



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
19 March 2021

Original: English

Committee for Programme and Coordination

Sixty-first session

Organizational session, 15 April 2021

Substantive session, 1–25 June 2021*

Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda**

Programme questions: evaluation

Inspection of the evaluation function of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services undertook an inspection of the evaluation function of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) to assess its relevance to and effectiveness in promoting accountability. The inspection was aimed at determining the adequacy of the evaluation function as a robust oversight mechanism that provides the necessary assurance to governing bodies. The inspection covered the period from 1 January 2016 to 31 March 2019.

Overall, UN-Women had a relevant, high-quality evaluation policy that needed updating. The policy identified the UN-Women Evaluation Office as custodian of the evaluation function. Evaluation reports produced were generally of high quality, with corporate evaluations surpassing decentralized evaluations in their quality.

UN-Women outsourced the execution of most corporate evaluations at an average cost of 334,000 United States dollars (excluding staff time). With the outsourcing model, UN-Women underutilized the expertise of the Independent Evaluation Service, and missed the opportunity to build the staff capacity and institutional knowledge of the Service.

Both the UN-Women Advisory Committee on Oversight and the Global Evaluation Advisory Committee oversaw the evaluation function. In recent years, the activity of the Global Evaluation Advisory Committee had declined.

While a corporate evaluation plan was developed at the start of each strategic plan cycle, at mid-cycle, the plan was typically substantially revised, in view of

* The dates for the substantive session are tentative.

** E/AC.51/2021/1.



emerging priorities and the organization's capacity to "absorb" evaluation results, resulting in often incomplete and/or delayed implementation. Stakeholders, including senior management, found corporate evaluations relevant and useful in informing ongoing change management processes.

Other areas of the Entity produced evaluations, with varied input from the Independent Evaluation Service.

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) makes four important recommendations:

1. With respect to policy and planning, the Executive Director and the Director of Independent Evaluation and Audit Services of UN-Women should ensure that an updated evaluation policy reflects the current organizational structure of the evaluation function and organizational priorities.
2. The Director of Independent Evaluation and Audit Services should ensure that the corporate evaluation plan follows the priorities set in the evaluation policy, and anticipates the needs of the organization, and that the Independent Evaluation Service delivers on the corporate evaluation plan in a timely manner.
3. The Executive Director should ensure that Independent Evaluation and Audit Services, as custodian of the UN-Women evaluation function, is responsible for all evaluation activity: all corporate evaluations should be conducted in house, and the Independent Evaluation Service, rather than implementing divisions, should manage the evaluations of all large initiatives.
 - Independent Evaluation and Audit Services should clarify authorship and ownership of the contents of corporate reports that result from outsourced evaluations.
4. With respect to UN-Women personnel away from headquarters critical to the production of evaluations, the Independent Evaluation Service should:
 - Re-examine the roles and responsibilities of each Regional Evaluation Specialist to ensure that there is greater standardization in their interpretation and discharge.
 - Develop onboarding training and continuous coaching to ensure that monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points are clear about their responsibilities and have the capabilities to carry them out.

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction and objective	4
II. Inspection scope	4
III. Methodology	5
IV. Background	5
V. Inspection results.....	10
A. Evaluation resources.....	10
B. Planning of the evaluation function.....	11
C. Execution of the evaluation plan	13
D. Oversight of the evaluation function	20
E. Reporting on and utility of evaluations.....	21
F. Monitoring the use of evaluations	22
VI. Conclusion.....	22
VII. Recommendations.....	24
 <i>Annexes</i>	
I. Comments received from senior management of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women).....	26
II. Response from the Office of Internal Oversight Services to the comments received from the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) .	27

I. Introduction and objective

1. The Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services undertook an inspection¹ of the evaluation function of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), in accordance with the Inspection and Evaluation Division risk assessment used to identify Secretariat programme evaluation priorities for the period 2019–2020. The aim of the inspection was: (a) to assess the evaluation function’s relevance to and effectiveness in promoting accountability; and (b) to determine the adequacy of the evaluation function as a robust oversight mechanism that provides necessary assurance to governing bodies.

2. UN-Women management provided comments on a draft of the present report (see annex I) to which OIOS responded (see annex II).

II. Inspection scope

3. The inspection covered the period from 1 January 2016 to 31 March 2019 and three of the five strategic areas set out in the UN-Women global evaluation strategy 2018–2021 (see table 1).² The global evaluation strategy supported the implementation of the Entity’s strategic plan 2018–2021.³

4. The inspection is limited to the objectives of the evaluation function set by the Secretary-General,⁴ for example, “to determine ... the relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness and impact of the Organization’s activities in relation to their objectives;” and “to enable the Secretariat and Member States to engage in systematic reflection”.⁵

5. Global evaluation strategy 2018–2021 strategic areas 3 and 4 went beyond the Secretary-General’s set objectives, suggesting a maturity in the UN-Women Evaluation function. In these areas, the UN-Women evaluation function was to lead coordination on gender-responsive evaluation and strengthen national evaluation capacities for gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation systems in the United Nations system. Because these two areas did not pertain to an oversight responsibility, they were excluded from the scope of the inspection.

Table 1

Strategic areas of the Entity’s evaluation function by inclusion in the inspection

<i>Strategic area of the Entity’s evaluation function for 2018–2021</i>	<i>Coverage</i>
1. Effective corporate evaluation systems	Included
2. Effective decentralized evaluation systems	Included
3. Leading United Nations coordination on gender-responsive evaluation	Excluded
4. Strengthening national evaluation capacities for gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation systems	Excluded
5. Strengthening evaluation use	Included

¹ Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, *Inspection and Evaluation Manual* (New York, 2014), p. 17.

² UN-Women global evaluation strategy 2018–2021, p. 12. Available at www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/accountability/evaluation/governance-and-policy/evaluation-strategic-plan.

³ UNW/2017/6/Rev.1.

⁴ United Nations, Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (ST/SGB/2018/3).

⁵ Ibid., regulation 7.1.

III. Methodology

6. Data were collected and analysed through a mixed-methods approach featuring:
- (a) Desk review of data and documents related to the UN-Women evaluation function;
 - (b) Assessments of sampled evaluation reports (36 out of 108 reports completed from 2016 to 2018), their respective terms of reference and management responses;
 - (c) Two web-based surveys of:
 - (i) All monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points – 51 per cent response rate, 25 respondents;
 - (ii) All country representatives or their surrogates (e.g., deputies, Officers ad interim): 53 per cent response rate, 35 respondents;
 - (d) Interviews – in-person or telephone with 41 stakeholders, including:
 - (i) Independent Evaluation and Audit Services staff, including five Regional Evaluation Specialists (10);
 - (ii) Headquarters managers (5);
 - (iii) Regional directors/deputy directors (6);
 - (iv) Country representatives (6);
 - (v) Monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points (7);
 - (vi) Senior management, including the Executive Director (3);
 - (vii) Chair and members of the Global Evaluation Advisory Committee and Chair of the Advisory Committee on Oversight (4);
 - (e) Observations of meetings;
 - (f) UN-Women Executive Board meetings on evaluation: annual and second regular sessions of 2019 (June and September 2019).
7. Limitations of the inspection included the unavailability of some potential interviewees. OIOS thanks UN-Women and its focal points in the Independent Evaluation Service for their cooperation.

IV. Background

Mandate of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)

8. The General Assembly, in its resolution [64/289](#), consolidated the mandates of four entities and established UN-Women, operational as of 1 January 2011. In establishing UN-Women, the Secretary-General envisioned an entity that would:

work for the elimination of discrimination against women and girls; the empowerment of women; and the achievement of equality between women and men ... The ... entity will lead and coordinate United Nations system efforts to ensure that commitments on gender equality and gender mainstreaming translate into action⁶

⁶ Report of the Secretary-General on a comprehensive proposal for the composite entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women ([A/64/588](#)), pp. 5 and 8.

The Entity's leadership, structure and governance

9. An Executive Director at the Under-Secretary-General level leads UN-Women. Two Deputy Executive Directors (Assistant Secretary-General level) support the Executive Director. The Entity comprises subprogramme 1 (intergovernmental support, coordination and strategic partnerships) and subprogramme 2 (policy and programme activities). Headquartered in New York, UN-Women also has 6 regional offices, 5 multi-country offices and 47 country offices.

