

OIOS Inspection of UN Women Evaluation Function

28 May 2020

Assignment No: IED-19-012



INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

Function *“The Office shall evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the programmes and legislative mandates of the Organization. It shall conduct programme evaluations with the purpose of establishing analytical and critical evaluations of the implementation of programmes and legislative mandates, examining whether changes therein require review of the methods of delivery, the continued relevance of administrative procedures and whether the activities correspond to the mandates as they may be reflected in the approved budgets and the medium-term plan of the Organization.”* ([General Assembly Resolution 48/218 B](#)).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS-IED) undertook this inspection of the evaluation function of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) to assess the evaluation function's relevance to and effectiveness in promoting accountability. The inspection aimed to determine the adequacy of the evaluation function as a robust oversight mechanism that provides necessary assurance to governing bodies. The inspection excluded the evaluation function's activities on leading coordination on gender-responsive evaluation across the United Nations System and strengthening national evaluation capacities for gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation systems.

Overall, UN Women had a relevant, high quality evaluation policy. However, the Policy was not current and pertained to a structure for evaluation that changed during the inspection period. The quality of evaluation reports produced was generally high, with corporate evaluations being of higher quality than decentralized evaluations. UN Women outsourced much of the conduct of its evaluations. On average, the external fees for each corporate evaluation conducted by a firm were approximately US\$ 334,000, in addition to the cost of staff time needed to produce the evaluations (e.g., create the Terms of Reference and Request for Proposals for the evaluations, manage the overseeing groups).

Oversight of the evaluation function was provided by the Advisory Committee on Oversight (ACO) as well as the Global Evaluation Advisory Committee (GEAC). Activity and participation in the GEAC had decreased in recent years. The committees advised on the Corporate Evaluation Plan (CEP) developed at the start of each Strategic Plan Cycle. At mid-cycle, the CEP was typically substantially revised, considering emerging priorities and the capacity of the organization to "absorb" evaluation results. Thus, the implementation of the CEP was often either incomplete and/or delayed.

Senior management and other stakeholders found corporate evaluations to be relevant and useful in informing the ongoing change management process. In addition to corporate evaluation activities that were conducted under the auspices of the Independent Evaluation Service (IES), evaluations were produced elsewhere in the entity, with varied input from IES.

By using a model where the entity contracts out the conduct of evaluations, either to consultants or to firms, UN Women missed the opportunity to build capacity and institutional knowledge among its evaluation staff and underutilized Independent Evaluation Service (IES) skills and capacities. The cost-efficiency of contracting out evaluation services while IES had a full team of evaluators was questionable as was the independence of decentralized evaluations.

OIOS makes four important recommendations:

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

B. The Director of IEAS should ensure that the CEPs follow the priorities set in the Evaluation Policy, anticipate the needs of the organization, and that IES delivers on the CEP in a timely manner.

C. The ED should ensure that IEAS, as custodian of the evaluation function in the Entity, is responsible for all evaluation activity--all corporate evaluations should be conducted in-house, and IES rather than implementing divisions, should manage the evaluations of all large initiatives.

i. IEAS should clarify authorship and ownership of the contents of corporate reports that resulted from outsourced evaluations.

D. With respect to UN Women personnel away from headquarters critical to the production of evaluations,

i. IES should re-examine the roles and responsibilities of each Regional Evaluation Specialist to ensure that there is greater standardization in their interpretation and discharge; and

ii. IES should develop on-boarding 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.

I. Introduction and objective

1. The Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS-IED) undertook this inspection¹ of the evaluation function of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) in accordance with its risk assessment used to identify Secretariat programme evaluation priorities for 2019-2020. The overall objective of the inspection was to assess the evaluation function's relevance to and effectiveness in promoting accountability. The inspection aimed 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 this report (see Annex A) which were taken into consideration in finalizing this report. Annex B holds the OIOS rebuttal to those comments.

II. Inspection Scope

3. The inspection covered the period 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 (GES) (Table 1).² The GES supported the implementation of the Entity's Strategic Plan 2018-2021.

4. The inspection is limited to the three areas that pertain to objectives of the evaluation function set by the Secretary General.³ According to the Secretary General, the objective of evaluation is "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..."⁴

5. The Strategic Areas of the UN Women Evaluation function include two areas (Strategic Areas 3 and 4) that went beyond the objectives the Secretary General set. In those areas, the UN Women evaluation function aimed to lead coordination on gender-responsive evaluation and strengthen national evaluation capacities for gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems in the United Nations system. That the UN Women Evaluation function went beyond the Secretary General's objectives suggested a maturity in its evaluation function. Because these two areas did not directly relate to an oversight function, they fell outside the scope of this inspection.

Table 1: Strategic Areas of the UN Women Evaluation Function by Inclusion in the Inspection

| Strategic Area of UNW evaluation function for 2018-2021 | Coverage |
|---|----------|
| 1. Effective corporate evaluation systems | Included |
| 2. Effective decentralized evaluation systems | Included |
| 3. Leading UN coordination on gender-responsive evaluation | Excluded |
| 4. Strengthening national evaluation capacities for gender-responsive M&E systems | Excluded |
| 5. Strengthening evaluation use | Included |

¹ OIOS-IED Inspection and Evaluation Manual. P. 17.

² UN Women Global Evaluation Strategy 2018-2021. P. 12.

³ United Nations. 2018. "Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation." <https://undocs.org/ST/SGB/2018/3>.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Regulation 7.1. P. 15.

III. Methodology

6. The inspection collected and analyzed data employing a mixed-methods approach featuring:
 - i. Desk review of data and documents related to the UN Women evaluation function;
 - ii. **Assessments** of sampled evaluation reports (36 out of 108 reports completed from 2016 to 2018), and their respective terms of reference (TOR) and management responses;
 - iii. Two web-based surveys:
 - iv. All Monitoring and Evaluation officers/focal points— 51 per cent response rate, 25 respondents;
 - v. All country representatives or their surrogates (e.g., deputies, Officers *ad interim*) - 53 per cent response rate, 35 respondents;
 - vi. **Interviews:** in-person or by telephone with 41 stakeholders, including:
 - a. Independent Evaluation and Audit Services (IEAS) staff, including five Regional Evaluation Specialists (RES) (10)
 - b. Headquarters (HQ) managers (5)
 - c. Regional directors/deputy directors (6)
 - d. Country representatives (6)
 - e. M&E officers/focal points (M&EOF) (7)
 - f. Senior management, including the Executive Director (ED) (3)
 - g. Chair and members of the Global Evaluation Advisory Committee (GEAC) and Chair of the Advisory Committee on Oversight (ACO) (4);
 - vii. Observations of meetings: and
 - viii. UN Women Executive Board (EB) meetings on evaluation: Annual and Second Regular Sessions of 2019 (June and September 2019).
7. Limitations of this inspection include the unavailability of some of the persons who OIOS would have liked to interview and the necessary brevity of this report.
8. OIOS thanks UN Women, especially its focal points in the Independent Evaluation Service (IES), for cooperating throughout the inspection.

