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

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Evaluation

Joint Evaluation of Joint Programmes on Gender Equality in the United Nations System

Summary

In 2012 - 2013, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund (MDG-F) in partnership with the Governments of Norway and Spain, undertook a corporate joint evaluation of joint programmes on gender equality in the United Nations system. The evaluation aims to provide evaluative information to support future policy and guidance on their design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation for a more coordinated and effective United Nations system contribution to advance gender equality and women's empowerment at the country level.

The scope of this evaluation covered joint gender programmes at country level,

implemented post 2006 across a range of gender-related themes. The evaluation makes four overarching recommendations to improve the next generation of joint gender programmes directed to United Nations entities, host governments and citizens, donors and the United Nations Development Group (UNDG).

The intended primary users of the evaluation findings are the United Nations entities involved in joint gender programmes, UNDG, donors and partner countries, civil society, particularly women's empowerment and gender quality advocacy groups and women's networks.

Joint Evaluation of Joint Programmes on Gender Equality in the United Nations System

Introduction

1. In 2012, seven partners - the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund (MDG-F), in partnership with the Governments of Norway and Spain - came together to commission the *Joint Evaluation of Joint Programmes on Gender Equality in the United Nations System*. It is the first corporate United Nations evaluation of this scale on gender equality and was implemented from May 2012 to November 2013. Its main intended users are: United Nations entities involved in joint gender programmes; United Nations Development Group (UNDG); donor and partner countries; civil society, particularly women's empowerment and gender equality advocacy groups; and gender related networks.

Context

2. Despite important progress in human development, inequalities, including those related to gender issues are only unevenly reducing. Women continue to face discrimination in health, education, political participation and the labour market. Consequently, gender equality and the empowerment of women¹ remains at the forefront of the global development agenda. The 2006 United Nations System-Wide Policy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment was followed by the creation of UN

¹ For brevity, the term 'gender equality' within the evaluation is applied to reflect the development concept of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Women in 2010, whose mandate is to lead on coherence and coordinate the efforts of the United Nations system on gender equality, in addition to undertaking its own normative and operational work. General Assembly resolution A/RES/67/226 (2012) urging the strengthening of gender-responsive activities at country level, a United Nations System-Wide Action Plan to increase accountability for gender equality and a new regional architecture for UN Women, all mark steps to progress the 'gender agenda' at country, regional and system-wide levels.

United Nations coherence and joint programmes

3. The United Nations system is also under going reform with a drive towards coherence which emphasizes joint programming at the country level. General Assembly resolution A/RES/67/226 (2012) also encouraged the United Nations system to strengthen joint programming processes, where appropriate. Within joint programming lies the development cooperation modality of joint programmes, to which United Nations Member States are committed. Joint programmes are defined as 'a set of activities in a common work plan and related budget, involving two or more [United Nations] organizations and (sub-)national partners...and [which apply] a joint programme document'.² The overarching premise of joint programmes is that, by working collectively, the combined strengths of different entities can be mobilized to generate improved efficiencies and synergies, leading to greater effectiveness and enhanced development results.

² A full definition is available in the *Guidance Note on Joint Programming* (UNDG, 2003).

Joint gender programmes

4. The definition of a joint gender programme applied for this evaluation is a 'joint programme with an explicit objective of empowering women and/or promoting gender equality'. Joint gender programmes emerged from the convergence of multiple flows: the trajectory of United Nations system-wide reform including joint programming; 2005 aid and development effectiveness reforms; and the drive towards greater effort and emphasis on gender equality. They have grown in scale and volume, in particular since 2006. The 2007 advent of the MDG-F whose first thematic window was on gender, and the establishment of UN Women in 2010, provided further stimulus.

Evaluation objectives and scope

5. The evaluation assessed the first generation of joint gender programmes to inform both their strategic direction and use, and to provide future guidance. Its objectives are to inform United Nations entities and their partners about:

- The overall contribution of joint gender programmes to national development results on gender equality, including intended and unintended results and efficiency in achieving their objectives;
- The extent to which the objectives and results of the joint gender programmes are relevant to national and United Nations development goals and policies;
- The overall sustainability of joint gender programmes results, including the level of national ownership, national capacity development, and partnerships between the United Nations system and national partners;

- The extent to which joint gender programmes have created synergies between and among United Nations entities and partners at national level; and
 - The overall level of integration of human rights-based approaches.
6. The unit of analysis for this evaluation is joint gender programmes within the United Nations system that have operated at country level, across a range of thematic areas, designed and implemented post 2006, and with budgets over US\$100,000.

Governance structure

7. Conceptualizing this evaluation as a joint one had the value added of increasing efficiency and the potential impact and use of its results. To ensure effectiveness, a clear governance structure was put in place. An Evaluation Management Group, comprised of representatives of the central Evaluation Offices of the partner entities and led by UN Women, jointly managed the evaluation and acted as the main decision-making body for the evaluation. An Evaluation Steering Committee, comprised of senior management from partner organizations, was also constituted to provide political and institutional support for the evaluation at the highest level and ensure the use of the findings and recommendations elaborated through a management response. A reference group was also constituted with technical experts on gender equality, joint programmes and United Nations coordination from the partner entities to provide feedback. Finally, national reference groups comprised of United Nations staff, government representatives and civil society involved in the five case study provided feedback to case study reports.

