



# COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION

# NEPAL

Synthesis Report



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report and the overall evaluation process were informed by the participation of more than 201 stakeholders from across stakeholder groups. Without the support and active participation of all individuals involved in the consultation process, this report would not have been possible.

The evaluation team comprised four team members: Sabrina Evangelista, Regional Evaluation Specialist for the Asia and the Pacific region, led the evaluation; other team members included Kirsty Milward, Evaluation Consultant; Mahima Basnet, Evaluation Research Intern; and Rita Khatiwada, National Consultant.

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# COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION

# NEPAL



**Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS)**  
**UN WOMEN**

New York, December 2022



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# ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<b>CBS</b>	Central Bureau of Statistics
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
<b>CPE</b>	Country Portfolio Evaluation
<b>CREA</b>	Creating Resources for Empowerment and Action
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization
<b>FCDO</b>	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (formerly Department of International Development [DFID])
<b>GiHA</b>	Gender in Humanitarian Action
<b>HIV/AIDS</b>	Human Immunodeficiency Virus, Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
<b>IDPG</b>	International Development Partners Group
<b>IEAS</b>	UN Women Independent Evaluation Service and Audit Services
<b>IES</b>	UN Women Independent Evaluation
<b>IFAD</b>	International Fund for Agricultural Development
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>JP RWEE</b>	Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards Rural Women's Economic Empowerment
<b>LGBTQI+</b>	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex
<b>MPTF</b>	Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office
<b>NAP II</b>	second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organization
<b>OCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>OECD/DAC</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/Development Assistance Committee
<b>PSEA</b>	protection against sexual exploitation and abuse
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>SERF</b>	Socioeconomic Response and Recovery Framework

<b>SOGIESC</b>	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identities and Expressions, and Sex Characteristics
<b>SWAP</b>	United Nations System-Wide Action Plan
<b>UNAIDS</b>	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
<b>UNCDF</b>	United Nations Capital Development Fund
<b>UNCT</b>	United Nations Country Team
<b>UNDAF</b>	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UN-Habitat</b>	United Nations Human Settlement Programme
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNIFEM</b>	United Nations Development Fund for Women
<b>UNODA/ RCPD</b>	United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs/United Nations Regional Office for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific
<b>UNODC</b>	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
<b>UNSDCF</b>	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
<b>UN Women</b>	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organization
<b>OCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION NEPAL

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*This report presents the main evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Country Portfolio Evaluation (CPE) of the UN Women Nepal Country Office conducted between January and August 2022. A CPE is a systematic assessment of the normative, coordination and operational aspects of UN Women's contribution to development results relating to gender equality and women's empowerment at the country level.*

## PURPOSE

The purpose of the CPE was to provide an independent and systematic assessment of UN Women's contribution to development results with respect to gender equality at the country level, to feed into learning on what strategies work well and what areas need strengthening over the course of the Nepal Country Office's Strategic Note 2018–2022. A secondary purpose was to identify the comparative advantages of UN Women in Nepal and support future decision-making for the Country Office's strategy. Given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this evaluation captured how UN Women is responding to the crisis and has analysed how UN Women can best support socioeconomic efforts in the country in the future.

## INTENDED AUDIENCE

The primary intended users of this evaluation are the UN Women Nepal Country Office and its key stakeholders, including the Government, civil society organizations (CSOs), development partners, other United Nations agencies, the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific and UN Women headquarters, including the Senior Management Team and the Independent Evaluation Service (IES). The United Nations Country Team (UNCT) Nepal may also use the findings of this evaluation as key input to its new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF).

## OBJECTIVES

The evaluation's objectives were to:

1. Assess effectiveness and organizational efficiency in progressing towards the achievement of results in gender equality and the empowerment of women.
2. Assess the relevance and coherence of UN Women's programme vis-à-vis the United Nations system, UN Women's value added, and contributions to the outcomes of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2018–2022.
3. Analyse how a human rights approach and gender equality and disability inclusion principles are integrated in the design and implementation of UN Women's work in Nepal and contribute to transformative change and the sustainability of efforts.
4. Provide lessons learned and actionable recommendations to support UN Women's strategic positioning in the future.

### PRIMARY INTENDED USES

- **Support decision-making** regarding the development of the next Strategic Note.
- **Ensure accountability** for the development effectiveness of the existing Strategic Note in terms of UN Women's contribution to gender equality and women's empowerment.
- **Facilitate learning** on effective, promising and innovative strategies and practices.
- **Support capacity development** and mobilization of national stakeholders to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women.

## METHODS

This CPE employed a non-experimental, theory-based, gender-responsive approach. In consultation with the Country Office, a reconstructed theory of change was developed and used as the basis for contribution analysis. Evaluation questions were developed using the theory of change and assessed against the criteria of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD/DAC), comprising relevance, coherence, effectiveness, sustainability, gender equality and human rights and organizational efficiency. UN Women evaluations are gender-responsive and apply the key principles of a human rights-based approach: they are inclusive, participatory and transparent; ensure fair power relations; and analyse the underlying structural barriers and sociocultural norms that impede the realization of women's rights. Multiple sources of data were obtained, and 201 stakeholders from across stakeholder groups were consulted (161 women, 39 men, 1 transgender woman).

The CPE followed UN Women procedures to ensure high-quality evaluation processes and products and ethical conduct as outlined in 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.

## BACKGROUND ON UN WOMEN IN NEPAL

Nepal ranks 142 of 189 countries in the Human Development Index published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)<sup>1</sup> and 110 of 162 countries on the Gender Inequality Index. Nepal is a federal state consisting of seven provinces, 77 districts and 753 local levels. The 2015 Constitution, along with the Fifteenth National Development Plan and the National Gender Equality Policy of 2021, include provisions for gender equality. The National Gender Equality Policy focuses on removing discriminatory barriers to the socioeconomic development of women, children and adolescent girls; ending gender-based violence; adopting a gender-responsive governance system; and achieving the economic empowerment of women.

Despite changes at the policy level, women in general across Nepal have a weaker role in decision-making within families and communities and less control over resources. Their physical movement is often restricted in comparison with men. Even among women, differences in position within the family affect roles, responsibilities and decision-making opportunities.<sup>2</sup> While the constitution of Nepal provides rights to sexual and gender minority citizens, political advances have not yet been fully realized. Persons of diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identities and Expressions, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) experience discrimination and violence in numerous aspects of their life.<sup>3</sup> The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an increase in intimate partner violence, domestic violence and gender-based violence. The pandemic also highlighted and intensified discrimination based on gender, sexuality, disability, caste, ethnicity and economic status across intersecting identities, significantly eroding the gains made on gender equality and women's empowerment in Nepal.

The UN Women Nepal Country Office was established in 2012 and received full delegation of authority in 2013.<sup>4</sup> The Strategic Note is the main planning tool for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment through UN Women's support to normative, coordination and operational work and is designed to align with UN Women's Global Strategic Plan, in addition to United Nations country-level outcomes as defined in the UNDAF 2018–2022 and national priorities for development, gender equality and women's empowerment. The Strategic Note is aligned with and seeks to contribute to Nepal's national priorities as described in its Fourteenth and Fifteenth Three-year Periodic Plans, i.e. its commitments to gender equality, the needs of women's organizations and the principle of leaving no one behind. The Country Office's programme comprised four outcome areas in the Strategic Note 2018–2022 cycle with resources totaling US\$ 16 million. The Country Office focused on two Global Strategic Plan Outcome areas: Women's Political Empowerment, with a budget of US\$ 5.8 million; and Women's Economic Empowerment, with a budget of US\$ 6.3 million.

<sup>1</sup> UNDP. Human Development Report.. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/latest-human-development-index-ranking>

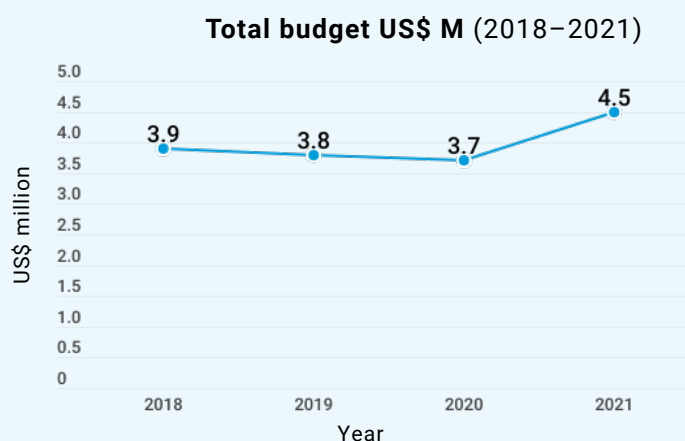
<sup>2</sup> M. Lama and O. Gurung (2012). Social Inclusion Survey, Caste, Ethnic and Gender Dimensions of Socio-Economic Development, Governance, and Social Solidarity. Kathmandu: Central Department of Sociology/Anthropology, Tribhuvan University, p. 167.

<sup>3</sup> USAID, UNICEF, UNDP (2014). Being LGBT in Asia: Nepal Country Report: A Participatory Review and Analysis of the Legal and Social Environment [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1861/Being\\_LGBT\\_in\\_Asia\\_Nepal\\_Country\\_Report.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1861/Being_LGBT_in_Asia_Nepal_Country_Report.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> <https://un.org/np/agency/un-women>.



**KEY FIGURES ON UN WOMEN IN NEPAL (2018-MARCH, 2022) AND DATA COLLECTED FOR THE EVALUATION**



**Thematic areas total budget US\$**



<b>130</b> Individuals Interviewed	<b>100+</b> Documents reviewed	<b>7</b> Focus group discussions	<b>3</b> Case studies	<b>2</b> Surveys conducted
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**KEY FINDINGS, LESSONS LEARNED, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

UN Women Nepal has implemented its Strategic Note 2018–2022 in unprecedented times, recognizing the dynamic context, with the federalization process of the Government of Nepal, political instability and the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the Nepal Country Office has emerged as a leader within this context and has built a strong and credible voice in Nepal in support of gender equality, social inclusion and women’s empowerment. The Country Office’s value added is the technical and advocacy support provided to development partners in their work to articulate how to implement the gender equality and social inclusion agenda in Nepal. By having a clear intent in its strategies and investment in its personnel to be able to embody and spread its messages, the Country Office has built expertise in operationalizing intersectional approaches to programming for gender equality and social inclusion.

The Country Office has used various approaches to increase its ability to reach the most marginalized groups; for example, overall targeting of focus provinces and districts/local government units with higher concentrations of some types of marginalized groups, such as Dalits; using a core strategy of creating partnerships with CSOs with strong reach at grassroots level, including CSOs with an explicit and singular focus on particular marginalized groups, such as disabled persons’ organizations, the Feminist Dalit Organization and LGBTQI+ groups/

networks; and working with organizations representing marginalized groups to strengthen a gender perspective within the group, emphasizing the specific issues facing women, and their inclusion in events, leadership and analysis undertaken by the organization.

A key lesson learned was that convening and listening to voices across the spectrum of different stakeholders is essential for an effective and relevant response during times of crisis. When a solid understanding of the target population and challenges in reaching them can be integrated, relief response can reap real long-term benefits. Another key lesson was that embedding a scale-up strategy or plan from the design stage can provide clear avenues for sustainability. Documenting models so that results can be easily shared with other parties for further scale-up across the federal structure is important. There is an opportunity for the Country Office to continue to “walk the talk” with respect to embodying feminist principles, share critical lessons learned and be a source of inspiration for other UN Women offices. Its next five-year Strategic Note period will be critical for sustaining and deepening gains and scaling up through knowledge-sharing and partnership. The new UNSDCF presents a critical opportunity to ensure that gender equality and social inclusion remain central to the efforts through a coherent and relevant United Nations system approach.

## CONCLUSION 1

The UN Women Nepal Country Office has adopted a relevant framework and holistic strategies for addressing gender-based discrimination due to the persistence of societal structures, beliefs, values and harmful practices. The office's thematic areas of focus remain highly relevant; however, they require more concerted efforts at provincial and local levels to maintain relevance within the context of federalization. To maintain its strong positioning, during implementation of the new UNSDCF, the Country Office must find ways of translating its advocacy into concrete technical advice and tools for partners across the UNSDCF areas of focus.

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** The new Strategic Note should define how UN Women Nepal will continue to strengthen its nested approach to supporting the federalization process in partnership with the UN system, while maintaining and strengthening the gender equality, social inclusion and intersectionality focus in practical terms. The Country Office should engage with UN Women partners in defining the next Strategic Note and continue to develop products that help communicate UN Women's vision to partners.

## CONCLUSION 2

UN Women Nepal has demonstrated how investment in coordination mechanisms and joint programmes can scale up advocacy and programming efforts for gender equality and women's empowerment. By ensuring that the voices of marginalized persons were heard in these platforms, UN Women demonstrated its value added in linking government and development partners with the reality on the ground. This not only translated into awareness but also concrete actions, as exemplified through the COVID-19 pandemic response.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** Continue proactive engagement with UN and development partners to further leadership and advocacy for gender equality and social inclusion in practical ways through key platforms. In line with recommendations from the draft Nepal UNDAF evaluation, to enhance coherence, UN Women should work with its UN system partners to strengthen joint programme management, while ensuring equal visibility of each agency within these efforts.

## CONCLUSION 3

UN Women Nepal has made a substantial contribution to gender equality and social inclusion in Nepal through its support to partners in gender-responsive policy development and programming in the context of federalization and the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes using a focused and nested approach to ensure synergy of efforts, at different levels (from individual to an enabling environment) and with a strong partnership approach. At local and provincial levels, results have been achieved through joint programmes or CSO programme partners, particularly those with strong grassroots links, and an increasing focus on organizations run by as well as for marginalized groups.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** Continue building an integrated approach to implementation of UN Women's triple mandate, layering efforts across different thematic areas and focusing on priority provinces to avoid being overextended while aiming to scale up efforts in cooperation with the Government, the United Nations system and development partners. Clearly communicate to partners UN Women models with potential for scale-up and value added within the different thematic areas.

## CONCLUSION 4

UN Women Nepal has exemplified feminist principles and its dedication to gender equality, diversity and social inclusion through a multi-faceted and comprehensive approach. By having a clear intent in its strategies and investing in its personnel to enable them to embody and spread its messages, the Nepal Country Office has built expertise in operationalizing intersectional approaches to programming for gender equality and social inclusion. By working with civil society led by and for marginalized and excluded groups, supporting and convening its partners to reach and listen to marginalized and excluded groups, UN Women Nepal has built capacity and potential for sustainability. This experience offers valuable learning to others on the principle of leaving no one behind while also providing insight into how methods could be further fine-tuned.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** Continue to evolve and strengthen the Country Office's focus on diversity and inclusion both internally and externally, including by regularly disaggregating all monitoring data by social group, and by periodically revisiting the discussion on who are the most marginalized groups and the rationale for targeting specific groups. In collaboration with sister agencies, draw on the detailed experience of programme partners to develop guidance tools on how to operationalize an intersectional approach.

## ORGANIZATIONAL EFFICIENCY

### CONCLUSION 5

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, adaptive management helped to respond to the dynamic operational environment. This has required directly supporting personnel and partners to learn in real time and adapt approaches accordingly. The Country Office has taken several actions to support adaptive management. For example, flexible funding received through the Strategic Note has allowed for a more adaptive and flexible use of funding. In addition, the internal focus on Country Office personnel has helped to build capacities and confidence and fostered personnel's adaptability to take on different roles as needed. Consistent evaluations and exploration of innovative means to measure social norms change has also enabled real-time learning and adaptation. The Country Office should continue to advocate for Strategic Note funding with a more diverse range of donors to reduce dependency on one donor. Although the Country Office is aware of the risk, the risk mitigation strategy contained in the resource mobilization strategy could address this issue more robustly, e.g. by collecting systematic evidence on the benefits of Strategic Note funding for dissemination to key like-minded donors.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** Document and share lessons learned through investing in adaptive management and innovation to facilitate learning, both internally with other UN Women offices and externally with partners as a resource mobilization tool. Continue advocating for Strategic Note and joint programme funding and explore opportunities for other donors to engage in Strategic Note funding.

**RECOMMENDATION 6:** Share the internal capacity-building approach internally, continue investing in the capacities of personnel and explore pathways for retention and career development within UN Women.

**RECOMMENDATION 7:** Continue investing in evaluation as a means to provide a space for reflection, learning and accountability. Monitoring could be strengthened through dedicated capacity-building of CSOs and the establishment of a third-party monitoring mechanism to ensure coverage in the field and during crises.

### LESSONS LEARNED



To reach the most marginalized groups, it is key for organizations to provide avenues for **engaging grassroots organizations** in meaningful ways to allow for capacity-building and co-creation of project design.



During times of crisis, **convening and listening to voices across the spectrum** of different stakeholders is essential for an effective and relevant response.



**Identifying synergies**, geographical focus and layering efforts maximizes progress.



**Embedding a scale-up strategy** or plan at the initial design stage of a project can provide clear avenues for sustainability.



**Diversity and inclusion** must start internally to support work externally.



**Investing internally** can have dividends for organizational credibility.



**Unearmarked funding** (such as Strategic Note funding) has the potential to support adaptive management and provide space for innovation.



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# INTRODUCTION

**UN  
WOMEN**  
United Nations Entity for Gender Equality  
and the Empowerment of Women

## 1. NEPAL COUNTRY CONTEXT

Nepal ranks 142 of 189 countries in the Human Development Index published by UNDP,<sup>5</sup> and 110 of 162 on the Gender Inequality Index. Nepal is a federal state consisting of seven provinces, 77 districts and 753 local levels. The provinces were formed in accordance with the 2015 Constitution of Nepal. The 2015 Constitution, along with the Fifteenth National Development Plan and the National Gender Equality Policy of 2021, include provisions for gender equality. The National Gender Equality Policy focuses on removing discriminatory barriers to the socioeconomic development of women, children and adolescent girls; ending gender-based violence; adopting a gender-responsive governance system; and achieving the economic empowerment of women. Despite delays in transitional justice processes, Nepal has undergone a profound reform of its legal system. The Criminal and Civil Codes, together with the adoption of 16 bills of Fundamental Rights,<sup>6</sup> contain numerous provisions protecting the rights of women and excluded groups. The endorsement and implementation of the second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (NAP II) on United Nations Security Council resolutions 1325, 1820 and subsequent resolutions were delayed due to the recent change in the federal Government in September 2021. The NAP II draft has been submitted to the cabinet by the Ministry of Home Affairs for the second time and awaits approval.

Despite these historical changes at policy level, in general women across Nepal have a weaker role in decision-making within the family and community and less control over resources. Often, women's physical movements are restricted in comparison with men's. Even among women, differences in position within the family affect roles, responsibilities and decision-making opportunities.<sup>7</sup> While the constitution provides rights to sexual and gender minority citizens, political advances have not yet fully materialized, and persons of diverse SOGIESC experience discrimination and violence in numerous aspects of their life.<sup>8</sup>

Approximately 22 per cent of women aged 15 to 49 in Nepal have experienced physical violence since the age of 15. The percentage of ever-married women who have experienced spousal physical, sexual or emotional violence is 26 per cent. Of the women who have experienced any type of physical or sexual violence, 66 per cent have not sought any help or talked about their experience with anyone.<sup>9</sup> Women from marginalized groups, including women in the entertainment sector, gender and sexual minorities, wives of migrant workers, displaced women and adolescent girls, were identified to be the most affected.<sup>10</sup> The pandemic significantly eroded the significant gains made in gender equality and women's empowerment in Nepal. For example, maternal deaths have increased, and there is a lack of or delayed access to services. The care burden on women and girls, as well as unpaid care work, has increased. Statistics indicate that gender-based violence has risen.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, discriminatory practices based on social and cultural beliefs prevent women's access to resources.

In line with the recommendation from the United Nations Committee for Development Policy, the General Assembly has adopted the resolution to graduate Nepal from the Least Developed Country category after an extended period of five years to enable post COVID-19 recovery and implement policies and strategies to reverse the economic and social damage incurred by pandemic.<sup>12</sup> The Government of Nepal has adopted the Green, Resilient and Inclusive Development Framework – Nepal Roadmap for inclusive and sustainable socioeconomic recovery in the aftermath of COVID-19 to keep up with and meet the conditions for graduation from Least Developed Country status.