IV. Background

UN Women Mandate

9. 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 UN system efforts to ensure that commitments on gender equality and gender mainstreaming translate into action throughout the world....⁵

UN Women Leadership, Structure and Governance

10. An ED (an Under-Secretary General level position) leads UN Women. Two Deputy Executive Directors (DED) (at Assistant Secretary-General (ASG) level) support the ED. The Entity comprises subprogramme 1 (intergovernmental support, coordination and strategic partnerships) and

⁵ United Nations General Assembly. January 6, 2010. "Comprehensive proposal for the Composite Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women" A/64/588, Pp. 5 and 8.

subprogramme 2 (policy and programme activities). UN Women has its headquarters (HQ) in New York and six regional offices (ROs) (East and Southern Africa (Nairobi); West and Central Africa (Dakar); Arab States (Cairo); Asia and the Pacific (Bangkok); Americas and the Caribbean (Panama City); and Europe and Central Asia (Istanbul)). It also has five multi-country offices (MCOs) and 47 country offices (COs).

11. UN Women has an EB with representatives from 41 Member States who the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) elects to serve three-year terms. During its thrice per annum meetings, the EB reviews and discusses corporate evaluation plans, key results of corporate evaluations and corresponding management responses, and the Independent Evaluation Service's (IES) annual report on the evaluation function.⁶

12. Since 2016, all corporate evaluations, their associated management responses, and meta-analysis reports, have been presented to the EB.

UN Women Resources

13. As of April 2019, UN Women's 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.⁷

UN Women Evaluation Function

Evaluation Policy and the Global Evaluation Strategy

14. The UN Women Evaluation Policy,⁸ endorsed by the EB 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 and parameters for selecting evaluations, and evaluation-related roles and responsibilities. While IES had contracted with an external consultant to review and update the policy, an updated policy was not yet enacted. The revised policy was with the ACO for review and it was anticipated that the EB would consider the revised policy during its June 2020 meeting.⁹

15. The Policy offered three equally important main purposes for evaluation: 1) to demonstrate accountability to stakeholders, 2) to provide credible and reliable evidence to be used for decision-making; and 3) to contribute "important lessons learned about the normative, operational and coordination work."¹⁰

16. 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."¹¹ The evaluation process is "a means to enhance gender equality and the empowerment of women through the incorporation of gender and women's rights dimensions into evaluation approaches, methods, processes and uses."

⁶ UNW/2012/12, para 44. An annual report example is UNW/2018/4, "Report on the Evaluation Function of the United National Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2017."

⁷ A/74/6 (Sect. 17), Table 17.3.

⁸ *UN Women Evaluation Policy* (UNW/2012/12).

⁹ Communication between OIOS-IED and IES, 10 March 2020 and 14 April 2020.

¹⁰ *UN Women Evaluation Policy*, P. 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

17. The Policy identified the UN Women Evaluation Office (also referred to as the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO)) as the custodian of the Entity’s evaluation function. To “safeguard its independence,” the office was to report directly to the ED.¹² The IEO was to “develop a corporate evaluation plan and conduct independent corporate evaluations.”¹³

18. The Policy distinguished between Corporate evaluations, which “assess issues of corporate strategic significance”¹⁴ and decentralized evaluations, which “assess issues of significance at the programmatic level....”¹⁵

19. The Policy delineated four types of corporate evaluations and required each to be conducted at least once during a strategic plan life cycle (Table 2). The Strategic Plan life cycles that pertained to this inspection were 2014-2017 and 2018-2021, each covering four years.

20. The policy implies **on average a minimum of one corporate evaluation and approximately 13 country or MCO evaluations (52 COs/MCOs divided by 4) carried out annually. Also, programmes should have been periodically evaluated.**

Table 2: Types and Frequency of Evaluations Prescribed by Evaluation Policy

| Evaluation Type | Frequency ¹⁶ |
|---|---|
| All Corporate Evaluations | A total of at least four per strategic plan life cycle |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate strategy/policy evaluation | At least one per strategic plan life cycle |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate organizational performance evaluation | At least one per strategic plan life cycle |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate normative support evaluation | At least one per strategic plan life cycle |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate thematic evaluation | At least one per strategic plan life cycle |
| Regional cluster/thematic evaluation | At least one in each of the five regions per strategic plan life cycle |
| Country-level evaluation | At least one per country programme/plan life cycle |
| Decentralized | <p>An evaluation of all programmes equal or exceeding one-third of the overall office portfolio or a cluster of programmes that together equal at least one-third of the overall office portfolio</p> <p>An evaluation of all programmes where an evaluation commitment was made to stakeholders and/or all strategic pilot initiatives that are designed for replication and scaling-up.</p> |

¹² *Ibid.*, P. 17.

¹³ UNW/2012/12. P. 17.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, P. 8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Pp. 11-13.

21. The Policy encouraged implementing **system-wide and joint evaluations** as a means of promoting United Nations system coherence, coordination and accountability with respect to gender equality and the women’s empowerment. System-wide evaluations at the global level would address accountability gaps.¹⁷

22. The Policy stressed evaluation capacity development at the national level--“an evaluation partnership and capacity development strategy will be developed at the corporate and regional levels.”¹⁸

23. The IEO evaluation handbook, which operationalized the Policy, stated that “IEO undertakes corporate evaluations with the support of external evaluators.”¹⁹ When IEO manages (rather than conducts) evaluations, the Policy indicated that the IEO was responsible for:

- i. **conducting** stakeholder analysis,
- ii. developing the terms of reference (TOR),
- iii. having transparent and competitive recruitment of evaluators/evaluation teams with adequate experience in the areas of gender equality and women’s rights,
- iv. **ensuring** overall stakeholder participation in the evaluation process, including the composition and management of evaluation reference groups;
- v. **quality** assurance processes established for interim and final evaluation products;
- vi. **developing** and resourcing dissemination plans; and
- vii. **supporting** the management response and action plans that result.²⁰

24. 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.²¹ This resource level exceeded and was less flexible than that set by the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) and the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU). UNEG did not set a minimum resource level for the evaluation function-- it instead discussed “factors to be considered when determining the range of funding” (e.g., organization’s mandate and size; types of evaluation, and the role of the evaluation function).²² The JIU wrote that “the general view is that the range of funding between 0.5% and 3% of organizational expenditure is worth consideration....”²³

25. The ACO believed that the 3 per cent figure for evaluation “appears to be high, given the size of the organization and other resource demands.”²⁴ ACO would like an undefined amount of resources, within the 3 per cent, to be dedicated “to further strengthening governance systems such as programme monitoring or results measurement which are designed to mitigate risk.”²⁵

¹⁷ UNW/2012/12, P. 8.

¹⁸ UNW/2102/12. Pp. 9-10.

¹⁹ UN Women. “Gender responsive evaluation in UN Women.” P. 15.

²⁰ Policy, Pp. 13-14.

²¹ UNW/2012/12, para 30.

²² UNEG. 2017. “Norms and Standards for Evaluation.” United Nations Evaluation Group. P. 16.

²³ Prom-Jackson, S. and G. Bartsiotas. 2014. “Analysis of the Evaluation Function in the United Nations System.” JIU/REP/2014/6. P. 29.

