

REFLECTIONS

LESSONS FROM EVALUATIONS: UNDP SUPPORT TO GENDER EQUALITY AS AN SDG ACCELERATOR

Lead author: Ana Rosa Monteiro Soares

Research associate: Rakesh Ganguli

INTRODUCTION

The Sustainable Development Goals¹ (SDGs) are a bold commitment to end poverty in all forms and dimensions by 2030. As a central actor in the United Nations Development System, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has matched its commitment in the Strategic Plan 2022-2025 to “*expand people’s choices for a fairer, sustainable future, to build the world envisioned by Agenda 2030 with planet and people in balance*”.² The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the UNDP, in support of the organization’s efforts, undertakes rapid evidence assessments of lessons from evaluations to provide evidence-based advice to UNDP country offices on pertinent areas of work and produces papers called “Reflections”.

This particular Reflections paper focuses on lessons from UNDP’s work where it has aimed to promote gender equality and empowerment of women and girls (GEWE) as a Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) accelerator. Additionally, this paper also presents lessons that might provide directions to UNDP’s COVID-19 response initiatives and emerging strategies for improved alignment and could further sharpen the gender focus in post-Covid SDG pursuits.

METHODOLOGY

This is a rapid evidence assessment designed to provide a balanced and abridged synthesis of evaluative evidence posted to the UNDP Evaluation Resource Centre between January 2018 and September 2021. In addition, UNDP IEO’s Artificial Intelligence for Development Analysis (AIDA) prototype was piloted to identify relevant documents for inclusion. Country-level, corporate and thematic evaluations conducted by IEO were the key sources of data for this paper covering/drawing

upon 49 Independent Country Programme Evaluations (ICPE) and 20 Thematic Evaluations. In addition, in drawing up these lessons, high-quality decentralized evaluations commissioned by country offices were also considered along with

7 Annual Reports of the Administrator for further triangulation and several other credible external references and discussion papers. The emphasis was on reviewing findings, conclusions and recommendations to capture relevant lessons on what worked, what did not and why in regard to UNDP’s work in promoting gender equality as a prerequisite condition to accelerate SDG outcomes.

This is not a systematic review of UNDP literature, but a synthesis of key learning to offer practical and timely insights to support effective UNDP decision-making. In exploring GEWE as an SDG accelerator, this review draws on the knowledge found in evaluative products that discuss the interconnections and the effects that working on GEWE bring in terms of results for the SDGs.

CONTEXT

Both in Agenda 2030³ and in UNDP’s Strategic Plan⁴ and its Gender Equality Strategy,⁵ GEWE is a stand-alone goal (SDG 5) but is also envisioned as cutting across the remaining 16 SDGs, reflected in 45 targets and 54 indicators measuring UNDP achievement. The assumption is that GEWE is not only a pre-condition to realizing the SDGs, but also an accelerator for their achievement, making SDG 5 unique. This assumption is directly linked to the need for fair representation, the acknowledgment of differential needs and for equitable distribution of benefits, resources, status and rights of diverse genders. Ultimately, as an accelerator, the aim is for changes in norms, cultural values, power structures and roots of inequalities that address discrimination against vulnerable people living on the margins, especially girls and women and gender minorities.

UNDP’s past and current strategic plans have recognized that advancing GEWE calls for a holistic view of programmes rather than a fragmented one that focuses on one area of intervention or on a select few. Limited integration and synergies among thematic areas and strategic partners constrain the achievement and sustainability of results in GEWE and all areas.

AT A GLANCE – LESSONS LEARNED

1	<p>Advancing GEWE in all programme areas accelerates progress towards the SDGs, including those not explicitly targeting GEWE. Recognizing multiple gender inequalities is an essential first step.</p>	2	3	<p>Shared responsibility and partnerships are key to integrating multidimensional approaches to advance GEWE and accelerate the SDGs, helping transform ‘stakeholders’ into ‘stakewinners’ in the interest of GEWE.</p>
4	<p>Women are key agents of change in regard to sustainable environment and energy, but initiatives must address discrimination and social/cultural norms that often prevent women from accruing benefits of results beyond participation.</p>	5	6	<p>UNDP’s Gender Seal enhances attention to gender equality in programmatic areas and promotes the integration of approaches that accelerate results beyond GEWE achievements.</p>
7	<p>Adequate resources for GEWE are an absolute must but without concrete commitment from country offices and partners for sustained action they are no guarantee for transformative gender outcomes.</p>			

LESSONS LEARNED

1 Advancing GEWE in all programme areas accelerates progress towards the SDGs, including those not explicitly targeting GEWE. Recognizing multiple gender inequalities is an essential first step.