Methodology

8. A utilization-focused, theory-based, and human rights and gender responsive approach was employed, and evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability were used. In addition, ‘participation and inclusion’ were applied as criteria, based on guidance by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG).

9. Evaluation phases, methods and sources of evidence involved the following:

- A substantive inception phase involving over 90 interviews with a range of stakeholders engaged in joint gender programmes in countries and at headquarters, including government, civil society (including women’s groups) and donor agency representatives;
- A detailed in-depth desk review phase involved a broadly representative sample of 24 joint gender programmes selected from a universe of 113 joint gender programmes operating from 2001 to 2010 identified through a comprehensive portfolio mapping. Of the 80 joint gender programmes eligible for review, the selection was guided by sampling criteria identified to provide representativeness for geographic and thematic area; contextual features; programme type; and lead United Nations entity;
- A field study phase involved further in-depth enquiry of five joint gender programmes: Albania, Kenya, Liberia, Nicaragua and the State of Palestine. These were selected for a combination of representativeness and diversity of context, scale, thematic area and status of United Nations system reform in the country. A deepened analysis and partner interviews on a joint gender programmes in Nepal was also conducted to improve regional representativeness; and

- A synthesis phase involved a further set of interviews with donor partners and wider literature review that included single-agency gender programme, thematic, meta and country programme evaluations by United Nations entities, the MDG-F and United Nations system documents.

10. The evaluation confronted two main limitations. First, very limited results information was available. Many programmes lacked impact level data and few robust evaluations exist. Despite this, a reasonable picture of each studied joint gender programme was constructed from documentation and interviews to enable analysis. Second, full comparative analysis with other types of joint programmes and with single-entity gender programmes has been limited due to the the varied timescales, sectors, activities, target areas and partnerships and unavailability of robust evaluation data.

Findings

Relevance

11. All joint gender programmes analysed are relevant in that they are conceptually geared towards the normative frameworks on gender equality whose commitments they are intended to serve (explicitly citing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women [CEDAW], the Beijing Platform for Action and United Nations resolution 1325) and recognize and cite broad national gender needs as articulated in national statistics.

12. However, alignment with national gender priorities has been more challenging and affected by limited consultations with the women's movement and/or rights holders directly. This was frequently a function of time constraints - and one shared by joint programmes in other thematic areas – that has contributed to the absence, in over half of

the programmes, of a clear selection of gender priorities in the country context, particularly those identified by women's representatives. This compromises the ability of joint gender programme partners to make informed strategic choices within the wide range of gender needs that many countries face and constrains broad-based ownership.

13. For joint gender programmes, alignment to the operating context has additional dimensions (as new modalities in their respective contexts) that enhance the importance of ensuring a strong analytical base for design. However, due to the lack of prior experience with the modality, some important analytical elements for joint gender programme design were often overlooked, including:

- Analysis of the conduciveness and maturity of the operating context, which led to many assumptions made about the ways of working by United Nations and national partners;
- Capacity analysis of the policy/institutional environment for joint gender programmes, including United Nations and national partners' capacity development needs and ability to work within a joint modality on gender;
- Political and political economy analysis, despite the potentially significant effects of political emphases and trajectories on implementation, including power relationships, interests and incentives or the resistances which underlie gender issues; and
- Risk analysis, which was not applied beyond tactical and operational-level risks to analyse strategic, political and governance risks, such as the capacity of national partners to implement activities.

14. Joint gender programme designs were, therefore, based on unidentified assumptions regarding the capability of the national operating architecture and partners,

and the capacity of the United Nations system itself to absorb and facilitate management of a joint gender programme modality. There are some exceptions³ where a phased approach was adopted to help build understanding, capacity and buy in to the joint gender programme modality, but the time and effort needed for this was underestimated.

15. Joint gender programmes were also designed under severe time and resource constraints, while aiming to tackle deep-rooted and systemic gender inequalities on multiple dimensions. Most were marked by the breadth and scale of their ambition and other common features such as broad-ranging results frameworks with numerous and complex outcomes, and little apparent linkage across activities and/or upwards to results. Resources and time frames for implementation were also frequently unrealistic. While these issues are not unique to joint gender programmes, they have significantly affected their delivery of results.

16. Finally, although the thematic focus of many joint gender programmes involves addressing women's rights, the substantive application of the human rights-based approach is an area to strengthen in joint gender programmes. In particular, the principle of inclusion warrants strengthening through further consultation, adequate identification of specific rights holder groups, and the disaggregation of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups within categories of rights-holders. A key reason commonly cited for the constrained application of the human rights-based approach in joint gender programmes is a gap in the requisite knowledge and skills within United Nations entities and their partners to operationalize this approach. Where joint gender programmes have been able to leverage other resources, the application of the human rights-based approach has been more comprehensive and sustained.

³ For example, joint gender programmes in Kenya and Albania.

Ownership

17. As a development effectiveness principle, ownership is broad-based and mainly an internal dynamic arising from domestic political drivers and incentives bound up in localized political economy features. Ownership of the gender agenda is not something external factors, such as a joint gender programme, can artificially stimulate, although it can be supported through the application of appropriate strategies. All countries hosting joint gender programmes have a strong rationale for ownership in their ratification of the CEDAW and Beijing Platform for Action normative frameworks.

18. However, ownership is particularly challenging when it comes to gender, which is a cross-cutting development issue deeply rooted in sociocultural norms and dynamics, not readily located within one pillar of the national governance structure, and where the national gender architecture and machinery may suffer from capacity constraints.