²⁴ Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. 2019. “Report of the Audit Advisory Committee for the Period from 1 January to 31 December 2018.” P. 7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

26. Additionally, UN Women developed a Global Evaluation Strategy (GES) 2018-2021 which supports implementation of the entity's 2018-2021 Strategic Plan. The GES five strategic areas for the evaluation function are:

- i. **Conducting** corporate evaluations and establishing effective corporate evaluation systems;
- ii. **Strengthening** the decentralized evaluation culture and systems for greater accountability and improved programming;
- iii. **Leading** UN coordination on gender-responsive evaluation to generate system-wide accountability;
- iv. Supporting national evaluation capacity-building for gender-responsive evaluation; and
- v. **Strengthening** evaluation use.²⁶

Structure and Governance of the Evaluation Function

27. Until January 2018, the Director of Evaluation (D1) reported directly to the ED, complying with the Policy: *"The IEO is the custodian of the UN Women evaluation function. It reports directly to the Executive Director in order to safeguard its independence from management and to conduct its work with impartiality."*²⁷

28. On 1 January 2018, UN Women established the IEAS division which included both the audit and evaluation functions and the ED appointed a Director (D2) to lead it. The IEO was placed within the division and renamed the Independent Evaluation Service (IES).²⁸ IES was led by a Chief (P5) and included six professional posts (2 P4, 3 P3, and 1 P2) at HQ and six RES (P4), one for each of the six ROs. All RES reported directly to the Chief, a structure conducive to independence and impartiality at the regional and country levels (Figure 1).

29. The ACO and GEAC advised the ED on the Director's performance and evaluation issues. The IES Chief reported to the Director of IEAS who in turn reported to the ED, a structure that violated the letter but not the principle of the Policy (see para 18). The IEAS Director is an oversight role with functional independence and ultimately has responsibility for IES work. In its 2018 annual meeting, the GEAC recommended that IEAS strengthen evaluations and their use and reviewed the Evaluation Policy and strategy.²⁹

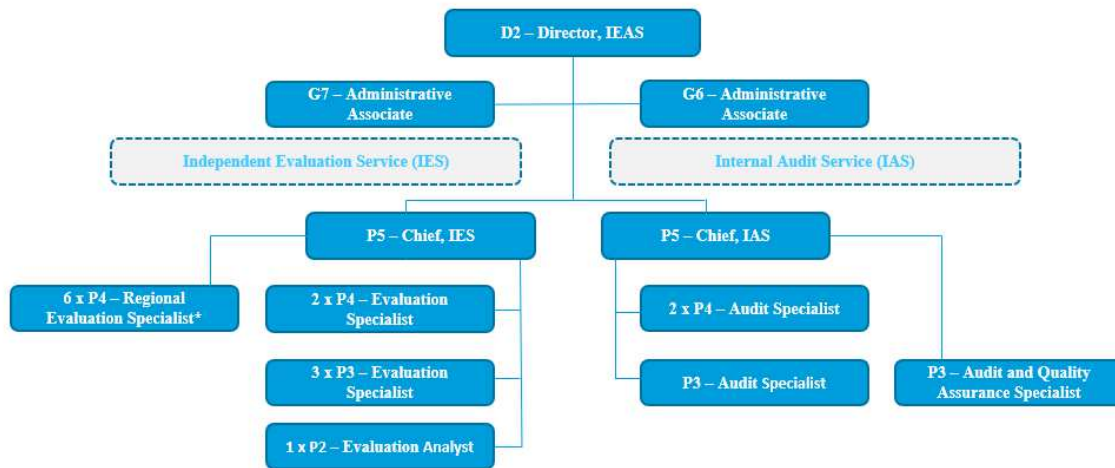
²⁶ UN Women Global Evaluation Strategy 2018-2021. P.12

²⁷ UN Women. "Gender-responsive evaluation in UN Women." p. 14.

²⁸ UN Women, *Charter of the Independent Evaluation and Audit Services*. P. 1.

²⁹ United Nations, EB of the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. 17 May 2019. "Report on the Evaluation Function of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2018." UNW/2019/4. P. 3.

Figure 1: IEAS April 2019 Organigram³⁰



30. In establishing IEAS, the ED assured the EB of the continued operational and functional independence and integrity of the evaluation function. Indeed, UN Women leadership and the EB appeared committed to this ideal.³¹

31. Annually, IES prepares and presents to the EB a meta-evaluation report on the evaluation function which synthesizes key evaluation findings, conclusions, and recommendations from reports and includes the quality ratings of evaluation reports. At the 2019 Annual Session of the EB, representatives requested that the IES annual report include information on the independence of the IES evaluation function.

32. Monitoring and evaluation officers or focal points at the country, multi-country, and regional levels further support the evaluation function. In 2018, 25 COs and ROs (43 per cent) had at least one M&E officer, 30 (52 per cent) had M&E focal points, and the remaining three (5 per cent) had neither an officer nor focal point.³²

33. “The COs, MCOs, ROs, programme divisions and other HQ divisions are responsible for the decentralized evaluation function.”³³ IES is to provide support for the decentralized evaluation function.³⁴ The RES rely on COs/ROs for decentralized evaluation budgets and on Country/Regional representatives to sign off on evaluation reports, a structure that may limit the independence of the decentralized evaluation function.

³⁰ Source: IEAS.

³¹ Executive Board decisions 2017/3 and 2019/6.

³² UNW/2019/4, para 25.

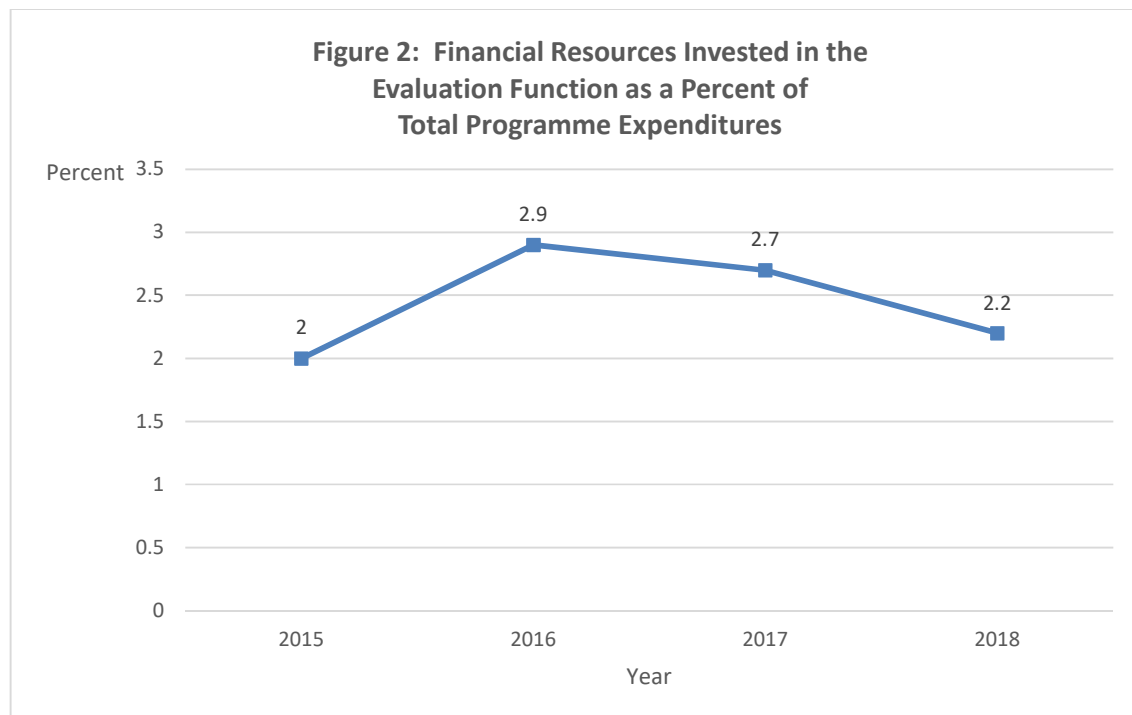
³³ IEO. 2015. “How to Manage a Gender-Responsive Evaluation: Evaluation Handbook.” P. 15.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

V. Inspection Results

Evaluation Resources

34. In 2018, UN Women spent US\$ 6.3 million,³⁵ amounting to 2.2 per cent of total programme expenditures, on evaluation (Table 3).³⁶ The absolute proportion expended had decreased from the 2016 high of US\$ 7.4 million. In nominal dollars, from 2017 to 2018, evaluation expenditures decreased by approximately US\$ 461,000, with nearly all of that decrease attributable to decreases in IES expenditures. In 2018, IES and decentralized evaluation activities had \$3.8 million and \$2.5 million in expenditures, respectively.