The approach of the Strategic Plan to integrating gender equality and women's empowerment in all areas of work, has proven to be a key accelerator of development results. UNDP is gradually moving away from counting beneficiaries by sex to engaging in more gender responsive approaches that address the different needs of men and women⁶. Strengthening linkages between upstream and downstream interventions while ensuring integration between thematic areas and building synergies are proving essential to enhance the chances of achieving more gender transformative change, therefore accelerating the SDGs (Panama, Uruguay, Zambia).⁷ It has proven important to also identify interventions and approaches leading to structural and transformational change, in order to create a socio-economic and cultural environment that provides the opportunity for women and girls to participate effectively in public, political, social, economic and cultural life at all levels.

UNDP has been more successful in achieving and accelerating results when it looked beyond employment and income generation to strengthening gender equality in national planning and addressing structural barriers to women's economic empowerment, including critical determinants such as the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work (Bangladesh, Cote D'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uruguay).⁸

UNDP has also been more successful in achieving integrated results when partnering across government ministries to ensure that SDG planning, implementation and reporting were gender responsive. This included support for sex-disaggregated data collection and analysis, the integration of gender analysis into voluntary national reviews, and the use of gender-responsive budgeting to ensure a more equitable distribution of resources associated with national or subnational plans.⁹

Accelerating the pace of advancing gender equality in all programme areas accelerates progress towards achieving the SDGs. In Turkey, grant projects have been selected based on gender criteria, and all grant holders received gender mainstreaming training.¹⁰ In Madagascar, the majority of people accessing the services work of legal clinics supported by UNDP are women (78 percent in 2017). Leveraging this point of access, UNDP supported efforts to realize the right of women to participate in the country's public affairs as voters,¹¹ advancing GEWE calls for a holistic view of programmes rather than a fragmented one that focuses on one or a select few.

The UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-2021 was key to promote the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment as an important accelerator of development results. UNDP, under the new Strategic Plan 2022–2025 and with a new gender equality strategy under development, can more clearly articulate how gender-integration approaches enable the delivery of more gender-transformative results in all areas of development. In addition, the use of clear frameworks like the Gender Results Effectiveness Scale (GRES) can help in the design, measurement and acceleration of programmes to achieve the SDGs. As mentioned in the Strategic Plan Evaluation, key constraints continue to be the lack of adequate financial and human resources.¹²

2 A better understanding of the intersecting discriminations and stronger gender analysis are key to the success of an LNOB approach with GEWE to accelerate the SDGs.

The intersectionality of discriminations is widely acknowledged as a phenomenon affecting GEWE and an individual's socioeconomic status and access to entitlements and opportunities. This has yet to be translated into a results framework from an LNOB perspective at UNDP.¹³ In Uruguay, UNDP has made relevant contributions to ensure the necessary legal framework for gender and ethnicity equality are in place.¹⁴ In the case of Uruguay, further attention is needed to the early attention care system and the care of persons with disabilities and the elderly all of which pose structural impediments to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women.

In addition, recognizing diverse genders and sexual identities as much as intersecting identities of men, women and non-binary persons can be a challenge for UNDP programmes. It requires programmes to carefully develop and implement sound gender analysis. Part of this gender analysis is to showcase and understand how gender intersects with other categories of discrimination like race, ethnicity or sexual orientation, age, identity, etc. Multiple ICPEs substantiate their work not necessarily under their GEWE work but rather aligned with their LNOB work, precisely because of the potential as an accelerator of multiple SDGs. (Panama, Uruguay, Zambia)

UNDP has worked on gender equality and human rights, but it has often missed opportunities to engage in more transformative work with more LNOB approaches which are needed to accelerate the SDGs to bring about changes in social determinants. Greater engagement in such transformative work is also essential to integrate economic transformation for poverty reduction, resilience building and social cohesion through the lens of LNOB (Mozambique).¹⁵ More skills and capacities are needed to further advance LNOB with GEWE in order to capture the intersection point of different types of discrimination and the complexity of the dimensions of gender inequalities.

