



IN BRIEF

## COUNTRY PORTFOLIO EVALUATION (2018 – 2021)

# DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Photo: ONU Femmes/ Mutaka

This summary presents the main findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Country Portfolio Evaluation (CPE) of UN Women Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) Country Office, conducted between August and December 2021.

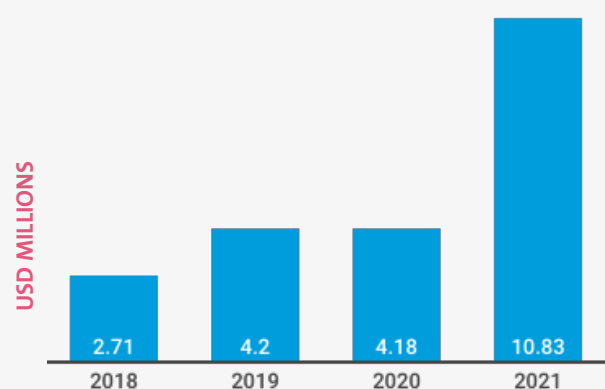
A CPE is a systematic assessment of the normative, operational and coordination aspects of UN Women's contribution to development results for gender equality and women's empowerment at the national level. Its method is essentially qualitative and the data on which its findings and conclusions are based were derived from a process of documentation, consultation and triangulation from multiple sources, including those encountered in Kinshasa, Goma and Bukavu. As UN Women DRC had not conducted a project evaluation or programme evaluation since 2017, the Independent Evaluation Service (IES) listed the UN Women DRC CPE as part of its workplan for 2021. The CPE was conducted in September 2021 in conjunction with the internal audit of the Country Office.

DRC is one of the most populous countries in Central Africa, with an estimated population of 95.2 million in 2022 spread over an area of 2,345,409 km<sup>2</sup>. The Human Development Index value of DRC is 0.48: it is ranked 179 of 189 countries and territories. In terms of gender inequality and development, it is ranked 175 of 189 countries: the human inequality coefficient is 30.9; the gender development index is 0.844; the gender inequality index is 0.617; and the incidence of poverty is over 60 per cent in 19 of 26 provinces. DRC is fifth in the Fragile States Index's "high alert" category for 2019, 2020 and 2021. This is a relative improvement since 2018, when the country was ranked first in the "very high alert" category. UN Women has been present in DRC since 2011. Prior to that, UNIFEM had a presence in the country for 15 years.

Between 2018 and 2021, the Country Office's average annual budget was approximately US\$ 5.5 million and came mainly from non-core funds, i.e. contributions received directly from different donors for the implementation of specific programmes or projects.

This institutional representation and programmatic presence provide the CPE with an object of study in terms of internal coherence, relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability following the same exercise conducted in 2017. The evaluation applied a qualitative methodology through the collection of information during opinion surveys, focus groups and semi-structured interviews with 63 respondents selected from several categories of Country Office partners and stakeholders. As the DRC Strategic Note 2018–2019 was extended until November 2021, the lessons learned from this evaluation will be used during the review of the new Strategic Note (2022–2024).

ANNUAL BUDGET IN USD MILLIONS (2018 – 2021)



## EVALUATION METHODOLOGY



## SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

120 interviews conducted as well as focus group discussions and surveys with 63 respondents.



## DESK REVIEW

164 documents reviewed including Annual Work Plans, evaluations, project document reports etc.



## MIXED METHODS

Mixed-methods to collect data | triangulation of various data sources



## QUALITY ASSURANCE

Reference Group consulted at various stages of the evaluation and discussion with Country Office management on evaluation findings

## MAIN FINDINGS

**The vast territorial size of the country, the post-conflict situation, the protracted crisis or resurgence of armed conflicts in certain provinces, and the slow improvement of general conditions of governance were all contextual factors that hindered UN Women's integrated mandate and related work in DRC. For a United Nations entity that was only established in DRC 12 years ago, success in terms of gender equality depends on its ability to rally the capacities of other United Nations agencies and the strength of civil society around its mandate.**