10. UN-Women has an Executive Board with representatives from 41 Member States elected by the Economic and Social Council to serve three-year terms. During its three meetings per year, the Board reviews and discusses corporate evaluation plans, key results of corporate evaluations and corresponding management responses and the annual report of the Independent Evaluation Service on the evaluation function.⁷ Since 2016, all corporate evaluations, their associated management responses and meta-analysis reports have been submitted to the Board.

The Entity's resources

11. As at April 2019, UN-Women estimated financial resource requirements were \$448,365,300 for 2019 and \$447,851,900 for 2020. Voluntary contributions comprised approximately 98 per cent of the estimated requirements.⁸

The Entity's evaluation function

Evaluation policy and the global evaluation strategy

12. The UN-Women evaluation policy,⁹ endorsed by the Executive Board and active since January 2013, governed its evaluation function. The policy detailed the purpose of evaluation in the Entity and outlined evaluation criteria, the process for selecting evaluation topics and evaluation-related roles and responsibilities. The Independent Evaluation Service had contracted with an external consultant to review and update the policy, which was under review by the Advisory Committee on Oversight, anticipating that the Board would consider the revised policy at its June 2020 meeting.¹⁰

13. The policy set out three equally important purposes for evaluation: (a) to demonstrate accountability to stakeholders, (b) to provide credible and reliable evidence to be used for decision-making; and (c) to contribute "important lessons learned about normative, operational and coordination work".¹¹

14. The policy defined evaluation in UN-Women as "a systematic and impartial assessment that provides credible and reliable evidence-based information about the extent to which an intervention has resulted in progress (or the lack thereof) towards intended and/or unintended results regarding gender equality and the empowerment of women".¹²

15. The policy identified the UN-Women Evaluation Office (formerly titled the Independent Evaluation Office) as the custodian of the evaluation function. To "safeguard its independence", the Office was to report directly to the Executive

⁷ UNW/2012/12, para. 44. See, for example, UNW/2018/4.

⁸ A/74/6 (Sect. 17), table 17.3.

⁹ UNW/2012/12.

¹⁰ Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services and Independent Evaluation Service communications, 10 March 2020 and 14 April 2020.

¹¹ UNW/2012/12, para. 5.

¹² Ibid.

Director.¹³ The Independent Evaluation Office was to “develop a corporate evaluation plan and conduct independent corporate evaluations”.¹⁴

16. The policy distinguished between corporate evaluations, which “assess issues of corporate strategic significance”¹⁵ and decentralized evaluations, which “assess issues of significance at the programmatic level”.¹⁶ The policy implied the annual production of, on average, a minimum of one corporate evaluation and approximately 13 decentralized (country office or multi-country office) evaluations. It specified four types of corporate evaluations – strategy/policy, organizational performance, normative support and thematic – requiring each type to be conducted at least once during a four-year strategic plan life cycle. The policy also prescribed that, within a strategic plan life cycle, the Independent Evaluation Office should have ensured the production of at least one regional/cluster evaluation in each of the five regions where UN-Women is present and at least one country-level evaluation within each country programme/plan life cycle. The inspection covered two strategic plan four-year cycles: 2014–2017 and 2018–2021. According to the policy, programmes should have been periodically evaluated.

17. The policy encouraged the implementation of system-wide and joint evaluations, to promote United Nations system coherence, coordination and accountability with respect to gender equality and women’s empowerment. System-wide evaluations at the global level were to address accountability gaps.¹⁷

18. The Independent Evaluation Office evaluation handbook, which operationalized the Policy, stated that “the Independent Evaluation Office undertakes corporate evaluations with the support of external evaluators”.¹⁸ When the Independent Evaluation Office manages (rather than conducts) evaluations, the policy indicated that the Office was responsible for:

- (a) Conducting stakeholder analysis;
- (b) Developing the terms of reference;
- (c) Recruitment of evaluators/evaluation teams;
- (d) Ensuring overall stakeholder participation in the evaluation process;
- (e) Quality assurance processes established for interim and final evaluation products;
- (f) Developing and resourcing dissemination plans;
- (g) Supporting the management response and action plans that result.¹⁹

19. The policy recommended that UN-Women allocate at least 3 per cent of its programme budget to the evaluation function and an additional 3–10 per cent of the programme budget to monitoring.²⁰ This level exceeded and was less flexible than those set by the United Nations Evaluation Group, which did not specify a minimum resource level²¹ and the Joint Inspection Unit, which suggested that “the range of

¹³ Ibid., para. 47.

¹⁴ Ibid., para. 47 (a) (ii).

¹⁵ Ibid., para. 16 (a).

¹⁶ Ibid., para. 16 (b).

¹⁷ Ibid., para. 13.

¹⁸ UN-Women, Independent Evaluation Office, “Gender responsive evaluation in UN-Women”, in *How to Manage Gender-Responsive Evaluation: Evaluation Handbook* (New York, 2015), p. 15.

¹⁹ UNW/2012/12, para. 32.

²⁰ Ibid., para. 30.

²¹ United Nations Evaluation Group, “Norms and standards for evaluation” (2017), p. 16.

funding between 0.5 per cent and 3 per cent of organizational expenditure is worth consideration”.²²

20. The Advisory Committee on Oversight found the 3 per cent figure “high, given the size of the organization and other resource demands”.²³ The Committee wanted some (undefined) of the 3 per cent dedicated “to further strengthening governance systems...which are designed to mitigate risk”.²⁴

Evaluation function structure and governance

21. Until January 2018, the Director of Evaluation (at the D-1 level) reported directly to the Executive Director, in compliance with the policy.²⁵

22. On 1 January 2018, UN-Women established the Independent Evaluation and Audit Services division, which included both the audit and evaluation functions. The Executive Director appointed a Director (at the D-2 level) to lead the Service. The Independent Evaluation Office was placed within Independent Evaluation and Audit Services and renamed the Independent Evaluation Service.²⁶ The Independent Evaluation Service was led by a Chief (P-5) and included six professional posts (2 P-4, 3 P-3, and 1 P-2) at headquarters and six Regional Evaluation Specialists (one for each regional office) at the P-4 level. All Regional Evaluation Specialists reported directly to the Chief, a structure conducive to independence and impartiality at the regional and country levels (see figure I).

23. The Advisory Committee on Oversight and the Global Evaluation Advisory Committee advised the Executive Director on the Independent Evaluation and Audit Services performance and evaluation issues. The Chief of the Independent Evaluation Service reported to the Director of Independent Evaluation and Audit Services, who reported to the Executive Director, a structure that violated the letter but not the principle of the policy (see para. 16). The Director of Independent Evaluation and Audit Services, an oversight role with functional independence, has ultimate responsibility for the work of the Independent Evaluation Service.

²² Joint Inspection Unit, Analysis of the evaluation function in the United Nations system (JIU/REP/2014/6), para. 77.

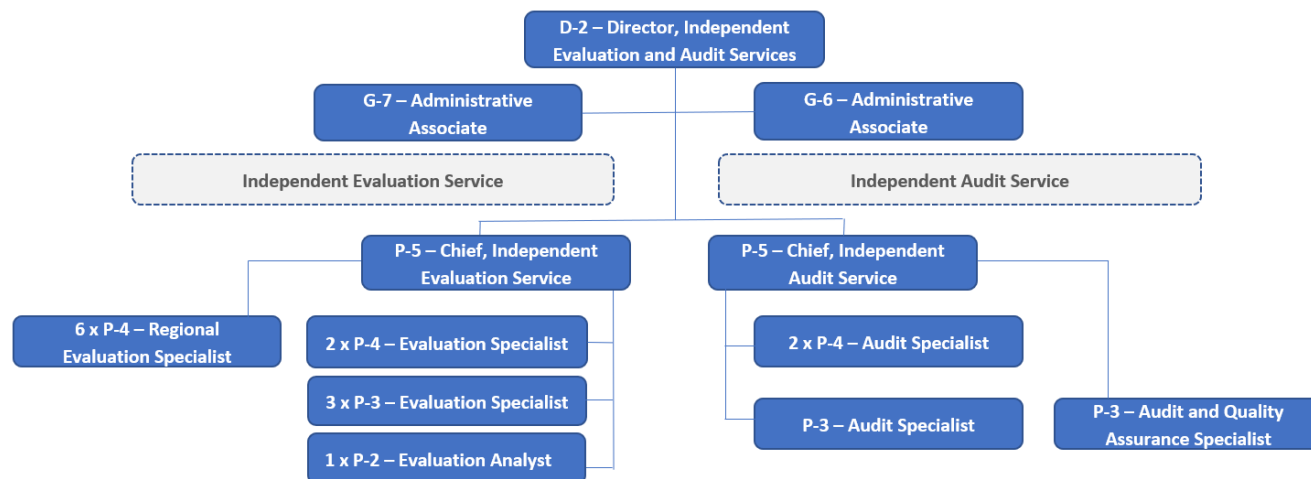
²³ Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, report of the Audit Advisory Committee for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2018 (UNW/2019/3/Add.1), para. 27.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Independent Evaluation Office, Gender-responsive evaluation in UN-Women, p. 14.