Mere targeting of men and women in projects can overlook their socio-economic status, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity or other factors. UNDP can further build its capacities to better understand, beyond focusing on the individual, how gender interacts with other social variables and how this leads to inequalities within broader structural systems of power and discrimination.

A significant example of UNDP support to countries has been its technical inputs and financial assistance in preparing LNOB assessments for national SDG reports and voluntary national reviews. New technologies and macroeconomics are specific subjects absent from LNOB plans and strategies, while dimensions like poverty, displacement, and sexual orientation and identity are also left out of the analysis of these reports and national reviews. Key target groups — such as people with disabilities, women and children, and elderly people — were considered in almost all such reviews but lacked a proper analysis of the gender dimensions of each group. Less than half of the reports considered poor people, ethnic minorities and (LGBTI+).¹⁶

There is limited evaluative evidence focusing on the intersectionality of gender and other markers. A 2019 meta-synthesis of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) Evaluations with a Gender Lens looked into the extent to which the documents had been able to address the LNOB principle. The meta-synthesis – developed prior to the SDG and LNOB principle – revealed that the definition of vulnerable groups differed according to the country context and UNDAF, and of the 443 references to human rights and/or gender equality, only 189 referred to at least one vulnerable/marginalized group. Upon further examination, the analysis showed that the inclusion and integration of vulnerable groups was predominantly comprised of women (35 percent), such as rural and/or poor women or women and girls who were

victims of domestic violence. A total of 14 percent of the references were made to youth and 29 percent to other vulnerable groups such as displaced people, refugees, the LGBTI+ community and prisoners.¹⁷ Placing women and girls in the same category as many of the other vulnerable groups occurs often and is a disservice to both gender equality and the other vulnerable groups. Until there is a better understanding of the intersection of different discriminations and stronger gender analysis of each vulnerable group, the most excluded may continue to be left behind and countries will not achieve GEWE.

3 Shared responsibility and partnerships are key to integrating multidimensional approaches to advance GEWE and accelerate the SDGs, helping transform ‘stakeholders’ into ‘stakewinners’ in the interest of GEWE.

UNDP has gradually moved towards multi-stakeholder platforms during 2018-2019¹⁸. In Asia and the Pacific, the ‘Transforming the Future of Work for Gender Equality’ initiative is a platform focusing on financial inclusion that works with policymakers, business leaders, regulators and civil society. As a result of interventions in the Pacific Islands connected to this platform, nearly a million women are expected to get improved access to digital agriculture and financial service delivery among market vendors and rural women micro-entrepreneurs.¹⁹ In Uruguay, UNDP has been able to strengthen gender responsive public policies through its catalytic platforms which focused on better data and information, and deeper partnerships between municipalities, urban planners, academia and policymakers. UNDP engaged in gender analysis in a set of urban mobility programmes and, through an alliance with the Development Bank of Latin America, integrated a gender perspective into the first mobility survey for Montevideo and its metropolitan area. This led to several diverse initiatives and research including an Urban Mobility lab.²⁰ UNDP has also established itself as a preferred development partner in Azerbaijan developing close ties with key ministries from government and national and international stakeholders promoting the work of CSOs, particularly around gender and social inclusion issues.²¹ In Angola, UNDP has helped the Ministry of Women’s Affairs to implement gender policies at national and local levels and to improve capacities to collect, analyse and report on gender data. UNDP technical support to the Government helped strengthen institutional development and enhance policy formulation in the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, leading to a broadening of the policy debate on gender-responsive budgeting. At the legislative level, UNDP supported the drafting of the National Gender Policy and the Domestic Violence Law and supported the Ministry of Women’s Affairs in its promotion and monitoring, and in the design of the law against domestic violence.²²