<sup>5</sup> UNDP. Human Development Report. Latest Human Development Index ranking. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/latest-human-development-index-ranking>

<sup>6</sup> The 16 bills passed by the Parliament and authenticated by the President on 17 September 2018 include: (1) Right to Safe Motherhood and Reproductive Health Bill, (2) Compulsory and Free Education Bill, (3) Right to Employment Bill, (4) Right to Food and Food Security Bill, (5) Right to Housing Bill, (6) Public Health Service Bill, (7) Protection of Victims of Crime Bill, (8) Individual Privacy Bill, (9) Disability Rights Act amendment Bill, (10) Children Act amendment Bill, (11) Land Act amendment Bill, (12) Environment Protection Act amendment Bill, (13) Consumer Protection Act amendment Bill, (14) Public Security Act amendment Bill, (15) Social Security Bill and (16) Caste Based Discrimination and Untouchability Act amendment Bill.

<sup>7</sup> M. Lama and O. Gurung. 2012. Social Inclusion Survey, Caste, Ethnic and Gender Dimensions of Socio-Economic Development, Governance, and Social Solidarity. Kathmandu: Central Department of Sociology/Anthropology, Tribhuvan University. p. 167

<sup>8</sup> USAID, UNICEF, UNDP (2014). Being LGBT in Asia: Nepal Country Report: A Participatory Review and Analysis of the Legal and Social Environment for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Persons and Civil Society, available at: [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1861/Being\\_LGBT\\_in\\_Asia\\_Nepal\\_Country\\_Report.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1861/Being_LGBT_in_Asia_Nepal_Country_Report.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Health, Nepal. 2016. Nepal Demographic and Health Survey. Kathmandu. p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> Care Nepal (2020). Rapid Gender Analysis Report on COVID-19 Nepal, Available at: <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2020/11/np-rapid-gender-analysis-on-covid-19-nepal-2020-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5043>

<sup>11</sup> Care Nepal (2020). Rapid Gender Analysis Report on COVID-19 Nepal. Available at: <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2020/11/np-rapid-gender-analysis-on-covid-19-nepal-2020-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5043>

<sup>12</sup> UN General Assembly, 24 November 2021: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/2021/graduation-of-bangladesh-lao-peoples-democratic-republic-and-nepal-from-the-ldc-category/>

## 2. UN WOMEN IN NEPAL

### Background

The Country Office was established in 2012 and received full delegation of authority in 2013.<sup>13</sup> The Strategic Note is the main planning tool for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment through UN Women's support to normative, coordination and operational work and is designed to align with UN Women's Global Strategic Plan, in addition to United Nations country-level outcomes and national priorities for development, gender equality and women's empowerment.

### Strategic Note 2018–2022

The Country Office programme comprises five<sup>14</sup> outcome areas in the Strategic Note 2018–2022 cycle. The Strategic Note is aligned with and seeks to contribute to national priorities as described in Nepal's Fourteenth and Fifteenth Three Year Periodic Plans, including its commitments to gender equality, the needs of women's organizations, UNDAF 2018–2022 and the principle of leaving no one behind.

### Normative and coordination efforts

UN Women is a member of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Nepal.<sup>15</sup> The UNDAF 2018–2022 coordinates the work of the UNCT – at the time of its formulation the total indicative budget was US\$ 643 million, with UN Women's contribution approximately 1.1 per cent of the total.<sup>16</sup> UN Women co-chairs the Gender Theme Group – Leave No One Behind/Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Working Group, the Protection Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Working Group, the UNDAF Outcome 4 Working Group, and the International Development Partners Group (IDPG) Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Working Group. UN Women chairs the Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Task Team. It also has relationships with UNDP, UNESCO, IOM, the Central Emergency Response Fund of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) Sustainable Development Goals Fund as direct partners in implementing the Strategic Note.

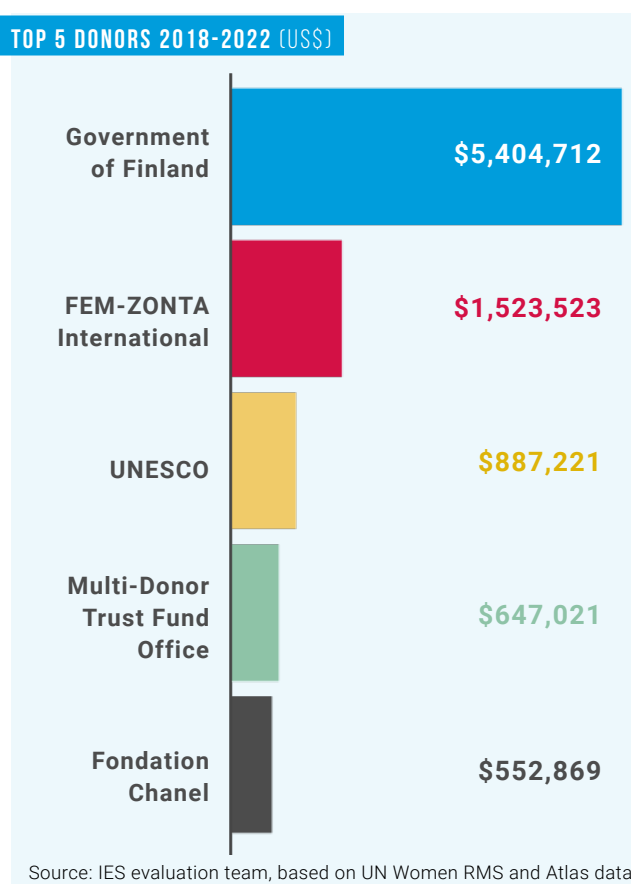
### Financial and human resources

The total available resources of the Nepal Country office for 2018–2021 was US\$ 16 million. The actual annual budget reached a high of US\$ 4.5 million in 2021. At present, the Country Office is staffed by 11 fixed-term positions.

Key donors during the Strategic Note period included the Government of Finland, ZONTA International, UNESCO, IOM, UNDP, the MPTF Office, Fondation Chanel, the Australia National Committee, the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and the Government of Sweden. UN Women Nepal is unique in that its primary donor funds the entire Strategic Note rather than individual projects.

### Key partners

A comprehensive human-rights based stakeholder analysis is presented in the inception report. The Country Office worked with a diverse range of local and international partners, including United Nations partners, donors, the Government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and CSOs, and was active in engaging groups of Muslim women, Dalit Women, LGBTIQ+, single women, Madhesi women, rural women, home-based workers, youth and adolescent girls, conflict survivors, women engaged in sex work, women with disabilities, survivors of human trafficking, women living with HIV/AIDS and returnee migrant women.



<sup>13</sup> <https://un.org.np/agency/un-women>

<sup>14</sup> Three outcome areas (1.2, 1.3 and 1.4) related to the global flagship programme "Women Count" were deactivated after the end of the programme in 2020.

<sup>15</sup> The UNCT includes 18 resident agencies and four non-resident agencies.

<sup>16</sup> Total indicative budget for the UNDAF period (2018–2022) is US\$ 643,309,106. Of this, the indicative budget for UN Women reported in the UNDAF was US\$ 7,500,000. See [UNDAF for Nepal 2018-2022 | United Nations in Nepal](#)

**FIGURE 1: NEPAL COUNTRY OFFICE OVERVIEW**

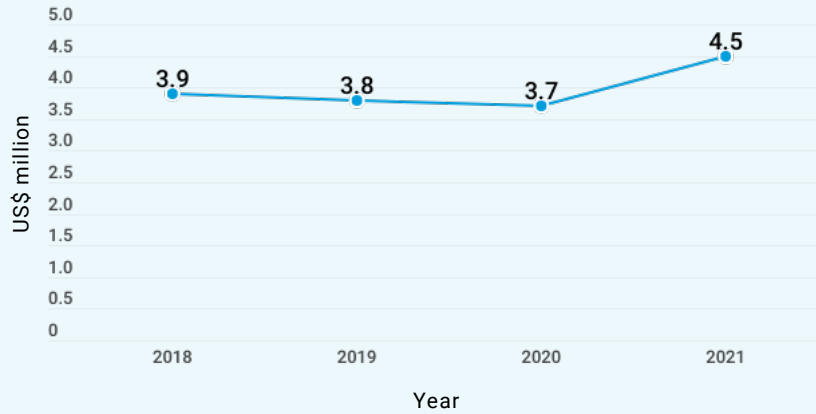
**16 M**

**US\$ total available resources**  
for 2018-2021

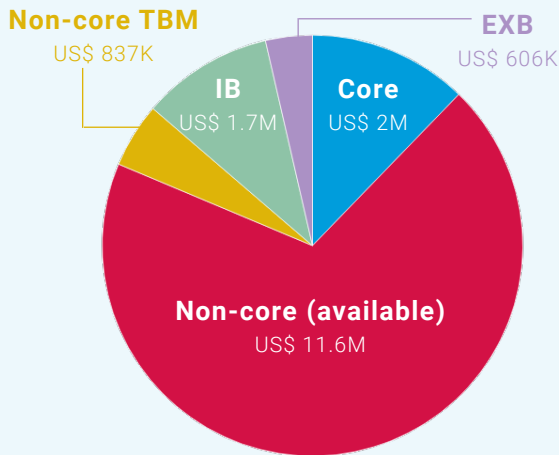
**49**

**Total Country Office Workforce** including 11 fixed-term positions

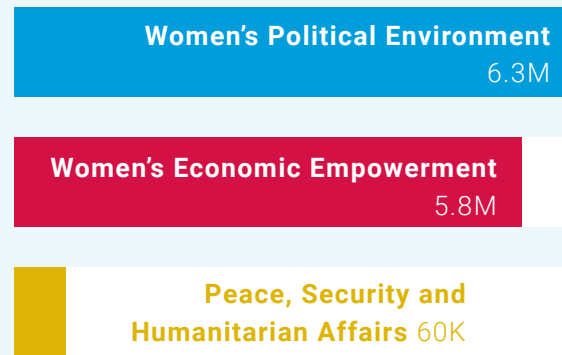
**Total budget US\$ M (2018–2021)**



**Type of funding (2018–2021)**



**Thematic areas total budget US\$ (2018–2021)**



**Highest Investment Areas**

**Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE)**



UN Women Nepal Country Office SN and AWP 2014-2017 Outcome Area 2 (*Women, especially the poorest and most excluded, are economically empowered and benefit from development*) Outcome Area 4 (*Peace and security actions are shaped by women's leadership and participation*)  
**Completed (US \$ 4.4M; Donor - Government of Finland)**

**Governance, Participation in Public Life**



Enhancing Access to Justice for Women in Asia and the Pacific: Bridging the gap between formal and informal systems through women's empowerment in Asia and the Pacific Region  
**Completed (US \$ 916K; Donor - Swedish International Development Cooperation)**

**Women, Peace and Security, Humanitarian Action and Disaster Risk Reduction**



The Future We Want: Creating Sustainable Foundations for Addressing Human Trafficking and Unsafe Migration of Women and Girls in Nepal  
**Completed (US \$ 1M; Donor - Zonta International)**

**Governance, Participation in Public Life, WEE**



UN Women Strategic Note (2018 - 2022)  
**Ongoing (US \$ 4.8M; Donor - Government of Finland)**

(source: IES evaluation team, based on UN Women RMS and Atlas data)

### 3. EVALUATION PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

#### Purpose

IES conducted this CPE to assess UN Women's contribution in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in Nepal over the course of its Strategic Note 2018–2022 to support enhanced accountability for development effectiveness and learning from experience.

The purpose of the CPE was to provide an independent and systematic assessment of the contributions made by UN Women to development results with respect to gender equality at the country level to feed into learning on what strategies work well and what needs strengthening. A secondary purpose was to identify UN Women's comparative advantages in Nepal and support decision-making for the Country Office strategy. Given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this evaluation aimed to capture how UN Women is responding to the crisis and analyse how the organization can best support future efforts in the country.

#### Evaluation scope

UN Women's entire programme of work and integrated mandate assessed, including the organization's contributions in the operational, coordination and normative spheres. The geographical scope of the evaluation included all provinces with Country Office programming, with site visits to Province 2 (Sarlahi District, Siraha District) and Province 7 (Kailali District).

#### Methodology

The CPE employed a non-experimental, theory-based approach.<sup>17</sup> The reconstructed theory of change, which is described under Finding 1, Figure 3, was based on consultation with the Country Office and a desk review. The CPE employed several different methods for data collection, all driven by the key evaluation questions and selected with the aim of providing the most useful information possible to the Country Office. Primary data collection was largely qualitative, with some quantitative data collected (the full matrix is available in Annex 8; sample data collection tools are also included in Annex 9). This included key interviews, UN Women financial and human resource analyses, two surveys, seven focus group discussions and three case studies (on the social inclusion and intersectionality approach, the capacity-building approach, and COVID-19 comprehensive relief, including through a cash-based initiative). Given the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of participatory methods was carefully considered based on the local context, and all health and security guidelines were followed. Methodological limitations are included in Annex 6. UN Women annual reports, donor reports, publications, and evaluations and audits were reviewed.

Due to the prioritization of the case studies, the literature review primarily focused on research areas (see above), grounded in an analysis of the key external factors identified above and how they may affect the realization of women's rights in Nepal. The Gender@Work framework was applied to the Strategic Note to explore the extent to which a gender transformative approach was applied. Areas of work are classified according to where they lie on the Gender@Work Framework,<sup>18</sup> which identifies dimensions of gender equality and underlying strategies for transformative change.

The CPE was tailored to the needs of UN Women and employed a participatory approach that included stakeholder perspectives throughout each phase. The evaluation was also human rights-based and gender-responsive in analysing UN Women's contributions to outcomes by ensuring a focus on underlying social norms and barriers to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment (see Annex 6). This assessment answers the key questions and sub-questions as defined in the evaluation matrix (Annex 8). The evaluation applied the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability) and a human rights and gender equality criterion.

#### Data collection and analysis

Multiple sources of data were obtained: 201 stakeholders from across stakeholder groups were consulted (161 women, 39 men and 1 transgender woman; and 13 people with disabilities were included in this total). Seven focus group discussions were held, one of which focused on people with disabilities. To the extent possible, information was disaggregated according to ethnic group. Two surveys were conducted, a survey of UN Women personnel and a survey of external coordination group members (IDGP GESI, LNOB GESI and GiHA). The personnel survey had a 75 per cent response rate (18 of 24 potential respondents: comprising 13 women, 4 men and 1 transgender woman) and the survey of coordination group members had a 20 per cent response rate (50 of 230 potential respondents comprising 45 women and 5 men). The plan for adhering to ethical guidance was outlined in the inception report and is aligned with the United Nations Evaluation Group Ethical Guidance and WHO guidelines on research with women affected by violence (Annex 6). Stakeholders were provided with information about the purpose and use of the evaluation and assurances about the confidentiality of the information provided. Rights holders were consulted about whether they were in a safe space to speak, and their oral consent was requested in their local language. Stakeholders were given the opportunity to opt out of participation or skip any questions.

<sup>17</sup> A detailed note on the evaluation methodology can be found in Annex 6.

<sup>18</sup> <https://genderatwork.org/analytical-framework/>.



Multiple methods of data collection and analysis were carried out using both primary and secondary data to triangulate evidence, including desk review, quantitative and qualitative analysis (see Annex 6) and by using NVivo software (a qualitative data analysis tool). This was summarized in an evidence map (a snapshot is available in Annex 5).

### Limitations

Overall, the CPE consulted a large and diverse range of stakeholders. Unfortunately, a few key stakeholders did not respond to requests to participate in the evaluation. Local elections may also have impacted responses. Personnel changes, high staff turnover and management change within organizations and governmental institutions during the period under review, was also an issue meaning some stakeholders consulted were new to their positions. To avoid bias, the information obtained through data collection was triangulated and validated with the Country Office and the Evaluation Reference Group. However, generalizations should be avoided.

## 4. EVALUATION GOVERNANCE AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

UN Women evaluations follow mechanisms to ensure high-quality evaluation processes and products in accordance with the UN Women Evaluation Policy and Handbook, and with the United Nations Evaluation Group's established norms and standards. All products are subject to quality review by the IEAS Director, the Chief of Evaluation, a peer reviewer, the Evaluation Reference Group and the Evaluation Management Group. The Evaluation Reference Group included UN Women programme staff, government officials, partners, civil society representatives, development partners/donors and UNCT representatives. The Evaluation Reference Group was engaged for its input on inception, data collection, preliminary findings and the draft report. Its feedback was important to ensure the factual accuracy and accurate interpretation of contextual information and to identify gaps in the analysis.

**FIGURE 2: COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION OVERVIEW OF DATA COLLECTED**

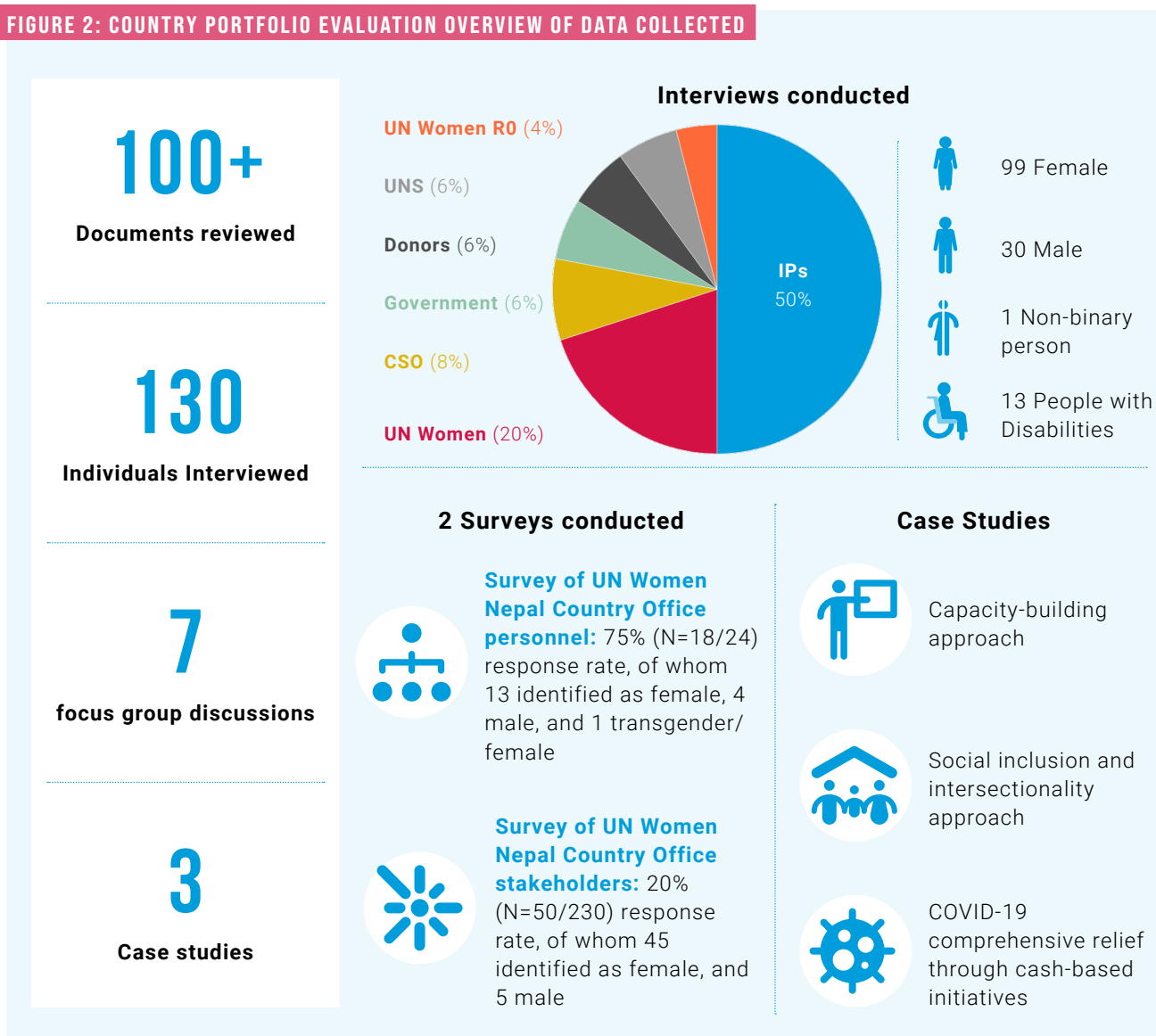




Photo ©UN Women/N. Shrestha

# FINDINGS

## RELEVANCE

*Is UN Women's thematic focus and strategy for implementation of its programmes the most relevant and coherent for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in Nepal considering its value added vis-à-vis other development actors, the ongoing national federalization process, and its response to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic?*

## FINDING 1

**The Country Office's work in Nepal is highly relevant and responsive. In Nepal's fifteenth national development plan, the country recognized the prevalence of gender-based discrimination due to the persistence of societal structures, beliefs, values and harmful practices. The Country Office's value added is its focus on translating the leave no one behind principle into action and its integrated normative support to Nepal on implementation and reporting on international agreements related to gender equality and women's empowerment.**

The Country Office developed key strategy documents, underpinning a feminist approach through the adoption of the Gender@Work Framework, including the Diversity Strategy 2019–2022, the Communication for Development Approach Paper 2019–2022, the Gender Responsive and Inclusive Governance Strategy (2019), the Strategy on Women's Economic Empowerment 2019–2027, the Communication and Advocacy Strategy 2019–2022, the Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence in Nepal 2021–2027 and the Resource Mobilization Strategy 2018–2022.

