



EVALUATION BRIEF

# JOINT EVALUATION OF JOINT PROGRAMMES ON GENDER EQUALITY IN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

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The United Nations System-Wide Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2006) and General Assembly QCPR Resolution 67/226 (2012) called for the United Nations (UN) system to be more accountable, effective and efficient in its initiatives to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women (GEEW). In order to do so, UN work on GEEW requires better coherence and coordination, with a focus on national ownership and leadership. The Joint Evaluation of Joint Programmes on Gender Equality in the UN System was commissioned to address a gap in evaluative evidence on country-level UN joint gender programmes (JGPs).

The findings provide an opportunity to ensure that future JGPs will be more effective and efficient. The evaluation was jointly managed by 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), and the Governments of Spain and Norway.

### **The evaluation demonstrates the added value of Joint Gender Programmes as a development cooperation modality in the UN system.**

Despite a steep learning curve, the assessed JGPs supported governments in meeting their normative commitments, albeit to varying degrees. JGPs were instrumental in bringing gender issues into national dialogue and prompting positive policy changes. Notably, JGPs contributed to:

- Creating shared understandings of, partnerships for, and a common discourse around, gender equality;
- Increasing the visibility and legitimacy of gender issues on the national agenda;
- Improving upstream results on policy reform and advocacy. A joint UN effort appears, in some cases, to have greater potential to deliver results on upstream change through a combined approach to policy influencing;
- Expanding the opportunity for translating normative gender work into operational initiatives, including by extending the reach of agencies with a particular normative

agenda, such as UN Women, into sectors opened up by partnerships with other agencies;

- Enhancing outreach on gender issues by strengthening synergies with other ministries, agencies or departments who previously did not recognize the centrality of gender in achieving their own goals and objectives; and
- Permitting a more multi-dimensional approach to addressing gender inequality.

### **Joint Gender Programmes have not led to increased efficiencies, mainly due to systemic barriers, unclear management arrangements and weak design processes.**

Overall, the JGP modality did not systematically lead to increased efficiencies. Specifically, burdens have:

- Decreased or remained the same for government partners (though positive change, where achieved, was extremely well received);

- Remained unchanged for civil society partners, who have largely continued bilateral operations as implementing partners under normal relationships and UN administrative rules; and
- Increased for UN entities.

The above are due to systemic barriers (such as the continued presence of non-harmonized UN procedures and diverse UN entity business models); unclear management arrangements (such as the authority and varying levels of engagement by UN Resident Coordinators and UNCTs; the role of UN Women at country level in JGPs; individual entities' respective openness to engage and give space for UN Women to play a more central role); and weak design processes (e.g. insufficient consultation, inadequate analytical underpinning, over-ambition) that do not fully take the context into account.

## The evaluation provides valuable lessons to strengthen future Joint Gender Programmes.

Lessons learned from the evaluation include:

- Delivering as One environments, that develop supportive frameworks for coherence and coordination, can provide a conducive setting for JGPs by helping to clear systemic hurdles and build on existing cooperation modalities;
- The successful implementation and the achievement of results by JGPs is strongly connected to a robust analytical basis and inclusive design process. Under-investment at the design stage limits opportunities to develop a common vision;
- Objectives of the JGPs must be kept realistic given the systemic barriers and the necessary learning curve;
- Capability of the national operating architecture to absorb the joint gender programme modality, as well as the capacity of national partners, needs to be studied and better understood; and
- Ownership and sustainability are maximized where accountability is grounded within the national context.

## Moving forward

The evaluation found that JGPs remain an accepted and integral part of the development cooperation landscape. However, taking forward the lessons learned and sustaining the value addition requires:

1. JGPs to be firmly grounded at the country level, so that action on GEEW can take place in a climate of solidly-founded development effectiveness;
2. National and UN partners to make JGPs a strategic option rather than a default choice. While the evaluation does not set 'minimum thresholds' for the JGP modality, it emphasizes the need to raise the bar for its use. More proactive ex ante deliberation should help partners explicitly anticipate the challenges inherent to, and maximize the benefits of, the JGP modality. It should enable better risk identification; improve the chances of efficiency gains; and make the modality a better 'fit' for the countries, national partners, and, most importantly of all, women, men and their communities whose interests, needs and priorities JGPs aim first to serve.
3. The 2012 UN System-Wide Action Plan for Implementation of the UN System-wide Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women to be brought clearly into focus, viewed through a country level lens and 'given teeth,' to drive forward the agenda for gender equality on the ground. Current UN system initiatives related to a post-2015 transformative goal on gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment and the Beijing +20 Review are of fundamental importance towards this end. Efforts towards a comprehensive UN accountability framework which brings country and normative results into view alongside the more process-focused Action Plan and associated performance indicators are also important.

## EVALUATION MANAGEMENT GROUP (EMG)

The Joint Evaluation of Joint Programmes on Gender Equality in the United Nations system was managed by an Evaluation Management Group chaired by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and composed of representatives from the independent evaluation offices of the commissioning entities - United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund (MDG-F) in partnership with the Governments of Spain and Norway.

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