³⁵ This includes: IES expenditure (US\$ 3.8 million); and expenditures on decentralized evaluations (US\$ 2.5 million), which contain “a broad range of categories: conduct of evaluation, capacity development on evaluation, M&E staff costs, and communication and dissemination of evaluation products.” UNW/2019/4, Table 3.

³⁶ UNW/2019/4, Table 3.

Table 3: Evaluation Function Expenditure 2014-2018 (US\$)³⁷

| Category of Expenditure | 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 expenditure on evaluation | 5,917,163 | 6,272,545 | 7,391,573 | 6,714,506 ³⁸ | 6,253,679 |
| IES | 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 |
| Total evaluation expenditure (as percentage of programme expenditure) | 2.2 | 2.0 | 2.9 | 2.7 | 2.2 |

35. IES staff and HQ managers believed that IES had adequate capacity, in terms of both financial and human resources and expertise, to deliver on their responsibilities and produce high-quality corporate evaluations. Stakeholders found IES to be appropriately, if not generously, resourced.³⁹

Planning of the Evaluation Function

Corporate Evaluation Plan

36. IEO/IES developed a CEP for 4-year periods, aligning with the timing of the organization's Strategic Plans. Though the Evaluation Policy indicated conducting at least four major corporate evaluations in a 4-year period, **the 2014-2017 CEP aspired to complete eight major corporate evaluations in four years, seven of which would have been major evaluations and one a joint evaluation.** In addition, there would be a meta-analysis of decentralized evaluations produced annually and reports narrower in scope.

37. The CEP is presented to the EB for approval in June of the respective start year. The IEO/IES permits "updating" to the CEP at the end of the 2nd year of each CEP to respond to emerging priorities in the implementation of the UNW Strategic Plan, and to inform its Mid-Year Review.⁴⁰ While the mix of evaluations in the 2014-2017 CEP complied with the evaluation policy, the CEP was adjusted mid-term to account for management priorities.

38. In March 2016, IES revised the CEP, accommodating senior management requests to move up the evaluation of regional architecture from 2017 to 2016, and delay other evaluations. **This revision changed the timing of major corporate evaluations produced.** For example, the revision added the evaluation of Regional Architecture and planned it for 2016, when it was published. The Thematic Evaluation of UN Women's Contribution to Governance and National Planning, which had been originally planned for 2016, was delayed in the revision to 2017. That evaluation was ultimately published in 2019. The Thematic Evaluation of Women's Political Participation and Leadership, originally planned for 2016, was postponed to 2017 and completed in 2018. Two planned evaluations (one on norms and another on organizational effectiveness at country and regional levels) were

³⁷ UNW 2019/4. Table 3.

³⁸ Does not sum due to rounding error as reported in source document, UNW/2019/4, Table 3.

³⁹ Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. 2019. "Report of the Audit Advisory Committee for the Period from 1 January to 31 December 2018." Paragraph 37.

⁴⁰ UN Women 2014-2017 Corporate Evaluation Plan (UNW/2014/CRP.5), Paragraph 11.

cancelled. The “updating” also decreased the total funding required to carry out the evaluations planned in the CEP, considering that two were cancelled, by \$400,000 (12 per cent) to \$2.95 million.

39. UN Women interviewees cited that the organization needed adequate time to “absorb” recommendations and evidence produced by corporate evaluations. Senior managers indicated that IEO/IES was accommodating to their requests and priorities. IES believed that accommodating senior management requests increased the buy-in to and utility of evaluations.

40. Results of two postponed thematic evaluations were intended to inform the development of the 2018-2021 Strategic Plan, thus their postponement made them less useful than originally intended.

41. Half (three of six) of regional directors (or surrogates) interviewed noted that they did not have a role in the CEP process. One noted the lack of linkages between the CEP and regional level discussions on areas of strategic importance. That interviewee believed strengthening this link would increase the relevance of the corporate evaluations.

42. Delays in implementing the prior CEP, competing priorities, and senior management priorities influenced the development of the 2018-2021 CEP. Further, IES did an independent assessment of the organization’s priorities. **The 2018-2021 CEP envisaged four major corporate evaluations, a significant reduction in what had been planned in previous CEPs.**⁴¹ One (the Thematic Evaluation of UN Women’s Contribution to Governance and National Planning) was a carryover from the 2014-2017 CEP. Partly because of challenges in “absorbing” evaluation results, IES reduced the number of “major” planned corporate evaluations. There was no commensurate reduction in resources available to IEO with the reduced number of corporate evaluations planned in the CEP.

43. The 2018-2021 CEP placed increased importance on evaluations of regional and country portfolios, though there was no concomitant budget increase. The 2018-2021 CEP had IES annually providing technical assistance for up to three HQ-led evaluations outside of IES per year and producing an annual meta-analysis of all evaluations. IES communicated that it intended to provide more support for country portfolio and regional evaluations.

Planning of Decentralized Evaluations

44. For decentralized evaluations, planning was largely driven by the Strategic Plan key priorities, country-specific Strategic Notes, and/or and donor requirements. When selecting projects/programmes/areas for evaluation, survey results indicated that to a “significant extent” 87 per cent of country representatives and 67 per cent of M&EOFs considered “key priorities of the Strategic Plan or strategic note” and 67 per cent of country representatives and 72 per cent of M&EOFs considered “donor requirements.”

45. RES contributions to the planning of decentralized evaluations varied. One regional director reported that the RES contributed to the region’s annual work plan to ensure that evaluation and work planning were linked. However, two other regional directors said that while their respective RES had valuable contributions to make to planning, the RES declined to participate in planning exercises, citing their independence. Two country representatives felt that the RES strict adherence to the principle of independence hindered their value, particularly in promoting the use of evaluation results at the country level. The TOR of the RES was broad enough to allow for differences in interpretation of the

⁴¹ The four were intended to be a 2018 Corporate Evaluation of UN Women’s Contribution to Governance and National Planning; a 2019 Corporate Evaluation of UN Women’s Contribution to Humanitarian Response; the 2020 Corporate Evaluation of UN Women’s Strategic Plan 2018-2021; and a 2021 Corporate Evaluation of Regional Architecture. Source: UN Women Independent Evaluation Office. June 2017. “2018-2021 Corporate Evaluation Plan (CEP).” pp. 9-12.

planning function. In their TOR, the RES is to “support the planning, monitoring and implementation of evaluation plans in UN Women’s regional and country offices.”⁴²

Joint Evaluations

46. The Evaluation Policy referred to joint evaluations, an approach that had received attention on account of United Nations Development System (UNDS) reforms. There was little systematic planning or production of joint evaluations, though interviewees at HQ and regional/country levels agreed on their increasing importance. There was one joint evaluation planned in the 2014-2017 CEP. In 2018 and 2019, the EB requested⁴³ that IES identify opportunities for joint evaluations of system-wide activities. IEAS will participate, along with the evaluation offices of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programmes (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.