²⁶ UN-Women, Charter of the Independent Evaluation and Audit Services, 1 February 2018, p. 1.

Figure I
Independent Evaluation and Audit Services, organigramme, April 2019



Source: Independent Evaluation and Audit Services.

24. In establishing Independent Evaluation and Audit Services, the Executive Director assured the Executive Board of the continued operational and functional independence and integrity of the evaluation function. UN-Women leadership and the Board appeared committed to that ideal.²⁷

25. Annually, the Independent Evaluation Service submitted to the Executive Board a meta-evaluation report covering the evaluation function, which contains a synthesis of key results of reports and their quality ratings. At their 2019 annual session, Board representatives requested that the Service annual report include information on the independence of the Service evaluation function.

26. Monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points at the country, multi-country and regional levels supported the evaluation function. In 2018, 25 country offices and regional offices (43 per cent) had a monitoring and evaluation officer, 30 (52 per cent) had monitoring and evaluation focal points and the remaining 3 (5 per cent) had neither.²⁸

27. While “the country offices, multi-country offices, regional offices, programme divisions and other headquarters divisions are responsible for the decentralized evaluation function”,²⁹ the Independent Evaluation Service was to support the decentralized evaluation function.³⁰ The Regional Evaluation Specialists relied on country offices and regional offices for decentralized evaluation budgets and on country and regional representatives to approve evaluation reports, a structure that may have limited the independence of the decentralized evaluation function.

²⁷ Executive Board decisions 2017/3 (see [UNW/2017/10](#)) and 2019/6 (see [UNW/2019/10](#)).

²⁸ Executive Board, report on the evaluation function of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2018 ([UNW/2019/4](#)), para. 25.

²⁹ Independent Evaluation Office, *How to Manage a Gender-Responsive Evaluation: Evaluation Handbook* (2015), p. 15.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

V. Inspection results

A. Evaluation resources

28. In 2018, UN-Women spent \$6.3 million (2.2 per cent of total programme expenditures) on evaluation (see table 2), with \$2.5 million for decentralized evaluation activities and \$3.8 million for the Independent Evaluation Service.³¹ Expenditures in 2018 decreased by \$1.1 million from a 2016 high of \$7.4 million. The 2017–2018 decrease in evaluation expenditures of \$461,000 was nearly all attributable to decreases in Service expenditures. Even with the decrease, Independent Evaluation Service staff and headquarters managers believed that the Service was adequately, if not generously, resourced.³²

Figure II

Financial resources invested in the evaluation function as a percentage of total programme expenditures

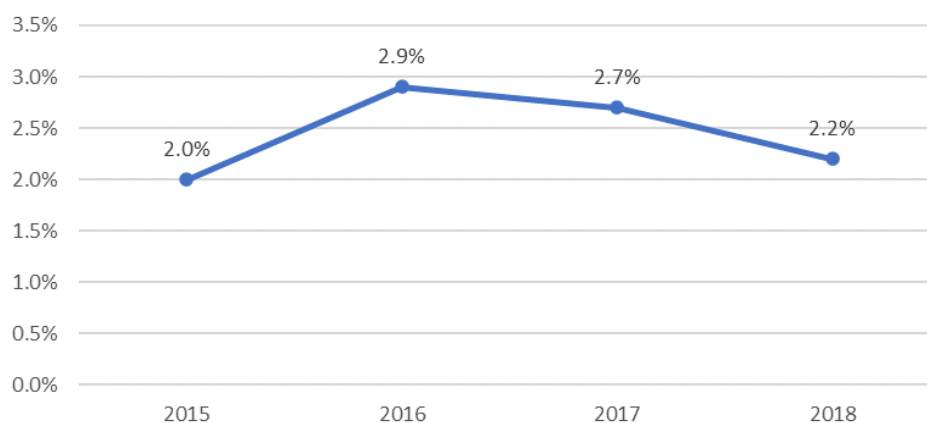


Table 2

UN-Women evaluation function expenditures, 2014–2018

(United States dollars)

Expenditure category	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total UN-Women programmatic expenditures	270 537 900	315 101 084	254 413 520	249 447 953	285 670 628
Total evaluation expenditures	5 917 163	6 272 545	7 391 573	6 714 506	6 253 679
Independent Evaluation Service	4 499 942	4 621 818	5 377 637	4 208 814	3 787 888
Decentralized evaluations	1 417 221	1 650 727	2 013 936	2 505 691	2 465 791
Evaluation expenditures as a percentage of programme expenditure	2.2%	2.0%	2.9%	2.7%	2.2%

Note: Figures may not sum, owing to a rounding error as reported in the source document, UNW/2019/4, table 3.

³¹ UNW/2019/4, table 3.

³² UNW/2019/3/Add.1, para. 27.

B. Planning of the evaluation function

Corporate evaluation plan

29. The Independent Evaluation Office developed a corporate evaluation plan for four-year periods, aligning with the timing of the organization's strategic plans. The 2014–2017 corporate evaluation plan aspired to complete seven major corporate evaluations, one joint corporate evaluation (which exceeded the four indicated in the evaluation policy), a meta-analysis of decentralized evaluations produced annually and reports narrower in scope. These ambitious aspirations were not achieved.

30. The Executive Board approves the corporate evaluation plan in June of the respective start year. The Independent Evaluation Office permits “updating” to the corporate evaluation plan at the end of the second year of each corporate evaluation plan to respond to emerging priorities in the implementation of the UN-Women strategic plan and to inform its midterm review.³³ While the mix of evaluations in the 2014–2017 corporate evaluation plan complied with the evaluation policy, the corporate evaluation plan was adjusted midterm to account for management priorities.

31. In March 2016, the Independent Evaluation Service accommodated senior management requests and revised the corporate evaluation plan. This substantial revision modified the timing of when two major corporate evaluations would be produced, cancelled two planned evaluations and added one evaluation (the evaluation of regional architecture, planned and published in 2016). The two delayed evaluations were the thematic evaluation of the UN-Women contribution to governance and national planning (originally planned for 2016, delayed to 2017 and published in 2019) and the thematic evaluation of women's political participation and leadership (planned for 2016, postponed to 2017 and completed in 2018). The updating also decreased the total funding required to carry out the corporate evaluation plan, in view of the fact that two evaluations were cancelled, by \$400,000 (12 per cent) to \$2.95 million.

32. When asked about the delays in planned evaluations, UN-Women interviewees indicated that the organization needed adequate time to “absorb” recommendations and evidence produced by corporate evaluations. Senior managers indicated that the Independent Evaluation Office accommodated their priorities, which the Service believed increased the utility of evaluations.

33. The results of two postponed thematic evaluations were to inform the development of the UN-Women strategic plan 2018–2021; their postponement thus decreased their originally intended usefulness.

34. Half (three out of six) of regional directors (or their surrogates) interviewed indicated that they did not influence the corporate evaluation plan. One referred to the lack of linkages between the corporate evaluation plan and regional level discussions on areas of strategic importance. That interviewee believed that strengthening the link would increase the relevance of the corporate evaluations.