Private sector partnerships are critical in amplifying SDG advocacy on gender issues that accelerate other SDGs, redirecting investments for goods and raising public awareness—from inviting millions of smartphone users to crowdsource climate policies, to co-founding a fund for global brands and the advertising industry to support conservation and biodiversity.²³ UNDP has been supporting the Global Compact as a key partner, and it has provided technical assistance for the adoption of the SDGs by members of the Compact. In this framework, UNDP has advocated for the integration of human rights, gender equality and environmental sustainability issues into private sector agendas. UNDP is generally perceived by private sector partners as a valued and trusted facilitator for public-private partnerships. There has also been a high level of engagement on gender equality with small producers from the private sector (Argentina).²⁴

Successful strategic partnerships on gender with other UN agencies are noted in some of the programme evaluations analysed for this lessons paper. UNDP helped establish a framework for addressing domestic violence in Kosovo through the combined efforts and expertise of UNDP, UN WOMEN and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). This collaborative effort helped raise public awareness, promote gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) as part of the Justice 2020 Programme.²⁵ In Côte d’Ivoire, in partnership with the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, UNDP contributed to increasing the employability of young men and women through a new national volunteer

programme. UNDP and UNV also supported the establishment of a national volunteer programme, to participate in development efforts while enhancing employability. The initiative led to the creation of useful management and monitoring tools to implement the programme, as well as a draft law awaiting adoption by parliament (Cote D'Ivoire).²⁶ In Belarus, in partnership with UNICEF, UNDP supported the National Statistical Committee in the development of a national platform for reporting on the indicators of the SDGs. A gender portal – complementary to the SDG database – is under development. Activities for building statistical capacity for SDG monitoring have been included in the Strategy for the Development of Government Statistics of the Republic of Belarus till 2022 (Belarus).²⁷

A key role of UNDP has been promoting the involvement of multiple stakeholders and bringing non-governmental actors into discussions around the SDGs. In Azerbaijan, in addition to the panels on SDG implementation organized with the National Coordination Council for Sustainable Development (NCCSD brought together different groups such as parliamentary representatives, CSOs, women, youth and academia), UNDP is supporting the creation of a platform for dialogue between the government and civil society on the SDGs and building CSO capacity to apply gender-responsive approaches to SDG implementation.²⁸

Diversified partnerships can accelerate gender equality and women's empowerment in achieving the SDGs. Through an innovative partnership with EU and other UN agencies under the "Spotlight Initiative to End Violence Against Women", UNDP was a key force for mobilizing funds and the development of a large UN joint programme with the National Women's Commission under the President of Kazakhstan. The programme aimed to promote political rights and the economic empowerment of women in Kazakhstan and their effective contribution to achievement of the SDG Agenda.²⁹ Globally, in 2020, with the support of the Spotlight Initiative, 189 official dialogues were held in 19 countries, with the meaningful participation of women's rights groups and relevant civil society organizations, including representatives of groups facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. As a result, 79 jointly agreed recommendations on policies to end violence against women and girls and to increase the accountability of perpetrators were developed. These were implemented in Argentina, El Salvador, Honduras, Liberia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tajikistan and Uganda. Altogether 341 women's right groups and relevant civil society organizations, with support from Spotlight Initiative programmes, increased their use of citizen audits, shadow reporting, or other accountability mechanisms.³⁰

4

Women are key agents of change in regard to sustainable environment and energy, but initiatives must address discrimination and social/cultural norms that often prevent women from accruing benefits from results beyond participation.

Energy and environment initiatives often rely on the assumption that women will automatically benefit from simply being involved in programmes but failure to consider social and cultural norms and power structures often prevent women from fully benefiting from opportunities in these areas. Results achieved in energy initiatives focused on ensuring gender parity or improved participation of women. However, decision-making over benefits was often overlooked. Women continue to face challenges in converting the support received by UNDP into changes to their economic status often because initiatives failed to consider or address social norms regarding women's livelihoods and financial control (Argentina, Bangladesh, Panama, Turkey).³¹ In Cuba and Maldives clean energy initiatives have reduced risks associated with firewood consumption and women's labour and health but have failed to bring about structural changes with regard to unequal gender division of labour (Cuba, Maldives).³² The greatest risk is the prevalent assumption that women will automatically benefit from energy access and are not subject to further discrimination in new technologies, business models, or institutional positions that accompany renewable energy.³³