47. Forty-six per cent of country representatives and 27 per cent of M&EOFs surveyed reported having considered the “potential for joint evaluations with partners” to a “significant extent.” Regional and national stakeholders informed that joint evaluations were more feasible in the context of joint programming, which was limited over the 2016-2018 period.

Execution of the Evaluation Plan

Numbers and Types of Evaluations Conducted

48. UN Women makes all its evaluations public through its Global Accountability and Tracking of Evaluation Use (GATE) system. In the 2014-2017 period, IES produced five corporate reports, exceeding the minimum of four stated in the Evaluation Policy, but less than the seven that were planned and budgeted for in the original 2014-2017 CEP. GATE included four corporate evaluations⁴⁴ and 104 decentralized evaluations issued between 2016 and 2018.⁴⁵ The four corporate evaluations produced 2016-2018 fell short of the six planned for that period while the number of country evaluations produced per year exceeded the Evaluation Policy’s minimum of 13 country evaluations on average per year. In 2019, IES issued two Corporate Thematic evaluations.

49. Between 2016 and 2018, project/programme evaluation at the CO/MCO level was the most common type of evaluation, representing 77 per cent of decentralized evaluations. (Table 4). The average per year was 25, exceeding the 13 implied by the Evaluation Policy. The number of regional evaluations in 2018 (three) was one-third of the 2016 number; and no regional thematic evaluations were produced in 2018.

50. Although during the 2016-2018 period, IES did not produce a corporate-level joint evaluation, there were twelve joint decentralized evaluations, one of a partnership and eleven of joint initiatives. In 2019, two country-level joint evaluations were produced (Sierra Leone and Cote d’Ivoire).

⁴² TOR of the RES for Europe and Central Asia, and the TOR of the RES for West and Central Africa.

⁴³ EB documents 2018/2 and 2019/5.

⁴⁴ “Evaluation of UN Women’s Contribution to the UN System Coordination” (2016); “Evaluation of UN Women’s Regional Architecture” (2016); “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” (2018).

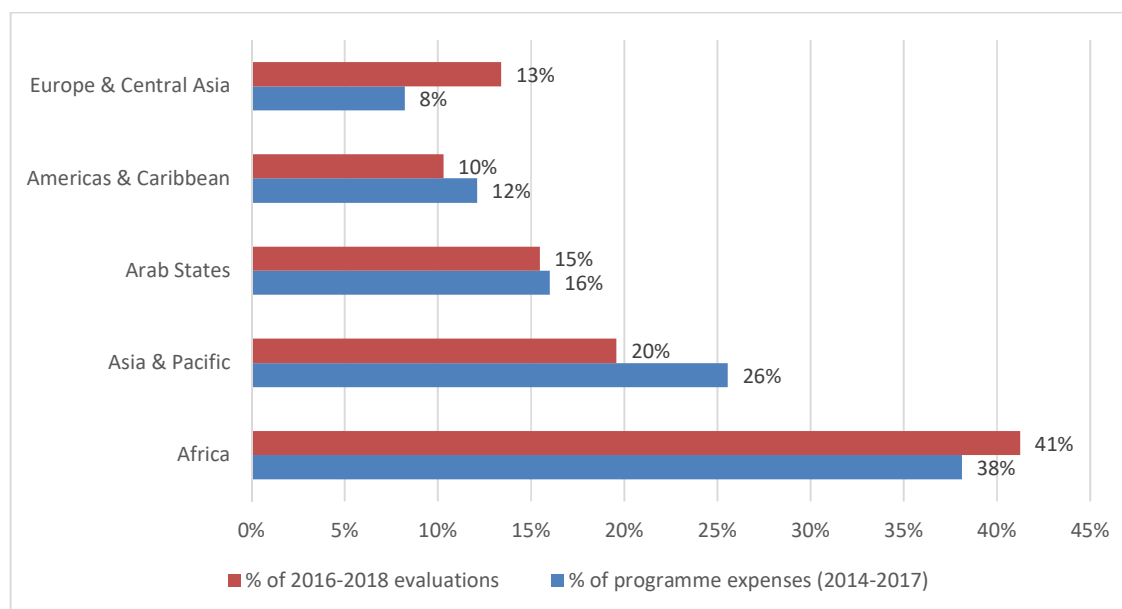
⁴⁵ These reports meet the OIOS-IED screening criteria used for its biennial study on the status of evaluation.

Table 4: Evaluations Produced, 2016-2018⁴⁶

| Category of evaluation | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | Total Number |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|
| IES Planned Corporate Evaluations | 3 | 2 | 1 | 6 |
| IOS Produced Corporate Evaluations | 2 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Organizational Performance | 1 | 0 | | 1 |
| Strategy/Policy | 1 | | | 1 |
| Thematic | | | 2 | 2 |
| Produced decentralized evaluations by area of focus | 39 | 37 | 28 | 104 |
| Country portfolio | 27 | 26 | 22 | 75 |
| Regional | 9 | 5 | 3 | 17 |
| HQ division | 2 | 3 | 2 | 7 |
| Multi-Country | 1 | 3 | 1 | 5 |
| Decentralized evaluations by type of evaluand | 39 | 26 | 23 | 104 |
| Project/Programme | 31 | 26 | 33 | 80 |
| Country-level | 4 | 9 | 5 | 18 |
| Regional cluster/ thematic | 4 | 2 | 0 | 6 |
| Total | 41 | 38 | 29 | 108 |

51. By region, Africa accounted for the largest share (41 per cent) of decentralized evaluations, followed by Asia and the Pacific (20 per cent), Arab States (15 per cent), Europe and Central Asia (13 per cent) and Americas and the Caribbean (10 per cent). The geographic distribution of evaluations produced roughly corresponded to the geographic distribution of UN Women expenditures (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Percent of 2016-2018 Decentralized Evaluation Reports and 2014-2017 Programmatic Expenditures by Region



⁴⁶ OIOS-IED analysis of reports on GATE as of 30 October 2019.

52. In 2016-2018 period, 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.⁴⁷ In the 2014-2018 period, all but eight COs and one MCO completed at least one evaluation. Thus, 83 per cent of COs/MCOs issued at least one evaluation report.

53. Analysis of the UN Women “impact areas” (as delineated in the 2014-2017 UN Women Strategic Plan) that the 2016-2018 evaluations addressed (an evaluation could address more than one impact area) showed that 57 per cent of evaluations addressed economic empowerment, 48 per cent addressed ending violence against women, 42 per cent addressed peace, security, and humanitarian action, 14 per cent addressed leadership and political participation, 7 per cent addressed national planning and budgeting, and 3 per cent addressed global norms, policies, and standards.⁴⁸ Comparing the coverage of the evaluations with the voluntary contributions anticipated by outcome area for the 2018-2022 Strategic Plan showed that the area of economic empowerment may have been overrepresented in decentralized evaluations, while the area of peace, security, and humanitarian action may have been underrepresented. Coverage of other areas was sufficiently aligned to the anticipated expenditures.

54. IES thematic corporate evaluations did not cover “Global norms, policies, and standards.” IES considered this area covered by the 2015 OIOS evaluation of UN Women that focused on its normative work. The OIOS evaluation was listed as a completed UN Women corporate evaluation in the 2015-2016 period, although IES had not conducted it. The OIOS evaluation was presented to the UN Women Executive Board as one of its corporate evaluations.⁴⁹ In accounting for evaluations that IES produced in the present report, the OIOS evaluation is not included.