35. The development of the 2018–2021 corporate evaluation plan was influenced by delays in implementing the prior corporate evaluation plan, competing priorities, challenges faced by the Entity in “absorbing” evaluation results, senior management priorities, and an Independent Evaluation Service assessment of the Entity's priorities. The 2018–2021 corporate evaluation plan set out four major corporate evaluations, half as many as planned in the previous corporate evaluation plans. One planned evaluation (Corporate thematic evaluation of UN-Women's contribution to governance and national planning) was a carryover from the 2014–2017 corporate

³³ UN-Women 2014–2017 corporate evaluation plan (UNW/2014/CRP.5), para. 11. Available at www.unwomen.org/en/executive-board/documents/annual-session-2014.

evaluation plan. The reduced number of corporate evaluations planned in the 2018–2021 corporate evaluation plan was not accompanied by a commensurate reduction in resources available to the Independent Evaluation Office.

36. In the 2018–2021 corporate evaluation plan, increased importance was placed on evaluations of regional and country portfolios, although there was no concomitant budget increase for decentralized evaluations. The 2018–2021 corporate evaluation plan had the Independent Evaluation Service annually providing technical assistance for up to three headquarters-led evaluations outside the Service per year and producing an annual meta-analysis of all evaluations.

Planning of decentralized evaluations

37. Planning of decentralized evaluations was largely driven by strategic plan key priorities, country-specific strategic notes, and/or donor requirements. Survey results indicated that, when selecting projects, programmes and areas for evaluation, 87 per cent of country representatives and 67 per cent of monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points considered “key priorities of the strategic plan or strategic note”, and 67 per cent of country representatives and 72 per cent of monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points considered “donor requirements”.

38. The contributions of Regional Evaluation Specialists to the planning of decentralized evaluations varied from one Regional Evaluation Specialist contributing to the region’s annual work plan to two declining to participate in planning exercises, citing their independence. Two country representatives felt that Regional Evaluation Specialists strictly adhering to the principle of independence curtailed their value, particularly in promoting the use of evaluation results at the country level. The breadth of the terms of reference of Regional Evaluation Specialists allowed for differences in interpretation in their function.³⁴

Joint evaluations

39. The evaluation policy referred to joint evaluations, an approach that had received increased attention owing to United Nations Development System reforms. The systematic planning or production of joint evaluations was infrequent. In the 2014–2017 corporate evaluation plan, one joint evaluation was planned. In 2018 and 2019, the Executive Board requested³⁵ that the Independent Evaluation Service identify opportunities for joint evaluations of system-wide activities. Going forward, Independent Evaluation and Audit Services will participate, together with the evaluation offices of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), in the joint evaluation of the common chapter of each entity’s strategic plan, a report planned for issuance in 2021.

40. A minority of country representatives (46 per cent) and monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points (27 per cent) surveyed considered the “potential for joint evaluations with partners” to a “significant extent”. Regional and national stakeholders informed OIOS that joint evaluations were more feasible in the context of joint programming, which was limited over the 2016–2018 period.

³⁴ Terms of reference of the Regional Evaluation Specialists for Europe and Central Asia, and terms of reference of the Regional Evaluation Specialists for West and Central Africa.

³⁵ See [UNW/2018/2](#) and [UNW/2019/5](#).

C. Execution of the evaluation plan

Numbers and types of evaluations conducted

41. UN-Women makes its evaluations publicly available through its Global Accountability and Tracking of Evaluation Use (GATE) system. In the 2014–2017 period, the Independent Evaluation Service produced five corporate reports, exceeding the minimum of four stated in the evaluation policy but fewer than the seven planned for in the original 2014–2017 corporate evaluation plan.

42. During the 2016–2018 period, four corporate evaluations were produced and included in GATE³⁶ and 104 decentralized evaluations.³⁷ The four corporate evaluations fell short of the six planned for 2016–2018 while the 25 country office/multi-country office evaluations produced on average annually exceeded the evaluation policy's minimum of 13 country evaluations per year.

43. Project/programme evaluation at the country office/multi-country office level represented 77 per cent of decentralized evaluations (see table 3). The three regional evaluations in 2018 were one third of the 2016 number; and no regional thematic evaluations were produced in 2018. Although during the 2016–2018 period the Independent Evaluation Service did not produce a corporate-level joint evaluation, there were 12 joint decentralized evaluations – 1 of a partnership and 11 of joint initiatives. In 2019, the Service issued two corporate thematic evaluations and two country-level joint evaluations.

Table 3
Evaluations produced, 2016–2018

<i>Evaluation category</i>	<i>2016</i>	<i>2017</i>	<i>2018</i>	<i>Total number</i>
Corporate evaluations planned	3	2	1	6
Corporate evaluations produced	2	1	1	4
Organizational performance	1	0		1
Strategy/policy	1			1
Thematic			2	2
Decentralized evaluations produced, by area of focus	39	37	28	104
Country portfolio	27	26	22	75
Regional	9	5	3	17
Headquarters division	2	3	2	7
Multi-country	1	3	1	5
Decentralized evaluations by type of evaluand	39	26	23	104
Project or programme	31	26	33	80
Country-level	4	9	5	18
Regional cluster or thematic	4	2	0	6
Total	41	38	29	108

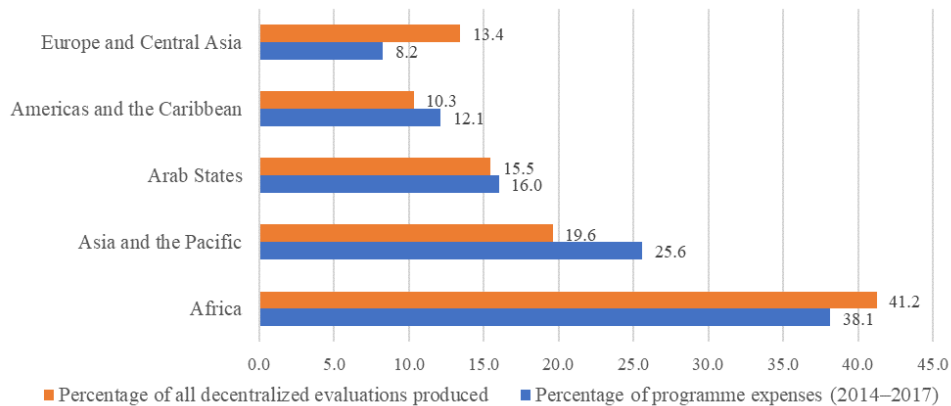
Note: Analysis of reports on GATE as at 30 October 2019, Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

³⁶ Evaluation of UN-Women's contribution to the United Nations system coordination on gender equality and the empowerment of women (2016); Evaluation of UN-Women's regional architecture (2016); Corporate evaluation of UN-Women's strategic partnerships on gender equality and women's empowerment (2017); and Evaluation of UN-Women's contribution to women's political participation and leadership (2018).

³⁷ These reports meet the screening criteria of the Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services used for its biennial study on the status of evaluation.

44. By region, Africa accounted for the largest share (41 per cent) of decentralized evaluations. The geographic distribution of evaluations produced roughly corresponded to the geographic distribution of UN-Women expenditures (see figure III).

Figure III
Percentage of 2016–2018 decentralized evaluation reports and 2014–2017 programmatic expenditures by region



45. In 2016–2018, 77 per cent of completed decentralized evaluations were of projects/programmes, 17 per cent were country-level evaluations, and 6 per cent were regional cluster/thematic evaluations.³⁸ In 2014–2018, 83 per cent of country offices/multi-country offices issued at least one evaluation report.

46. Comparing the impact areas³⁹ that the 2016–2018 evaluations addressed with the voluntary contributions anticipated by outcome area for the 2018–2021 strategic plan suggests that the area of economic empowerment (addressed by 57 per cent of decentralized evaluations) may have been overrepresented while the area of peace, security and humanitarian action remained underrepresented (addressed by 42 per cent of evaluations). Coverage of other areas was reasonably aligned to anticipated expenditures.

47. The Independent Evaluation Service thematic corporate evaluations did not cover impact area 6 (Global norms, policies and standards). The Service considered that area to have been covered by the 2015 OIOS evaluation of UN-Women, focused on its normative work. The OIOS evaluation was listed as a completed UN-Women corporate evaluation in the 2015–2016 period although the Service did not conduct it. The Service presented the OIOS evaluation to the Executive Board as one of its corporate evaluations.⁴⁰ The inspection excluded the OIOS evaluation from the listing of evaluations produced by the Service.

Corporate evaluations

Outsourcing

48. Independent Evaluation Service staff did not conduct any corporate-level evaluations. Instead, Service staff “produced” corporate evaluations by commissioning, managing and advising external vendors or consultants. For the two most recent

³⁸ Office of Internal Oversight Services analysis of Global Accountability and Tracking of Evaluation Use (GATE) evaluation database.