The Country Office's Strategic Note (2018–2022) is aligned with Nepal's national priorities as described in the Constitution of Nepal (2015), which outlines the country's aim to become an equitable society based on the principles of inclusion, proportionate participation and which calls for an end to discrimination based on sex, caste, geographical region, language or religion.<sup>19</sup> With the promulgation of the Constitution in 2015, Nepal moved from a unitary system to a federal system with three tiers of autonomous government at federal, provincial and local level.

The Country Office's SN is also aligned with Nepal's Fourteenth and Fifteenth Three-year Periodic Plan, UNDAF 2018–2022<sup>20</sup> and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2, 5, 8, 10, 11 and 16. The emphasis on the principle of leaving no one behind is evident from the overarching Strategic Note goal and theory of change (Box 1) and the office's support for implementation of the Planet 50:50 Nepal campaign.

The Country Office's programme portfolio (as shown in the infographic on Nepal Country Office Programme Portfolio, page 17) is spread across four thematic priorities, covering most of the UN Women Strategic Plan 2018–2022 impact areas. However, the Strategic Note prioritizes two thematic areas: Inclusive Governance and Women's Economic Empowerment. As such, programmatic funding was highest under these areas. This is also in line with the guidance provided by the UN Women Programme Division to prioritize two to three thematic areas to ensure the organization is not spreading itself too thinly.<sup>21</sup> In line with Nepal's climate and geologic-induced vulnerability, the humanitarian action area encompasses disaster risk reduction, preparedness and response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

### BOX 1: UN WOMEN COUNTRY OFFICE STRATEGIC NOTE (2018–2022) GOAL AND THEORY OF CHANGE



<sup>19</sup> Constituent Assembly Secretariat, Constitution of Nepal, 2015, Preamble.

<sup>20</sup> Sustainable and Inclusive Growth, Resilience to Climate Change and Disasters, Social Development and Inclusive Governance and Rule of Law.

<sup>21</sup> UN Women Strategic Note Guidance 2018.

The evaluability assessment<sup>22</sup> led by IES highlighted that the headquarters requirement to include three outcomes pertaining to the global programme on gender statistics skewed the emphasis of the Strategic Note towards gender statistics work (when it was rather a smaller element of the approach). However, the programme on gender statistics was discontinued at the midpoint of Strategic Note implementation. The outcome areas were subsequently adjusted accordingly, which better reflected the Country Office's programmatic approach. The evaluation team conducted a survey with relevant stakeholders, which included CSOs, United Nations partners, governmental agencies, bilateral agencies and donors (Annex 4). Overall, respondents were satisfied that the Country Office's programmes aligned with the most pressing needs of women and girls in Nepal and in targeting the causes of gender inequality.<sup>23</sup>

### Integrated normative support to Nepal

In line with UN Women's mandate and the reconstructed Theory of Change, as illustrated in Figure 3 (page 26), the Country Office supports the Government of Nepal's normative work through research, advocacy and technical support. In partnership with the National Women Commission, the Country Office developed a monitoring framework to track implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Concluding Observations (2018) in preparation for the next report due in 2022. The office also produces reports to support advocacy on gender equality and women's empowerment and works with the United Nations system to report on the Universal Periodic Review on Human Rights. The Country Office also contributed to preparation of Beijing+25 through coordination, advocacy and technical support. Overall, most respondents to the stakeholder survey found UN Women's normative work to be effective, including technical support to reporting on international processes; monitoring implementation; supporting gender equality policies at national level; and raising awareness about key normative work.<sup>24</sup>

At federal level, the Country Office contributed to the translation of normative agreements into action, including by providing substantive input to the Fifteenth National Periodic Development Plan (2019/2020–2023/2024). Along with six United Nations agencies, UN Women supported the Ministry of Home Affairs to develop NAP II in line with United Nations Security Council resolutions 1325, 1820 and subsequent resolutions, which the cabinet endorsed in August 2022. UN Women also reported contributing to integrating gender in the Civil and Criminal Codes and the National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategic Plan of Action.

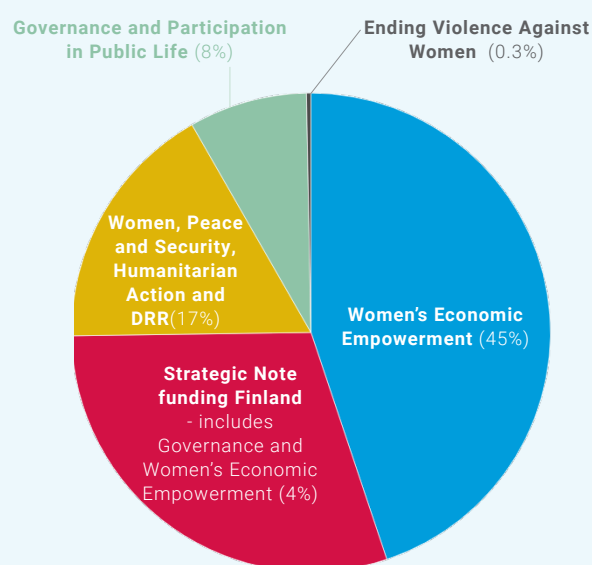
### UN Women Nepal's value added

Both donor and civil society stakeholders acknowledged that the Country Office is an important neutral partner that can work directly with the Government to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. The United Nations partners and government stakeholders consulted and surveyed widely acknowledged the Country Office's technical and advocacy work in translating the leave no one behind principle into action as its value added. The Country Office has consistently advocated for the gender equality and social inclusion policy and has dedicated capacity to servicing the Leave No One Behind/Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Working Group and supported the United Nations system to translate the principle into action.

One key challenge identified by development partner stakeholders was government partnerships. At the central level, it has been challenging for the Country Office to sustain a relationship with the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens given the rapid turnover of government officials. The weak relationship with key government stakeholders may be cause for concern. Stakeholder relationships at all tiers of government are critical for prioritizing gender equality and social inclusion and recognizing the value added of the Country Office within this space. To address this gap, the Country Office is working closely with CSO partners; ensuring the Country Office and funding partners are mentioned during meetings with the Government; and is working on enhancing its communication products.

### FINANCIAL OVERVIEW OF THE NEPAL COUNTRY OFFICE BUDGET

#### AS % OF THEMATIC AREAS (2018–MAY 2022)



Source: Compiled by the IES team from the main interventions undertaken under the Strategic Note

<sup>22</sup> UN Women, Independent Evaluation Service, Evaluability Assessment UN Women Nepal Country Office Strategic Note 2018–2022, 2018.

<sup>23</sup> 62 per cent (N=31/50) of respondents were somewhat satisfied, and 24 per cent (N=12/50) of respondents were very satisfied with the Country Office's alignment to the most pressing needs of women and girls in Nepal. Furthermore, 58.3 per cent (N=29/50) of respondents were somewhat satisfied, and 22.9 per cent (N=11/50) of respondents were very satisfied with Country Office efforts in targeting the causes of gender inequality.

<sup>24</sup> Technical support for discussions in international processes: 39 per cent of respondents found UN Women's work to be somewhat effective, and 19 per cent found it very effective.

**45%**

Women's Economic Empowerment project funds totalled US\$7 million or 45 per cent of the total project funds

**30%**

Strategic Note funding for Governance and Participation in Public Life and Women's Economic Empowerment funded by the Government of Finland totalled US\$4.6 million or 30 per cent of the total project funds.

### Women's Economic Empowerment (45% of Nepal Country Office Strategic Note budget)

UN Women Nepal Country Office Strategic Note and Annual Work Plan 2014–2017, Outcome Area 2 (Women, especially the poorest and most excluded, are economically empowered and benefit from development) and Outcome Area 4 (Peace and security actions are shaped by women's leadership and participation)



Accelerating Progress toward the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women in Nepal: A Joint Pilot Contributing to the Implementation of the Agricultural Development Strategy (JP RWEE Phase I)



Empowering Adolescent Girls and Young Women Through the Provision of Comprehensive Sexuality Education and a Safe Learning Environment in Nepal



Leveraging Women's Leadership and Empowerment in Value Chains–Transforming Social and Economic Norms for Planet 50:50 Nepal



Reorienting Public Finance for SDGs Acceleration and Leveraging Additional Resources in Nepal



### Women, Peace and Security, Humanitarian Action and Disaster Risk Reduction (17%)

The Future We Want: Creating Sustainable Foundations for Addressing Human Trafficking and Unsafe Migration of Women and Girls in Nepal



UN Women Nepal Country Office Annual Work Plan 2017, Outcome areas 2, 4 and 5 – Advancing Resilience and Empowerment (ARE)



Strengthening Urban Preparedness and Earthquake Response in Western Region of Nepal (SUPER)



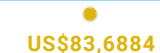
Enhancing the Quality of Preparedness in Nepal: Making Preparedness Pay-Off



Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Disaster Risk Reduction and Preparedness



Preparedness and Response to COVID-19 in Nepal



Gender-sensitive and Socially Inclusive Anticipatory Actions for the Mitigation and Prevention of Flood-related Risks on Women and Other Vulnerable Groups (EAST)



### Governance and Participation in Public Life (8%)

Enhancing Access to Justice for Women in Asia and the Pacific: Bridging the Gap Between Formal and Informal Systems Through Women's Empowerment in Asia and the Pacific Region



United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Multi-Donor Trust Fund (UNPRPD MDTF)



Making Every Woman and Girl Count: Supporting the Monitoring and Implementation of the SDGs Through Better Production and Use of Gender Statistics



### Ending Violence Against Women (0.3%)

UNiTE 16 Days of Activism 2018 – Joint Advocacy Campaign



16 Days of Activism



### Strategic Note funding Finland (30%)

UN Women Nepal Strategic Note funding by the Government of Finland (2018–2022) - includes Governance and Women's Economic Empowerment



## FINDING 2

**The Nepal Country Office maintained the relevance and coherence of its efforts by adapting to the shifting dynamics within the country, including the federalization process and the COVID-19 pandemic, working to its comparative advantage by convening and linking key partners. However, provision of follow-up action and technical guidance on how to translate gender equality and women's empowerment principles into action within this dynamic context will be important in the future.**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Country Office took swift action to chair the GiHA Task Team and implement the comprehensive relief package based on feedback received during GiHA meetings. The GiHA Task Team provided a multi-stakeholder platform for understanding the priorities of marginalized groups during the pandemic and linking them with organizations and government action.

UN Women's contribution to GiHA included raising awareness of the heightened risks of gender-based violence and issuing guidance in response to this. The Country Office supported the production of radio public service announcements on the effects of the pandemic on women, potentially reaching nearly 9 million people according to broadcaster information (as reported by UN Women). The GiHA Task Team supported the development of the gender equality and social inclusion checklist prepared by the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens and UN Women for monitoring quarantine centres. The checklist is a practical tool to assess the safety, dignity and service provisions of quarantine centres for women, girls, children, persons with disabilities, persons with diverse SOGIESC and other vulnerable and excluded groups. Additionally, in 2020 and 2021, the Country Office developed and published 20 Gender Equality Updates<sup>25</sup> to inform gender-responsive response and recovery interventions. Stakeholders consulted noted that GiHA meetings were an important means for dialogue and linking ground-level realities with policymakers. Despite this, some stakeholders wanted UN Women to further use these meetings to monitor progress against commitments made.

In response to Nepal's federalization process, UN Women coordinated with local and provincial governments and provided technical and financial support. Stakeholders consulted noted that the Country Office strategically engaged with newly elected leaders at the local level, and along with United Nations system partners supported locally elected women to transition into local government and helped raise awareness about judicial committees, amongst other activities.

In line with the federalization process, UN Women also focused efforts at provincial level by supporting the provincial government and six local government units from Province 7 (Sudurpaschim) to integrate gender equality and social inclusion into policies and plans. This included the Sudurpaschim Province's Dalit Empowerment Bill in collaboration with the provincial Ministry of Social Development, which was recently endorsed (see Finding 8, which identifies good practices in operationalizing the leave no one behind principle at local government level that could be further showcased and/or scaled up).

The lack of clarity around the national decentralization process is a key challenge that has been communicated by UN Women and other development partners. This needs to be considered within the Nepal Country Office partnership strategy with respect to how the office can diversify partnerships with line ministries and ensure the continuity of technical-level working arrangements. Another key challenge has been the lack of physical Country Office presence at provincial and local levels. This has limited the Country Office's direct engagement with government representatives, which reduces visibility and recognition at these levels.

The Country Office has a long history of dedicated work on women's movement building. This has helped to nurture and support a vibrant and diverse feminist movement in Nepal and linkages with development actors. The Country Office identified four modalities of engagement with CSOs to further movement building: (1) the CSO consortium approach; (2) alliance building among national networks of women and vulnerable groups; (3) institutional capacity-building to strengthen advocacy in grassroots women's organizations and organizations of persons with disabilities; and (4) engagement of CSOs led by women and marginalized or excluded groups.

<sup>25</sup> UN Women Nepal Country Office Annual Report 2020.

UN Women reported<sup>26</sup> (and the evaluation team validated) that it has effectively engaged three national women's networks in its COVID-19 pandemic programming: the Inter-Generational Feminist Forum, the Women Friendly Disaster Management Group and the Women Humanitarian and Disaster Risk Reduction Platform. These networks developed a charter of demands, entitled "Nepali Women Speak about COVID-19 – Hear Their Requests" with technical support from UN Women. The charter, which serves as an advocacy tool for informing policy action across sectors in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic,<sup>27</sup> was submitted to the federal, provincial and local governments to advocate for a gender equality and social inclusion perspective in the pandemic response, which was confirmed to be an important input by several of the stakeholders consulted. The networks also organized a policy dialogue with the National Planning Commission before the fiscal budget (2020/2021) session, which helped ensure that the charter's recommendations were considered in the budget.

As a result, the current fiscal budget mentions the importance of government collaboration with related NGOs on raising awareness of gender-based violence and harmful practices.

UN Women is increasingly engaging youth in its efforts, which will also help to maintain relevance and contribute to movement building for gender equality. For example, the Country Office engaged youth in movement building through the Changing Norms, One Step at a Time – Youth Video Competition. The Country Office reported in 2021<sup>28</sup> that five youth participants from excluded groups, including young women and persons who have diverse SOGIESC, were mentored to develop films about their lived experiences and barriers to equality in their communities. Furthermore, UN Women has been engaging five National Youth Gender Activists to drive youth mobilization at the community level as part of the Generation Equality campaign.



## ‘CHANGING NORMS, ONE STEP AT A TIME’ Video Competition

<sup>26</sup> UN Women Annual Reports 2020 and 2021. Validated with stakeholder interviews.

<sup>27</sup> UN Women, 2020. The Charter of Demand: Compiled by UN Women on behalf of three women's networks. Available at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/the-charter-of-demand>.

<sup>28</sup> UN Women Annual Report 2021, validated with stakeholder interviews.

*To what extent is the Country Office leveraging its coordination mandate to strategically position itself and influence the UNSDCF/UNDAF and other development actors to catalyse transformative change for women and girls and achieve gender equality in Nepal?*

### FINDING 3

**The Country Office's proactive approach to coordination has contributed to development partners' awareness of the key priorities of rights holders, particularly the most marginalized people in Nepal. This has contributed to the Government and other development partners stepping up leadership of coordination efforts and advocacy towards inclusive and responsive development approaches.**

UN Women contributed to the formulation of the UNDAF 2018–2022 in close cooperation with other UN agencies, the Government of Nepal, CSOs and development partners. In alignment with UN Women's mandate on United Nations system coordination for gender equality and women's empowerment, the Country Office co-leads and coordinates Outcome 4 (Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights) of the UNDAF. The office also guides the UNCT on gender mainstreaming, as well as the PSEA Working Group, the IDPG Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Working Group, and the Leave No One Behind/Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Working Group; and chairs the GiHA Task Team. The Leave No One Behind/Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Working Group was formed after the abolition of the UNCT Gender Theme Group. The Country Office also participated in 19 inter-agency working groups and 9 humanitarian clusters.

Stakeholders praised the Leave No One Behind/Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Working Group and the IDPG Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Working Group as highly useful and active platforms for exchange and connecting grassroots concerns with government and development partners. As joint lead of the IDPG Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Working Group, some stakeholders consider the Country Office the consistent force in efforts to ensure inclusion issues steer all programming approaches. For example, the working group put forward a new capacity development and leadership model highlighting coherence in the federal context, which was adopted by the Government of Nepal. The Country Office reported that, as a result, 1,005 elected representatives (488 women) have been trained on gender-responsive governance and social inclusion.

Partners consulted noted that the GiHA Task Team also provided a key platform for raising concerns and priorities of rights holders and establishing linkages with partners during the COVID-19 pandemic. As co-chair of the PSEA Working Group, the Country Office helped to ensure PSEA was included as a mandatory component of the induction package for United Nations personnel.

The Country Office also reported it had updated the Nepal gender equality and social inclusion profile and provincial fact sheets and provided input to situation reports developed by the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office during the COVID-19 pandemic. The information was then disseminated to duty bearers through the Humanitarian Country Team. The Country Office reported<sup>29</sup> contributions to the integration of gender equality and social inclusion in the Common Country Analysis conducted under the leadership of the UNCT coordinated by the Resident Coordinator's Office, which informs the new UNSDCF. This was validated by the evaluation team.

In coordination with the Resident Coordinator's Office and an inter-agency team, the Country Office conducted the UNCT–System-Wide Action Plan (SWAP) Annual Progress Report. The Country Office reported that, as of December 2021, five of eight recommendations of the 2018 Gender Equality Scorecard had been implemented by UNCT Nepal. The main recommendations were to enhance the approach to social norms and harmful practices and to strengthen coordination mechanisms, including through the establishment of a pooled fund for activities. The draft Nepal UNDAF<sup>30</sup> evaluation noted that of all the global programming principles, gender equality and human rights were the most effectively mainstreamed in the work of the UNCT.

The Nepal UNDAF 2018–2022 evaluation found that the Socioeconomic Response and Recovery Framework (SERF) to the COVID-19 pandemic developed under the UNDAF was a good example of the capacity of United Nations agencies to respond effectively to a crisis and as one entity, while also being flexible and adaptable. The Country Office led the drafting of the Social Cohesion and Community Resilience Pillar of the SERF, including consultations with women and excluded groups. While the draft Nepal UNDAF evaluation points to a good level of gender mainstreaming, it also identified the need for more support to disaggregated data beyond gender to ensure social inclusion.

<sup>29</sup> UN Women Nepal Annual Report 2021.

<sup>30</sup> Draft Evaluation of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework for Nepal (2018 – 2022), February 2022.



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## FINDING 4

**The Nepal Country Office demonstrated a commitment to joint United Nations programmes, which have demonstrated UN Women's value added. The new UNSDCF process presents a strategic opportunity for strengthening synergy and enhancing joint management of joint programmes.**

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Overall, UN Women and members of the UNCT in Nepal demonstrated a strong commitment to joint United Nations programmes in the country. In 2021, UN Women reported 13 joint programmes. The partner survey conducted for this evaluation revealed that overall respondents were positive about UN Women's contributions: 50 per cent of respondents identified UN Women's contribution to the conceptualization and implementation of United Nations joint programmes on gender as somewhat effective; and 20 per cent identified UN Women's contribution as very effective. However, some survey respondents identified duplication of gender work as an issue, with 4.5 per cent fully disagreeing and 15.9 per cent disagreeing that UN Women's work does not duplicate that of other United Nations agencies. Survey respondents suggested that UN Women work more with grassroots organizations and provide more practical tools to support gender mainstreaming.