UN Women is well regarded among gender equality stakeholders for having exercised its normative and coordinating mandates to contribute to the efforts that led to reform of the Family Code. UN Women's comparative advantage is clear in the areas of political participation and, to some extent, women's economic empowerment, at least in terms of mobilizing rural women and organizing them into one national network. The UN Women Strategic Note is aligned with national priorities, and while the component relating to combating sexual and gender-based violence is not reflected in its results framework, this does not necessarily imply an absence of interventions in this area. The current distribution of roles within the United Nations Country Team is such that the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) takes the lead when it comes to sexual gender-based violence. However, given internal operational challenges and the vastness of the country, UN Women DRC is struggling to prove itself in the fields of humanitarian action and emergency response to natural disasters.

The nationwide networking strategy, as demonstrated by Réseau National des Femmes Rurales and Dynamique Nationale des Femmes Candidates (for economic or political empowerment, respectively), has proven advantageous in overcoming challenges specific to political and economic domains. Added to this are the formal gender coordination mechanisms (Gender Thematic Group, One UN Gender Group) and the informal high-level consultation frameworks (e.g. One+One, Friends of Gender) that have enabled UN Women to keep gender issues on the agenda. Nevertheless, gender cafés have been put on hold since June 2018 and the Civil Society Advisory Group has been discontinued.

The number and turnover rate of human resources in the Country Office posed real difficulties in managing the portfolio of operations, which impacted all aspects of the office's functioning, including the monitoring, reporting and evaluation of projects. This has also resulted in loss of institutional memory, as demonstrated by the loss of documentary items required for the internal audit. For example, the 2015 Gender Scorecard recommendations were unknown to many respondents. In addition, the excessive workload in the Country Office is exposing remaining staff to professional burnout: this explains the abandonment or suspension of certain consultation mechanisms such as gender cafés, which although promising, only lasted one year.

The Family Code was promulgated in 2017, the culmination of more than a decade of collective work in the normative field. This positive legacy will only endure if the country programme considers the prevailing importance of customary law. The status of people with disabilities and indigenous people is also affected by old traditions, which the Strategic Note did not really take into account.

The evaluation also assessed the steps the Country Office took to adapt its support to the national COVID-19 response. This made it possible to assess the relative contribution of UN Women to the country's efforts, in coordination with the United Nations system, and to determine to what extent the results originally articulated by the Strategic Note were affected by the pandemic.

The primary users targeted by this evaluation are: (i) UN Women DRC Country Office; (ii) UN Women Independent Evaluation and Audit Services; (iii) UN Women Executive Board; (iv) UN Women Management Team; (v) key national stakeholders in DRC; (vi) the United Nations system in DRC; and (vii) UN Women Regional Office for West Africa and Central Africa.

## MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS



**In conjunction with the other United Nations agencies in the country, make state-strengthening a fundamental objective of the country programme.** Contribute in particular to the consolidation of capacity within the Ministry of Gender, Women and Children, so that it can carry out its functions. The conclusion of formal collaboration agreements with this ministry combined with technical support will allow it to regain the confidence of citizen organizations; improve relations with state authorities on a lasting basis; contribute to the application of the Government's obligation to make public the amount of resources allocated to gender equality and women's empowerment; update the National Gender Policy; and resume consultation mechanisms such as gender cafés and the Gender Thematic Group.



**Prioritize joint work**, particularly in the fight against sexual/gender-based violence and peace, security and humanitarian action, by integrating the context of fragility and recurring conflicts into programming. The 2015 Gender Scorecard recommendations should be updated with an action plan.



Target political parties in campaigns for **parity in elections** and encourage them to present lists that include women and people with disabilities.



**Recruit staff (and stabilize their contracts) to compensate for the lack of human resources** and set up a Monitoring, Evaluation and Knowledge Management Unit; and significantly strengthen the Operations team, taking into account the aims of the Strategic Note.



In collaboration with other United Nations agencies, **mainstream the principle of "no one left behind"** in humanitarian and development discourse and interventions.