In 2019, 74 countries reported that they had integrated gender into environmental and climate policies, plans and frameworks while 97 countries reported strengthening women's leadership and decision-making in natural resource management.³⁴ UNDP serves as a leading member of the GEF Gender Partnership, a network of experts working on gender and to ensure the work is gender responsive. To support the integration of gender considerations into multilateral environmental agreements, in 2020 UNDP supported the development of the gender plan of action for the Convention on Biological Diversity for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.³⁵ More contributions to gender mainstreaming can be seen in the GEF-funded small grant programme, which works to maintain at least 47.5 percent of women's participation in planning and management of the programme. In Afghanistan, with support from SGP, Ebtakar Inspiring Entrepreneurs of Afghanistan Organization (EIEAO) implemented a project to promote renewable energy through solar-powered food carts. The project supported 70 women from underprivileged communities in Kabul by offering them employment opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The women were trained to run their food business from 35 solar food carts developed by the project and each woman earned around \$11 per day through the initiative. In Indonesia, grants have contributed to closing the gender gap in access to and control over resources through organic farming, agro-forestry, and the production and use of energy efficient stoves.³⁶ Overall, 83 percent of the completed GEF projects were found to be gender responsive and 31 percent of the projects were led by women under the initiative.³⁷

The recognition and involvement of women as key stakeholders in environment and energy-related programming at all levels can be a particularly vital element to improving national decision-making processes. In Cambodia, women now represent at least 40 percent of the members of water management committees, and, because of improved water management, farmers doubled their rice crop yields and were better able to adapt during drought and dry spells³⁸. In Guatemala³⁹ successful integration of gender aspects in interventions at the local and institutional levels helped monitor the implementation of the national environment gender policy and the development of a course with the inclusion of gender considerations for sustainable forest management. Recognizing women's collective organization as a powerful force to advance resilience, UNDP increased its support to strengthen women-led community-based associations from 41 countries in 2018 to 57 countries in 2019.⁴⁰ In 2018, UNDP Bangladesh's climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction initiatives promoted a human rights-based approach to climate change adaptation with special emphasis on women and girls and indigenous people.⁴¹ Ecuador incorporated gender equality into its nationally determined contributions, the by-law of the national environmental law, and the national strategy for climate change.⁴² In Somalia, UNDP aimed to close the energy gap by improving the energy access and use of alternative energy by selected communities.⁴³ This enabled the selected households to perform an energy switch and reduce biomass and kerosene use. UNDP in Jordan put women in the driver's seat of environmental change, with ground-breaking solid waste management, creating sustainable livelihoods for local communities, with salaries, business training and shareholder incentives for women employees.⁴⁴

Despite progress, almost all countries that participated in UNDP's GEF-funded project "Technical Support to Eligible Parties to Produce the Sixth National Report - 6NR"⁴⁵ to the Convention on Biological Diversity⁴⁶ faced challenges while trying to mainstream gender into their national reporting process. Most countries did not have the capacity to produce, collect and use sex-disaggregated data. Many countries lacked mechanisms to ensure that quantitative and qualitative sex-disaggregated data and indicators were monitored and could be incorporated into the report. Commonly, National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans did not include gender-responsive indicators that allowed national teams to capture the contribution and needs of both women and men, and therefore prepare a gender-responsive 6NR.

5 Crisis prevention, response, recovery, stabilization and peacebuilding initiatives that adequately integrate gender responsive approaches achieve more sustainable results and more durably advance women's empowerment.