Several evaluations, including the draft Nepal UNDAF evaluation (2022) point to challenges with joint programme management across the United Nations system in Nepal. This was exemplified through the Women's Economic Empowerment portfolio, where there have been several joint programmes (JP RWEE, the Comprehensive Sexuality

Education programme, Future We Want, etc.). Case study evidence suggests that in the Comprehensive Sexuality Education programme, different agencies implemented different outcomes, which resulted in some missed opportunities to synergize, e.g. connecting work in schools with skills development work with young women. The joint evaluation of JP RWEE also identified similar challenges to joint programme implementation. While the programme leveraged the comparative advantages of each agency and addressed the interlinked areas of Women's Economic Empowerment in an integrated manner, programme partners did not always work with each other, which limited the ability to leverage synergies between activities and partners at local level.<sup>31</sup> One of the key lessons identified by the joint evaluation of JP RWEE was the importance of securing multi-year funding, which helps to ensure staff stability throughout the programme implementation period and allows for more strategic, multi-year planning. The joint evaluation also identified the need for coordination mechanisms between programme partners, which could support improved joint programming/planning. The new UNSDCF presents a strategic opportunity for strengthening synergy and enhancing joint management of joint programmes.

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<sup>31</sup> FAO, UN Women and WFP, Global End-term Evaluation of the Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger and Rwanda from 2014 to 2020, May 2021. [https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000130753/download/?\\_ga=2.153488824.1028214001.1657548093-1778802312.1592836808](https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000130753/download/?_ga=2.153488824.1028214001.1657548093-1778802312.1592836808).

**FIGURE 3: RECONSTRUCTED THEORY OF CHANGE\*, UN WOMEN NEPAL 2018-2022**



**PRINCIPLES**

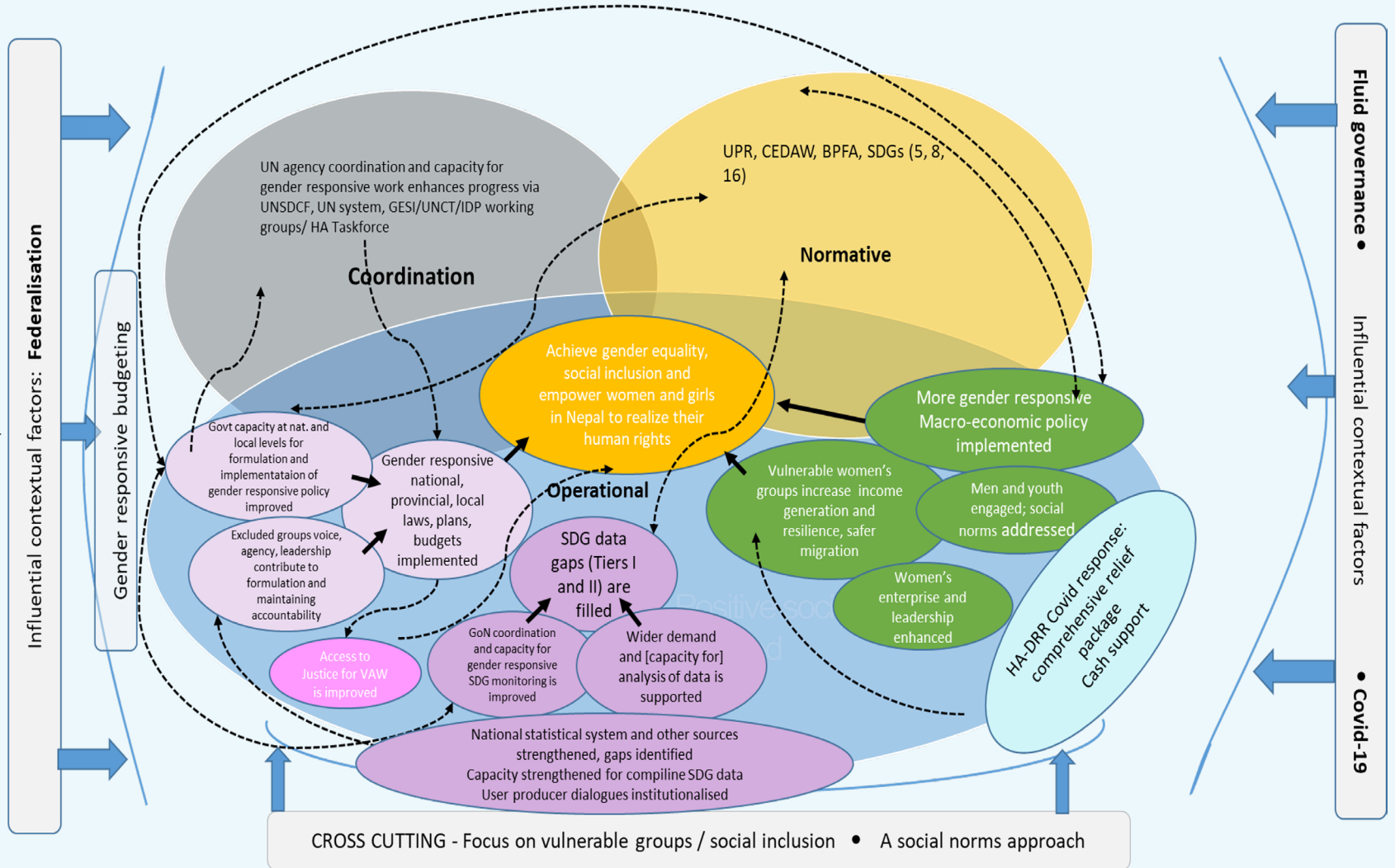
- Human rights-based and empowerment approach
- Leaving no one behind
- Coordination and joint advocacy

**ASSUMPTIONS**

- Support economic stability
- Prioritization of issues of inclusion
- Evidence based policy making

**STRATEGIES**

- Implementing a diversity approach – internal and external operations, activities and practices including partnerships
- Social inclusion
- Securing rural women's livelihoods and economic rights
- Strengthening governance – GRB, social inclusion
- Strengthening women's voice, choice and security
- Tackling adverse norms
- Ensuring legal protection
- Reforming discriminatory laws and regulations
- Recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid work and care
- Changing business culture and practice
- Improving public sector practices
- Advocacy, and wider visibility and recognition
- Prevention and response to GBV



*\*The above Theory of Change was utilized to assess contributions to outcomes assessed under the Effectiveness findings.*

(Source: Based on evaluation team desk review and consultations)

*To what extent have the Country Office's contributions across UN Women's integrated mandate advanced gender equality and the empowerment of women in Nepal, including through the outcomes of the Nepal UNDAF 2018–2022?*

## FINDING 5

**Gender-responsive inclusive governance: The Country Office contributed to identifiable progress in deepening gender equality and social inclusion at provincial and local levels in focus provinces; strengthening justice mechanisms; and strengthening advocacy for gender-responsive budgeting and gender statistics. However, substantial external challenges remain at the provincial and local levels because gender equality and social inclusion budgets remain small and the strategy for achieving wider coverage for gender-responsive inclusive governance is unclear.**

The 2015 Constitution of Nepal contains temporary special measures and provisions that guarantee the rights of women, including participation in all state structures and bodies on the principle of proportional inclusion (quotas). In the 2017 national election, the quota resulted in more than 14,600 women representatives entering public office, holding around 41 per cent of the elected seats. Post-election, Nepal began to see early signs of shifts in power and leadership.

The Country Office's focus on supporting gender-responsive inclusive governance, especially at provincial and local levels, has reflected its commitment to supporting the federalization process. The Strategic Note theory of change set out three main streams of work: capacity support for key government officials to formulate gender-responsive laws, plans and budgets; increased capacity of key duty bearers to implement and monitor gender-responsive laws; and strengthened voice and agency of excluded groups to demand accountability.

Working across these streams has resulted in several key achievements related to gender-responsive inclusive governance reported by the Country Office (and in some cases validated through the field visit by the evaluation team) at federal, provincial and local levels (see Box 2). At provincial level, work has focused on two provinces, and with intensity in Sudurpashchim Province, where the Country Office implemented Comprehensive Capacity Development Support to Elected Women Representatives and Promoting Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Sub-National Governance, with the UN Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities nested within it. Within Sudurpashchim, the Country Office also decided to focus local-level work on a limited number of selected local government units to allow for connections and synergies between the different work themes. These clusters of results at provincial level appear to validate the causal connection in the Theory of Change between supporting government capacity at local levels for the formulation and implementation of gender-responsive policies and developing plans and budgets at these levels.

The theory of change also posits a role for the voice, agency and leadership for formulating plans and maintaining accountability: while it is clear local groups were engaged and supported to this end and have contributed to establishing demand for inclusive laws and plans, the evidence collected here did not include sufficient detail to shed light on the precise role played by these groups or the strategies used.

After the initial formulation of the Strategic Note results framework, a strong focus was added to support improvements in the availability of gender data to help fill gaps in Tier I and II SDG data, through the global Women Count project. This was to be implemented through three outcomes under overall Impact 1 of the results framework. However, the process of finalizing the memorandum of understanding with the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), a key stakeholder in the project, was delayed, and an opportunity to include references to gender statistics in the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics was missed. While some progress was made in strengthening capacity among data users, and bringing data users together with data producers, the project did not gain full momentum. It was eventually withdrawn, and the associated outputs and indicators were removed from the Strategic Note results framework in 2020. Nevertheless, building on relationships that were initiated during this period, in 2021 UN Women was able to support, through partnership with CBS, the thorough integration of a gender equality and social inclusion perspective into the National Population and Housing Census (2021), which was also conducted in consultation with UNFPA, the main United Nations counterpart supporting CBS on the census. The Country Office's contribution was to support the design of training of enumerators to facilitate the inclusion of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex (LGBTQI+) community in developing comprehensive definitions of this group to include in the manual and the inclusion of members of these groups as census enumerators.

## BOX 2. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN GENDER-RESPONSIVE AND INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE AT FEDERAL, PROVINCIAL AND LOCAL LEVELS WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM UN WOMEN

### FEDERAL LEVEL

- NAP II on United Nations Security Council resolutions 1325, 1820 supported for finalization. The Country Office provided technical support with other United Nations agencies and consultations to advocate for finalization.
- 15th National Periodic Development plan adopted. The Country Office provided recommendations to the Approach Paper.
- At federal level, overall there was a slight increase in gender-responsive budget allocation, although with fluctuations over the Strategic Note period (see Figure 4).
- Contributions to the development of:
  - » Civil and Criminal Codes
  - » National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategic Plan of Action.
- Charter of demands, developed with technical support from the Country Office, was presented to the National Planning Commission before the budget session by 50 national women's organizations.

### PROVINCIAL AND LOCAL LEVELS

- Gender equality and social inclusion policies endorsed in six local government units of Province 7, Sudurpaschim.
- Gender-responsive procedures adopted in 10 local government units.
- Gender-responsive plans adopted by eight local government units in two provinces (Provinces 7 and 2) in 2021.
- Endorsement of the Dalit Empowerment Bill in Sudurpaschim Province, drafted with the Country Office support to the Ministry of Social Development.
- Gender-responsive budgets formulated in 11 municipalities in 3 provinces.
- Gender-responsive budgets increased in seven local government units.

Source: As reported by the Nepal Country Office in Annual Reports

More than 50 per cent of census enumerators were women, which is likely to have supported better reporting on women's care and unpaid work. The direct outcome in terms of better data about women and work is not yet known as census data was still being processed at the time of this report. Nevertheless, the principle of having expanded these definitions in official processes is significant. UN Women also developed a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Advocacy and Communication Strategy for the National Population and Housing Census (2021) to ensure meaningful engagement of decision makers and diverse stakeholders – including women, marginalized/excluded groups – in all stages of the census.

Despite these important achievements, some key challenges remain in the Country Office's work in supporting federal, provincial and local governments to refine their gender-responsive approaches and further advance the fulfilment of key gender equality commitments.

First, with the focus of operational work appropriately at provincial and local level in support of the federalization process, the Country Office has struggled to maintain close relationships with its core counterpart, the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens. This challenge has been compounded by rapid turnover of government officials, and the Ministry's limited role in influencing other ministries at the federal level.

As the Country Office's budget and activities are not specified in the Government's Red Book,<sup>32</sup> complex procedures for specific financial support have been established through a memorandum of understanding. While relationships with other ministries at federal level have been maintained through advocacy and convening, as well as specific projects, there are concerns that the limited role of the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens and the cumbersome process of providing financial support may undermine the Country Office's standing in the long term.

<sup>32</sup> The Red Book is a budget cycle tool. It sets out details of budget allocations each fiscal year – both charged and appropriate expenditure of the various Ministries.

**BOX 3: GAINS IN GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUDGETS AT PROVINCIAL LEVEL**

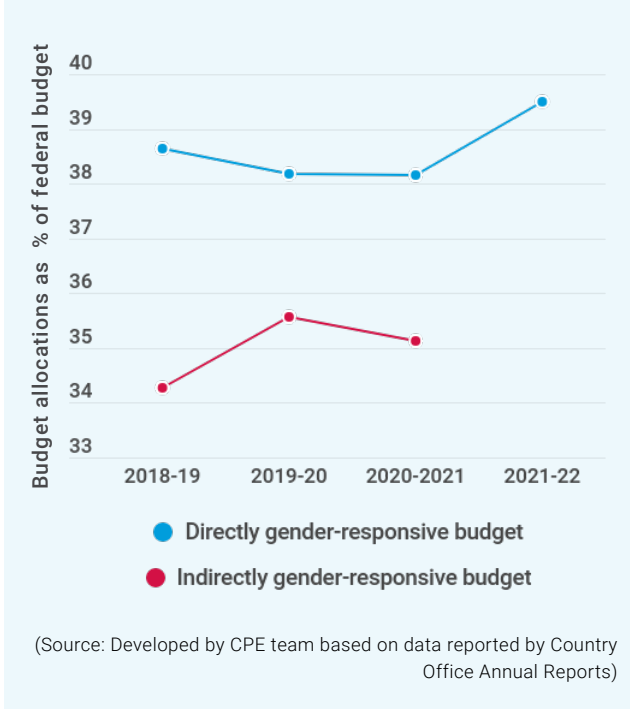


Second, while progress in securing gender-responsive budgeting – in part through UN Women’s membership of the Gender-Responsive Budgeting Committee chaired by the Ministry of Finance – deserves full credit and recognition, results in terms of increasing gender, gender equality and social inclusion budgets have been incremental at the federal level (see Figure 4). At the local level, there have been key wins across 11 municipalities (see Box 3), but overall budgets for gender equality remain very small. Elected representatives and local government officials are aware of competing priorities, particularly for infrastructure development, and of the constraints they face with small budgets to address deep-rooted social issues.

The 2022 local elections – the second local elections since the beginning of the federalization process – offer the important prospect that some women, now more experienced in governance, will be re-elected and therefore in a position to consolidate and improve their positions. It is also likely that a new cadre of women will be elected, who are able to drive advocacy for budget allocations to address the root causes of discrimination more effectively with further capacity and leadership support from UN Women and other agencies. In 2021, the Country Office reported that the provision of technical advisory support to elected officials/justice actors and officials in the Ministry of Health and Population, and sharing platforms for justice actors and elected officials for cross-learning fostered greater thinking and commitment to advance gender equality and social inclusion and the principle of leaving no one behind. The Country Office’s decision to focus on select provinces and local government units within these provinces has been effective in supporting progress in these areas. The evaluation partner survey revealed that partners who participated in capacity-building activities and training led by UN Women were quite satisfied with the training and research/knowledge products produced by UN Women but felt that follow-up support was lacking.

Furthermore, the government-led Provincial and Local Governance Support Programme (the country’s largest subnational governance capacity development programme) now incorporates a strong gender perspective with technical assistance from UN Women and UNDP. In 2021, the agencies worked together to build the capacities of government counterparts from all federal and provincial line ministries on gender equality and social inclusion. The Country Office noted that during the drafting of this evaluation report, it was in the final stages of signing an agreement on a new European Union–United Nations joint programme on gender equality, which may provide potential for deepening and scaling up of results.

**FIGURE 4. GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUDGET ALLOCATIONS, % OF FEDERAL BUDGET, 2018–2022**



## FINDING 6

**Women's Economic Empowerment: In targeted districts, women have strengthened their skills, income generation and entrepreneurship, despite the very challenging economic environment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the linkage between skills and income has not always been reliably established, and although programmes are integrating intersectionality approaches, greater efforts may be required to consistently prioritize and reach the most marginalized groups. There is scope for clearer articulation of the programming models that have been tested/implemented and are suitable for potential scale-up.**

The theory of change for women's economic empowerment work, as set out in the Strategic Note, identified three strands of work leading to the outcome that vulnerable women's groups in Nepal have income-generation opportunities and are resilient to climate change and disasters, thereby advancing Planet 50:50 in Nepal by 2022:

- gender-responsive macroeconomic policies and sectoral policies (including agriculture, labour and energy) are developed and implemented to promote economic empowerment and resilience of vulnerable women;
- men, faith-based leaders and youth are mobilized to tackle the social and cultural norms that result in gender-based discrimination; and
- a substantive equality approach to women's economic empowerment is tested and adopted for scaling up in select target sectors for income generation and improved climate-resilient livelihoods.

Regarding the first strand of work articulated in the theory of change on macroeconomic and sectoral policies, the ongoing federalization process made policy-level work more challenging during the early years of the Strategic Note and the COVID-19 pandemic in the latter years. Despite this, as noted under Finding 5, Box 2, several policy level efforts have provided an enabling environment. Progress was made through the JP RWEE, where the Country Office contributed to strengthening gender equality and social inclusion in the Agricultural Development Strategy in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development.

The second strand of community-level work with men, faith-based leaders and youth was constrained in the second half of the Strategic Note period by the COVID-19 pandemic, limiting the opportunity for community interaction and events. To address the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Country Office used alternate modalities such as radio programmes. For example, in 2021, the Country Office reported that 15 episodes of a magazine format radio series (Sambal programme) were produced and aired, reaching an audience of approximately 229,548 people in Rautahat and Sarlahi districts. Projects involving social norms change, such as the "Changing Norms, One Step at a Time" youth video competition, which facilitated youth production and dissemination of

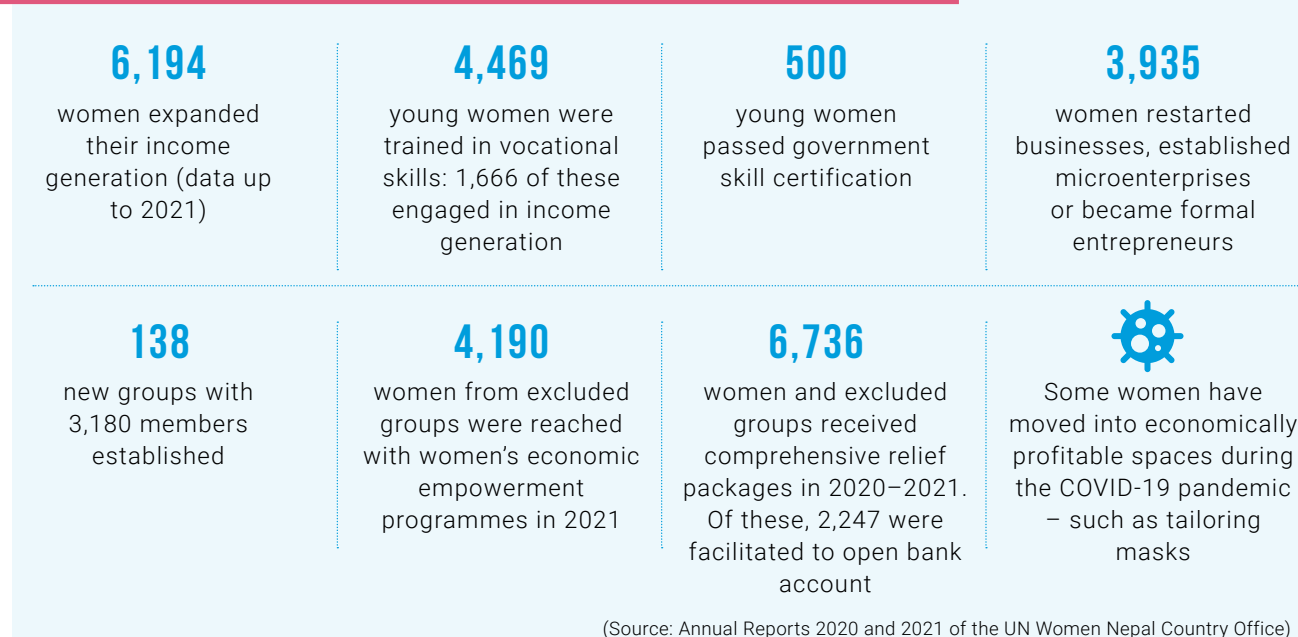
films across the country to raise awareness and generate support to norms change, were not specifically directed at the social norms constraining women's economic empowerment, such as limits on their mobility (e.g. to purchase product inputs) and that the sectors in which women are expected to work tend to be traditional roles (e.g. tailoring) and poorly paid.<sup>33</sup>

A large part of the Women's Economic Empowerment portfolio focused on the third strand of work in the theory of change. The approach recognised the intersection between poverty and gender and on intersectionality in the form of livelihood development work among women who are additionally marginalized as a result of caste, single status, youth and/or disability. The Country Office reported several results through these programmes, including training women in skills and leadership; improving their certification and income; and supporting women to maintain or restart their businesses after the pandemic (see Box 4). Several examples of these types of results were validated during the evaluation field visit. Sectors in which women's livelihoods have been strengthened include agriculture (especially vegetable farming), tailoring and sewing, and the beautician sector.