³⁹ See UN-Women strategic plan, 2014–2017 (UNW/2013/6).

⁴⁰ UNW/2016/5, para. 28.

corporate evaluations (issued in 2019),⁴¹ the Service contracted with firms and created internal and external reference groups for each evaluation, as indicated in the foreword to each report. The UN-Women senior management team also reviewed the reports.

49. Two 2019 UN-Women corporate evaluation reports listed authorship as Independent Evaluation and Audit Services, the Independent Evaluation Service and UN-Women on the title page. Typically, when firms carry out evaluations for United Nations system entities, title pages of reports reflect the name of the firm.^{42, 43}

50. The two 2019 evaluation reports had the disclaimer:

Produced by the Independent Evaluation Service of the Independent Evaluation and Audit Services of UN-Women. Disclaimer: The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluators. They do not represent those of UN-Women or any of the individuals and organizations referred to in the report.

51. The reports were presented to the Executive Board as Independent Evaluation Service corporate evaluations and a management response to the reports was composed. The Service clarified to the Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services that “the UN-Women Independent Evaluation Service is responsible for the publication and content of the report. The disclaimer indicates that the document does not necessarily reflect the view of UN-Women (as an organization) and its Executive Board or members/individuals of those consulted in the report.”⁴⁴

52. The *Corporate Evaluation of UN-Women’s Contribution to Women’s Political Participation and Leadership, Synthesis Report* (2018), which the Independent Evaluation Service produced by engaging four individual evaluators as consultants (not a firm) did not include such a disclaimer. The title page of *Independent Global Programme Evaluation of the Fund for Gender Equality, 2009–2017*, issued in 2018, included the firm’s and evaluation team’s names but no disclaimer.

53. The disclaimer put the recommendations at arm’s length from ownership by UN-Women senior management. The title page, combined with the statement included in the report’s foreword and the disclaimer, made unclear (a) authorship and ownership and (b) the extent to which the Independent Evaluation Service was accountable for the report’s contents and recommendations.

54. Outsourcing does not make a report independent, as indicated in the 2014 peer review.⁴⁵ The principle of independence relies on the structural independence of the Independent Evaluation Service and the exercise of independence by the Service and Independent Evaluation and Audit Services leadership.

55. Some headquarters programme managers mentioned the challenge of identifying suitable consultants who possess the required evaluation qualifications (including language qualifications), experience and objectivity and who will work

⁴¹ UN-Women, *Corporate Thematic Evaluation of UN-Women’s Contribution to Governance and National Planning* (New York, 2019); UN-Women, *Corporate Thematic Evaluation of UN-Women’s Contribution to Humanitarian Action* (New York, 2019).

⁴² See www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/files/MASTER_Final1_Evaluation_Report_WASH-Program_2014-2017_Nigeria_14Feb2020.pdf; and www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/files/FINAL_UPHV?MCE_Synthesis_Report_-Part_1.pdf.

⁴³ See World Health Organization, *Initial Evaluation of the Framework of Engagement with Non-State Actors: Report and Annexes* (2019). Available at www.who.int/docs/default-source/documents/about-us/evaluation/fensa-report-final.pdf?sfvrsn=c62a32c5_8.

⁴⁴ Personal communication between the Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services and the UN-Women Independent Evaluation Service, 24 February 2020.

⁴⁵ UN-Women Peer Review Panel, “Professional peer review of the evaluation function of UN-Women, final report”, September 2014, p. 16.

within the available budgets. At the time of the review, the Independent Evaluation Service was piloting a new model of producing evaluations whereby Service staff would either lead an evaluation team or conduct the evaluations themselves.

56. Table 4 shows that, for corporate evaluations, the Independent Evaluation Service paid on average \$334,000 if conducted by a firm and \$220,250 if conducted by a team of individual consultants. There was not a significant difference between the two modes in report quality.

Table 4
Cost and contracting arrangements of corporate evaluations
(United States dollars)

<i>Corporate evaluation (year issued)</i>	<i>Type of vendor</i>	<i>Contract value</i>	<i>Contract type</i>	<i>Contract period</i>
Humanitarian action (2019)	Firm	319 698	Institutional contract	2018–2019
Governance and national planning (2019)	Firm	341 481	Institutional contract	2017–2019
Meta-analysis of UN-Women evaluations (on an annual basis)	Firm	168 800 for 4 years	Multi-year institutional contract	2014–2018
Leadership and political participation (2018)	Consultants: 4 international and 1 national	220 250	Individual consultant contract/special service agreement	2016–2018
Strategic partnerships for gender equality and women's empowerment (2017)	Firm	318 316	Institutional contract	2015–2016
Regional architecture of UN-Women (2017)	Firm	333 189	Institutional contract	2015–2016
United Nations coordination (2016)	Firm	356 184	Institutional contract	2014–2016

Timeliness of corporate evaluations

57. Neither the GATE system, the global evaluation oversight system nor annual reports on the evaluation functions included information on adherence to the corporate evaluation plan timelines.

58. For corporate evaluations, there were substantial delays as compared with the completion times envisioned in the corporate evaluation plan, although they were difficult to detect for reasons including the way in which the Independent Evaluation Service reported evaluations in annual reports on the evaluation function. For example, for 2018, the annual report reported an implementation rate of 90 per cent. In fact, 41 per cent of planned evaluations were not yet completed. It should be noted that, owing to an error, the corporate evaluation on governance and national planning is listed as having been delivered in 2017, although it was completed in 2019.

59. The terms of reference for corporate evaluations typically aimed for completion within 12 months. However, the timespan from start to report issuance for the six corporate evaluations completed since 2016 ranged from 16 to 25 months, with half taking over two years. One third (two) of country/regional representatives indicated that the delay of corporate evaluations negatively impacted their utility.

60. Of the eight major corporate evaluations contained in the original 2014–2017 plan, only four were completed by the end of 2017.⁴⁶ Of the four not completed, one was completed in 2018 and another in 2019, and two were cancelled.

⁴⁶ Thematic evaluation of women's economic empowerment; Evaluation of the UN-Women contribution to the United Nations system coordination; Evaluation of regional architecture; Evaluation of UN-Women strategic partnerships on gender equality and women's empowerment.

61. The Entity justified the cancellation of the normative evaluation by reference to the planned OIOS evaluation of UN-Women, issued in 2015,⁴⁷ which was focused on normative support and its link to operational activities. The OIOS evaluation should have differed from an internal corporate evaluation.

62. One of the four corporate evaluations planned in the 2018–2021 corporate evaluation plan was to be a 2020 corporate evaluation of the UN-Women strategic plan 2018–2021. This was postponed owing to the mid-term review of the strategic plan led by the Office of the Executive Director, to be submitted to the Executive Board June 2020 annual session, and to allow for the strategic plan to be operational for a longer period.

63. The Independent Evaluation Service decided to use the resources intended for the strategic plan evaluation for portfolio evaluations of Nigeria and the UN-Women Multi-Country Office – Caribbean, Bridgetown, because they had not been previously evaluated, although typically, country offices and multi-country offices resourced their own portfolio evaluations.

Independence from senior management

64. Since 2016, six corporate evaluations had included country or thematic case studies. The Independent Evaluation Service interviewees said that cases were selected using set criteria (e.g., investment, maturity, gender-equality index and potential cooperation level of the country office). However, some staff relayed that programmatic and implementing offices often had an influence on the countries that were selected as case studies for corporate evaluations.

65. In five of the six corporate evaluations, the case studies did not cover all six regions with a UN-Women presence. Some countries were used repeatedly as case studies and one country representative found that case studies were skewed towards countries where UN-Women had relatively large budgets. Having investment as a selection criterion limited the relevance of evaluation findings to offices with smaller budgets.

Use of results

66. Most interviewees, including senior management, highlighted the relevance of several corporate evaluations and their utility for the ongoing change management process. Regional directors (or their surrogates) interviewed said that the corporate evaluations produced since 2016 were relevant and informed regional work and the development of their respective strategic notes.

67. Most country representatives were familiar with recent corporate evaluations. Approximately 90 per cent of those familiar found the evaluations relevant to key areas of the Entity's work in their countries.

