

MOPAN 2017-18 ASSESSMENTS

Organisational Performance Brief:

UN Women

About this assessment

In 2017-18, the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) assessed the performance of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). The assessment looked at UN Women's organisational effectiveness (strategic, operational, relationship and performance aspects) and the results it achieved against its objectives. This was the second MOPAN assessment of UN Women; the first assessment was conducted in 2014.

This brief accompanies the full assessment, published in early 2019, which can be found on MOPAN's website at www.mopanonline.org. UN Women's management response will be made available on the MOPAN website as well.

Organisations assessed by MOPAN in 2017-18:

- ADB
- IFAD
- UNESCO
- WFP
- FAO
- IOM
- UNFPA
- WHO
- GEF
- OHCHR
- UNHCR
- UN Women
- UNRWA
- GPE

Key findings

The assessment found that UN Women has made many changes to increase its organisational effectiveness and strengthen its capacity to meet current and anticipated needs since the organisation's first MOPAN assessment in 2014. UN Women has established a strong strategic vision, aligned with and supportive of global agendas, including Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5. It has significantly improved its systems, processes and structures, as well as its focus on results. It continues to respond quickly and nimbly to new demands and opportunities for policy dialogue and global co-ordination.

There remain, however, some key questions of resourcing and capacity at country-level which limit effective programme delivery, partnership engagement and co-ordination, most notably with other UN agencies. While staff remain highly committed and resourceful, workload can exceed capacity, which may be at the root of some of the challenges. There is also a risk of a lack of transparency in the allocation of resources at country level and of undertaking activities that are not necessarily aligned with strategic priorities. These challenges weaken effective results-based management.

Overall, UN Women has made notable contributions to improving gender equality and the empowerment of women through its normative, co-ordination and technical assistance work. Sustainability of results and efficiency of delivery are noted challenges. Also, there is room for improvement with regard to the organisation's work in the areas of climate change, environmental sustainability and governance.

UN WOMEN STRATEGIC OUTCOMES, 2018-21

Outcome 1:

UN Women supports the strengthening and implementation of a comprehensive and dynamic set of global norms, policies and standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Outcome 2:

Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems.

Outcome 3:

Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy.

Outcome 4:

All women and girls live a life free from violence.

Outcome 5:

Women and girls contribute to building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from crisis prevention and humanitarian action.

Source: *UN Women Strategic Plan 2018-2021*

UN Women's performance at a glance

UN Women has a strong strategic vision aligned with global agendas, including the SDGs.

The assessment credits UN Women for having a clear long-term vision which informs and drives its strategy and results framework. The current Strategic Plan 2018-21 articulates the organisation's guiding principles, its five priority outcome areas and thematic outputs, as well as their underlying assumptions. It is also well aligned with relevant normative frameworks, including the Beijing Platform for Action, the Political Declaration 2015, adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. UN Women actively supports all these frameworks by producing policy reports and facilitating countries' participation, reports and contributions. During the development of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, UN Women played a major role in ensuring decision makers understood that gender equality, the empowerment of women and their human rights are essential for achieving sustainable development. Specifically, the organisation played a leading role in designing SDG 5 and in ensuring that other SDGs addressed gender equality.

Despite an overall increase in revenue, full funding targets have not yet been met and weaknesses exist with the strategic allocation of finances.

UN Women has not yet reached the USD 500 million funding target originally identified by the UN Secretary-General as optimal to enable the organisation to pursue its composite mandate; however, its overall revenue grew commendably by 57.6%, with total resources increasing from USD 234 million in 2011 to USD 369 million in 2017. While UN Women's allocation of resources is clear, the criteria for allocating them to strategic priorities and to regions and countries remain unclear. This suggests that the current practice tends towards being responsive rather than strategic. There are a number of examples where the organisation resorts to funding activities which potentially weaken its ability to remain strategically aligned, including the recent increase in UN Women's involvement in humanitarian action. It is a noted concern within the UN General Assembly that UN Women has had to draw on voluntary contributions to enable it to carry out its mandate of servicing normative intergovernmental and UN coordination processes.

By design, UN Women has a strong focus on gender and human rights.

UN Women embodies a sophisticated understanding of gender issues, as befits an organisation which leads and advises on gender for the UN. It contributes to gender equality through its advisory work on joint working groups and task forces.

It leads major flagship reports, including *Progress of the World's Women* and the *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*. In its co-ordination role, UN Women has developed the System Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, which has been used successfully to ensure that all UN entities focus on gender issues in their work at country level. Human rights are effectively addressed through UN Women's commitment to "leave no one behind", and a human rights-based approach conceptually underpins its strategy and operational activities.

However, UN Women pays limited attention to the environment, climate change and governance.