During the pandemic, project implementation was slowed to some extent, such that some programme partners perceive the full trajectory of support to some groups of women as incomplete. For the Value Chains project, testimony suggests that not all groups achieved the full evolution into independent businesses, as there was not time to find solutions to challenges such as credit access. Women's businesses that were growing just before the pandemic were hard-pressed to survive the economic slowdown. In examples of good practices, the Country Office made some rapid adjustments, pivoting COVID-19 relief packages to support businesses and especially in enabling entrepreneurs to move into spaces made profitable by the pandemic, such as the production of masks and other personal protective equipment. Seed funding was also supplied to women's collectives during and after lockdowns to help them recover their businesses. However, this was not a comprehensive response involving all participants in women's economic empowerment projects, and was one factor affecting relatively low rates of conversion from skills training to income generation in some cases (as shown in Box 4).

<sup>33</sup> The Country Office reported that UN Women provided mentoring and technical support to five youths representing diverse excluded groups to develop films about social norms that impede equality. The films were disseminated across the country to raise awareness and generate support for norms change.

## BOX 4: ON-THE-GROUND WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMMING RESULTS



The evaluation of the UNESCO–UNFPA–UN WOMEN Joint Programme on Empowering Adolescent Girls and Young Women through Education noted that while the training helped local women to earn their own living and to support themselves and their families, the programme could be “more effective by focusing on a lower number of activities, and especially by emphasizing seed funding for income generating activities.”<sup>34</sup> Other evidence points towards:

- weak market linkages;
- training designed and delivered in types of work that do not challenge traditional gender segregation in economic production and therefore do not address social norms of low remuneration for women's work; and
- uneven/inconsistent support for entrepreneurship or for participants to challenge social norms in the household.

By contrast, the model implemented through the Value Chains project was stronger in these dimensions, particularly in supporting entrepreneurship, e.g. for women to access opportunities higher up the value chain. JP RWEE reported a higher conversion of programme support into income-related results – and had also focused on developing leadership and addressing social norms. However, the environment continues to present strong challenges to women trying to expand their businesses, including difficulty in accessing financing in the absence of property ownership and small-scale results in terms of government financial support.

The Value Chains project also incorporates an interesting group-building approach, supporting women to build and maintain both informal and formal work-related groups,

developing into cooperative building in some cases. This model was started in the earlier JP RWEE programme. Focus group discussions with Value Chains project participants noted that these groups were a helpful source of support during the COVID-19 pandemic. There was also some evidence that these groups provide a platform for business expansion. More documentation is needed to fully understand the advantages (or disadvantages) of this approach.

The Country Office's thematic evaluation of women's economic empowerment programmes<sup>35</sup> identified a similar challenge. While complementary activities addressed different challenges, the implementation process of the Advancing Women's Economic Empowerment programme and Future We Want project (both jointly implemented) resulted in a series of distinct activities rather than leveraging synergies between activities even within the same community. The e-rickshaw project received praise for tackling women's economic empowerment through non-stereotypical, non-traditional occupations. The initiative aimed to strengthen the leadership role of excluded women in economic activities, particularly returnee women migrant workers, and contribute to Country Office efforts relating to social norms change by promoting non-traditional businesses.<sup>36</sup>

More attention is required to articulate successful models and find ways to expand them. This dimension of the original theory of change has not received much attention, and all programming has been at relatively small scale, with little leveraging of how models might be scaled up. Working with local government, which has begun but has not yet matured, is an important dimension of this.

<sup>34</sup> Draft Independent External Evaluation of the UNESCO–UNFPA–UN WOMEN Joint Programme on Empowering Adolescent Girls and Young Women through Education, February 2022; shared with the evaluation team by the Country Office.

<sup>35</sup> UN Women, Thematic Evaluation of Women's Economic Empowerment, 2019. <https://gate.unwomen.org/EvaluationDocument/Download?evaluationDocumentID=9423>.

<sup>36</sup> This initiative was being implemented through the UN Women programme Advancing Women's Economic Empowerment (AWEE) - Ensuring Nepal's Sustainable and Equitable Development in five districts of Nepal.

## FINDING 7

**The comprehensive COVID-19 relief package provided a well-appreciated mix of services and essential items to very marginalized women, but ways to deploy UN Women's value added at greater scale should be explored.**

Building on experience from the 2015 earthquake response, the Country Office adopted a developmental lens in responding to humanitarian crises, including COVID-19. The office structured its response to COVID-19 in line with the four pillars of the UN Women Humanitarian Strategy (2015–2017), namely: (a) evidence base, (b) targeted intervention, (c) coordination and (d) capacity development support to the Government and CSOs. Additionally, a total of US\$ 660,200 was reprioritized for the COVID-19 response in negotiation with the respective donor.<sup>37</sup> The Country Office's response to the COVID-19 pandemic took several forms and was able to provide localized relief responses through its CSO network, such as supporting community kitchens. UN Women provided meals to 30,859 people, and local women were empowered to take a leading role in relief services.<sup>38</sup>

Despite disruptions as a result of pandemic-related lockdowns, the Country Office supported women's businesses through its women's economic empowerment programme to some degree, and facilitated their revival following the lockdowns. A few participants in the programme were supported to move into new areas of business made profitable by the pandemic, such as producing face masks and other protective equipment.

The Country Office was able to reach highly marginalized women with cash support included in the comprehensive relief package in 2020–2021 using an intersectional approach. The Country Office reported reaching 6,736 women from excluded groups. Of these, 2,247 people were reported to have been supported to open bank accounts. Through its CSO network, the Country Office was able to target relief using an intersectional approach. Evidence provided by the Country Office and partially verified by the evaluation team (though reporting is not disaggregated) suggests that very marginalized groups, including Dalit women, destitute single women, women engaged in sex work and groups representing persons with diverse SOGIESC, were indeed reached by the comprehensive relief package.

The cash component had the unexpected benefit of obliging support to women who were previously excluded from formal financial services to open bank accounts and provide the citizenship papers required (see Box 5). This is an important result with long-term potential benefits to the women supported.

Overall, these responses were implemented quickly and reflected the Country Office's strengths. However, some areas warrant further review. For example, psychosocial counselling was in principle part of the relief package, but in practice it was implemented only on a small scale, and unevenly across locations. Partners' ability to implement this service may have depended on the local availability of trained psychological counsellors. As this was a new area of work for the Country Office, the skills and contacts necessary to manage the service were not fully developed and were patchy.

The timing of the relief package was slow in some cases. Although distributions had started by July 2020 (three to four months after the first lockdown), they were still being completed six months later in December 2020. The reported reach of the relief package (fewer than 7,000 people) was quite narrow, raising questions about how the successful targeting of intersectionally marginalized women could have been achieved at greater scale.

Among United Nations partners, there continues to be a demand for more action-oriented, practical technical advice for humanitarian sectors on how to fine-tune gender responsiveness and how to identify and reach the most marginalized communities. In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, there is an opportunity to review in detail how marginalized groups were reached and make this knowledge available to other United Nations partners.

<sup>37</sup> UN Women Nepal Country Office Annual Work Plan 2020 Addendum Note.

<sup>38</sup> Number of meals provided as reported in UN Women Nepal Annual Report 2020; women's leadership in relief response and other activities validated through the evaluation team consultations and field visit.



## BOX 5. NEPAL COUNTRY OFFICE EXPERIENCE WITH CASH TRANSFERS: CASE STUDY

The Country Office approach to COVID-19 relief efforts attempted to be comprehensive and therefore included a one-time cash component of US\$ 106 to selected marginalized women, with additional monthly payments of US\$ 15 for lactating or pregnant women and persons with disabilities and US\$ 4 for women with childcare responsibilities. Four provinces (Madhesh, Bagmati, Lumbini and Sudurpaschim), and 21 Municipalities were covered. Between July 2020 and August 2021, the Country Office reported that the cash component had reached 2,862 households (of the 6,737 households receiving the broader comprehensive relief package). The cash distribution was facilitated by WFP and UNDP, with UN Women drawing on its relationships with CSOs to identify the most vulnerable groups.

Focus group discussions with beneficiaries conducted by the evaluation team suggested that the cash component was welcomed among very marginalized people in the challenging circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic – and welcomed in approximately equal measure with the non-cash items. Non-cash items provided by UN Women as part of the overall package included rice, lentils, a smartphone and SIM card, a gas stove and a gas cylinder. Cash was used mainly for immediate needs such as food, medicine and treatment for illness, and maintaining social networks. Some recipients used part of the cash distribution for their children's education. There is limited evidence that a small number of women were able to invest in productive assets, such as buying a goat.

### IMPORTANT LESSONS INCLUDE:



2,247 women first needed to be supported to open bank accounts to receive the cash.<sup>39</sup> Many women had difficulties opening an account because citizenship documentation was required, and several women did not have citizenship papers. CSO partners helped women to access these papers.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, an unexpected outcome was that these women gained citizenship status through the initiative.



While receiving citizenship documentation and opening bank accounts were very important benefits with long-term implications, these requirements also meant that the most marginalized people had to wait the longest to receive the cash disbursement. It is therefore an important consideration for the inclusion of women in cash components of humanitarian/relief work as women are less likely to have bank accounts and may be more likely to have been excluded from citizenship documentation.



Advocacy on removing these requirements has potential for long-lasting benefits to very marginalized groups in humanitarian responses.



Cash elements of the package offered choices and autonomy to address different needs. There is some evidence that cash contributed to changes in household gender dynamics, supporting women's confidence and household decision-making.

<sup>39</sup> UN Women Nepal Annual Report 2020.

<sup>40</sup> Review of UN Women's Comprehensive Relief Package, Final Report, January 2022 and validated by FGDs and KIIs conducted by the CPE team.

## FINDING 8

The most effective strategies used by the Country Office to achieve results include: (a) working through CSO programme partners and/or joint programmes at local (palika and provincial) level, both of which offer modalities for reaching communities; (b) leveraging linkages across projects to produce synergy; and (c) capacity-building as a core strategy, which has been widely used among both rights holders and duty bearers, although evidence of resulting outcomes is mixed.

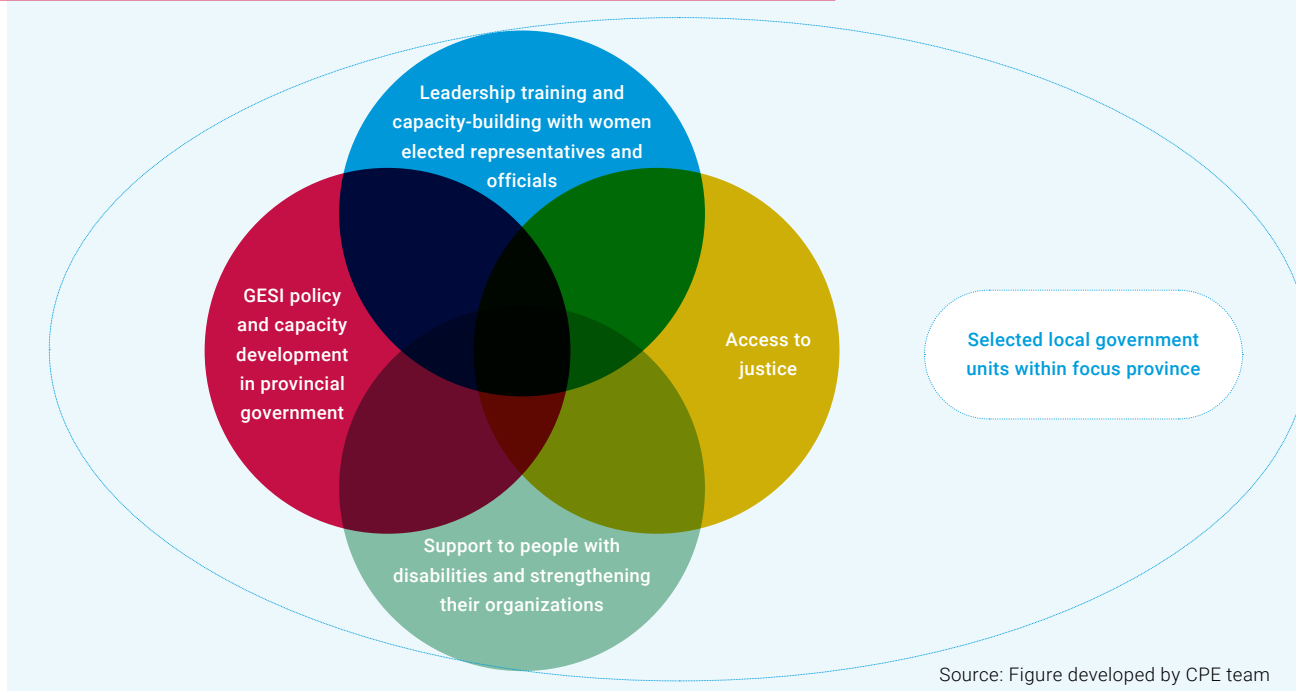
### 1. Partnerships

In the federalization process, CSOs have been the Country Office's main partners providing support at provincial and local levels and through which the Country Office has reached marginalized groups. While CSO relationships with provincial and municipal governments have been important for accessing official data to identify marginalized rights holders, partnering with CSOs specifically for and by specific marginalized groups – where a relationship with the group is already in place or easy to establish – has been a particularly effective strategy. This has included working with organizations such as the Feminist Dalit Organisation for distribution of the COVID-19 comprehensive relief package to Dalit communities, reaching groups representing persons with diverse SOGIESC, such as Mitini Nepal and Blue Diamond Society<sup>41</sup> by using a consortium approach to partnership; collaborating with disabled persons' organizations for work on rights of people with disabilities; working with the Community Action Centre Nepal on initiatives for women in sex work, and working with trafficking survivors in collaboration with Maiti Nepal.<sup>42</sup>

### 2. Nested and integrated approaches at local level

The Country Office has created opportunities for synergies in the following ways: First a **geography-based synergy** – UN Women's interventions at provincial and local levels have mainly focused on two provinces, with a decision made to focus several programmes on the same selection of local government units. Second, a **stakeholder-based synergy**: key government ministries, such as the Ministry of Social Development, and elected women representatives have been engaged in multiple interventions, such as promoting gender-responsive and inclusive subnational governance, comprehensive capacity development support to elected women representatives and access to justice. CSO partners were also asked to engage and coordinate with the Ministry of Social Development for all project interventions. Third, key interventions have been implemented simultaneously with different types of stakeholders (individual rights holders, rights holder organizations, duty bearers) while also creating opportunities for convening, thereby creating a well-synergized **enabling environment**.

FIGURE 5: APPROACHES TO SYNERGIZING COUNTRY OFFICE INTERVENTIONS



<sup>41</sup> Mitini Nepal is a women-led CSO working for rights and dignity of women with LBT identity; Blue Diamond Society is an LGBT rights organization.

<sup>42</sup> Community Action Centre works on women's and girls' rights in Nepal; Maiti Nepal is an NGO working for a society free from sexual and other forms of exploitation against women and children.

### 3. Capacity-building

Capacity-building has been a third key strategy of the Country Office and is used across all work areas. In the evaluation period, capacity-building activities included training in gender-responsive inclusive governance and women's leadership; orientations and stakeholder dialogues; training of trainers for informal justice actors to strengthen access to justice; training for justice sector actors; training of trainers for a gender-responsive census; training for users of gender data; training of trainers on gender equality and social inclusion and gender-responsive budgeting; initiatives to strengthen the capacities of community members (especially men and boys) to challenge discriminatory social norms and promote gender equality and women's empowerment; and vocational skills training among marginalized women. The respondents to the partner survey for this evaluation generally found these efforts effective: 63.9 per cent (N=32/50) said the training was somewhat effective and 19.5 per cent (N=10/50) said the training was effective.

The case study conducted by the evaluation, which looked at a sample of six training modules (see Box 6), revealed that the Country Office generally approached capacity-building in a holistic sense, addressing a cross section of stakeholders including duty bearers, rights holders and their organizations, and men and boys to build an enabling environment. Some needs assessments have been highly consultative and thorough; however, this holistic approach, on occasion, has not been fully delivered. At times, rights holder training has not been accompanied by a broader focus of support, and in some cases, market assessment for skills training has been weak. There are examples of patchy follow-up on refresher training, and to monitor the impacts of capacity-building, especially training of trainer processes, which has not been strong. Where follow-up (i.e. further training) has taken place, it tends to strengthen results and is also an opportunity to document upstream impacts, which are otherwise often missed.

#### BOX 6: CAPACITY-BUILDING CASE STUDY 1/2

Based on a desk review of reports and training manuals, and some focus group discussions and interviews with rights holder and duty bearer recipients of capacity-building initiatives, this case study was developed to provide insights into their effectiveness. Three initiatives, including six training manuals, were reviewed in depth; a further four training courses were reviewed to supplement the review.

These initiatives focused on

- a. actors in the formal and informal judicial systems to improve gender justice;
- b. rights holders to support their skill development for economic empowerment; and

- c. stakeholders in government and disabled peoples' organizations to strengthen capacity to advocate for and implement policies supporting people with disabilities.

There have also been important initiatives to support the capacity of newly elected women leaders in the federalization process and of local and provincial government officials for gender equality and social inclusion, and on gender-responsive budgeting for government personnel through partnership with the Nepal Administrative Staff College.

#### DIAGNOSIS

The Country Office has taken opportunities to ensure that newly developed training curricula are based on up to date needs assessments (three of six core cases), and in some cases these have been thorough consultations carefully eliciting the perspectives of rights holders. However, terms of reference do not consistently specify needs assessments. It is not clear how far or whether this is related to prior knowledge of the capacity needs to be addressed.

#### DESIGN

Some training design is strong on including gender and social norms analysis and information alongside practical steps and information. However, integration of these elements is mixed and absent or nearly absent from some women's economic empowerment training. This is not only a missed opportunity but also weakens the depth at which the enabling environment is in focus.

*Box continued on following page*

**DELIVERY**

Training through these programmes has reached relevant duty bearers (two of six cases), rights holders and their organizations to help create change. However, not all training initiatives have worked at all levels. There were some reports that rights holder training was not held at accessible locations for more marginalized participants, and that associated travel allowances may not have covered extra journeys needed by rural women. There is some evidence that manuals were not always fully delivered through implementation of the training.

**SYNERGIES AND FOLLOW-UP**

Levels of follow-up and links with wider interventions varied across different projects. In some cases (two of three main projects), nested projects and the involvement of key government ministries ensured good synergy and the involvement of trainees as strategic programme components. In other cases, training appeared to have been relatively ad hoc, with little connection to a bigger picture. Stakeholder survey respondents also recognized that follow-up was not comprehensive.

**ENABLING ENVIRONMENT**

For access to justice and rights of people with disabilities, the projects included components targeting the main challenges to applying skills and knowledge learned through training, even while these were partly constrained by COVID-19 pandemic limits on mobility and gatherings. For the Comprehensive Sexuality Education programme, this wider context of addressing the many challenging features of social norms around entrepreneurship by the women trained appears to be missing.

**INDIVIDUAL CHANGE**

Pre and post-testing has been used in two of three main project cases to monitor training exercises and shows varying degrees of success in terms of individuals being able to apply their training effectively. Information available suggests that more densely nested and synergized projects were better at enabling individuals to use new skills. For government stakeholders, less pre and post-test information has been monitored.

**ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE**

There are signs that local organizations involved in projects linked at multiple levels have been strengthened and are continuing to advocate on issues consistent with the training. For government organizations, change is more incremental, and where it is evident the role of the Country Office is mainly invisible to stakeholders. Therefore, it is difficult to confidently attribute these changes to specific training.