68. Survey respondents indicated that the dissemination of relevant evaluation lessons and results was insufficient (issues raised included the holding of webinars accompanying the release of every corporate evaluation report at inconvenient times and the limited applicability of the reports to local contexts because the reports were pitched at an overarching level). Half the country representatives surveyed suggested enhancing dissemination and communication of corporate evaluation results in the interests of greater local relevance and utility.

Decentralized evaluations

69. Like corporate evaluations, decentralized evaluations were usually outsourced to individual consultants or firms. Country representatives, Regional Evaluation

⁴⁷ E/AC.51/2015/9.

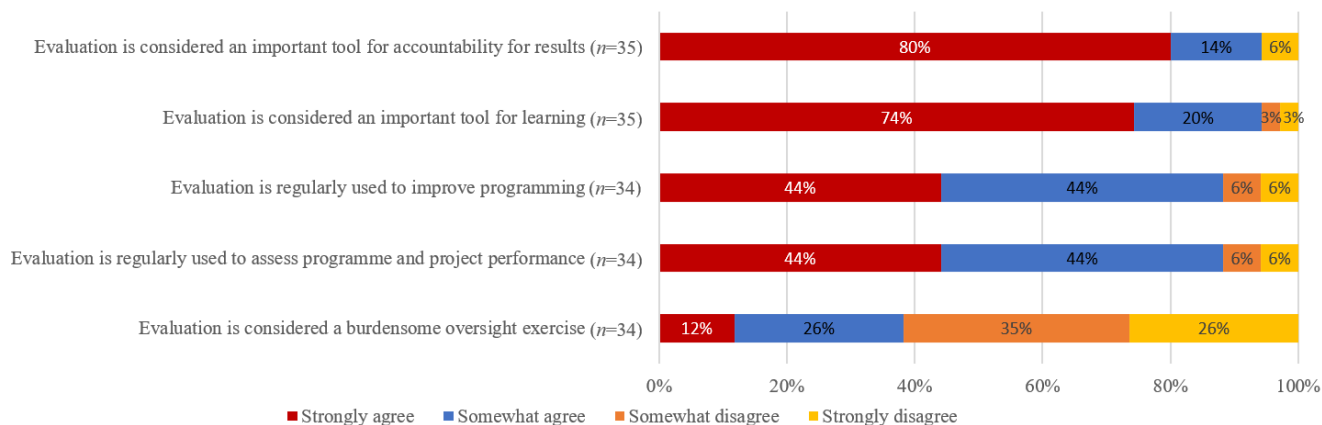
Specialists and monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points mentioned challenges in engaging consultants with the required qualifications, experience, objectivity and willingness to work within available budgets.

70. The Advisory Committee on Oversight referred to inadequate project monitoring and oversight in field offices. In its 2017 report, the Committee emphasized the importance of the Independent Evaluation Service working closely with UN-Women project staff in the regions to reinforce the understanding and importance of monitoring and evaluation as integral to project management, improving performance and achieving results.⁴⁸

71. Two thirds of country/regional representatives surveyed (see figure IV) thought that evaluation results about their country/region were integrated into their office's policies and programmes to a "significant extent". The results of the monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points survey showed that 92 per cent of respondents agreed that evaluation was considered an important tool for accountability for results and 80 per cent agreed that evaluation was regularly used to improve programming.

72. In 2015, the Independent Evaluation Office introduced the concept of "country portfolio evaluations" which would be co-managed by the Regional Evaluation Specialist and the country office.⁴⁹ In 2019, Regional Evaluation Specialists or the Independent Evaluation Service at headquarters initiated two (Nigeria and Caribbean multi-country offices) that were ongoing at the time of writing and completed one (Papua New Guinea). Of the three, the Service fully funded two and partially funded one (Papua New Guinea).

Figure IV
Results of survey of country and regional representatives



73. The UN-Women Policy Division, not the Independent Evaluation Service, managed some evaluations of large Policy Division initiatives, creating a conflict of interest. Sometimes, such evaluations cost several hundred thousand dollars and were of high-value programmes with wide footprints (e.g., the Policy Division managed the evaluation of its 2.2 million euro programme "Promoting and protecting women migrant workers' labour and human rights"). Decentralized evaluations managed by implementing units risked the appearance of bias.

⁴⁸ Report of the Audit Advisory Committee for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2017 (UNW/2018/3/Add.1), para. 42; *ibid.*, para. 24.

⁴⁹ UN-Women, Independent Evaluation Office, *Guidance on Country Portfolio Evaluations in UN-Women* (New York, 2016).

The role of Regional Evaluation Specialists in supporting decentralized evaluation

74. Regional Evaluation Specialists had important roles pertaining to building evaluation capacity in the field, the process of producing decentralized evaluations and quality assurance. Regional and country-level stakeholders reported having received sufficient guidance and technical assistance from Regional Evaluation Specialists. All monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points surveyed reported that the Regional Evaluation Specialists had contributed to the evaluations that they had undertaken (e.g., 89 per cent indicated that the Regional Evaluation Specialists had provided guidance and quality assurance). Monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points interviewed indicated that Regional Evaluation Specialists provided adequate guidance in managing decentralized evaluations.

75. Seventy-six per cent of country representatives surveyed described the evaluation support provided by Regional Evaluation Specialists as “fully adequate,” while 20 per cent described it as “somewhat adequate”. Survey results suggest that Regional Evaluation Specialists typically did not participate in data collection and report drafting. In at least one region, the Regional Evaluation Specialists fully managed all evaluations of countries that lacked full-fledged offices, although this was atypical.

76. Regional Evaluation Specialists had sufficient independence. All Regional Evaluation Specialists interviewed indicated that, because of their direct reporting line to the Independent Evaluation Service at headquarters, they were protected from undue local management influence. One Regional Evaluation Specialist mentioned difficulties with being entirely independent from the Regional Director, given their co-location.

77. Stakeholders expressed a need to standardize the role of the Regional Evaluation Specialist. Regional Evaluation Specialists themselves had somewhat differing interpretations of their role. While some actively participated in regional mechanisms and supported national-level United Nations Development Assistance Framework/United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework processes, a consistent approach among Regional Evaluation Specialists had not yet emerged.

Monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points

78. The positions of monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points are important at the country office and multi-country office level. They oversee the conduct of evaluations in their offices and maintain databases on evaluation results. In December 2018, 43 per cent of regional offices, country offices and multi-country offices had a monitoring and evaluation officer, 52 per cent had appointed focal points to support monitoring and evaluation functions, while 5 per cent had neither a monitoring and evaluation officer nor a focal point.

79. Monitoring and evaluation focal points faced significant capacity constraints owing to competing responsibilities and a lack of evaluation capacities. Forty per cent held a primary role/function unrelated to monitoring and evaluation. Monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points reported spending between 5 and 40 per cent of their time on monitoring and evaluation functions. Survey results showed that only 36 per cent of monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points strongly agreed that they had adequate skills and knowledge for their positions.

80. A minority of monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points and country representatives (16 per cent and 35 per cent, respectively) believed that their offices had adequate capacity to conduct evaluations. While some monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points interviewed found guidance material developed by the Independent Evaluation Service helpful, others indicated that the materials inadequately equipped them to manage a gender-responsive evaluation. Forty-four per

cent of monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points strongly agreed that they had access to sufficient guidance and technical assistance in undertaking their evaluation roles and responsibilities or adequate understanding of their roles and responsibilities related to the evaluations that their office produces.

81. Staff turnover of monitoring and evaluation focal points was said to have negatively impacted the effectiveness of a coaching programme that the Independent Evaluation Service developed for them.

D. Oversight of the evaluation function

Quality of evaluation reports and the credibility of the Independent Evaluation Service quality assessment system

82. Executive Board meeting agendas and minutes reflected that it was strongly committed to and supportive of the evaluation function. The Independent Evaluation Service developed tools to support oversight and quality assurance for decentralized evaluations. The Global Evaluation Report Assessment and Analysis System provided an external independent assessment of the quality of corporate and decentralized evaluation reports.

83. OIOS tested the quality of the Global Evaluation Report Assessment and Analysis System by independently rating the quality of a sample of evaluations (all 4 corporate and 32 decentralized) issued during 2016–2018 and comparing the OIOS 5-point quality rating with the Global Evaluation Report Assessment and Analysis System rating (see table 5). OIOS and Global Evaluation Report Assessment and Analysis System quality ratings reasonably agreed – in 56 per cent of cases they matched and in 39 per cent they differed by one level (either higher or lower). The System was credible and reliable.