19. Joint gender programmes clearly recognized the importance of ownership and have utilized strategies for addressing ownership dimensions, such as:

- Integrating joint gender programmes within national strategies/plans. This was the case for all joint gender programmes with over half geared to directly supporting their implementation. This ensured that the United Nations was both supporting ownership of the policy agenda, and legitimizing gender as a development issue in its own right;
- Supporting the institutional machinery for gender. This was a major focus of at least 16 (out of 24) joint gender programmes, with some coordination functions housed within governments; and
- Financing for gender issues. This was a strategy applied both as a goal within programme design and as an indicator of national commitment to gender.

National financial resource allocations increased in one-third of the joint gender programmes.

20. Other strategies used include raising gender on the policy and political agenda, supporting accountability frameworks for gender, efforts to strengthen the demand-side for gender-sensitive reforms and the inclusion of national partners in governance structures.

21. Joint gender programmes worked in partnership with national stakeholders to stimulate ownership. Governments are commonly the lead programme partner with work tending to centre on a core Ministry partner (commonly the Ministry of Gender). While many have also expanded to work with other ministries, there is evidence of missed opportunities to generate broader cross-government engagement. Engagement with civil society groups, particularly women's organizations, has been less consistent and more limited during both design and implementation. Their limited representation in programme management and governance structures is symptomatic of their perceived role as implementing partners, rather than as strategic partners. However, limited capacity or nascent status is also a factor in some cases.

22. Improving capacity, expertise and knowledge of gender issues is the foundation for generating ownership. All designs reviewed contain some strategies for capacity development. The capacity enhancement of institutions and partnerships, in particular, is a core foundation of ownership and is especially important for gender, given its cross-cutting nature and often under-resourced national machinery. However, the opportunities that joint gender programmes provide for capacity development at wider national and institutional levels have not been capitalized on, with efforts mainly focused at the individual level and on the side of duty-bearers. Efforts involving civil society partners mainly focused on developing their capacity to deliver programme components as

implementing partners. However, there is a promising trend towards growing inclusiveness in approaches to the capacity development of national partners.

Coherence, synergies and efficiency

23. Joint gender programmes operate within wider national frameworks of development cooperation arrangements. Their external coherence is assessed by situating and understanding them in relation to other gender equality development efforts in a given country. In fact, several countries have multiple concurrent joint gender programmes in operation.

24. Where the United Nations system architecture is more mature in its harmonization (such as Delivering as One pilot countries), incentives, frameworks and guidance have been available for joint gender programmes to be positioned as part of the wider United Nations development effort on gender equality within a country. However, where these supportive frameworks are not yet developed and particularly where analysis of the operating context at the design stage also omits concurrent gender initiatives, joint gender programmes are sometimes positioned as multiple ‘packages’ of support without clarity on how gender equality results will be collectively achieved. Another factor affecting external coherence has been the additional challenges the gender equality theme faced compared to other development issues, e.g. the national gender architecture and operating context is often fragmented, poorly resourced and lacking strong leadership.

25. Equally important has been the issue of internal coherence, which refers to the extent to which internal design and implementation features of the joint gender programme reflect a joint approach. The value of an extended design phase in enhancing coherence was demonstrated by the few joint gender programmes which included this

feature, with those moving into a second phase opting for extended design as a key lesson learned. It allowed for a common visioning process, the sharing of priorities, approaches and experience and the analysis of differences among partners. In tangible terms, such joint gender programmes reflect more robust and coherent designs; unified programme frameworks and a clearer division of labour; the use of joint annual work planning processes; more coordinated approaches to geographical coverage; and collective implementation of specific initiatives. Joint gender programmes which included coherence as a field for accountability (i.e. as an outcome area in programme designs) also demonstrated stronger coordination at implementation stage.

26. However, the majority of joint gender programmes were marked by compressed design processes and subsequently present limited maturity in terms of coherence. Most contained outputs and (sometimes) outcome areas that were not fully unified or geared to the achievement of overarching results. Some comprise an aggregation of activities which did not provide a vision for how the joint gender programme would add value or lead to enhanced results. This is an area that would benefit from more guidance by headquarters.

27. A conceptual understanding of what internal coherence implies in joint gender programmes is also crucial. Without it, the implications for operational coordination is not fully grasped by partners and new ways of working devised to address them. All partners had a universally limited conceptual understanding of internal coherence and the harmonized approaches implied by the joint gender programme modality. For example, a full conceptual understanding of the implications and requirements of joint resource mobilization would have helped to ensure that responsibilities were assigned and modalities put in place. Without this understanding, it has proven challenging in practice.

28. A commitment to coherence is exhibited by United Nations partner entities in a few joint gender programmes, notably those with more mature designs, a supportive

surrounding architecture and a strong coordination function, where a ‘spirit of cooperation’ has prevailed. This has had significant effects in terms of staff motivation, messaging around the joint gender programme, conveying the principle of coherence to partners, and strengthening the spirit and culture for coherence on gender equality across participating United Nations entities. However, United Nations entity evaluations reviewed (with the exception of some from UN Women) provided limited recognition of joint gender programme participation, also highlighting the potential need for more programmatic coherence on gender equality within entities. Other factors negatively affecting commitment to coherence include evidence of continued inter-agency competition and territorialism, often driven by visibility for donor funds received and disagreements over roles in the joint gender programme.