**IMPACT**

There are signs of impact from applied knowledge and skills acquired through training, but information is very limited and follow-up is patchy. Where future programmes are thematically or geographically linked to past projects, opportunities to document the downstream impact of training should be taken. Respondents to stakeholder surveys identified impact monitoring as an area that requires more work.

*Has the Strategic Note 2018–2022 been designed and implemented according to the principles of human rights; leaving no one behind, including disability inclusion; social and environmental safeguards; and development effectiveness to ensure national ownership and sustainability of programming efforts?*

## FINDING 9

**The Country Office's inclusion and intersectionality approach has been integrated and strongly implemented at multiple levels in most cases. Several good practices, offering lessons to others, were identified by the evaluation, such as capacitating and empowering personnel while at the same time prioritizing partnerships and engagement with organizations representing and led by marginalized groups. More consistent and systematic attention to the collection of disaggregated data and an iterative learning process about what works could further refine and strengthen the approach.**

The overall Strategic Note is in alignment with the UNSDCF (previously UNDAF) and has a strong focus on gender equality and social inclusion. This is supported by a series of nested strategies (see Figure 6) running right through to implementation of dedicated projects for marginalized groups (e.g. people with disabilities), alongside careful targeting of marginalized groups – and sometimes very marginalized groups – within broader programmes (such as women's economic empowerment initiatives and the COVID-19 comprehensive relief package).

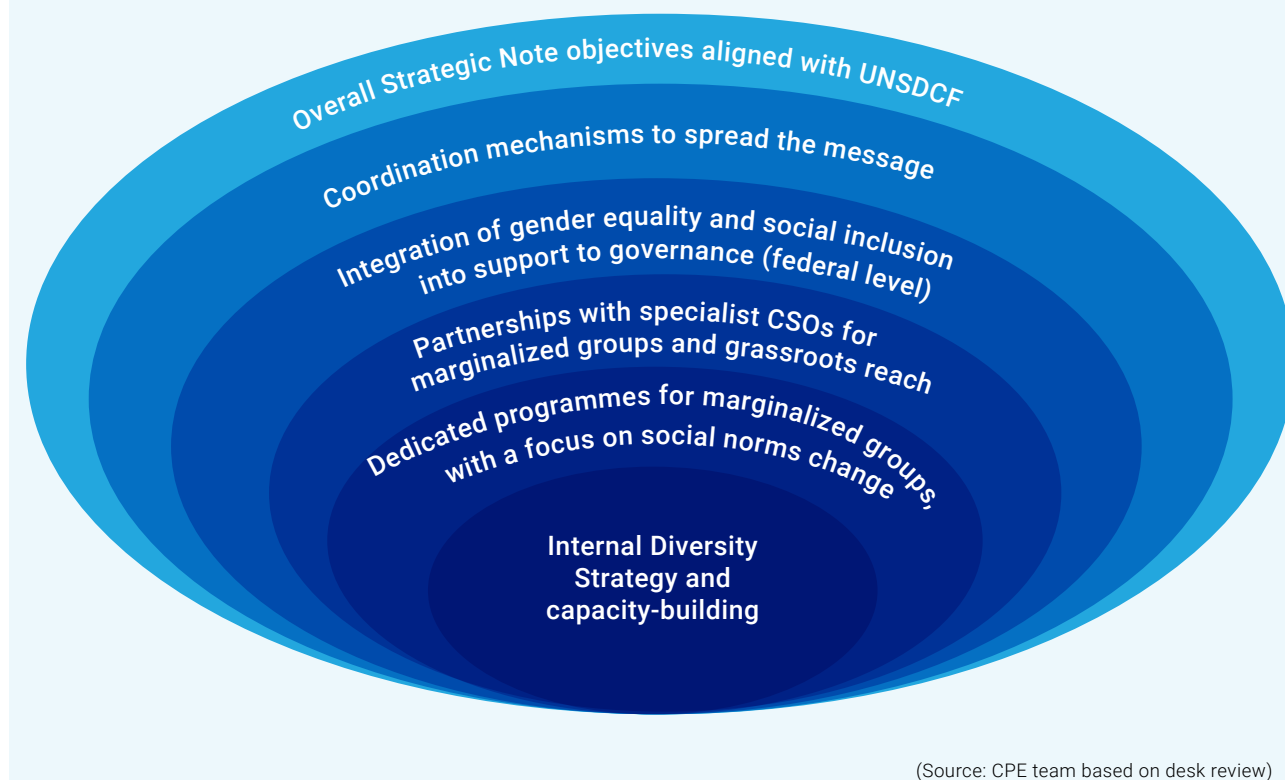
The internal Country Office Diversity Strategy 2019–2022 is a key component supporting consistent implementation of this approach. The strategy includes an analysis of internal staff social groups and of sources used for procurement.<sup>43</sup> It constitutes part of a framework to raise staff consciousness of inclusion issues and associated power dynamics at office level and is supplemented by internal capacity-building and the adoption of a feminist approach to management. The Country Office has also invested in coordination on gender equality and social inclusion issues as a mechanism for strengthening dissemination

and building a platform (see Finding 3). Integration of a gender equality and social inclusion perspective has been a core pillar of Country Office support to the federalization process and its liaison with the Ministries of Social Development in the target provinces. The intersectionality approach supports the analysis embedded in the 2015 Constitution of Nepal, which identifies 19 types of marginalization<sup>44</sup> and has contributed to the enabling environment (see Finding 5). The final two layers represent different modes of operationalizing a gender equality and social inclusion approach in programmes. The Country Office has achieved this by building partnerships with specialist CSOs that specifically represent and/or are led by marginalized groups, such as CSOs for/by people with disabilities, and LGBTQI+ groups and CSOs with strong relationships at grassroots level, which enables programmes to reach marginalized groups. The movement building among CSOs and individuals dedicated to gender equality and women's rights can also be included in this layer of actions (see Finding 3).

<sup>43</sup> The analysis is based on social groupings as set out in the UNDP Interim Workforce Diversity Policy (2009), which also forms the basis for actions to support intake of disadvantaged groups through recruitment and procurement processes, with some differences in the clearer categorization of Janajatis (Janajati is the broad term for non-Hindu ethnic groups, or indigenous groups) into advantaged and disadvantaged groups. The UNDP strategy places targeted groups into first (broadly, disadvantaged women), second (broadly, disadvantaged men and advantaged women) and third (advantaged men) priority groups. The Country Office Diversity Strategy also follows this approach. The Country Office strategy uses the groupings "Hill Janajati" and "Terai Janajati" instead of the groupings "advantaged Janajati" and "disadvantaged Janajati", as in the UNDP strategy. It is not immediately clear why the terminology was changed or the implication of such a change.

<sup>44</sup> Economically poor, socially excluded women, Dalits, Adibasi Janajatis, Khas Aryas, Madhesi's, Tharus, farmers, labourers, suppressed classes, Muslims, minorities, marginalized, endangered communities, youth, children, the aged, people of diverse gender and sexual orientation and people with disabilities or citizens of regions that have been left behind.

**FIGURE 6: THE COUNTRY OFFICE'S NESTED APPROACH TO DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION**



### Social norms change as a core programmatic focus

The innermost circle (see Figure 6) centres around programming, with targeting and a focus on social norms as a core aspect of programmatic strategy. The Developmental Evaluation of the Country Office conducted jointly with IES in 2021<sup>45</sup> points to several steps the Country Office has taken to make social norms change a prominent and central aspect of its work. For example, the Country Office undertook three key initiatives:

1. Adoption of Communication for Development across programmatic efforts as an approach to mobilizing awareness and action in challenging the discriminatory social norms underlying gender inequality in Nepal.<sup>46</sup>
2. Application of the Gender@Work framework throughout its strategies.<sup>47</sup>
3. Use of co-creation methodologies such as storytelling and design challenge in collaboration with donors and other key stakeholders to take forward efforts to understand and measure social norms change.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> The Developmental Evaluation for the Nepal Country Office (April 2021) was undertaken to produce real-time information that could be used for adjusting programming within a complex environment and infuse evaluative thinking throughout the Strategic Note period. Accessed from: <https://gate.unwomen.org/Evaluation/Details?EvaluationId=11529>.

<sup>46</sup> The Country Office adopted a Communication for Development (C4D) approach to bring about positive social norms change for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. The approach seeks to build understanding of people, their beliefs and values and the social and cultural norms that shape their lives. It involves directly engaging with people to identify their problems, empower them to be able to propose possible solutions/alternatives, and build their capabilities to take action to bring desired changes for positive new social norms.

<sup>47</sup> In order to better understand and address social norms defined by gendered power relations and structures, the Country Office has adopted the Gender@Work (G@W) analytical framework as a tool to analyse and design its interventions for the Strategic Note period 2018–2022 by foregrounding questions on power, voice, agency, privilege and resources. The framework is organized along two dimensions (informal–formal and individual–systemic) and four quadrants: consciousness and capabilities (informal–individual), resources (formal–individual), social norms and deep structures (informal–collective) and policies/rules (formal–collective). The framework posits that collective social change is most likely to be possible and sustained when these multiple levels of influences are addressed in a more synergistic manner.

<sup>48</sup> The Country Office has adopted an innovative co-creation initiative to foster social norm change using storytelling. UN Women and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA) believe women and girls are the best sources for self-identifying indicators for complex and hard to access dimensions of change in gendered power relations and social norms. To this end, the co-creation initiative, which has been implemented in collaboration with Gender@Work, has explored the use of a mass storytelling tool to track UN Women and MFA strategic goals and interpret programmatic contributions to changes in social norms and gender equality (empowerment). Furthermore, the Country Office, along with the Regional Office, is collaborating with the World Design Organization innovative solutions to end violence against women through a cross-sectoral collaboration among designers, global thought leaders, youth and experts on gender equality and gender-based violence.

As noted previously, the Country Office has developed specific strategies<sup>49</sup> for each thematic area of work. While it is a good practice to articulate the vision for each area and the interlinkages between areas, the specific social norms that were sought to be changed were not clearly identified, and the linkages with respect to innovating for and measuring social norms change were unclear. The Developmental Evaluation concluded that while the Country Office is clearly committed to social norms change at a visionary level, the next step will be to bring this to a practical level to ensure that these innovative efforts (i.e. storytelling) are clearly linked to programming and advocacy efforts. This requires more thinking and research to understand norms, building on the United Nations report on the community perception survey on harmful practices,<sup>50</sup> and clearly linking the Country Office's strategies for gender-responsive and inclusive governance, women's economic empowerment, resource mobilization and gender-based violence as a means to influence discriminatory norms and harmful practices. Building capacities to measure social norms change – as envisaged by the storytelling initiative – will also be key.

### Targeting marginalized and excluded people

While the case study of inclusion and intersectionality found that the Country Office's approach has most often succeeded in reaching marginalized groups, it also found that targeting could be further sharpened and applied more systematically. It is difficult to track the success of targeting, as disaggregated data by intersectional criteria (youth, marital status, caste group) is not consistently collected. This also constrains learning. It is not possible, for example, to know whether the 500 women in the Comprehensive Sexuality Education project who gained skill certification, or the 1,666 women in the same project who managed to convert their training to income earning, were members of disadvantaged groups. Therefore, it complicates decision-making about which groups to prioritize. There is also evidence that targeting was not fully successful in some instances and that the most marginalized groups are not always being reached or targeted. For example, available evidence suggests that most women reached by women's economic empowerment programming were not Dalit. Why some marginalized groups have been reached more than others is unclear.

The Country Office's programme partners need to work with local communities and governments to select participants. Stakeholders consulted noted that selection is related to local officials' knowledge of who is in need, based on income levels, occupation or education level. However, overall, the process could be better documented and the criteria for selection made clearer. The Country Office could work towards ensuring all programme partners have close relationships at the grassroots level by focusing on CSOs with [head] offices at provincial and local levels and CSOs specifically working for and/or run by marginalized groups.

While the Country Office does track information on the type of CSO/partner in relation to groups represented, more documentation on the precise – and varying – methods these organizations use to reach marginalized groups could support sharper targeting and increase the number and type of tools in the Country Office's toolbox. Examples observed include group-based targeting (such as targeting a Dalit village in which all residents were similarly highly disadvantaged), and use of detailed local knowledge to hand select very marginalized individuals (e.g. for the comprehensive relief package). Collating and analysing these approaches could aid further understanding of which methods are the most effective. More systematic disaggregated monitoring and reporting of the rights holders reached would further strengthen the information available to the office.

Interview evidence also suggests that while partners acknowledge the Country Office's value added in focusing on this area, and appreciate the sharing of lessons, more information on the practical steps required to strongly integrate a gender equality and social inclusion approach would be welcomed.

#### Box 7: Good practices for an inclusion and intersectionality approach

##### Using different tools to target the most marginalized groups and women with an intersectional disadvantage.

The Country Office has used various approaches to increase its ability to reach the most marginalized groups. These include:

- Overall targeting of focus provinces and districts/ local government units with higher concentrations of some types of marginalized groups, such as Dalits.
- Using a core strategy of creating partnerships with CSOs with strong reach at the grassroots level. This includes CSOs with an explicit and singular focus on particular marginalized groups, such as disabled persons' organizations, the Feminist Dalit Organization and LGBTQI+ groups/networks (e.g. Mitini Nepal).
- Working with organizations representing a marginalized group to strengthen a gender perspective within the group, emphasizing the specific issues facing women, and their inclusion in events, leadership and analysis undertaken by the organization (such as in disability organizations).

##### Including feedback by disaggregating by marginalized group during monitoring.

The Country Office has at times ensured that it obtains information about whether it is actually reaching marginalized groups by including disaggregation by grouping for training and other interventions. This ensures that the Country Office has the information to course correct and sharpen targeting if necessary.

<sup>49</sup> The strategies include: (1) strategy on gender-responsive and inclusive governance, (2) strategy on women's economic empowerment, (3) communications strategy, (4) draft gender-based violence strategy, (5) resource mobilization strategy and (6) communication for development approach paper.

<sup>50</sup> Harmful Practices in Nepal: Report on Community Perceptions, available at [here](#)

## FINDING 10

**There are inherent challenges to the sustainability of outcomes due to high personnel turnover among government officials and competing government priorities. To counteract this risk, the Country Office has invested in CSOs and local groups, both formal and informal, and especially in organizations that represent marginalized groups. Strategic Note funding and consistent exit strategies have also facilitated a more sustainable approach to programming.**

Strengthening the capacity and skills for a gender equality and social inclusion perspective in local government by building champions among elected women leaders and government officials appears promising for sustained attention to marginalized groups and remains an important strategy. The Country Office is aware of the challenge related to the rapid rate at which government officials change positions, and elected representatives are vulnerable to political changes. While elected representatives may well remain as local leaders even when not in government – and therefore continue to use their skills – turnover of political leaders in government means that the capacity-building task is never completed.

The Country Office has put in place other sustainability strategies that are partly working to counter this risk. For example, **working through CSO programme partners with a sustained presence at local level** (e.g. offices or at least other ongoing projects) has resulted, in some cases, in partners sustaining relationships with project participants beyond the project time frame, and seeking ways to continue to support project outcomes (e.g. groups of women formed through the value chains project in Sudurpaschim Province). **Strengthening organizations representing and/or led by marginalized groups** also shows promise for empowering these organizations to continue to advocate for and support the group (e.g. disabled persons' organizations in Sudurpaschim Province, grassroots women's organizations working with the Access to Justice project).

Another strategy is the **creation of and access to resources**, e.g. training under the Access to Justice project; skills training for the Comprehensive Sexuality Education project; and the gender equality and social inclusion guidelines to support the 2021 census. However, this evaluation has not found concrete evidence that the training resources are used beyond the project time frame and

objectives. Similarly, key strategies such as implementing capacity-building through a government personnel training mechanism (e.g. the Nepal Administrative Staff College) ostensibly has good potential for sustainable outcomes. However, without follow-up, this cannot be confidently confirmed.

Case study evidence also suggests that the relatively weak attention paid to the enabling environment and sustainability limited overall outcomes related to women's economic empowerment. For example, in the Comprehensive Sexuality Education joint programme, evaluation team consultations with beneficiaries identified limited follow-up with entrepreneurship support after skills training, which limited the potential for sustainable income generation.<sup>51</sup> Missed opportunities to synergize project components or address the enabling environment/market linkages for vocational training is likely to be associated with relatively low conversion rates from training to income earning.<sup>52</sup> Where income earning is not a result of training, the skills learned are unlikely to be sustained.

On a positive note, the Strategic Note funds received from the Government of Finland have allowed for a longer time frame for programming efforts, which has the potential to facilitate sustainability of efforts. In contrast, of the 13 projects that were not funded by the Government of Finland (excluding the two advocacy campaigns on 16 days of activism), 12 projects (92 per cent) have an implementation time frame of less than three years. A positive feature is that 12 of the 13 projects have a plan to ensure sustainability of results embedded in the project document. The Country Office's thematic strategies for implementing the Strategic Note have also provided space for long-term visioning that can contribute to deepening approaches to achieve sustainability.

<sup>51</sup> The Joint Programme on Empowering Adolescent Girls and Young Women Through the Provision of Comprehensive Sexuality Education and a Safe Learning Environment in Nepal was the Nepal chapter of the global JP Empowering Adolescent Girls and Young Women through Education. It was implemented by UN-ESCO, UNFPA and UN Women; UN Women was responsible for implementing one Outcome focused on vocational skills training for vulnerable (out of school) adolescent girls and young women to enable them to enter and remain in the labour market. UNESCO and UNFPA had responsibility for providing alternative education opportunities including functional literacy classes and supporting schools with Adolescent Friendly Information Centres.

<sup>52</sup> The Comprehensive Sexuality Education Project trained a total of 4,469 young women in vocation skills; 36 per cent (N=1,666) of whom were engaged in income generation.



## ORGANIZATIONAL EFFICIENCY

*Does UN Women Nepal have appropriate governance, capacity and capability to ensure good use of resources (personnel and funding) to deliver results?*

### FINDING 11

**The Country Office has adopted a horizontal approach to management and leadership inviting colleagues to share the “leadership bench”, and integrated programme and operations, with a focus on learning and building the capacity of its personnel. This has resulted in an empowered team and reduced siloed approaches (i.e. vertical or project approach). However, long gaps in filling positions caused by external factors have burdened the team and resulted in burnout.**

The Developmental Evaluation of the Country Office conducted jointly with IES in 2021 found that the office has invested in developing the capacities of its personnel to ensure feminist principles are internalized, which has contributed to most personnel feeling empowered and increased credibility among partners. Between 2018 and 2020, the Country Office invested significantly in its personnel, amounting to approximately US\$ 70,000.<sup>53</sup> The cognitive coaching and adaptive leadership programmes have nurtured a culture of self-directedness and adaptive leadership skills among personnel and inspired a shared vision based on personal and collective reflexivity. The personnel survey conducted for the Developmental Evaluation asked whether Country Office personnel had opportunities for learning. Eighty-three per cent of the survey respondents agreed to a great extent, while the rest somewhat agreed.

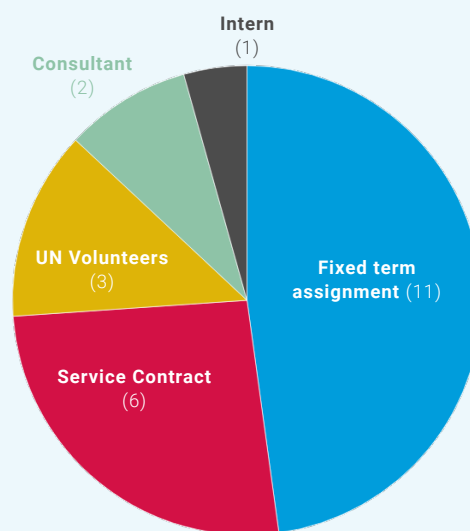
The Country Office has also actively promoted leadership of staff and horizontal management through practices such as power-sharing by deepening the “leadership bench” among personnel; regular all-personnel meetings to share information and learning; and a “reading circle”, which was initiated by the Country Office in 2020 as a safe space for personnel to discuss, exchange thoughts and learn from each other around a range of topics related to gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Results from the CPE personnel survey (75 per cent response rate [N=18/24] [see Annex 4]) indicate an overall positive work environment. One hundred per cent of respondents either agreed (83.3 per cent, N=15/18) or fully agreed (16.7 per cent, N=3/28) that the people they work with collaborate to get the job done. Furthermore, 89 per cent of the respondents either agreed (83.3 per cent, N=15/18) or fully agreed (5.6 per cent, N=1/18) that the people they work with share information and ideas to help others succeed.