84. The quality of corporate evaluations exceeded that of decentralized evaluations. The evaluations conducted from 2016 to 2018 produced 1,410 actions needed to address recommendations (averaging 14 per report). The Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services found 92 per cent of the actions developed to be “reasonably concrete and objectively verifiable”. Of the corporate evaluation actions, all were of this category.

Table 5

Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services overall quality rating of the sample of 36 Entity evaluation reports

<i>Quality</i>	<i>Corporate</i>	<i>Decentralized</i>	<i>Total</i>
Very good	75% (3)	14% (5)	22% (8)
Good	25% (1)	47% (17)	50% (18)
Fair	–	25% (9)	25% (9)
Poor	–	2% (1)	3% (1)
Very poor	–	–	–
Total	100% (4)	100% (32)	100% (36)

Note: The numbers in parentheses refer to the number of the 36 reports that were assessed.

85. The Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services concludes that the quality and credibility of evaluation products generated by UN-Women and its quality oversight process was satisfactory.

*Evaluation oversight bodies**Global Evaluation Advisory Committee and Advisory Committee on Oversight*

86. UN-Women had two evaluation oversight bodies, the Advisory Committee on Oversight and the Global Evaluation Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee on Oversight was mandated to advise the Executive Director on the evaluation, audit and investigation functions. The Advisory Committee on Oversight consisted of five external oversight experts, who received an honorarium. The Executive Office of UN-Women performed secretariat duties for the Advisory Committee on Oversight, which was to meet at least three times annually.

87. The role of the Global Evaluation Advisory Committee was to advise the Executive Director and the Independent Evaluation Office on the evaluation function. In 2018, the Global Evaluation Advisory Committee was composed of five pro bono external evaluation experts, the Director of Independent Evaluation and Audit Services and the Chief of Staff of UN-Women (ex officio member). The Independent Evaluation Office performed secretariat duties for the Global Evaluation Advisory Committee, which was to meet at most twice annually.

88. The committees' positions on the consolidation of the audit and evaluation functions differed. The Advisory Committee on Oversight considered the creation of Independent Evaluation and Audit Services an opportunity for creating synergies between audit and evaluation, while holding that the functions should be kept independent. The Global Evaluation Advisory Committee initially expressed its opposition to creating Independent Evaluation and Audit Services.

89. The extent to which the Global Evaluation Advisory Committee continued to provide valuable advice after the creation of Independent Evaluation and Audit Services was unclear. Interaction between UN-Women senior leadership and the Global Evaluation Advisory Committee became sporadic, as demonstrated by the declining participation of members and UN-Women senior leadership in Global Evaluation Advisory Committee annual meetings and the meetings' brevity. Two Deputy Executive Directors attended the 2016 annual meeting, one Deputy Executive Director attended the 2017 meeting, and neither the Executive Director nor any Deputy Executive Directors attended the 2018 meeting. At its 2018 annual meeting, the Global Evaluation Advisory Committee recommended that Independent Evaluation and Audit Services strengthen evaluations and their use and reviewed the evaluation policy and strategy.⁵⁰

90. The Advisory Committee on Oversight seemed more active and involved than the Global Evaluation Advisory Committee. The terms of reference of the two had redundancies, with the Advisory Committee on Oversight terms of reference including all elements of the Global Evaluation Advisory Committee terms of reference, in addition to the audit function. For that reason, in April 2020, Independent Evaluation and Audit Services proposed to sunset the Global Evaluation Advisory Committee, a change that was expected to be reflected in the revised evaluation policy that the Executive Board would need to approve at its June 2020 meeting.

E. Reporting on and utility of evaluations

91. Some good practices in the dissemination of evaluation findings included: having the issuance of each corporate evaluation accompanied by a webinar and other communication materials; and developing regional knowledge management products (e.g., the Independent Evaluation Service and the East and Southern Africa Regional Office jointly developed a series of 10 brief (four-page) products based on evidence from 19 evaluations conducted in the region during the period 2009–2015).

⁵⁰ UNW/2019/4, p. 3.

92. *Transform* magazine, a booklet with key evaluation results first developed by the Independent Evaluation Office in June 2015, made evaluation results readable and guided the divisions with the application of results. Since then, 16 subsequent issues had been produced.

F. Monitoring the use of evaluations

93. The global evaluation oversight system established by the Independent Evaluation Office (December 2013), developed nine key performance indicators on the use of evaluations, which country offices and multi-country offices were required to report annually. Key performance indicator 9 showed the percentage of offices that reported using any evaluation to inform programming. In its 2018 annual report, the Independent Evaluation Service indicated that 86 per cent of field offices had self-reported on having done so. At a 2019 informal briefing on evaluation to the Executive Board, a delegation indicated that key performance indicator 9 did not capture the use of evaluations well and encouraged improved monitoring of evaluation use.⁵¹

94. The GATE system required offices and divisions to update on a quarterly basis the status of the implementation of action plans for management responses.⁵² Implementation was self-reported by the relevant units, with no independent verification.

95. The Independent Evaluation Service reported the status of the implementation of key actions reported in GATE to senior management biannually and to the Executive Board annually. Several stakeholders expressed the need to monitor the implementation of key actions through periodic discussion at senior management meetings.

96. Stakeholders interviewed considered the use of evaluation results to be an area for improvement. Staff turnover and vacancies impacted the utility and relevance of evaluation results. For example, one regional director ad interim had not seen or heard of corporate evaluations. For half the corporate evaluations completed since 2016, the client headquarters division or unit had experienced a leadership change. At the country level, 54 per cent of country representatives surveyed had held their positions for less than a year.

VI. Conclusion

97. Overall, UN-Women's evaluation function was relevant to the Entity. Its scope satisfied the criteria that the Secretary-General had set in the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation.⁵³ Evaluation findings were communicated to governing bodies, and the volume and coverage of reports adhered to the Regulations and Rules. UN-Women had a high-quality evaluation policy that its Executive Board endorsed, which was being updated.

98. The Independent Evaluation Service produced high-quality corporate evaluations that met the minimum volume requirement set in the evaluation policy. To varying degrees, the Service assisted in producing a number of decentralized evaluations that exceeded the policy minimums. Senior management and other stakeholders found corporate evaluations relevant and useful to the ongoing change management process.

⁵¹ Observation of Executive Board sessions – summary.

⁵² UN-Women, Independent Evaluation Office, GATE website user guide, January 2015, p. 21.

⁵³ [ST/SGB/2018/3](#).

99. While resources devoted to evaluation fell below the 3 per cent threshold specified in the policy, the evaluation function was sufficiently resourced to meet the Entity's accountability needs.

100. The incomplete and delayed delivery of the 2014–2017 corporate evaluation plan undermined the relevance of evaluation reports. With respect to efficiency, the evaluation policy made the Independent Evaluation Service the hub for evaluation in the Entity, allowing for institutional knowledge and capacities to be developed and an efficient use of evaluation resources.

101. Evaluations were produced by the Entity outside the Independent Evaluation Service with varied input from the Service. Decentralized evaluations were controlled by implementing units and thus should not be considered independent evaluations. The quality assessment of reports indicated that the evaluations directly produced by the Service were of higher quality than evaluations produced by others across the Entity.

102. The model of the Entity outsourcing the conduct of evaluations to consultants or to firms resulted in UN-Women missing the opportunity to build capacity and institutional knowledge among its evaluation staff and underutilizing Independent Evaluation Service skills and capacities. The model was not clearly cost-efficient since the Service had a full team of evaluators that produced, on average, one corporate report annually.

103. The turnover of monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points in the field created challenges for developing and sustaining capacity.

104. Regarding effectiveness, necessary structures and oversight mechanisms existed for evaluation function independence. Regional Evaluation Specialists reported directly to the Independent Evaluation Service (rather than to regional directors), and the Service had allies (e.g., the Executive Board) in protecting its independence.