29. As new modalities, joint gender programmes require, to some extent, the building of capacity for coherence. However, United Nations entities’ comparative advantage has usually been deployed as applying prior areas of experience, rather than a strategic consideration of how to best maximize results. Positive results have emerged in the case studies where the lead entity possessed both the capacity and experience for driving forward internal coherence or demonstrated commitment to coherence as a result of a willingness to invest resources in and provide leadership for coordination.

30. Case studies found staff time allocations to joint gender programmes unrealistic, given their ambitious designs. Staff turnover, gaps in assigned responsibilities and the perceived limited experience of staff assigned to joint gender programmes by host governments, were additional constraints to coherence.

31. Where high-level gender expertise was available for joint gender programmes, clarity around how to deploy it was needed. In particular, the role of UN Women at country level, which now holds the coordinating mandate for gender across the United Nations

system, requires more clarification. Mixed expectations on the value it can bring and the absence of an agreed United Nations country team position on its role, have been compounded by its still varied skills, capabilities and experience at country level. While UN Women's Strategic Plan 2014-2017 acknowledges the need for more consistent quality in the Entity's coordination role at the country level, there have been clear venues of success. For example, in Albania, the UN Women-hosted coordination function of the joint gender programme was considered a critical function in enhancing coherence and supporting the delivery of results. However, UN Women's technical input to programme activities depended largely on the extent to which other United Nations entities were open to their involvement. The engagement of Gender Theme Groups in joint gender programmes reflects their own status and maturity within United Nations system reform. In some, they have played a strong role supporting coherence, particularly when providing an accountability function. In others, they have remained either information recipients or distanced from the joint gender programme.

32. Four key barriers to coherence have been identified within joint gender programmes:

- Systemic barriers: While change towards harmonizing United Nations procedures is underway,⁴ to an extent, gaps between conceptual and operational coherence still remain. In common with other assessments and extensively documented,⁵ systemic United Nations barriers to harmonized operations have been found to significantly impede coherence in joint gender programmes. The application of individual procedures determined by headquarters, particularly in procurement, has reinforced individual agency incentives that militate against the joint spirit and management of joint gender programmes. Parallel and pass-through financial

⁴ See, for example, General Assembly resolution A/RES/67/226 (January 2013).

⁵ See, for example, Downs (2013), *UNDG Joint Programme Mechanism Review*.

mechanisms (applied in the majority of programmes) have been complex and onerous, causing delays and high administrative burdens for partners;

- Breadth of entity inclusion and coverage: The challenge of establishing coherence is magnified with an increasing number of participating organizations, United Nations or national partners. More time and energy is absorbed in addressing differences, tensions, and competition during implementation. There are also challenges in finding common ground and for decision-making that hinders the focus on results. It may be for these reasons, the optimal number of United Nations entities for a joint gender programme considered by stakeholders who commented upon it, was four;
- Management arrangement: Low levels of staffing, unclear reporting lines and ambiguity regarding the leadership role of the lead/ coordinating entity affects coherence and delays decision-making; and
- Limited shared strategies for monitoring, reporting and lesson learning: The prioritization of outcomes, indicators and baselines against which to measure quality and effectiveness of coordination and overall coherence has been limited. The use of comprehensive shared measurement and monitoring strategies has not been the rule. Linked to prioritization of upwards accountability, central coordinators mainly collate and forward individual agency reports, with some entities/individuals unwilling to effectively report twice.

33. Finally, while not a barrier per se, challenges for joint gender programmes are intensified in conflict-affected or reconstruction settings. In these locations, where women and girls are at their most vulnerable and a particularly strong rationale for gender equality work exists: barriers to coherence are magnified: operating architectures, external

coherence and national ownership are commonly weak; risks to implementation and results delivery high; and challenges to capacity, extreme.

34. Joint gender programmes have contributed to synergies, including helping to intensify and expand the dialogue on gender equality in all the countries analysed – a key added value of the joint gender programme modality. Joint gender programmes have also improved synergies:

- Between the United Nations and its development partners, particularly those engaged at programmatic level, such as donors;
- Between the United Nations and its national partners, with avenues far more developed with governments than with civil society and women's groups;
- Between and among national partners, with major gains in the resourcing of gender ministries, providing them with increased visibility and inspiring more confidence in and demand for their support from other national stakeholders.
- Between United Nations entities at national level, with all joint gender programmes leading to tangibly stronger relationships and deeper mutual understanding, as demonstrated by the many spin-off initiatives, dialogues and partnerships which have emerged.

35. Increasing efficiency is core to the central premise of joint gender programmes and a key interim result for demonstrating the added value of the modality. However, in common with findings from other joint thematic programmes,⁶ the joint gender programme modality has not increased efficiency but has commonly left the volume of burdens⁷:

⁶ See, for example, MDG-F evaluations of joint programmes of youth employment and migration, democratic economic governance, and culture and development.

⁷ This finding is echoed by MDG-F study of the Gender Thematic Window (UNDP/MDG-F, 2012).

- Reduced or stayed the same for government partners, although positive change here, where achieved, has been extremely well received;
- Remained unchanged for civil society partners, who have largely continued bilateral operations as implementing partners under normal relationships and United Nations administrative rules; and
- Increased for United Nations entities, who struggled with the unanticipated ‘costs of coordination’.

However, the ‘costs of coordination’, in contrast with single-agency gender programmes, are commonly perceived as an investment which promise future benefits. Interlocutors universally agreed that, while far from perfect, the potential of the modality in terms of efficiency is high.