Corporate Evaluations

Outsourcing

55. IES staff did not conduct any of its corporate-level evaluations. Instead, IES staff “produced” corporate evaluations by commissioning, managing, and advising external vendors or consultants. For the two most recent corporate evaluations (issued in 2019⁵⁰), IES contracted with firms and created internal and external reference groups for each evaluation, as the foreword to each report indicates. The UN Women Senior Management Team also reviewed the reports.

56. The title pages of the two 2019 UN Women corporate evaluation reports listed authorship as IEAS, IES, and UN Women, though the forewords to the reports indicated that the evaluations were conducted by external firms. Typically, when firms carry out evaluations for UN-system entities, title pages of reports reflect the name of the firm.^{51, 52}

57. The two 2019 evaluation reports had the disclaimer:

⁴⁷ OIOS analysis of GATE evaluation database.

⁴⁸ Comparing the alignment of impact areas covered by evaluation reports with corporate objectives is difficult since evaluation reports can cover more than one area.

⁴⁹ UNW/2016/5, p. 11.

⁵⁰ UN Women. 2019. “Corporate Thematic Evaluation of UN Women’s Contribution to Governance and National Planning;” UN Women. 2019. Corporate Thematic Evaluation of UN Women’s Contribution to Humanitarian Action.”

⁵¹ See https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/files/MASTER_Final1_Evaluation_Report_WASH-Program_2014-2017_Nigeria_14Feb2020.pdf;
https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/files/FINAL_UPHV?MCE_Synthesis_Report_-Part_1.pdf;

⁵² See https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/documents/about-us/evaluation/fensa-report-final.pdf?sfvrsn=c62a32c5_8.

“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.”

58. The title page, combined with the statement in the foreword to the report and the disclaimer, made authorship and ownership unclear. Also unclear was the extent to which a) IEAS/IES was accountable for the report’s contents and recommendations, and b) the recipients of recommendations felt compelled to act on them. These reports were presented to the EB as IES corporate evaluations and a management response to the reports was composed. IES clarified to OIOS-IED that *“UN Women IES is responsible for the publication and content of the report. The disclaimer refers that the document does not necessarily reflect the view of UN Women (as an organization) and its EB or members/individuals of those consulted in the report.”*⁵³

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

60. The risk and consequence of such a disclaimer and unclear authorship is that buy-in to the evaluation results and recommendations may have been limited. The disclaimer put the recommendations at arms-length from ownership by UN Women senior management.

61. Outsourcing does not make a report independent, as the 2014 peer review noted. *“Having recourse to ‘independent external evaluators’ does not constitute an institutional attribute of independence as external consultants are, inter alia, dependent on the agreement of management for their selection and remuneration, have little incentive to risk disagreement and its consequences on their livelihood...”*⁵⁴ The principle of independence relies on the structural dependence of IES and the extent to which the leadership of IES and IEAS exercise their independence, and not on the entity that carries out the evaluations.

62. Some HQ programme managers noted the challenge of identifying suitable consultants who possess the required evaluation qualifications (including language), experience, and objectivity and who will work within the available budgets. At the time of the review, IES was piloting a new model of producing evaluations where IES staff would either lead a team conducting the evaluation or conduct the evaluations themselves.

63. Information on the cost or process of the outsourcing of the evaluation function was not readily available on the United Nations Global Marketplace portal. Upon request, IES provided information on the costs of recent corporate evaluations (Table 5). On average, IES paid US\$ 334,000 to firms to carry out corporate evaluations. It paid considerably less, US\$ 220,250, for the evaluation conducted by a team of individual consultants. The latter evaluation received the highest quality rating from OIOS.

⁵³ Personal communication between OIOS-IED and UN Women IES, 24 February 2020.

⁵⁴ UN Women Peer Review Panel. September 2014. “Professional Peer Review of the Evaluation Function of UN Women, Final Report.” P. 16.

Table 5: Cost and Contracting Arrangements of Corporate Evaluations (in US\$)

| Name of Corporate Evaluation (Year Issued) | Type of vendor | Contract value | Contract type | Contract period |
|---|---|-----------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Humanitarian action (2019) | Firm | \$319,698 | Institutional contract | 20 September 2018 – 30 June 2018 |
| Governance and national planning (2019) | Firm | \$341,481 | Institutional contract | 12 Dec 2017 – Jan 2019 |
| Meta-analysis of UNW evaluations (on annual basis) | Firm | \$168,800 for 4 years | Multi-year institutional contract | 31 Oct 2014 to 22 Dec 2018 |
| Leadership and Political Participation (2018) | Individuals (4 international consultants and 1 national consultant) | \$220,250 | Individual consultant contract / special service agreement | 6 Sept 2016 to 30 June 2018 |
| Strategic partnerships for GEWE (2017) | Firm | \$318,316 | Institutional contract | 28 Sep 2015 – 15 Dec 2016 |
| Regional architecture of UNW (2017) | Firm | \$333,189 | Institutional contract | 28 Aug 2015 – 30 Nov 2016 |
| UN coordination (2016) | Firm | \$356,184 | Institutional contract | 17 Dec 2014 – 15 May 2016 |

Timeliness of Corporate Evaluations

64. Neither the GATE system, the Global Evaluation Oversight System (GEOS), nor annual reports on the evaluation function to the EB include information on adherence to the CEP timelines. The GATE Website User Guide instructs M&EOFs to update the “planned end date” in the GATE system if the evaluation issuance date changes. However, the system did not maintain the initial planned completion date, making it difficult to determine adherence to the CEP.

65. There was substantial delay in corporate evaluations compared to the completion years the CEP envisioned, though this was difficult to detect given how IES reported evaluations and its lack of inclusion in the Annual Reports on the Evaluation Function. For example, the 2017 and 2018 Annual Reports on the Evaluation Function, which were presented to the EB, included only the schedules of planned evaluations, and not the status of corporate evaluations that were planned to be completed in the reporting year. Analysis showed that while in 2018, an implementation rate of 90 per cent was reported in the annual report, 41 per cent of the planned evaluations were not yet completed. Further, the 2019 Corporate Evaluation on Governance and National Planning was listed under the deliverables for 2017 in the revised 2014-2017 CEP.

66. The TOR for corporate evaluations indicated their typical completion within 12 months. However, the timespan from preparation to the completion and issuance of the evaluation report 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 interviewed cited that the delay of corporate evaluations, which is impacted by the lag between the start and finish of evaluations, negatively impacted their use.

67. **Of the eight major corporate evaluations included in the original 2014-2017 plan, only four were completed by the end of 2017.**⁵⁵ (One of those four completed, one was a carryover from 2013, and completed according to the timeline set in the 2014-2017 CEP.) Of the four that were not completed by the end of 2017, one was completed in 2018, another completed in 2019, and two were cancelled.

68. The justification for cancelling the normative evaluation was that OIOS planned and issued an evaluation of UN Women in 2015⁵⁶ with a focus on normative support and its link to operational activities. However, an OIOS evaluation of the organization should differ from an internal corporate evaluation.

69. **The 2018-2021 CEP planned four corporate evaluations for the 4-year period (the minimum allowed under the Evaluation Policy).** According to the 2018-2021 CEP, in 2020 IES was to conduct the Corporate Evaluation of UN Women's 2018-2021 Strategic Plan (SP), which was to be one of the four major corporate evaluations that IES would produce. This was postponed due to the mid-term review of the SP led by the Office of the Executive Director, to be submitted to the EB June 2020 Annual Session, and also to allow for the SP to be operational for a longer period.