Almost half of Country Office personnel have a fixed-term appointment (see Figure 7), which allows for more stability. The personnel survey led by the CPE team flagged some persistent challenges:

1. While 55.6 per cent of survey respondents (N=10/18) agreed on having a manageable workload, the same number disagreed that the office has adequate human resources to do its job effectively.
2. The respondents were confident in the management of the office, despite feeling that the office may not be adapting well to operational changes. Many respondents had to take on additional roles due to staff turnover, and some found the procedures confusing.

**FIGURE 7. PERSONNEL DISTRIBUTION**



Source: Human Resources data provided by Country Office in February 2022

<sup>53</sup> Source: Atlas expenditure for the period of January 2018 – December 2020.

Stakeholders consulted (Country Office, United Nations system partners and CSOs) also perceived the office to be exceptionally understaffed, with key positions being vacant in the past couple of years and the existing staff performing multiple functions, including participating in multiple coordination bodies. The Country Office experienced an extended period without a Country Representative. The post has been vacant since June 2021 and is still vacant as of November 2022. The regional human resources focal point noted that headquarters put the recruitment process on hold due to a potential headquarters rotation, which was later cancelled; then the post was advertised towards the end of 2021 and the selected candidate declined requiring the process to be re-initiated in mid-2022. Interviews with both Country Office personnel and external partners suggested that while respondents are confident in the very competent office management, there is a concern that the absence of a Country Representative for such a long period could undermine the Country Office's credibility and weaken high-level relationships.

The personnel survey revealed that while most respondents found the Country Office Diversity Strategy 2019–2022 quite effective overall, several noted that procurement and recruitment of staff and consultants could be improved: 16.7 per cent (N=3/18) of respondents stated that the diversity strategy has been somewhat ineffective in the recruitment of staff and consultants, while 27.8 per cent (N=5/18) found it neither effective nor ineffective. Personnel comprise 16 women, 5 men and 1 transgender female. The evaluation team analysed the diversity of Country Office personnel according to the caste

hierarchy prevalent in the country based on information provided by the Country Office (see Figure 9).<sup>54</sup> Fifty-nine per cent of Country Office personnel (N=13/22) fell under the “high caste” quadrant of the caste hierarchy and 36 per cent (N=8/22) were in the middle quadrant. No personnel belonged to the lowest and most marginalized castes. The Country Office's commitment to diversity is demonstrated through its efforts to establish a strategy, monitor diversity and establish opportunities for engaging more marginalized youth through the traineeship programme. Stakeholders acknowledged that an investment in cognitive coaching by the office to increase staff confidence in articulating feminist ideals externally has been effective.<sup>55</sup> While the personnel survey conducted by the CPE team suggests the Diversity Strategy could be more thoroughly implemented, it has nevertheless contributed to raising awareness of diversity issues and thereby increased attention to inclusion issues through the other layers of the approach.<sup>56</sup> At least two external stakeholders also noted that more diversity among Country Office personnel would demonstrate organizational commitment to the issue. While the Country Office has taken concrete steps, personnel still expect more, as they believe the office should be a leader in this area. Ideas to improve diversity included continuing to advocate for internal promotion, and enhanced recruitment and procurement practices; investing more in social norms change; sharpening efforts on intersectionality diversity and inclusion; engaging more at “ground level;” and increasing programmes focused on marginalized groups and work with CSOs led by marginalized groups.

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<sup>54</sup> UN Women Nepal, which follows the social groupings as set out in the UNDP Interim Workforce Diversity Policy (2009), noted that: Brahmins and Chhettris are considered higher/upper caste. Newaris are a part of Janajatis, however, Newars that are Shresthas fall under high caste due to their access to resources, wealth, education, etc. The rest of the Newaris, especially the Kasais, fall below them (with the Janajatis). Janajatis come after Newaris, and Madhesi after Janajati. However, it is important to note that even within a particular caste there are hierarchies, and as such some fall under the higher spectrum and some under the lower. Advantaged Janajatis and Janajatis who are Gurungs, Magars and Tamangs are significantly well off compared with their hill and terai counterparts. This again is due to access to resources, wealth, education and access to the army. Advantaged Janajatis are also foreign educated. Similarly, Madhesi Brahmins are considered higher within the terai region and are significantly well off compared with their other counterparts. The most marginalized, however, are the Dalits. To this day – despite being constitutionalized – in practice, they are still considered “untouchable” in some areas.

<sup>55</sup> The Developmental Evaluation also concluded that by investing in its most critical asset, i.e. its people, the Country Office has built a cadre of competent, motivated individuals who are ready and able to innovate and have helped to build trust and credibility among partners, exemplifying what it means to be a feminist organization. This foundation is critical to the ability of the Country Office to innovate for social norms change.

<sup>56</sup> Fifty-eight per cent (N=11/18) of respondents found implementation of the Diversity Strategy to be somewhat or very effective, meaning that more than half of the respondents still see room for improvement.

## FINDING 12

**The Country Office has demonstrated commitment to adaptive management and learning from results through consistent evaluations and exploring innovative means to measure social norms change. Third-party monitoring may provide a means for more consistent information, particularly during times of crisis.**

The Country Office is committed to learning, which is evident from its investment in evaluations and reviews. The office has dedicated funds for a Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, who is currently appointed through the national United Nations Volunteer modality. The personnel surveyed by the CPE were very supportive of the Country Office's approach to adaptive management: 77.8 per cent of respondents (N=14/18) either agreed (50 per cent, N=9/18) or fully agreed (27.8 per cent, N=5/18) that the office is adapting well to operational changes. Furthermore, 89 per cent (N=16/18) either agreed (66.7 per cent, N=12/18) or fully agreed (22.2 per cent, N=4/18) that the office regularly tries new ideas to improve services, processes or programmes. With respect to knowledge management and sharing, 89 per cent of respondents (N=16/18) either agreed (77.8 per cent, N=14/18) or fully agreed (11.1 per cent, N=2/18) that knowledge and lessons learned are shared in useful ways around the office.

As highlighted by the Developmental Evaluation, the Country Office has adopted an adaptive management approach and focused on establishing institutional mechanisms to support innovation. The Developmental Evaluation found that the Country Office could be considered an "early initiator" within UN Women in the Asia and the Pacific region when it comes to innovating for social norms change. Although there was no existing overarching strategy or documented approach for innovation, elements have been embedded throughout the Country Office's programme of work. Enabling factors included senior management support, investment in capacities for innovation (obtained through cognitive coaching and leadership programmes), and space for innovation. Senior managers recognized that innovation requires risk taking and accepting potential failure.

The Country Office prepares comprehensive annual reports and donor reports, and has managed five evaluations during the Strategic Note period (2018–2022) (see Annex 2) and been involved in several others, such as the draft Nepal UNDAF evaluation (2022) and the Evaluation of the Joint Programme on Rural Women's Economic Empowerment.<sup>57</sup> The Country Office engaged in three

critical exercises that demonstrated its commitment to results-based management, adaptive management, innovation and learning, which should provide inspiration to other Country Offices: (1) an evaluability assessment of the Strategic Note, (2) a storytelling approach for measuring social norms; and (3) a Developmental Evaluation. In combination, these processes have supported reflective learning and adjustments throughout the Strategic Note period, and are likely to have contributed to enhancing overall results both internally and externally.

- 1. Evaluability assessment of the Strategic Note** The purpose of this assessment was to document the key contextual factors, both internal to UN Women and external (national context), that have a bearing on the design and implementation of the Strategic Note and implications for evaluability; and to contribute to UN Women's organizational and development effectiveness by providing ideas on a way forward given the contextual constraints on how the Strategic Note, results frameworks and monitoring and evaluation systems could be enhanced.
- 2. Measuring social norms change through storytelling** In collaboration with Gender@Work<sup>58</sup> and the Government of Finland, the Country Office engaged in a storytelling approach, which is an innovative way to identify and understand the pathways for social norms change that occur at the individual and community level. The unique approach of capturing such data could inspire other UN Women Country Offices to use this approach as a "feedback loop" of evidence and learning, feeding into long-term programming. While the Country Office has created an enabling environment for innovating for social norms change, the Developmental Evaluation also noted that further work must be done to embed its approach to innovation and ensure it is not lost with changes in personnel.
- 3. Developmental Evaluation** The main purpose of the Developmental Evaluation was to inform and support implementation of innovative and adaptive development programme strategies focused on social norms change in a complex and dynamic environment.

<sup>57</sup> WFP, Joint evaluation: Joint programme on accelerating progress towards the economic empowerment of rural women (2014–2020), May 2021. <https://www.wfp.org/publications/joint-evaluation-joint-programme-accelerating-progress-towards-economic-empowerment>.

<sup>58</sup> Gender at Work is a private firm that aims to advance gender equality and transform power relations by supporting both local and global social change organizations to change their structures, processes and programmes and to spotlight and change the rules, social institutions and exclusionary practices that maintain inequalities. This is achieved through producing new analytical tools, ways of thinking and practices.

Its primary objective was to “support developmental decision-making and course corrections along the emergent path” of achieving gender equality in Nepal and its progress towards the goal to “achieve gender equality, social inclusion and empower women and girls in Nepal to realize their human rights”. The Developmental Evaluation supported the generation of knowledge and organizational learning on what works and does not work to advance gender equality in Nepal. It also reflected on changes in the programming context; adaptations to programme priorities; and the intervention strategy to innovate in social norms change.

### **Evaluability and annual reporting of the Strategic Note**

As part of preparation for this evaluation, a rapid evaluability assessment was carried out (Annex 7). Overall, the evaluation team assessed that the evaluability of the Nepal CPE is adequate to good. The current Development Results Framework and Organizational Effectiveness and Efficiency Framework were both assessed overall as good for quality and completeness, with some adequate indicators.

Overall, the Country Office prepares timely and satisfactory quality reports. The 2020 global assessment of annual reports conducted by headquarters assessed the Nepal Country Office’s annual report as satisfactory, and the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific reported that the Country Office submits timely donor reports. Nepal was the only Country Office in the Asia and the Pacific region that scored above 70 per cent across all four parameters of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of projects analysed<sup>59</sup> as part of a portfolio review of the quality of project management completed by the Regional Office, with an overall average score of 77 per cent for these projects.<sup>60</sup> The main challenge identified by this CPE was monitoring at the local level and during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was dependent on programme partners.<sup>61</sup> In order to ensure that programming is delivered to the intended individuals and areas, a third-party monitoring mechanism may be helpful, especially to ensure that potential complaints are captured.

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## **FINDING 13**

**Strategic Note funding provided by the Government of Finland has enabled flexible programming, innovation and a more sustainable staffing structure. However, given that the Strategic Note is highly dependent on one donor, diversification may be necessary. While there are project-specific efforts in the pipeline, the resource mobilization strategy may need to be reviewed.**

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Country Office senior management established a Communications, Coordination and Resource Mobilization Unit in 2020, which was placed directly under the supervision of the Country Office Representative. The unit developed a resource mobilization strategy; however, its leadership post was abolished in December 2021, and Country Office communications is now led by one Communications Officer. Duties related to coordination and resource mobilization are now shared by different personnel. The Country Office has a resource mobilization strategy for the Strategic Note period 2018–2022, which was updated in the third quarter of 2019 and then again in June 2021.

This was done to adapt to the changing social and political landscape in Nepal and later to the COVID-19 pandemic context. It details the necessary individual and institutional capacities around resource mobilization to inspire commitment at an individual level among Country Office personnel and applies a Gender@Work framework, outlining the capacities, tools, systems and partnerships required to meet the resource mobilization goals set out in the Strategic Note. UN Women personnel consulted noted that coaching and orientation sessions on resource mobilization are provided.

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<sup>59</sup> The three projects analysed were: (1) Accelerating Progress Towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women In Nepal; (2) the Women in Value Chains project; and (3) (UNPRPD MDTF) Aawaaz – Inclusion for and by Persons With Disabilities.

<sup>60</sup> The portfolio review exercise took place in August 2021 as part of the portfolio management process to bridge the gap between strategy and implementation. It analysed 83 projects across 17 countries in the region.

<sup>61</sup> The Country Office reported that it elevated its engagement with programme partners through virtual platforms and involved local-level project staff and participants in review and monitoring more frequently than prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there was a gap in documenting these monitoring/review meetings.

The Developmental Evaluation noted that the weekly programme, partnerships and resource mobilization meetings were open to all staff as an extended learning opportunity. Country Office personnel reported that in 2022, two international consultants were recruited to support resource mobilization. As shown in Table 1, the actual annual budget reached a high of US\$ 4.5 million in 2021.

The first year of the Strategic Note had a high funding gap; however, another gap emerged in 2022 because expected funding from the EU<sup>62</sup> was delayed due to challenges in receiving clearance from the Government for the donor agreement – this is expected to be resolved by the end of 2022. New and diverse funding is important to avoid disruptions to business continuity.

**TABLE 1: TOTAL COUNTRY OFFICE RESOURCES REQUIREMENTS, ACTUAL BUDGET AND FUNDING GAP (2018–2022)**

Resources	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Core</b>	590,000	590,000	420,000	465,000	420,000
<b>Non-core available</b>	2,747,982	2,702,087	2,686,969	3,513,235	2,621,631
<b>Non-core TBM</b>	837,292				600,000
<b>IB</b>	462,694	412,239	450,513	379,943	375,329
<b>EXB</b>	182,813	119,631	157,162	146,525	134,279
<b>Total resource requirements</b>	4,820,781	3,823,957	3,714,644	4,504,703	4,151,239
<b>Available resources</b>	3,983,489	3,823,957	3,714,644	4,504,703	3,551,239
<b>Funding gap</b>	837,292	-	-	-	600,000
<b>Funding gap %</b>	17%	0%	0%	0%	14%

Source: RMS data, August 2022

The Country Office has maintained a unique funding situation with the Government of Finland, which funds the Strategic Note rather than specific projects. The Country Office reported that of the funds provided by the Government of Finland over the Strategic Note period,<sup>63</sup> approximately 18 per cent went to supporting human resources; 8 per cent to support costs; and 74 per cent to specific programming. This relationship has been long-standing since the UN Women Country Office was established (from the previous United Nations Development Fund for Women [UNIFEM]). Good practices include how the Country Office engages the Government of Finland in specific initiatives to co-create the way forward, such as with the storytelling initiative, where a joint mission was undertaken. As noted by the resource mobilization strategy, the Country Office has adopted a philosophy of engagement with donors that fosters commitment, and to this extent, all Country Office personnel are encouraged to be involved in managing these relationships as part of their day-to-day responsibilities.

Through funding the Strategic Note, the Government of Finland has facilitated a more flexible, adaptive management approach in line with the dynamic context of development work. This has also allowed the Country Office to innovate, e.g. the storytelling approach noted under Finding 12. The respondents to the personnel survey also noted that the Strategic Note funding modality was quite effective in terms of its ability to better align with country priorities; to meet the needs of partner institutions, beneficiaries and civil society; to better respond to changes in context/crises; to decrease the administrative burden on personnel; and to offer the potential to support central functions, develop and test innovative approaches, and support hard-to-fund areas.

While the office has a diverse number of joint programmes, the Country Office should continue to advocate for Strategic Note funding with a more diverse range of donors to reduce dependency on one donor. In 2018–2022, 37.2 per cent (US\$ 5.4 million of US\$ 14.5 million) of the total funds, or 52 per cent (US\$ 5.4 million of US\$ 10.4 million) of the total external funds (excluding contribution by UN Women) were mobilized from the Government of Finland.

<sup>62</sup> US\$ 3.5 million in funding is expected to be received from the EU for the Empowered Women, Prosperous Nepal programme over the next five years.

<sup>63</sup> The Government of Finland provided approximately US\$ 5.05 million for the entire Strategic Note period (inclusive of 2022).

Although the Country Office is aware of the risk, the risk mitigation strategy in terms of the resource mobilization strategy could more robustly address this issue, e.g. by collecting systematic evidence on the benefits of Strategic Note funding for dissemination to key like-minded donors.

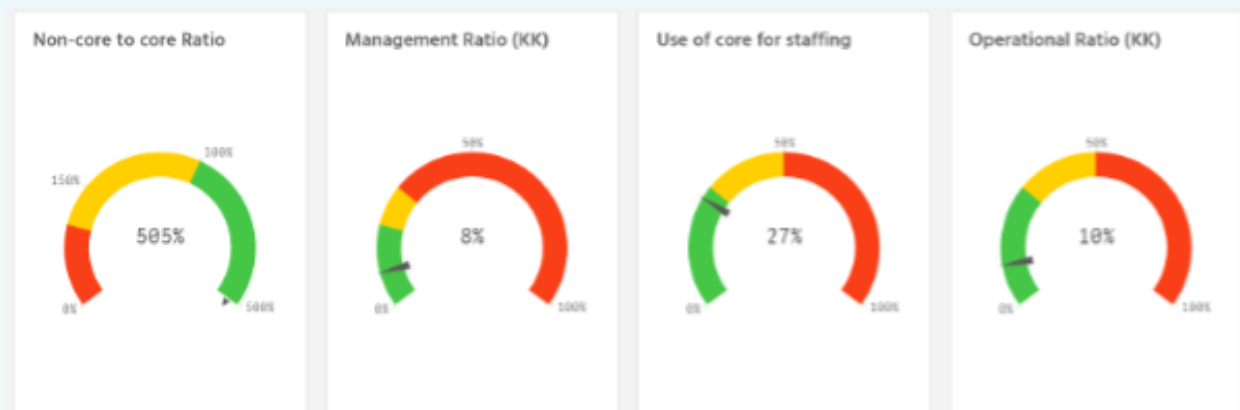
Overall, the Country Office was in the “green” zone with respect to financial key performance indicators monitored by UN Women (see Box 8). No major operational issues were identified through the data collected for this evaluation.

### BOX 8. COUNTRY OFFICE PERFORMANCE ON FINANCIAL KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

1. The management ratio, meaning the management costs based on Institutional Budget expenditure used for funding full-time staff positions, which should be less than 20 per cent to be in the green zone, was 8 per cent.
2. The operational ratio, meaning the funding used from the Core Budget for staffing, which should be less than 30 per cent to be in the green zone, was 10 per cent.
3. The Non-Core revenue to Core Budget ratio, which should be greater than or equal to 300 per cent in order to be in the green zone, was 505 per cent; and
4. With regard to the use of core funding for staffing, which should be less than 30 per cent to be in the green zone, the ratio was 27 per cent.

(Source: RMS, data averaged for the month of December across 2018–2021)

FIGURE 8. COUNTRY OFFICE ASSESSMENT TOOL (COAT) AS OF MARCH 2022



# LESSONS LEARNED

*The evaluation has brought the following key lessons into focus:*



To reach the most marginalized groups, it is key for organizations to provide avenues for engaging grassroots organizations in meaningful ways to allow for capacity-building and co-creation of project design. Several effective strategies include targeting of geographical areas with higher concentrations of marginalized groups; creating partnerships with CSOs with strong reach at the grassroots level, including CSOs for and led by marginalized groups; facilitating consortia of CSOs to apply to requests for proposals; and providing a strategic package of capacity-building and learning exchange with CSOs.



During times of crisis, convening and listening to voices across the spectrum of different stakeholders is essential for an effective and relevant response. The people who relief efforts are trying to target may well be precisely the hardest to reach with cash because of their lack of citizenship documentation for example. When this is factored into the response, and marginalized women supported to access these formal documents, the relief response can reap real long-term benefits.



Identifying synergies, geographical focus and layering efforts maximizes progress. Decisions to focus on particular local governments in select provinces over a longer period of time can pay off as relationships are built, synergies are leveraged between the efforts thereby maximizing potential for sustainable results.



Embedding a scale-up strategy or plan from the design stage can provide clear avenues for sustainability. Documenting models so that results can be easily shared with other parties for further scale-up across the federal structure is important.



Diversity and inclusion must start internally to support external work. Several practices identified can be shared as practical steps for embedding an inclusive and diverse approach within the Country Office, including investing internally in personnel learning and leadership; taking a feminist, horizontal management approach that breaks down power barriers; providing opportunities for youth representing marginalized groups; and tracking and transparently reporting on diversity across key dimensions that are relevant to the country context.



Investing internally can have dividends for organizational credibility. The Country Office's internal capacity-building and flat hierarchy, which allows junior staff to gain experience, articulate positions and build confidence, shows promise for supporting UN Women's reputation. This has the added advantage of supporting the sustainability of the organization's skill set.



