regional, specific to UN Women in Asia and the Pacific. However, the global-level governance, policies and procedures to support regional and field presences were also examined.

UN Women evaluations are gender responsive, meaning that they are participatory, transparent and analyse the underlying barriers and social norms that inhibit progress on realizing women’s rights. The evaluation employed mixed methods of data collection and analysis. The main report provides details on the data collected. The case studies included the Bangladesh Country Office (with a focus on the Cox’s Bazar sub-office), the Fiji Multi-Country Office (with a focus on Fiji) and the Myanmar Country Office. Headquarters and Regional Office support to Country Offices and overall feedback loops during these crises were also be assessed. The Regional Office response to COVID-19 was also looked at in-depth. The methodology explains further the scope of data collection at each level (headquarters, Regional Office, Country Office).



official adoption) and strategy (also in draft) and set of corporate protocols and tools (in process of being developed) that address crisis response services, a clear governance structure and adequate resources (human as well as financial) for crisis response. To enhance efficiency and internal coherence, existing systems and procedures to support crisis response require review and integration of lessons learned through recent field experience.

A clear, coherent approach to crisis response can help to strengthen the credibility of UN Women and accountability, both within the organization and towards affected and at-risk women and girls, as well as the most vulnerable groups, donors and national counterparts.

CONCLUSION 1

UN Women has made significant strides in responding to crises, and its work is relevant to the priorities and needs of women and girls and in line with international agreements. UN Women in Asia and the Pacific has had to repeatedly respond to complex, large-scale crisis from the military coup in Myanmar, COVID-19 crisis in India, Afghanistan, and the Pacific despite the lack of an adopted corporate policy (one is in draft, but not yet submitted for

CONCLUSION 2

There is evidence that a combination of coordination, technical assistance and knowledge generation, capacity-building efforts and inclusive approaches has enhanced the gender equality awareness of crisis responders, as indicated through more gender-responsive plans, frameworks and project proposals in crisis-affected countries in Asia and the Pacific.

UN Women has successfully established its added value within crisis response by taking up leadership positions of coordination mechanisms to enhance gender responsiveness, despite not always having a clear mandate, dedicated resources or corporate tools. UN Women's success within the coordination space has contributed to an enabling environment for UN Women to engage in crisis response.

There is evidence that the integration of gender is fundamental to ensuring more effective services that better serve the immediate and long-term needs of women and girls and vulnerable groups experiencing crisis. However, broader accountability amongst humanitarian actors for reporting on the integration of gender perspectives in the implementation of crisis interventions is limited. This means that there is limited follow-through on how gender-responsive plans translate into gender-responsive results. Moving forward, UN Women can fill a niche by leveraging coordination mechanisms to advocate for accountability and provide technical support to the development of common indicators and monitoring systems beyond sex and age disaggregated data (e.g., including marginalized groups and qualitative data). The adoption of a coordination framework applicable to crisis response could help to better articulate how coordination actions translate to results.



CONCLUSION

3

There is no question that more needs to be done to ensure that crisis response efforts prioritize the needs and priorities of women and girls and ensure inclusive crisis response efforts with persons with disabilities and diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Sex Characteristics. Presently, UN Women's added value lies within its ability to stretch across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus. Although UN Women's operational efforts are not yet recognized as its comparative advantage, the establishment of an organizational governance, policy and procedures for crisis response could encourage donors to fund UN Women and provide the necessary resources to strengthen overall capacity. A clearly articulated corporate-level menu of services for sudden onset or protracted crisis response that can be adapted to country-level context, recognizing existing capacities (both internal and external, can help UN Women to better position itself amongst partners and realize the added value of the organization in its ability to bridge the humanitarian–development–peace nexus.

More specifically, UN Women's added value in crisis response efforts in Asia and the Pacific includes: (1) normative and advocacy support to national and humanitarian stakeholders both in advance of a crisis and during the immediate aftermath of a crisis; (2) pre-existing relationships and dedicated work with civil society that

facilitates engagement with the most vulnerable groups and enhances potential for more relevant, appropriate and sustainable efforts; (3) strong technical expertise through rapid gender analyses, technical assistance, capacity-building and development and knowledge management, including sharing of tools; and (4) in protracted humanitarian settings, a holistic approach to engaging women in leadership, economic empowerment and education and providing safe spaces where psychosocial counselling and referrals in relation to gender-based violence can be sought.