Accountability

36. Mutual accountability with donors and national partners is central to all development activity and a key aspect of the human rights-based approach to development. It implies a reciprocal commitment, with national actors and development partners presumed to hold each other to account. Mutual accountability has been supported with the inclusion of national stakeholders within reporting structures and the housing of coordination units within Ministries of Women’s Affairs, but efforts have been uneven and not broad-based. Meanwhile, national partners, who play a crucial role in grounding accountability within national priorities and results systems, have not always demanded accountability from joint gender programmes or the United Nations, attributed to a perceived power imbalance resting on the side of the United Nations.

37. Downwards accountability to disadvantaged women and men is an area in need of greater prioritization across all joint gender programmes. Although a key dimension of

the human rights-based approach, very few joint gender programmes considered this in their design, implementation or reporting. Its absence appears to be linked to perceived roles of civil society partners as implementing rather than as strategic partners.

38. The most prominent site of accountability for joint gender programmes is upwards to headquarters and donors, rather than within United Nations country teams. With no agency accountable for the programme as a whole, particularly with pass-through and parallel fund management mechanisms, each entity is accountable for its own portion, under its own rules and procedures. Institutional authority of the Resident Coordinator is currently insufficient to generate wider United Nations country team responsibility for gender equality results.

39. Some of the more mature joint gender programmes made efforts to create a culture of accountability, grounded in the national context. Examples of drivers and incentives for this include: the employment and empowerment of a joint gender programme coordinating function (Albania and Liberia); inclusion of coordination as an outcome area (Albania and Kenya); embedding programme management and coordination functions within central government ministries (Macedonia, Liberia and the State of Palestine); efforts to integrate incentives for accountability within joint gender programmes (Kenya); a strong focus on monitoring and evaluation, feedback loops and course correction (MDG-F joint gender programme requirement); and, where the pooled funding modality has been used and located at the country level, there is evidence of stronger interest and engagement from the Resident Coordinator and United Nations country team (Albania, Iraq and Uruguay).

40. A number of disincentives were also identified that affect accountability, many of which are systemic and arise from factors beyond the joint gender programmes themselves. These include: lines of staff reporting and financial management for joint

gender programmes do not lie in-country, but upwards to entity headquarters; lack of clarity and consistency on the role of Resident Coordinators in joint gender programmes; weak tools or enforceable sanctions to check or prevent bilateral implementation, poor coherence or performance, overlap or duplication during implementation; weak joint monitoring and reporting and feedback loops to inform programme decision-making; lack of organizational incentives for coherence and harmonization; emphasis on reporting on activities, rather than on results for gender equality; and limited demand for accountability by partner governments and investment by joint gender programmes in systematically stimulating this demand, e.g. through strengthening of women's organizations/movements.

Sustainable results

41. There is evidence of normative results in that some joint programmes increased the prioritization of gender equality results in the national setting and, in so doing, supported governments to meet their CEDAW and Beijing Platform for Action commitments. They have also supported the creation or development of stronger and more inclusive development partnerships for gender equality.

42. The three main areas to achieving these normative results are listed below, along with some of the corresponding operational results to which they are directly linked. They are individually significant for the national environments in which joint gender programmes have operated.⁸

- Thematic results for rights holders, i.e. reduced tolerance for, and an increase in reported cases of, gender-based violence; improved women's civil and political

⁸ A full list of results achieved is available in the synthesis evaluation report.

participation; improved maternal health; greater access to education for girls and women; and economic empowerment, including increased access to assets and services, increased employment.

- Reforming and/or strengthening the policy, legislative and accountability environment for gender, i.e. increased national financial allocations to gender priorities; national plans, strategies or frameworks for gender equality developed or implemented; legislative reforms, including strengthening the judicial system to be more gender-responsive; and strengthened accountability environment for gender equality.
- Strengthened demand-side for reform, i.e. greater capacity of women's groups representatives; greater awareness of gender-related rights; greater networking and advocacy capacity among women's groups; and a strengthened national evidence base on gender issues.

43. Some joint gender programmes have shown evidence of powerful and high-level changes, raising the visibility of gender on the political agenda, bringing partners, entities and funding together and stimulating legislative and policy reforms.

44. The consistent use of clear and coherent oversight and performance management strategies, core commitments of the 2006 United Nations System-Wide Policy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, is essential for improving the achievement of results by joint gender programmes. While there are some good examples of course corrections following a mid-term review, such as under the MDG-F model, final evaluations were only available for seven of the joint gender programmes. For the other 17 joint gender programmes, there were either no plans for evaluation or it represented a missed stage.

45. A robust assessment of the sustainability of the results achieved was limited because some programmes were still ongoing, whilst others had only recently been completed and most were of short duration. Therefore, the focus of assessment was on the strategies for sustainability and inferences drawn regarding possible future trajectories. Around half of the joint gender programmes for which evidence was available showed two or more clear strategies for sustainability. The main emphasis was on supporting ownership and sustainability among duty-bearers.

46. However, the resilience of results would be improved if sustainability strategies were more robust, comprehensive, their operationalization strengthened and if they were not limited to the final stages of implementation. For example, exit plans were either developed late or were missing.