70. IES decided to use the resources intended for the SP evaluation for portfolio evaluations of Nigeria and the Barbados/Caribbean MCO because they had not been previously evaluated, though typically, COs and MCOs resourced their own portfolio evaluations.

Independence from Senior Management

71. In conducting corporate evaluations, IES staff interviewed felt that they had sufficient independence from senior management. However, the selection of country case studies for corporate evaluations was often influenced by programmatic and implementing offices rather than systematic analysis. This practice risked infringing on the IES independence and basing results on a potentially biased sample.

72. The six corporate evaluations completed since 2016 used country or thematic case studies which involved field visits as a key data collection methodology. IES interviewees said that the selection of case studies was based on the criteria of investment, maturity, gender-equality index of the countries, and whether the country office would or could cooperate. (This last criterion could negatively impact the independence of the evaluation function.) The case studies in five of the six corporate evaluations did not cover all six regions where UN Women has a presence-- one-third excluded West and Central Africa, one-third excluded Europe and Central Asia, and one-sixth excluded East and Southern Africa.

73. Some countries were repeatedly used for case studies- e.g., Malawi, Jordan, Egypt, Colombia, and Mexico were each used in two corporate evaluations. One country representative believed that case studies were skewed towards countries where UN Women had relatively large budgets. Though investment is one of the selection criteria, it had the unintended consequence of limiting the relevance of evaluation findings to those offices with smaller budgets.

⁵⁵ 1) Thematic Evaluation of Women's Economic Empowerment; 2) Evaluation of UN Women Contribution to the United Nations System Coordination; 3) Evaluation of Regional Architecture 3) Evaluation of UN Women Strategic Partnerships on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.

⁵⁶ OIOS-IED. 25 March 2015. "Evaluation of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)." E/AC.51/2015/9.

Use of Results

74. Most senior management and other interviewees highlighted the relevance of several corporate evaluations (e.g., UN Women’s Regional Architecture) and their use in informing the ongoing change management process. Regional directors (or their surrogates) interviewed said that the corporate evaluations produced since 2016 were relevant to their respective areas and informed, to a varying extent, their regional work, and the development of their respective Strategic Notes.

75. Most country representatives were familiar with the most recent corporate evaluations. Among CO representatives who indicated familiarity with the corporate evaluations conducted since 2016, approximately 90 per cent found the evaluations very or somewhat relevant to the key areas of the Entity’s work in their countries. Of the 35 country representative survey respondents, approximate one-third provided concrete examples of integrating results of specific corporate evaluations conducted since 2016 into their work.

76. However, survey respondents indicated that the dissemination of relevant evaluation lessons and results was insufficiently supported. For example, while a webinar accompanied the release of every corporate evaluation report, some stakeholders, particularly those in Asia and the Pacific, found the times of the webinars inconvenient. They also commented on the limited applicability of the reports to their local contexts, given the overarching level at which the reports were pitched.

77. Half of country representative survey respondents suggested enhancing dissemination and communication of corporate evaluation results to enhance their relevance and utility at the local level.

Decentralized Evaluations

78. Like corporate evaluations, conducting decentralized evaluation was usually outsourced to individual consultants or firms. Further, like the corporate evaluations, country representatives, RES and M&EOFs expressed challenges in engaging consultants with the required qualifications, experience, objectivity, to work within available budgets.

79. The ACO has noted inadequate project monitoring and oversight in field offices. In its 2017 report, the ACO emphasized the importance of IES working closely with UN Women project staff in the regions to reinforce the understanding of M&E as an integral part of managing projects and as a means to improve performance and achieve results.⁵⁷

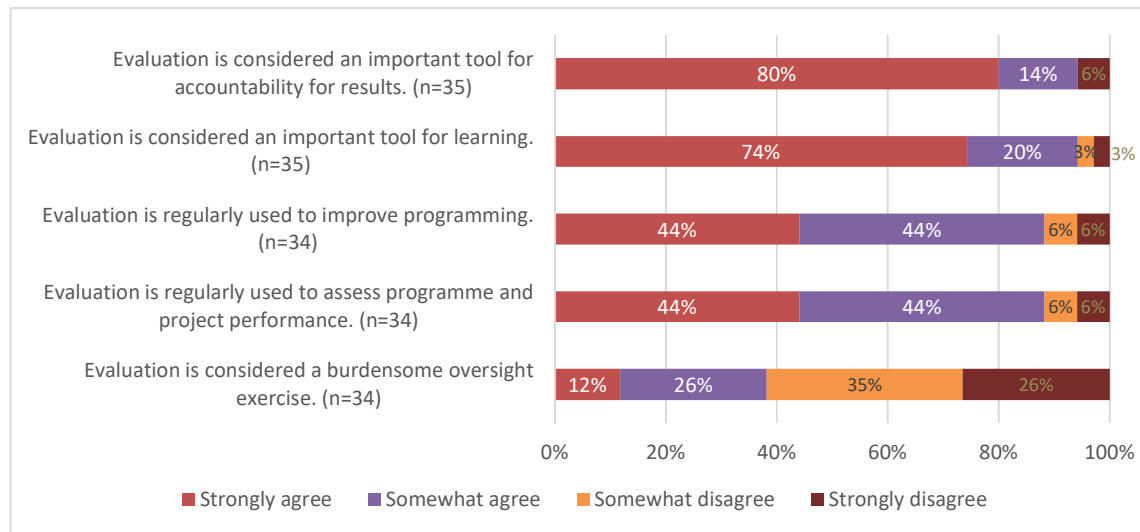
80. Results of the survey of country/regional representatives (Figure 4) showed that 65 per cent thought that results of evaluations on their country/region were integrated into their office’s policies and programmes to a “significant extent.” Results of the survey of M&EOFs showed that 92 percent agreed that evaluation was considered an important tool for accountability for results and 80 percent agreed that evaluation was regularly used to improve programming.

81. In 2015, IEO introduced the concept of “country portfolio evaluations,” which would be co-managed by the RES and the country office.⁵⁸ In 2019, RES or IES HQ initiated two (Nigeria and Caribbean MCO) that were ongoing at the time of writing and completed one (Papua New Guinea). Of the three, IES fully funded two and partially funded one (PNG).

⁵⁷ Report of the Audit Advisory Committee for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2017 (UNW/2018/3/Add.1), para 42; Report of the Audit Advisory Committee for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2018 (UNW/2019/3/Add. 1), para 24.

⁵⁸ Independent Evaluation Office, UN Women, 2016. “Guidance on Country Portfolio Evaluations in UN Women.”

Figure 4: Results of Survey of Country/Regional Representatives



82. In addition to evaluations overseen by IES, **there were evaluations of large Policy Division initiatives that were managed by the respective Policy Divisions themselves.** Sometimes, such evaluations cost several hundred thousand dollars and were of high value programmes that had wide footprints. For example, for the end-of-programme Evaluation of Action to Promote the Legal Empowerment of Women in 2017, the UN Women Policy Division (the implementing division) contracted an external firm to evaluate the programme “Promoting and Protecting Women Migrant Workers’ Labour and Human Rights,” a programme with a budget of €2.2 million. Decentralized evaluations managed by HQ units that implement the same initiatives risked the appearance of bias.