When allowed by social and cultural norms, women are active stakeholders in humanitarian crisis prevention, response and recovery. However, humanitarian response and recovery initiatives often treat women and girls as passive recipients of aid and support, undermining their role and potential contribution to sustainable recovery and rebuilding processes. Evaluation evidence shows that advancing women's leadership in humanitarian settings remains a challenge. The share of women holding leadership positions in social dialogue and reconciliation mechanisms in 15 countries increased from 25 percent in 2018 to 35 percent in 2019. However, the number of leadership positions within prevention and recovery mechanisms held by women in both 2018 and 2019 was dramatically low. To address this, UNDP developed and began rolling out its "Gender and Recovery Toolkit".⁴⁷

Although UNDP efforts towards prioritising and mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment in humanitarian response are well intended, they do not necessarily translate into action and sustainable change, as sociocultural barriers pose severe challenges to mainstreaming GEWE in humanitarian response. While the participation of and consultation with affected women for needs assessment increases over the duration of a crisis response, this has not necessarily translated into women and girls being involved in decision making regarding project activities or response management. Additionally, consultation with women on their needs was often limited to "women's issues" as perceived by humanitarian actors – such as hygiene or sexual and reproductive health – rather than their other broader needs, or their own strengths, resilience and capacities.⁴⁸

In Iraq and Syria, women survivors were involved in menial low-skill work under the cash for work programme of rubble removal. While from a cash-for-work point of view this might appear to be the most immediate requirement for survival and therefore a success, it does little to sustainably help improve women's status or gender equality in any manner from a building-back-forward perspective (Iraq, Syria, Viet Nam).⁴⁹ Short-term programming at the cost of longer-term gains often undermines gender transformative processes in humanitarian response. Promoting resilience remains a particular challenge in a scenario where humanitarian and development programme have divergent outlooks and mandates without a gender responsive approach. Although humanitarian work and agencies are constantly evolving, donor strategies continue to reinforce the humanitarian-development-peace divide and promote short-term projects rather than sustainable solutions, which often leaves out appropriate gender perspectives (Turkey).⁵⁰

Adopting context-sensitive gender approaches and strengthening the resilience of women to negative impacts on ecosystems are crucial to the success of environmental programming, especially in the aftermath of crises.⁵¹ In a UNDP project in Afghanistan⁵² women in remote areas were not allowed to meet project staff. UNDP adapted its strategy by training women to train other women in the remote areas and found they generally showed more responsibility in income generation activities than men.

Humanitarian emergencies, disaster response and recovery, conflict resolution and peacebuilding contexts offer opportunities to recast traditional gender roles. Successful initiatives have taken advantage of these opportunities to position women in decision-making roles in crisis management initiatives to leverage their intrinsic local knowledge and understanding of risk and recovery processes (Bangladesh, Chad, Colombia, Iraq, Nigeria, Myanmar, Palestine, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen).⁵³ The demographic imbalance after crises has in some cases presented a renewed opportunity to further pursue gender equality and women's empowerment at the policy level (Syria).⁵⁴ UNDP, in a joint project with UN

Volunteers and local organizations, "Enhancing Gender Equality and Mainstreaming in Afghanistan", supported Youth Mullah Volunteer Caravans to spread key messages on women's rights in selected communities and regions.⁵⁵

The practice of interviewing only heads of households in major assessment exercises can reduce the voice of women when the heads are male. Even if women's needs are identified, delays in revising programming exacerbate this issue and its impacts. Gender equality is often deprioritized in the first phase of a response, as it is not considered a "life-saving issue" to the same extent as other humanitarian needs, with the exception of responding to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) or GBV cases among affected women.⁵⁶ The promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment should be the cornerstone of UNDP's crisis response.⁵⁷ In Somalia⁵⁸ stronger engagement by women at the local level led to a substantial increase in the number of projects supporting schools and health clinics, rather than road building and improvements, the number one priority for men. In Iraq⁵⁹ the construction of community centres established as a safe place for promoting social cohesion have provided community engagement activities (e.g. from vocational training to the creation of a women's football team) and psychosocial support to victims of sexual and GBV.

GEWE remains grossly underfunded in humanitarian response and crisis management programmes.⁶⁰ Gender analysis of humanitarian response reveals an implicit assumption among humanitarian programming staff that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls can be addressed without resources, including funding for expertise.⁶¹ Expenditure for gender equality and women's empowerment remains inadequate in humanitarian response programmes where such funding is even more exigent.⁶² The so-called "GenCap" senior advisors represent a dedicated source of funding for strategic-level gender expertise, albeit timebound, and these advisors have been a valuable resource for filling this expertise gap. When GenCap senior advisors were present, the humanitarian responses showed substantial improvements in gender equality programming and coordination. Correspondingly, when GenCap senior advisors left and were not replaced by other long-term gender expertise, the quality of GEEWG programming and coordination declined.⁶³

6 UNDP's Gender Seal enhances attention to gender equality and promotes gender integration across programmes to accelerate results beyond GEWE achievements.