Unearmarked funding (such as Strategic Note funding) has the potential to support adaptive management and provide space for innovation. Close partnerships with donors that support unearmarked funding can provide scope for an organization to be more responsive in a dynamic context. Flexible and adaptive management are essential seeds for stimulating innovation.



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# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

UN Women Nepal has implemented its Strategic Note 2018–2022 during unprecedented times, recognizing the dynamic context, with the Government of Nepal's federalization process, political instability and the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has already rolled back gains achieved, and its effects will be long-lasting. Pre-existing, deep-seated inequalities and discriminatory practices have been magnified for women and marginalized groups in Nepal, resulting in a lack of access to services and social protection, loss of livelihood, a rising care burden and increasing gender-based violence. The federalization process has presented great opportunities to bring programming to local levels and build the capacities of elected women. However, other challenges have been experienced, with a slow roll-out process and constant turnover of government officials, particularly at federal level. In combination, these have presented key challenges to UN Women's programming efforts in Nepal. Nevertheless, the Country Office has become a leader within this context and contributed to the realization of the rights of women and excluded groups in Nepal. There is an opportunity for the Country Office to continue to "walk the talk" with respect to embodying feminist principles, share critical lessons learned and be a source of inspiration for other UN Women offices. Its next five-year Strategic Note period will be critical for sustaining and deepening gains and scaling up through knowledge-sharing and partnership.

The presentation of the preliminary CPE findings and discussion on the way forward took place with members of the Evaluation Reference Group in June 2022 and fed into the final recommendations presented below. The recommendations were reviewed by the Evaluation Management Group and the Evaluation Reference Group, and subsequent changes were integrated as appropriate. The bullet points below the recommendations represent potential key actions for consideration by the Country Office, based on feasibility within its current programme of work and available resources. Some of the suggested actions were already under way given the time interval between the issuance of the preliminary findings and finalization of the report. The level of priority and suggested time frame for implementation are indicated below the recommendation. Feedback from the Evaluation Management Group and Evaluation Reference Group on factual errors in the evaluation report was tracked for transparency.



Based on: Findings 1, 2, 3

## CONCLUSION 1:

**Gender-based discrimination due to the persistence of societal structures, beliefs, values, and harmful practices requires long-term programming for transformative change to tackle the spectrum of individual to systemic-level changes across the informal and formal spheres of life. In line with national priorities and the need to address gender equality and social inclusion, the Country Office has adopted a relevant framework and strategies for addressing these challenges in a holistic manner. The thematic areas of focus remain highly relevant and will require more concerted efforts at provincial and local levels to maintain relevance within the context of federalization. To maintain its strong positioning, during implementation of the new UNSDCF, the Country Office must find ways to translate its advocacy into concrete technical advice and tools for partners across the UNSDCF areas of focus.**

The UN Women Nepal Country Office has built a strong and credible voice in Nepal in support of gender equality, social inclusion and women's empowerment. The Country Office's value added is the technical and advocacy support provided to development partners in their journey to articulate how to implement the gender equality and social inclusion agenda in Nepal. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Country Office demonstrated its ability to be responsive to changing needs. The Country Office had the foresight to invest in adaptive management approaches that allowed it to be responsive and adjust as appropriate. As demonstrated by its leadership and participation in UNCT working groups and humanitarian clusters during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Country Office has taken a proactive leadership approach to coordination in response to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. This has helped to position the Country Office as a key leader within UNCT efforts in support of inclusive and responsive development approaches. The ability of the Country Office to convene partners from across the development spectrum – grassroots to government – has been highlighted by stakeholders as a value added because it has brought the voices of rights holders to an equal platform with duty bearers, feeding into more relevant and coherent approaches to development.

With respect to the thematic areas of the Strategic Note, Inclusive Governance remains highly relevant, and ways of strengthening the Country Office approach on supporting local-level government will be needed for the next Strategic Note period. While there is a huge need for further work on Women's Economic Empowerment, the overall approach will need to be more strongly linked to the governance approach to increase the potential for sustainability and scalability. Work on Gender Statistics is in its early stages, with challenges. However, it is an important area to continue building expertise and advocating for with the Government, and more specifically the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens as a key data user. Ending Violence Against Women is a highly relevant area where partners see a niche for UN Women, and which could be made more visible through the social norms change focus in the next Strategic Note. UN Women's niche within the humanitarian–development–peace nexus is an area of high relevance but requires dedicated personnel with technical expertise. Building on UN Women's niche in the humanitarian–development–peace nexus, the menu of services delivered in response to humanitarian needs should be further defined in line with the recommendations of the regional evaluation on crisis response<sup>64</sup> and clearly build on the Country Office's specific value added in support of the nexus.

**RECOMMENDATION 1: The new Strategic Note should define how the Country Office will continue to strengthen its support to the federalization process through a nested approach in partnership with the United Nations system, while maintaining and strengthening the gender equality, social inclusion and intersectionality focus in practical terms. Engage with Country Office partners in defining the next Strategic Note and continue to develop products that help communicate UN Women's vision to partners.**

The following key actions can be considered by the Country Office:

- » Continue to focus on priority thematic areas and identify how to translate this into a local-level governance approach.
- » In line with the Developmental Evaluation, leverage inter-agency coordination, joint programmes and technical and strategic partnerships with the Government that allow the Country Office to expand its reach at provincial, local and community levels to support social norms change efforts.

**PRIORITY: HIGH | TIME FRAME: Q1 2023**

**Relevant to:** Country Office senior management, programme and operations personnel

<sup>64</sup> UN Women, Independent Evaluation Service, Evaluation of UN Women's Crisis Response in Asia and the Pacific; <https://gate.unwomen.org/Evaluation/Details?evaluationId=11538>.

Based on Findings 1, 2, 4

## CONCLUSION 2:

The Country Office has demonstrated how investment in coordination mechanisms and joint programmes can translate into the organization's ability to scale up advocacy and programming efforts for gender equality and women's empowerment. The Country Office has dedicated time to United Nations system coordination mechanisms and other broader development partner coordination mechanisms with clear messaging around gender equality and social inclusion across these platforms. By ensuring that the voices of marginalized persons were heard in these platforms, UN Women demonstrated its value added in linking Government and development partners with the reality on the ground. This not only translated into awareness but also concrete actions, exemplified by the COVID-19 pandemic response efforts.

Momentum must be sustained despite changes in leadership in the Country Office and government partners. Partnerships can be deepened through investment in managing the partnership in a truly joint manner through ongoing learning processes. The new UNSDCF presents a critical opportunity for ensuring that gender equality and social inclusion remain central through a coherent and relevant United Nations system approach. The Country Office must translate advocacy into concrete technical tools and advice for partners so that they can action advocacy messages and build their capacity to continue strengthening and championing gender and social inclusion mainstreaming work on their own. These tools might emphasize Country Office learning about analyses required for including a no one left behind lens in programme design, well-defined targeting strategies, and partnerships that enable reach to marginalized groups.

To realize the aims of the Strategic Note and ensure relevance of its efforts, the Country Office will need to review its partnership strategy to ensure strong partnerships across all tiers of government and beyond the traditional line ministries along with other United Nations system partners. A revitalized partnership with the Government will deepen Country Office support in the normative space by translating established policies and frameworks into action at all levels.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** Continue proactive engagement with United Nations and development partners to further leadership and advocacy for gender equality and social inclusion in practical ways through key platforms. In line with recommendations from the draft Nepal UNDAF evaluation, with the aim of enhancing coherence, UN Women should work with its United Nations system partners to identify ways to strengthen joint programme management, while ensuring the equal visibility of each agency within these efforts.

The following key actions can be considered by the Country Office:

- » Ensure action-oriented coordination meetings and follow-up (e.g. GiHA). Identify indicators and monitor how coordination efforts influence gender mainstreaming or partnership establishment.
- » Translate ideals of inclusion into practical tools or advice for non-gender experts (e.g. across humanitarian sectors). Explore the possibility of assigning/hiring a focal point for coordination efforts.
- » In discussion with United Nations partners, explore ways to find solutions to some identity/reputational risks that can emerge when joint programmes are pursued in well-synergized ways that amplify the value added of each agency. Specifically, there is concern that UN Women's lack of visibility for its contribution to joint programmes – such as when working with governments – carries a risk to maintaining its credibility and attracting funds and will act as a disincentive to pursuing this otherwise promising operating method.

**PRIORITY: HIGH; TIME FRAME: Q4 2023**

**Relevant to:** Country Office senior management, programme and operations personnel

## CONCLUSION 3:

**UN Women in Nepal has made substantial contributions to gender equality and social inclusion in Nepal through its support to partners with gender-responsive policy development and programming in the context of federalization and the COVID-19 pandemic. Methods to support achievements include using a focused and nested approach to ensure synergy between efforts and at different levels (from individual to an enabling environment) and a strong partnership approach. At local and provincial levels, results have been achieved either through joint programmes or through CSO programme partners with a focus on those with strong grassroots links and an increasing focus on organizations run by as well as for marginalized groups.**

A holistic approach to capacity-building has been used as a core strategy, involving duty bearers, rights holder organizations and individual rights holders. The Country Office should continue to expand its reach at local and provincial levels to support social norms change by leveraging inter-agency coordination, joint programmes, and technical and strategic partnerships with the Government and development partners, as also recommended by the Developmental Evaluation.

Strong linkages and communication about how the Country Office will support an enabling environment are required. These should clearly define and specify how efforts will address and link with social norms change and barriers to gender equality and social inclusion. For example, in the framework of Women's Economic Empowerment, this has meant that at times there is some disconnect between skills developed and the ability to translate these into sustainable income earning and entrepreneurship. Strengthening how these approaches address and make space beyond the gendered norms that structure the economy will be a key part of moving this agenda forward.

Identifying ways to scale up and explore how good practice models can be embedded in programme development and design so that the question of achieving scale is established from the outset will be critical moving forward. Useful models have been trialled and experience gathered by the Country Office, but it is not clear how these might be scaled up or disseminated. As a small agency, building scale into programme design is a huge challenge that requires a strategy. It also requires envisioning and stating this ambition to partners. It might also mean further exploring the positioning of gender-specific programming in the country's new federal structures, alongside the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior

Citizens, as well as methods to support the sharing and exchange of gender equality and social inclusion expertise across provincial and local governments as envisaged in the Provincial Local Governance Support Programme. For Women's Economic Empowerment, it might mean exploring ways to link project work to national or federal umbrella mechanisms for women's entrepreneurship, social impact investing and large-scale procurement processes, for example.

**RECOMMENDATION 3: Continue building an integrated approach to implementation of UN Women's triple mandate, layering efforts across different thematic areas and focusing on priority provinces to avoid being spread too thinly, while aiming to scale up programmes with the Government, the United Nations system and development partners. Clearly communicate to partners UN Women's models with potential for scale-up and value added within the different thematic areas.**

Suggested key actions

- » Continue to move away from isolated, localized training towards a nested approach that integrates initiatives, includes interventions in an enabling environment and asserts a rights-based approach.
- » Ensure that capacity-building initiatives more consistently address the gendered features of the enabling environment and include guidance on how these can be tackled.
- » Continue to include a focus on social norms at household and community levels (especially in the economy) to support this.
- » In collaboration with partners, articulate a strategy or strategies for scaling up different types of initiatives, using the analytical framework suggested by the Corporate Formative Evaluation on UN Women's Approach to Innovation.<sup>65</sup> In the design of the next Strategic Note and related programmes, ensure that this vision is expressed in the theory of change and therefore translated into specific actions.
- » Build strong partnerships at both federal and local levels and nurture linkages between these as a means to influence the normative space and scale up efforts. In collaboration with partners, articulate a strategy or strategies for scaling different types of initiatives to a broader scale, using the analytical framework suggested by the evaluation of UN Women's approach to innovation.<sup>66</sup> In the design of the next Strategic Note and related programmes, ensure that this vision is expressed in the theory of change and therefore translated into specific actions.

**PRIORITY: MEDIUM - TIME FRAME: Q2 2023**

**Relevant to:** Country Office senior management, programme and operations personnel

<sup>65</sup> UN Women, Independent Evaluation Service, Corporate Formative Evaluation on UN Women's approach to innovation, 2021: <https://gate.unwomen.org/Evaluation/Details?evaluationId=11543>

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

Based on Findings 9 and 10

## CONCLUSION 4:

**The Country Office has exemplified feminist principles and its dedication to gender equality, diversity and social inclusion through a multifaceted and comprehensive approach. By having a clear intent in its strategies and investments in its personnel to embody and spread its messages, the Country Office has built expertise in operationalizing intersectional approaches to programming for gender equality and social inclusion. By working with CSOs led by and for marginalized and excluded groups, supporting and convening its partners to reach marginalized and excluded groups and listen to their concerns, the Country Office has built capacity and potential for sustainability. This experience offers valuable learning to others on the principle of leaving no one behind, while also providing insight into how methods could be further fine-tuned.**

This evaluation has identified three key areas for fine-tuning the Country Office's work moving forward. First, to fulfil the demands of the principle of leaving no one behind, the Country Office should ensure the most marginalized groups are supported to improve their social and economic positioning. The results of the 2021 census that integrated gender equality and social inclusion are likely to be highly instructive to this enquiry. Social groupings and hierarchies are complex in Nepal and are likely to have been affected by the recent crises of the 2015 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic. Country Office programmes have all targeted women with identifiable types of intersectional disadvantage, such as being single, young, low caste, a returned migrant, engaged in sex work, disabled (as guided by the groups identified in the Strategic Note). While straightforward ranking of which groups are most severely disadvantaged may be too complex, some ongoing discussion over which groups should be more consistently targeted and making the rationale behind this explicit would be beneficial.

Second, if the Country Office had a consistent and systematic approach for collecting and disaggregating data by targeted group (ethnicity or some other form of marginalization) the office would be able to tell its own story with regard to leaving no one behind across all efforts. Disaggregated data would offer insight into how far programme approaches have offered benefits to which group, as well as identifying challenges when working with specific marginalized and excluded groups. With more readily available in-depth information, work could be further fine-tuned as efforts are implemented to support an adaptive management approach.

Third, in the interest of enriching learning on leaving no one behind, there is scope for extending existing efforts to explicitly learn from programme partners about where intersectional targeting has worked, where it has not been effective, good practices, difficult issues and decisions, and how they were resolved. In addition to the current sharing of these experiences through different platforms, e.g. GiHA, IPDG Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Working Group, establishing a process to collate experience with methods for reaching marginalized groups, and for disseminating this experience, would be appreciated by partner agencies.

Clearly documenting how progress is being made would support partners that are interested in more concrete, practical guidance on how to implement an intersectional approach to fulfil the leave no one behind agenda. It would provide detail and data that could be translated into specific tools and support.

**RECOMMENDATION 4: Continue to evolve and strengthen the focus on diversity and inclusion both internally and externally, including by routinely disaggregating all monitoring data by social group, and by periodically revisiting the discussion on who are the most marginalized groups and the rationale for targeting these or other groups. In collaboration with sister agencies, draw on the detailed experience of programme partners to develop guidance tools on how to operationalize an intersectional approach.**

Actions to consider include:

- » Continue to implement the recently finalized Diversity Strategy and further explore ways to increase internal diversity in recruitment and procurement. Within this, consider making explicit the level of disadvantage among Hill and Terai Janajati communities, and consider including in the strategy data from the new census detailing the proportion of the overall population represented by each group, so that "ideal" levels of representation are easily understood.
- » Convene programme partners to collate learning on how they reach and target very marginalized groups and learn about how they resolve challenges.
- » Initiate a process to convene CSOs with expertise in integrating an intersectional approach to programming and sister agencies to co-create guidance on good practices for identifying, targeting and reaching very marginalized groups.

**PRIORITY: MEDIUM - TIME FRAME: Q4 2023**

**Relevant to:** Country Office senior management, programme and operations personnel and Regional Office senior management

Based on Findings 6, 7, 11, 12

## CONCLUSION 5:

**Recognition that organizations must promote adaptive management in line with the dynamic operational environment is much more accepted in the post-COVID-19 pandemic context. This requires organizations to support their personnel and partners to learn in real time what is really going on and adapt approaches accordingly to support organizational efficiency. There are several actions that the Country Office has taken to support this journey: (a) flexible funding received through the Strategic Note has allowed for a more adaptive and flexible use of funding; (b) the internal focus on Country Office personnel has helped to build capacities and confidence and fostered flexibility to take on different roles as needed; and (c) consistent evaluations and exploration of innovative means of measuring social norms change has enabled real time learning and adaptation.**

With respect to resource mobilization, the Country Office's funding pipeline is healthy, but the office will need to do more to document and share with potential donors (and internally within UN Women) how Strategic Note funding has supported flexible programming, innovation and a more sustainable staffing structure (potentially in collaboration with its current Strategic Note donor).

Regarding internal investments in its personnel, good practices included a horizontal approach to management and integrated programme and operations; a focus on learning and capacity-building of personnel; and, as noted, not only stating a commitment to diversity and inclusion but embarking on a path to making this more transparent. Despite the good practices, burnout is always possible, and this has been a difficult time of transition with long gaps in filling positions, caused by external factors. Where recruitment of senior-level positions is an issue, more could be done in collaboration with the Regional Office to advocate at headquarters level to expedite the recruitment of senior-level positions and explore ways to improve retention and internal growth.

Finally, regarding investments in results-based and adaptive management, these have supported more efficient and responsive programming. Third-party monitoring may provide a means for more consistent information, particularly during times of crisis.

In line with the Developmental Evaluation, there is a need to tie the Country Office's different strategies together to ensure a coherent plan for measuring social norms change across initiatives in alignment with the Strategic Note. In parallel, there will be a need to continue strengthening the capacity of Country Office personnel as well as that of partners to measure progress.

**Based on this conclusion on organizational efficiency, the following three recommendations are issued:**

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** Document and share lessons learned through investment in adaptive management and innovation to facilitate learning both internally with other UN Women offices and externally with partners as a resource mobilization tool. Continue advocating for Strategic Note funding and joint programme funding and explore opportunities to engage with other donors for Strategic Note funding.

The following key actions can be considered by the Country Office:

- » As recommended by the Developmental Evaluation, build on the enabling factors in support of innovation and institutionalize mechanisms to support innovation. Develop a risk appetite statement that establishes the Country Office's intention to test new or unknown approaches in the spirit of innovation while managing risk. Establish a core team to invest time in supporting innovation in the office to support brainstorming new ideas, finding innovative solutions as well as finding and sharing examples of innovation. Document this process including the rationale behind decisions, expected benefit, mechanisms to monitor whether successful and monitor risk.
- » Continue the workshop series to help define social norms that the Country Office seeks to influence and engage partners in this process at key points to ensure relevance, ownership and commitment. Ensure this input feeds into a coherent approach for measuring social norms change in line with the Strategic Note.

**PRIORITY: MEDIUM - TIME FRAME: Q2 2023**

**Relevant to:** Country Office senior management, programme and operations personnel and Regional Office senior management

**RECOMMENDATION 6:** Share the internal capacity-building approach with personnel and continue investing in personnel capacity and explore pathways for improved retention and career development within UN Women.

The following key actions can be considered by the Country Office:

- » As recommended by the Developmental Evaluation, work with the Regional Office (and headquarters) to share the office's internal capacity-building efforts by organizing a series of learning sessions for the region (and open to others) on specific topics such as cognitive coaching and adaptive leadership, and a community of practice in teams.
- » In collaboration with the Regional Office, advocate for expediting future recruitment of senior-level positions.
- » To reduce the risk of burnout among staff, reassess current assignments and ensure tasks are shared across the office.

**PRIORITY: MEDIUM - TIME FRAME: Q2 2023**

**Relevant to:** Country Office senior management, programme and operations personnel and Regional Office senior management

**RECOMMENDATION 7:** Continue to invest in evaluation as a means to provide a space for reflection, learning and accountability. Monitoring could also be strengthened through the dedicated capacity-building of CSOs and the establishment of a third-party monitoring mechanism to ensure coverage in the field and during crises.

The following key actions can be considered by the Country Office:

- » Continue the Developmental Evaluation approach allowing for adaptive learning and mid-term review of the Strategic Note.
- » Continue to combine project-level evaluations with thematic evaluations to ensure better use of resources.
- » Commit resources to engaging a third-party monitoring mechanism pilot, particularly for work implemented in hard-to-reach areas.

**PRIORITY: MEDIUM - TIME FRAME: Q2 2023**

**Relevant to:** Country Office senior management, programme and operations personnel and Regional Office senior management

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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.



220 East 42nd Street  
New York, New York 10017, USA  
Tel: 212-906-6400  
Fax: 212-906-6705

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