RECOMMENDATION

1

Headquarters executive and senior management to clearly articulate a commitment to crisis response by accelerating the revision and adoption of a corporate crisis response policy, new and updated procedures and tools, and corresponding (re)allocation of resources and engage UN Women colleagues who are already on the ground responding to crisis in validating these.



RECOMMENDATION

2

Continue advocating for and prioritizing gender in humanitarian action coordination efforts, including technical assistance and knowledge generation, capacity-building efforts and inclusive approaches. Advocate for streamlining the various gender focused mechanisms where possible and strengthen a set of guidance and tools for consistent approaches and enhancing measurement of change through UN Women coordination efforts in crisis response.



RECOMMENDATION

3

Building on UN Women's added value in the humanitarian–development–peace nexus, clearly articulate a menu of services to be delivered during crisis response (both sudden onset and protracted), including criteria for determining office capacities and resources to respond, based on engagement with colleagues already on the ground responding to the crisis to validate. Continue enhancing and socializing corporate tools to systematize crisis response within the organization and enhance monitoring so that it can help tell the impact story and feed into enhanced understanding and credibility of the organization in the crisis response.

Lessons learned

The evaluation team identified the following lessons that have significance beyond UN Women:

1

It takes commitment and action from the top levels of an organization to clearly articulate a way forward and an associated strategy and thereby commit the necessary resources. While a combination of bottom-up and top-down approaches can influence strategy, without action from senior leadership and clear guidance from the highest level of an organization, efforts may be stalled or lack coherence. In addition, credibility may be lost. Strategic engagement from the top levels of an organization can also provide an enabling environment and mobilize support for an effective response on the ground.

2

Organizations must build into their DNA and practice mechanisms that facilitate quick action and adaptive learning to ensure preparedness and effective action, while mitigating inherent risks to crisis management and ensuring accountability for results. In an era of intense climate-induced disasters, conflict and movement of internally displaced persons compounded with health crises, and recognizing the extended duration of crises and emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations cannot stand idly by. Ensuring adequate capacities and investment in preparedness and response systems to bring an organization up to speed is necessary.

3

Lack of a clear documented organizational vision, strategy, policy, accountability, roles of the policy owner and other key contributors, risk management and escalation of exceptions, impacts the efficiency of crisis management and may negatively impact the quality of results. Protocols for different levels of emergency should be in place to ensure rapid mobilization of human and other resources.

4

There is a need for a single point of accountability corporately to effectively implement organizational policies, with sufficient authority to hold other managers accountable. This will ensure effective and efficient flows and protocols in managing crisis.

5

In a time of information overload and considering the need to respond rapidly, a clearly defined and communicated menu of services can facilitate rapid engagement of partners and donors, while ensuring the technical quality and value for money of those services. There is an expectation among crisis response and humanitarian stakeholders, donors and governments that organizations intending to respond can rapidly and clearly articulate a menu of services that can be easily adapted to crisis contexts.

6

An integrated approach to programme design, planning, monitoring, reporting and evaluation across the humanitarian–peace–development nexus may support adaptive learning on how the response influences how individuals build back their lives and prepare for future crises. This is a niche for organizations that have efforts across the nexus, but more strategizing and engagement with donors on how to do this in a practical manner is needed.

7

It is not enough to invite civil society organizations to participate in coordination mechanisms; it is rather facilitating their active engagement through co-leadership, strengthening their capacities and co-creation of analyses and tools and sharing of experience that will have the most mutual benefits and support localization.

8

The proliferation of coordination mechanisms dedicated to gender may have a deleterious effect on the motivation and engagement of crisis responders, resulting in “gender fatigue”. There is a need to identify means for streamlining coordination mechanisms within the gender space and ensuring gender expertise within and across sectors and the humanitarian–development–peace nexus.