Gender Equality Seal⁶⁴ scaling vertically across country offices and partnerships, both with public and private agencies, has increased the potential for accelerating outcomes across multiple SDGs. Evaluations revealed that a systematic gender analysis remains a crucial success factor for achieving strong performance. UNDP continued to partner across government ministries to ensure that integrated SDG planning, implementation and reporting were gender-responsive. This included support for improved livelihoods, sex-disaggregated data collection and integration of gender analysis into socioeconomic plans. Good practices from the Gender Seal⁶⁵ show how programme portfolio reviews contribute to more responsive and transformative results and offer improved ways forward.⁶⁶ Efforts towards achieving a Gender Equality Seal benefit the office with significant guidance for proper gender mainstreaming in areas of programme other than gender.⁶⁷

In countries like Turkey and Panama, the Seal has served as an incentive for participating governmental and private sector entities to mainstream gender equality in their organizational culture and adopt gender-sensitive policies and strategies. Companies that volunteer for the Seal typically aim to eliminate gender pay gaps, increase the number of women in decision-making positions and make the workplace more inclusive and safer (Turkey, Panama).⁶⁸ Uganda in 2016 became the first country in Africa to endorse the Gender Equality Seal for private enterprises by signing up the Private Sector

Foundation in Uganda to implement it among members.⁶⁹ In Rwanda, 36 private sector companies and two public companies have signed on to the Gender Equality Seal.⁷⁰

The GRES analysis⁷¹ of the ICPEs and results-oriented analysis reports (ROARs) conducted for the Strategic Plan Evaluation 2018 - 2021 found that overall, Gender Equality Seal countries had more gender responsive results that focus on addressing the different needs of men, women or marginalized populations and focused on the equitable distribution of benefits, resources and status. Non-Gender Seal countries had more gender-targeted results than gender-responsive results that focused on the number of women, men or marginalized populations engaged in initiatives. This trend is clear in the self-informed ROAR data, but also confirmed from ICPEs which consist of independent triangulated data collected by IEO.

It is not a given, but in some countries the Seal has also contributed to increasing allocation of funds for gender equality, establishing better partnerships, and expanding gender-responsive programming. Countries like Turkey and Panama have been able to increase allocations for gender-responsive programming (Turkey, Panama).⁷² Kyrgyzstan became one of 10 UNDP country offices to receive the Gold Certification of the Gender Equality Seal. Transformative results included the adoption of a national action plan on gender equality for 2018-2020; 30 percent of gender quotas introduced into the composition of local councils; promotion of a law criminalizing child marriage and bride kidnapping; and the introduction of 112 hotlines for gender-based violence response.⁷³ In the 2018-2019 round of the Gender Seal, demand was higher than ever before, with 55 offices applying to the programme (36 were accepted) and a retention rate of 94 per cent.⁷⁴

While the Gender Seal incentive certainly helps the promotion of GEWE, more importantly it highlights that gender mainstreaming can be a critical path to results in all areas. However, the application of the Gender Seal requires strategic theories of change and sustained efforts over a sustained period of time, not simple gender mainstreaming. Some of the useful strategies promoted include more specialized attention to UNDP programme rationale noting structural barriers to gender equality in other programming areas and ensuring adequate gender analysis and gender-disaggregated data as key strategies for promoting equality (Cameroon, Colombia, Turkey).⁷⁵

Other factors that have proven successful to advance results and accelerate progress include well-structured and well-informed gender teams, with activities defined in a workplan to improve the pace and quality of gender outcomes rather than one overwhelmed and siloed gender focal point per office. Positioning an entire gender focal team with shared responsibilities and commitments proves much more effective. The country office in Uzbekistan established the Gender Equality Assurance Team, composed of focal points from all programme and operations clusters and selected project specialists to support the process of gender mainstreaming throughout programmes and operations and in UN joint programming. The Gender Equality Assurance Team's interventions were directed to helping improve the integration and enhancement of the gender dimension in its interventions (Uzbekistan).⁷⁶

7 Adequate resources for GEWE are an absolute must but without concrete commitment from country offices and partners for sustained action they are no guarantee for transformative gender outcomes.