Added value of the joint gender programme modality

47. There has been individually significant evidence of the added value of the joint gender programme modality in improving gender results by: creating shared understandings of, partnerships for and a common discourse around gender equality; increasing visibility for gender issues on the national agenda and legitimising them; expanding the opportunity for translating normative gender work into operations by extending the reach of entities with particular normative gender equality agendas (such as UN Women) into new sectors and opening up partnerships with other entities; building outreach and synergies on gender with other ministries, entities or departments who previously did not recognize the centrality of gender; permitting a more multi-dimensional approach to addressing gender inequality; enhancing the visibility,

credibility and resources for the national gender machinery by resourcing and enabling the lead Ministry to fulfil its mandate; and, improving upstream results on policy reform and advocacy through a combined multi-stakeholder approach to policy.

Lessons learned

48. The key lessons of the evaluation are set out below and are intended to support the improvement of future joint gender programmes. If applied within the designs of new joint gender programmes, they should help operationalize the connection between upstream and operational-level coherence. They should also support the United Nations to better manage and leverage those factors which are under its control. The lessons learned are:

- Delivering as One environments, where appropriately leveraged, can provide a conducive setting for joint gender programmes;
- successful implementation and the delivery of results within joint gender programmes is strongly connected to a robust analytical basis;
- a detailed and inclusive design process for a joint gender programme is the cornerstone of operational coherence;
- working to ensure the understanding, capacity and commitment of partners to coherence is also key, particularly at leadership level;
- realism is essential when seeking coordination and coherence across individual United Nations entities with their own diverse systems and ways of operating;
- large-scale joint gender programmes have the potential to address systemic gender issues and stimulate inclusive ownership and accountability for gender equality and

empowerment of women, although a large number of partners presents challenges in terms of resource requirements for ensuring coherence;

- the potential for coherence is maximized when the capacity of the lead entity is analysed from the outset, and its role and responsibilities fully understood and agreed by all partners;
- ownership and sustainability are maximized when accountability is grounded within the national context and understood as truly mutual; and
- clear planning for and integrated designing-in of risk management strategies in advance.

49. Finally, implementing joint gender programmes within fragile and reconstruction settings is a special undertaking which requires an intensive focus on political factors, capacity levels, and on the specific features and fluidities of the context.

Conclusions

50. Although multi-donor approaches have been applied in bilateral development cooperation for many years, joint gender programmes were a relatively new modality to the United Nations. Building on the momentum embedded in the process of wider systemic reform, they opened up new avenues for operational coherence among entities at country level on gender equality. In doing so, they also provided opportunities for new partnerships and, ultimately, enhanced development results for gender equality and women's empowerment.

Strategic selection of the joint gender programme modality

51. A primary question confronting designers, commissioners and national stakeholders is whether the joint gender programme modality is the best fit for a particular context. Or whether, in fact, other modalities and forms of cooperation, which may be no less joint in nature, would be more appropriate in specific situations and at particular times. Such a systematic options appraisal, conducted inclusively, has been omitted in the joint gender programmes studied here. Furthermore, the joint gender programme modality encountered the most difficulties in fragile, post-conflict and reconstruction settings, where the premise for, and global commitment to, coherence is even more critical. Yet it is here that difficulties are most magnified. High levels of commitment, capacity and risk tolerance are needed, as well as a highly flexible approach.

Relevance

52. Joint gender programmes have commonly demonstrated relevance and alignment with both normative frameworks on gender equality and broad national gender needs. However, improving their fit with the operating context, responsiveness to national gender priorities and implementation of a human rights-based approach is essential for broadening and deepening their relevance.

53. The design process of a joint gender programme is the foundation of the programme's ability to deliver its results, far more so than the resulting programme document. It provides the main opportunity for a common vision to be developed, partnerships to be formed, priorities agreed and differences aired. It is particularly crucial and a specialist task for joint gender programmes given the complex nature and diverse understandings of gender equality. Yet, the important opportunity to put in place the cornerstones for coordinated delivery by developing a common vision, collective partnership and capacity development strategy to tackle the challenging and deep-rooted

issues of gender inequality was often missed during the design phase of joint gender programmes.

54. Joint gender programmes have faced a number of unanticipated challenges and a steep learning curve. The underestimated calculation of the time and resources needed, and the limited analytical base for the design of joint gender programmes, contributed to over-optimism of and uncertain responsiveness to the operating context. In particular, the responsiveness to the priorities of women and civil society and the application of the human rights-based approach were affected, and the assessment of the capacities of the United Nations and its partners to implement the joint gender programme, over-estimated. Risks have also been insufficiently identified and mitigated.

Coherence, synergies and efficiency

55. Joint gender programmes operating in conducive environments have demonstrated coherence, but in general they have been affected by the absence of important drivers for, and faced a number of barriers to coherence, some of which are systemic. Despite this, many stakeholders believe that the cost of coordination in joint gender programmes in the short-term will lead to important dividends for gender equality in the long-term.

56. The challenges faced by joint gender programmes to achieve external and internal coherence present a powerful case for reform. In the joint gender programmes studied, the connection between the upstream policy coherence implied by both the United Nations global development agenda and system-wide reform, and the operational coherence of country-level joint gender programmes, as a vehicle for its implementation at country level, has thus far not been fully realized.

57. For gender particularly, the presence of multiple partners means extra attention to building a shared vision for gender equality, ironing out differences and plotting the

prioritized pathway towards transformational change is needed. Due to inexperience, many joint gender programmes did not plan or implement for this from the start. While Delivering as One has provided a supportive framework and incentives, overall, an imperfect understanding has prevailed of the implications of the joint modality for business practices and ways of working. This has been compounded by the lack of clear central guidance from headquarters and systemic barriers which have diverted effort and attention from a clear focus on results. Whilst grappling with systemic barriers and donor demands, United Nations entities have, with some notable exceptions, frequently reverted to bilateralism which undermines a spirit of cooperation.