The organisation's policy on environmental sustainability lacks clarity and visibility, despite aspects of resilience and climate change being integrated into the work of the organisation. A Greening Statement does exist, but this primarily addresses the organisation's own carbon footprint and environmental impact at the Secretariat and office levels. Similarly, governance is addressed through UN Women's activities and vision; however, the organisation has no clear policy statement on good governance.

Partnerships are central to UN Women's work but vary in their effectiveness.

The organisation's ability to enact positive partnerships at country level is variable and relies on significant input from headquarters, as

well as coherence to the UN Development System (UNDS) reform processes. Use of country systems is not clearly documented or incentivised. At the country level, members of the UN Country Teams often maintain separate bilateral (and sometimes competitive) relationships with the same strategic partner, which leads to inefficiencies and potential duplication. Joint initiatives have enabled UN Women to leverage its mandate more effectively and to play a greater catalytic role in country. The organisation is also improving the accessibility and transparency of its information, having received a relatively low rating from the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), although the rating has recently increased.

At the intervention level, operational and design tools and capacity assessment of partners differ in quality. Climate change, governance and human rights are not fully mainstreamed in UN Women's Country Strategic Notes. There is also variability in the extent to which partners are engaged with and consulted on Country Strategic Notes. UN Women has a stated intent to support sustainable interventions but does not have a well-defined exit strategy, and results on sustainability are mixed. Procedural delays and bottlenecks remain, although new systems are beginning to tackle these issues, and new risk management and mitigation systems are being rolled out.

UN Women is restructuring its organisational architecture to deliver its mandate and results more effectively. Based on learnings from the 2014 MOPAN assessment, from the mid-term review of its Strategic Plan 2014-17 and from corporate evaluations undertaken since 2016, UN Women's restructuring is designed to increase decentralisation, efficiency and effectiveness. The organisation has used the recommendations of the Evaluation of UN Women's Regional Architecture (2016) to review the responsibilities and roles of its three levels of work – country, regional and headquarters. The evaluation's recommendations addressed improvements in increasing decentralisation, delegating authority to regions and country offices, and revising the headquarters' role to better support regional and country activities. The assessment found the push towards greater decentralisation to be a newly emerging strength of the organisation.

The MOPAN assessment noted gaps in the extent to which the restructuring focuses on strategic priorities in the absence of a country typology. Documentation and staff interviews indicated that UN Women was pre-emptive in starting to address the country-typology question; however, plans were paused to ensure alignment to ongoing UNDS reform processes.

UN Women's financial systems, operational management and audit arrangements have improved. Project disbursements and donor contributions are now processed faster using new management systems, and UN Women's Results Management System allows for real-time tracking of resource allocation and delivery against outputs and outcomes at all levels. The arrangements for external and internal audits meet international standards, and all audit reports and the corresponding management responses and action plans are publically available.

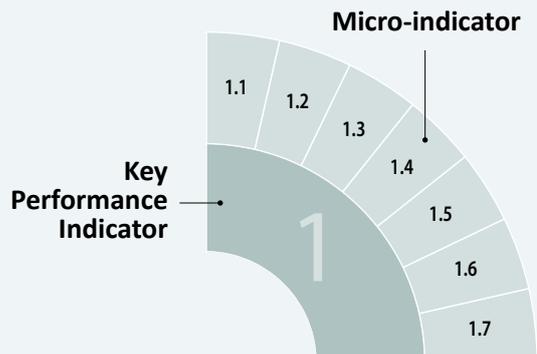
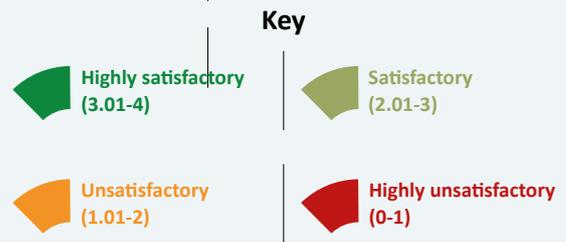
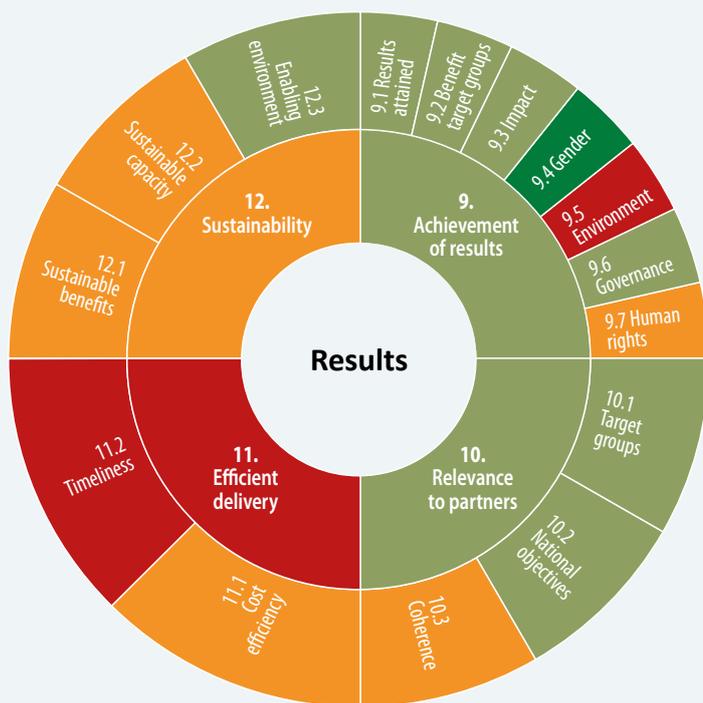
UN Women is committed to results-based management. The strategic plan contains a newly developed organisational theory of change which provides the basis for a stronger analytic and results framework. Each of the Flagship Programme Initiatives is set to deliver one of the thematic priorities and has a theory of change that falls within the overall organisational theory of change. The Integrated Results and Resources Framework (IRRF) is based on the latter; outputs and outcomes are linked in a results chain, and all headquarters and field level work plans, results, budgets and expenditures are linked to this.