Acknowledging that achieving gender equality requires institutionalizing a gender-responsive approach to financing and ensuring adequate investments to different areas, UNDP has incorporated the Gender Marker⁷⁷ as a corporate monitoring tool to track financial investments associated with gender mainstreaming. The Gender Marker is operationalized through ATLAS ERP, where every output at the project level is rated against a set of pre-established criteria from GEN 0 (no noticeable contributions to gender equality), to GEN 1 (some contributions to gender equality), GEN 2 (significant contributions to gender equality), and GEN 3 (gender equality is the principal objective).

Funding for GEWE has increased since Gender Markers were established, but there is no clearly established causality link between more resources to better and more sustainable gender equality results or otherwise. Projecting, earmarking and then allocating funds does not guarantee gender equitable outcomes, but these variables do often correlate. Evaluations⁷⁸ indicate that financial investments, time, strong architecture with institutional effectiveness and responsive integrated approaches are key contributing factors to achieve sustained gender results. A robust mechanism to monitor progress and make course corrections is also essential. Although the Gender Marker has contributed to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls with a steady increase of resource allocations, gender equality remains underfunded overall and the classifications, especially between GEN 1 and GEN 2, can be misleading.⁷⁹ More projects have been moving from one GEN to another and the reporting of figures has increased, but a larger project giving attention to gender does not always mean that the attention to gender is indeed larger. In addition, analyses of the Gender Marker across countries indicate that a significant portion of programme expenditures still do not contribute to gender equality (GEN 0) or only contribute to gender equality in a limited way (GEN 1) (Angola, Argentina).⁸⁰

The Gender Marker scores reflect a lack of consideration of gender perspectives and do not go deeper into the gender dimension than ensuring that monitoring and evaluation (M&E) efforts include gender-disaggregated data or that women are engaging in some activities in projects (Bangladesh, China, Mauritius, Union of Comoros).⁸¹

Proof of the limited or misused incentive of the Gender Marker is that UNDP has so far failed to meet the suggested target of allocating 15 percent of financial expenditures to initiatives that have gender equality and/or the empowerment of women as their primary and explicit objective. The overreliance on Gender Marker scores reflects a lack of consideration of gender perspectives and a failure to go deeper into the gender dimension than just ensuring compliance at the planning stage in order to assign a number (Angola, Argentina, Bangladesh, China, Mauritius, Union of Comoros).⁸²

Lessons from evaluations indicate that the Gender Marker as a tool needs to be more carefully employed to plan allocations for accelerating GEWE processes and to fully align with an action plan and M&E system, with flexibility for recalibration as projects get carried out. While some countries have been able to leverage the Gender Marker to advance gender equality outcomes (Azerbaijan, Kosovo, Serbia, Uzbekistan),⁸³ it proved to be significantly constraining for others such as (Bangladesh, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius),⁸⁴ where outcomes of GEN 3 and GEN 2 programmes fail to clearly determine pathways for the deeper integration of gender in the SDGs. Incongruity between the level of focus on gender equality suggested by the gender marker and actual focus suggested in project documentation has a bearing on a thorough assessment of UNDP efforts in mainstreaming GEWE across programmes (Bangladesh, China, Maldives, Mauritius).⁸⁵

While it is important to have a well-designed planning and monitoring system, gender outcomes will only be transformative when backed by adequate resource allocations. Investing below the UNDP commitment of 15 percent to GEN 3 projects, among other things, reflects a lack of commitment to GEWE by UNDP.⁸⁶ More core resources have been allocated to gender projects since 2018, but the vast majority of projects and partners still refuse to put significant resources from their own budget lines into gender initiatives and adequate mainstreaming (Bangladesh, Indonesia, Mauritius).⁸⁷

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