58. Finally, the function and use of gender expertise within joint gender programme implementation was often unclear. The mandate and role of UN Women as the global standard-bearer for gender equality is established, but its technical input on the design and implementation of programmes has been largely dependent on individual entities' respective openness to engagement, rather than as a systematized process. This situation is uncondusive to the collective advancement of gender equality goals, and warrants change. The role of the Resident Coordinator and Gender Theme Groups in supporting joint gender programme coherence, both external and internal, has not been clarified and, in some cases, they have been under-utilized.

59. The assumption that the modality would lead to improvements in efficiency has not been realized, at least for United Nations entities. The costs of coordination have been both unanticipated and high and compounded by systemic barriers. Without supportive action from the United Nations system itself, the full potential of joint gender programmes will remain unrealized, since the incentives, drivers and accountability requirements for greater efficiency lie beyond and outside individual programmes.

Ownership and accountability

60. Joint gender programmes recognized the importance of ownership and have successfully featured strategies for its facilitation, including through partnerships with national stakeholders and capacity development efforts. However, the inclusion of explicit and overarching strategies for ownership which are broad-based and reflect a core role for women's representatives, are still needed. In particular, opportunities provided by joint gender programmes for capacity development at wider national and institutional levels need to identify rights holders as strategic partners and improve their inclusion.

61. Some joint gender programmes made strong individual efforts to build a culture and practice of accountability for gender equality results. However, the focus of accountability needs to shift from upwards (to United Nations headquarters and donors) to accountability at the country level by focusing on mutual accountability (to national stakeholders and the United Nations country team) and downward accountability to rights holders. National governments, while willing partners in all cases, have not demanded accountability from the United Nations, nor prioritized gender equality as a development theme. Downwards accountability to rights holders has also been limited, constraining the application of the human rights-based approach.

Achieving sustainable results

62. The joint gender programmes reviewed supported governments to respond to their normative commitments and expanded opportunities to translate normative gender work into operational results. While it is premature to assess the sustainability of the results achieved, evidence shows that while sustainable change has been made, many results are

potentially lacking in resilience if strategies for sustainability and ownership are not strengthened.

63. Strategies for managing for (collective) development results experienced only limited implementation. Where a more coherent programme model was applied, additionality was demonstrated, through the emergence of a shared vision; appropriate deployment of comparative advantage; the gearing of activities towards intended results; and via transparent and joint performance monitoring. Yet, to date, at aggregate level, the composite set of joint gender programmes analysed have not, in their totality, realized results that demonstrate the full potential of their added value.

Moving forward

64. Going back to a model of bilateral design and implementation, limited coordination and compromised development effectiveness is an unrealistic option, especially for a transversal, and indeed universal, issue such as gender equality.

65. The issues highlighted in this evaluation are symptomatic of the very steep learning curve that joint gender programmes have undergone. Despite the challenges faced, the shared vision and operational coherence, which are fundamental to working jointly, have emerged towards the end of implementation. Much knowledge has been gained, not only about the joint gender modality itself, but also about how to embed its intentions in operating contexts; how best to work for gender results in a collective partnership; how different models of coherence play out in practice; and how to anticipate barriers, and develop mitigation strategies to manage them. New partnerships have emerged, and more joint initiatives developed and initiated. These, and other instances of added value, stand testament to the possibilities for the future.

66. They remain an accepted, and indeed integral, part of the future development cooperation landscape. Yet, on the evidence gathered, they also require reform. The joint gender programmes reviewed do not yet fully respond to the components and commitments of the 2006 United Nations System-Wide Policy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, indicating that more work needs to be done.

67. They must build on their learning to date, continue to challenge systemic barriers and rise to meet the expectations of their partners, all whilst holding their ultimate aims and their ultimate clients, clearly in view.

Recommendations

68. Overarching recommendation 1: To United Nations entities: Ensure a clear strategic rationale for joint gender programmes - firmly ground designs in development effectiveness efforts at country level.

Operationalizing the recommendation:

- i. Make the decision on a joint gender programme a strategic choice rather than a default reaction to funding incentives, United Nations reform or donor pressure. This implies a clear options appraisal, which requires the United Nations and partners to 'make the case' for the joint modality from a development effectiveness and comparative advantage perspective, including in-country capacity of the stakeholders involved. It also implies a) analysis of the state of gender programming nationally (as it sits within broader country programming) and b) the consideration of other potential modalities, which embed the principle of jointness but which may be differently implemented, such as silent partnerships, basket or challenge funds.