UN Women also performs well in evaluation, despite issues with funding. There is evidence of the use of lessons learned from evaluations in both the strategic plans and in the field offices. Published reports track performance against impact area indicators, marking areas that are both on and off track. UN Women demonstrates its commitment to public accountability by disclosing all evaluation plans, reports, and management responses and action plans through the web-based and publically accessible UN Women Evaluation Resource Centre. However, funding levels have fluctuated over time and have not been sufficient to meet the Evaluation Policy target.

The organisation faces challenges in demonstrating its specific contributions to global results.

At intervention level, theories of change seek to identify ways in which UN Women’s specific activities and inputs contribute to achieving measurable results, yet a notable gap exists between linking their contribution to aggregated results. Furthermore, a noted challenge with the IRRF is the lack of articulated responsibility for ownership or delivery of results by divisions or, where appropriate, external partners. Baselines and metrics for a third of IRRF indicators are under development, including several indicators for normative outputs which are reliant on the outcomes of international negotiations. Finally, where organisations share indicators from the UN Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review or from the Common Chapter, the metrics for UN Women’s contribution remain unclear.

PERFORMANCE RATING SUMMARY



Finally, an imbalance between expectations and what staff can deliver could be at the root of some of the challenges. Staff are highly committed to UN Women's vision and work extremely hard to deliver. At the same time, the workload is heavy and often exceeds staff capacity. There have been cases of burnout and the risk of more cases is high, according to both the 2014 and 2016 staff surveys. Country offices currently have low levels of staffing, not related directly to the level of activities required. Furthermore, job insecurity is a noted risk, in particular for the 60% of employees who do not have a staff contract.

Notwithstanding these challenges, at the global level, there is positive evidence of UN Women's influence on political discourse, standards and a range of national policies. The evaluations that were reviewed indicated that UN Women is becoming more effective in delivering normative results at the country level. Country portfolio evaluations found that development objectives were broadly achieved, but results were not clear. This is in part due to a previously weak results-based management system, which limited the assessment of results at country level. Evidence on the sustainability of results is mixed.

The sustainability of results and efficiency of delivery continue to be on-going challenges. There is a need for a longer-term vision, systematic planning and adequate resourcing to achieve longer lasting and transformative changes. There are also system, resource and operational constraints on the delivery of results at country level. The MOPAN assessment found evidence of an overall increase in efficiency, which reflects the growing maturity of systems and processes. However, areas for further improvement remain as the timeliness of interventions and delivery continues to be a challenge, often related to the previously noted limited financial and human capacity at country level and to system weaknesses.

About MOPAN

MOPAN is a network of 18 countries¹ that share a common interest in assessing the effectiveness of the major multilateral organisations they fund, including UN agencies, international financial institutions and global funds. The Network generates, collects, analyses and presents relevant and credible information on the organisational and development effectiveness of the organisations it assesses. This knowledge base is intended to contribute to organisational learning within and among the organisations, their direct clients, partners and shareholders, and other stakeholders. Network members use the reports for their own accountability needs and for strategic decision-making. Finland and Sweden championed the assessment of UN Women on behalf of the Network.

Methods of analysis

The assessment of performance covers UN Women's headquarters and regional and country field presence. It addresses organisational systems, practices and behaviours, as well as results achieved during the period 2016 to mid-2018. It relies on three lines of evidence: a review of 152 documents, interviews with 75 staff members – individually and in small groups, and an online survey conducted among partners in 12 countries.²

The MOPAN 3.0 methodology entails a framework of 12 key performance indicators and associated micro-indicators. It comprises standards that characterise an effective multilateral organisation.

1. Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States – and two observers, New Zealand and the United Arab Emirates.

2. Bangladesh, Bolivia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Guinea, Jordan, Lebanon, Mexico, Myanmar, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea and Turkey.