105. The incorporation of the Independent Evaluation Service by Independent Evaluation and Audit Services had reduced the level of the seniormost staff member of the evaluation function from D-1 to P-5, presumably accompanied by a loss of senior evaluation expertise. Incorporating the evaluation function under Independent Evaluation and Audit Services was perceived as a signal of the reduced importance of evaluation, potentially compounded by the recently added disclaimer on corporate evaluations, which suggests that the reports are not fully owned by the Entity.

106. Challenges to having an effective evaluation function included having monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points who were not sufficiently skilled and trained and who had insufficient guidance materials and coaching resources. Difficulties in attracting appropriately qualified evaluation consultants were reported, particularly in the field.

107. By having all evaluations and their quality assessments available on its public website, the Independent Evaluation Service was transparent about the evaluations produced, although it could add information on the cost and the terms of reference for outsourced reports. The quality assessment system that the Service used was credible and reliable.

VII. Recommendations

108. OIOS makes four important recommendations, as set out below.

Recommendation 1

109. With respect to policy and planning, the Executive Director and the Director of Independent Evaluation and Audit Services should ensure that the evaluation policy is updated to reflect the current organizational structure of the evaluation function and priorities of the organization.

Indicator of achievement: an endorsed, updated evaluation policy exists.

Recommendation 2

110. The Director of Independent Evaluation and Audit Services should ensure that the corporate evaluation plans follow the priorities set in the evaluation policy, and anticipate the needs of the organization, and that the Independent Evaluation Service delivers on the corporate evaluation plans in a timely manner.

Indicators of achievement: the corporate evaluation plan abides by the priorities set in the evaluation policy; the Independent Evaluation Service delivers the major corporate evaluations indicated in the respective corporate evaluation plan within the time frame indicated in the plan; transparent and timely reporting on changes to the corporate evaluation plan; review of the methodology of the calculation of the implementation rate (key performance indicator 4).

Recommendation 3

111. The Executive Director should ensure that Independent Evaluation and Audit Services, as custodian of the evaluation function in the Entity, is responsible for all evaluation activity: all corporate evaluations should be conducted in-house and the Independent Evaluation Service, rather than implementing divisions, should manage the evaluations of all large initiatives.

Indicators of achievement: a review of all current and planned major evaluation activity in the Entity is conducted jointly by the Director of Independent Evaluation and Audit Services and the senior management team, and the Independent Evaluation Service is responsible for all major evaluations; number of corporate evaluations and high-value decentralized evaluations that the Independent Evaluation Service conducts each year.

112. Independent Evaluation and Audit Services should clarify authorship and ownership of the contents of corporate reports that result from outsourced evaluations.

Indicator of achievement: Clear guidelines on authorship (and disclaimers) are created and approved by the Executive Board, and the authorship of past corporate evaluation reports is explicit on the title page.

Recommendation 4

113. With respect to UN-Women personnel away from headquarters critical to the production of evaluations, the Independent Evaluation Service should:

(a) Re-examine the roles and responsibilities of each Regional Evaluation Specialist to ensure that there is greater standardization in their interpretation and discharge.

Indicator of achievement: reviewed and standardized roles and responsibilities of each Regional Evaluation Specialist.

(b) Develop onboarding training and continuous coaching to ensure that monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points are clear about their evaluation responsibilities and have the capabilities to carry them out.

Indicators of achievement: number and percentage of monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points that have monitoring and evaluation training as part of their onboarding process; proportion of monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points that attended at least one coaching session per year; proportion of monitoring and evaluation officers and focal points who feel capable of fulfilling the monitoring and evaluation officer and focal point job responsibilities.

(Signed) Fatoumata **Ndiaye**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services
March 2021

Annex I*

Comments received from senior management of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)

I refer to your memorandum (IED-2020-00661), transmitting the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the Inspection of the evaluation function of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women).

Thank you for undertaking a consultative process and for incorporating most of my team's comments into the report. I take note that the inspection took more than twelve months to complete, due in part to turnover of the OIOS team.

I welcome OIOS's conclusion that the UN-Women evaluation function was relevant to the Entity and that it had a high-quality evaluation policy. I am also pleased to learn that OIOS found UN-Women's evaluation quality assurance system to be credible, independent, and reliable and that there were good practices noted in the dissemination of evaluation findings. OIOS rightly notes that the UN-Women Executive Board is strongly committed to and support of evaluation in UN-Women.

Having reviewed the report I am pleased to inform you that UN-Women has accepted three recommendations of the OIOS inspection fully and one recommendation partially. Accordingly, we have completed a recommendation action plan (attached).**

In reference to Recommendation 3, the Independent Evaluation Service will continue to act as the custodian of the evaluation function in UN-Women. As such, and in addition to work in the areas of UN coordination and national capacity development for gender responsive evaluation, it will continue to conduct all corporate evaluations. UN-Women agrees with the inspection's recommendation that independent evaluations should, to the extent possible, be conducted in-house and I am pleased to report that the Independent Evaluation Service has already begun to implement this model. However, evaluation of some major projects and initiatives are donor driven. Some programme managers may also commission decentralized evaluations to help them fulfil their professional accountability and knowledge management responsibilities. These are not independent or corporate evaluations. In such cases, the responsibility for the management and commissioning of these decentralized evaluations will remain with implementing divisions within the methodological, quality and reporting standards set by the Independent Evaluation Service.

In relation to paragraphs 116–177 in the report, I would like to underscore that the co-location of the Independent Evaluation Service within the Independent Evaluation and Audit Service in 2018 did not reduce the senior-most member of the function or break the function's direct reporting line to me. Rather, the evaluation function was strengthened with the upgrade of the Director post and with the establishment of a service Chief post. I can assure you that evaluation in UN-Women continues to be highly regarded throughout the Entity and by its partners as an important accountability and learning function and that the Independent Evaluation Service continues to enjoy independence in the determination of its work together with commensurate resources.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

* In the present annex, the Office of Internal Oversight Services sets out the full text of comments received from senior management of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). This practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution [64/263](#), following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.

** On file with the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

Annex II

Response from the Office of Internal Oversight Services to the comments received from the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) thanks the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) for its thoughtful response to the inspection report and acknowledges that the Entity has accepted three of the four recommendations in their entirety and one partially. The latter comment addresses the component of recommendation 3 relating to ensuring the independence of all major evaluations, which the Entity does not accept.

There is a conflict of interest when implementers of initiatives manage evaluations of said initiatives. While the 2012 evaluation policy limits the role of the Independent Evaluation Service in decentralized evaluations to a quality assurance function, the best practice would be for the Service, as an independent unit, to manage the evaluations of the Entity's large initiatives. With 98 per cent of its budget deriving from voluntary contributions, UN-Women is highly reliant on donors, who typically desire unbiased, evidence-based evaluations of the initiatives that they fund. Large, donor-funded initiatives are significant aspects of the Entity's programming. Rather than evaluations of such initiatives being outside the bounds of the Service's management, they should be as essential a part of the work of the Service as they are of the work of UN-Women.

To minimize the conflict of interest inherent in implementers managing evaluations of their initiatives, and to better satisfy donors' needs, the Independent Evaluation Service ought to manage the evaluations of large UN-Women initiatives. Without greater separation between the implementers and evaluators, there is a continued risk that such evaluations may not be regarded as credible.

Nevertheless, OIOS is pleased that UN-Women fully accepts recommendations 1, 2 and 4 and part of recommendation 3.

With regard to recommendation 3, as UN-Women has not accepted the recommendation for the Independent Evaluation Service to manage the evaluations of large initiatives, the risks associated with non-implementation of this recommendation is accepted by UN-Women management. Accordingly, recommendation 3 is revised as follows for monitoring purposes, reflecting the partial acceptance of this recommendation:

Revised recommendation 3: The Executive Director should ensure that Independent Evaluation and Audit Services, as custodian of the evaluation function in the Entity, is responsible for all evaluation activity, and all corporate evaluations should be conducted in-house.

Indicators of achievement:

- A review of all current and planned major evaluation activity in the Entity is conducted jointly by the Director of Independent Evaluation and Audit Services and the Senior Management Team.
- Number of corporate evaluations that the Independent Evaluation Service conducts each year.

Independent Evaluation and Audit Services should clarify authorship and ownership of the contents of corporate reports that resulted from outsourced evaluations.

Indicator of achievement:

- Clear guidelines on authorship (and disclaimers) are created and approved by the Executive Board, and the authorship of past corporate evaluation reports is explicit on the title page.