- ii. Increase the rigour of the design phase for joint gender programmes:
 - a) Precede design with robust analytical underpinnings, including political, political economy, conflict/fragility, human rights and operating context analyses. Ensure designs are built on solid capacity analyses of all partners, including United Nations entities, and including the capacity for coherence;
 - b) Make design inclusive (including the guidance of the Gender Theme Group where appropriate); well resourced (human and financial, including technical expertise for gender and human rights); broad-based; and incorporate strategic visioning/realistic measurement and results frameworks geared to the realization of common intended results; and
 - c) Ensure that design reflects the systematization of a human rights-based approach.
- iii. The role of UN Women whose mandate positions them, where conditions permit, as a logical technical and/or coordination lead, should be clarified and made explicit within joint gender programmes;
- iv. Ensure that the following key principles are integrated into design and implementation:
 - Alignment should focus on the articulated priorities of rights holders (including those of women's organizations) and from a human rights perspective, rather than just generalized national needs;
 - Accountability should be shifted in perspective, from upwards to United Nations headquarters, to being truly mutual, human rights focused and centred on the country level. The role of the Resident Coordinator and the United Nations country team in holding programmes and partner agencies

to account should be formalized including going beyond the use of tools of performance measures or scorecards. Joint monitoring and performance reporting should be both a precondition of funding and monitored throughout;

- Ownership requires explicit strategies which are articulated from the outset and linked to capacity development strategies, below. Mechanisms for ownership during implementation should be broad based - including representatives of women's organizations and other appropriate agents of change - and tracked through reporting;
- Harmonizing for coherence also needs a clear vision and set of strategies from the outset, full commitment from partners and to be followed through. The premise of the joint modality should be core to the visioning process, and embedded within monitoring and reporting requirements. An explicit results statement on coordination within results frameworks should be included. The use of pass through or parallel modalities, which actively militate against harmonization, should be resisted. Coordination mechanisms should be explicitly resourced and housed in national structures (not necessarily government) to increase the location of accountability at national level. Lesson learning strategies should be integrated and applied throughout; and
- Underpinned by a shared vision, joint gender programmes need a stronger focus on managing for development results through collective working, and clearly monitored, measured, evaluated and reported upon. Activities do not need to be all jointly implemented, but need to be geared towards a common set of results, with clear upwards and horizontal linkages.

Performance reporting needs to be frequent, joint, results-oriented and required. Comparison of the joint gender modality with single-entity models needs to be included in the design of country programme and thematic evaluations.

- v. For joint gender programmes to be implemented in fragile or conflict-affected situations, a Do No Harm analysis, the international principles for good engagement in fragile situations and a state-building lens should be applied as appropriate and on an ongoing basis. A separate theory of change should be developed for programmes in these situations, which includes the elements indicated in Section 4 of the Synthesis Report.
- vi. Designs should be centred within a full risk framework from the outset – analysis of strategic, political, political economy, capacity and governance risks, as well as the risks of the joint modality itself, is essential. Mitigation strategies, and ongoing risk management processes, should be explicit, and frequently reviewed. This is the case for all joint gender programmes without exception and particularly those in fragile or conflict-affected situations.
- vii. Joint gender programmes should be positioned as an opportunity to develop comprehensive national capacity development strategies for gender equality and empowerment of women. This should fit with national capacity development strategies; reference UNDP's capacity development framework; include both duty-bearers and rights holders; and be partnership-oriented, inclusive and cross-cutting.

69. Overarching recommendation 2: To host governments and citizens: Ensure full ownership of, and accountability for, joint gender programmes as part of wider strategizing and capacity development for gender.

Operationalizing the recommendation:

- i. Locate United Nations joint gender programmes as part of clear national strategizing for gender equality and the empowerment of women which is grounded in a broad and inclusive development partnership, nationally-led and cross-government in nature, and which is grounded in clear intended gender equality results;
- ii. Adopt stronger leadership, and a more assertive stance, towards United Nations joint gender programmes in terms of their design, management and implementation, and reporting; and
- iii. Demand full accountability as a condition of implementation of a joint gender programme, and be vigilant in sustaining oversight.

70. Overarching recommendation 3: To donors: Accompany demands for rigour and results in joint gender programmes with supportive guidance and a partnership-oriented approach

Operationalizing the recommendation:

- i. Raise the technical bar for joint gender programmes' design and implementation, as a condition of funding, including an emphasis on development effectiveness principles and on the sound development practice garnered from many years of experience with joint development efforts;

- ii. Match demands with supportive guidance to United Nations entities on the joint modality, drawing on experience from sector-wide approaches, basket funds, silent partnerships and other joint modalities;
 - iii. Permit flexibility of approach where justified, and particularly in response to contextual change, as part of constructive accompaniment to United Nations entities on the ‘road to gender equality results’; and
 - iv. Demand results reporting which is geared to national strategies and results and include a focus on capacity development results for gender equality.
71. Overarching recommendation 4: To UNDG: Provide more specific guidance on joint gender programmes whilst advocating for systemic change

Operationalizing the recommendation:

- i. Develop and refine current guidance on when, how and under what conditions to use a joint gender programme modality, including its strategic orientation, design features, expectations on coordination, and what a ‘successful’ joint programme looks like; and which includes clear criteria for United Nations entity participation in a joint gender programme based on internal capacity, experience and comparative advantage.
- ii. Continue to advocate for:
 - a) A revised United Nations business model, in the form of: (i) authority and decision-making power for coherence and coordination issues resting with the Resident Coordinator; (ii) the Resident Coordinator heading an inclusive governance mechanism which is nationally-led; (iii) governance mechanisms embedding systems for horizontal and mutual accountability of Resident Coordinators and United Nation county teams; and (iv) the application of national implementation modalities where possible;

- b) The removal of systemic barriers and greater harmonization of the procedures which currently impede coordination and mitigate against the delivery of results on the ground;
- c) The creation of incentives for the application of the joint modality in gender programming: e.g. in job descriptions; through key performance indicators; and/or embedding joint reporting within annual performance reporting and evaluations.