The Role of Regional Evaluation Specialists in Supporting Decentralized Evaluation

83. RES had important roles with respect 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 RES. All M&EOF surveyed reported that the RES had played a role in the evaluations they had undertaken. Nearly all (89 per cent) of the M&EOFs indicated that the RES had provided guidance and quality assurance to the evaluation. M&EOFs interviewed indicated that RES provided adequate guidance in managing decentralized evaluations. In at least two regions, the RES proposed possible regional evaluation topics for the Regional Director’s consideration.

84. Further, 76 per cent of country representatives surveyed described the RES-provided evaluation support as “fully adequate,” while 20 per cent described that support as “somewhat adequate” and 4 per cent described it as “not adequate.” Survey results suggest that the RES did not typically participate in data collection and report drafting. However, in at least one region, the RES fully managed all evaluations of countries that lacked full-fledged offices, which was not the case in other regions.

85. RES had sufficient independence in their roles. All RES interviewed stated that because of their direct reporting line to IES at HQ, they had an adequate level of independence from undue management influence. However, one RES noted difficulties with being entirely independent from the Regional Director, given their co-location.

86. Stakeholders expressed a need to standardize the role of the RES. Currently, the RES have differing interpretations of their role. While some RES actively participated in regional mechanisms and support national-level UNDAF/UNSDCF processes (including training for UNCT members), a standard approach among RES to engaging across regions had not yet emerged.

M&E Officers/ Focal Points (M&EOs)

87. The positions of M&E Officers and M&E focal point are important at the CO/MCO level. These staff oversee the conduct of evaluations in their offices and maintain databases on evaluation results. In December 2018, 43 per cent of RO/CO/MCOs had an M&E officer, 52 per cent had appointed focal points to support M&E functions, while 5 per cent had neither a M&E officer nor a focal point.

88. M&E focal points faced significant capacity constraints in their ability to manage evaluations due to competing responsibilities and a lack of skills. More than one-third (40 per cent) had a primary role/function unrelated to M&E. M&EOFs reported spending between 5 and 40 per cent of their time on M&E functions. Survey results showed that only 36 per cent of M&EOFs strongly agreed that they had adequate skills and knowledge for their positions. While only 16 per cent of M&EOFs thought that their office had adequate capacity to conduct evaluations, 35 per cent of country representatives thought that their office had adequate capacity to conduct evaluations.

89. While some M&EOFs interviewed found guidance material developed by IES to be helpful, others noted that the materials were inadequate to equip them to manage a gender-responsive evaluation. Fewer than half (44 per cent) of M&EOFs strongly agreed that they had access to sufficient guidance and TA in undertaking their evaluation roles and responsibilities or adequate understanding of their roles/responsibilities related to the evaluations that their office produces.

90. Staff turnover of M&E focal points was said to have negatively impacted the effectiveness of a coaching program that IES developed for them.

Oversight of the Evaluation Function

Quality of Evaluation Reports and the Credibility of IES's Quality Assessment System

91. The EB displayed a strong commitment and support for evaluation promoting the evaluation function, as demonstrated in its meeting agendas and minutes. IES developed several tools to support oversight and quality assurance for decentralized evaluations. The Global Evaluation Report Assessment and Analysis System (GERAAS) provided an external independent assessment of the quality of corporate and decentralized evaluation reports.

92. OIOS tested the quality of GERAAS by independently rating the quality of a sample (36 of the 108 evaluation reports issued during 2016-2018) and comparing the OIOS quality rating with the GERAAS rating. The OIOS- sample included all four corporate evaluations and 32 of 104 decentralized evaluations. Evaluation quality could be rated very good, good, fair, poor, or very poor quality (Table 6). Overall, 22 per cent were rated as very good, 50 per cent good, 25 per cent fair, and 3 per cent poor. None were of very poor quality. Of the four corporate reports, OIOS-IED rated one "good" and three "very good". Overall, the quality of corporate evaluations exceeded that of decentralized evaluations.

93. Of all report sections, the conclusion and recommendations sections were the weakest. Ratings of fair or poor were given to the recommendations section of 36 per cent of reports and the conclusions and lessons learned sections of 33 per cent of reports. Among corporate evaluations, the recommendations section of all corporate evaluation reports was rated as "very good." Approximately two-thirds of recommendations clearly identified the entity (e.g., function, position,

division) responsible to act. In 14 per cent of recommendations, the responsibility to act was joint between UN Women and an external partner.

94. The evaluations conducted in the 2016-2018 period produced a total of 1,410 actions needed to address recommendations (mean of 14 per report). Of the 36 reports sampled, OIOS-IED found 92 per cent of the actions developed “reasonably concrete and objectively verifiable.” Of the corporate evaluation actions, all were of this category.

Table 6: OIOS-IED Overall Quality Rating of the Sample of 36 UN Women Evaluation Reports

| Quality | Corporate | Decentralized | Total |
|------------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|
| 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 number in parentheses refers to the number of the 36 reports that were assessed as such.

95. Comparing the results of the OIOS quality assessment and the GERAAS rating showed a reasonable match in ratings. The OIOS and GERAAS ratings matched in 56 per cent cases and were off by only one level (either higher or lower) in 39 per cent of cases. Overall, OIOS rating of reports broadly concurred with the rating indicated on the GERAAS. This suggests the existence of effective quality assurance systems that contribute to ensuring good quality evaluation reports.

96. These results indicated that the quality and credibility of evaluation products generated by UN Women and its oversight of the quality was satisfactory and that the GERAAS was credible and reliable.

Evaluation Oversight Bodies: GEAC and ACO

97. UN Women had two evaluation oversight bodies, the GEAC and the ACO. GEAC’s role was exclusively advising the ED and IEO/IES on the evaluation function, while the ACO mandate was to advise the ED on the evaluation, audit, and investigation functions. As of 2018, GEAC was composed of five external evaluation experts, the Director of IEAS, and the Chief of Staff of UN Women as an *ex officio* member. ACO was composed of five external oversight experts. With the co-location of the audit and evaluation functions under IEAS, ACO targeted recruiting two members specifically for their evaluation expertise. GEAC members served without compensation while members of ACO were compensated with an honorarium. The Executive Office of UN Women performed secretariat duties for the ACO while the IEO/IES performed such duties for the GEAC.

98. The key difference between the committees’ approach was with regard to their position on the consolidation of the audit and evaluation functions. While GEAC strongly expressed its initial opposition to creating IEAS, ACO considered IEAS an opportunity to create synergies between audit and evaluation, while holding that the functions should be kept independent. That there were two committees providing advice and oversight may be an artifact of the former structure of the evaluation function in the Entity. The ACO was to meet at least thrice annually, whereas the GEAC was to meet at most twice annually.

99. The extent to which the GEAC continued to provide valuable advice was unclear because the interaction between UN Women senior leadership and the GEAC became sporadic, as demonstrated by the declining participation of members and UN Women senior leadership in the GEAC annual meetings and the brevity of the meetings. Two DEDs attended the 2016 annual meeting, one DED

attended the 2017 meeting, and neither the ED nor any DED attended the 2018 meeting. A GEAC interviewee believed that the GEAC was not delivering on its TOR, including promoting the use of all evaluations.

100. The ACO held meetings three times per year. It seemed more active and involved than the GEAC and given its renewed interest in overseeing the evaluation function, the GEAC TOR had redundancy with the ACO TOR. The ACO TOR included all elements found in the GEAC TOR, in addition to the audit function. For this reason, in April 2020 IEAS proposed to sunset the GEAC, a change that would be reflected in the revision of the evaluation policy which at the time of writing was ongoing. The Executive Board would need to approve this proposed change in its June 2020 meeting.

Reporting on and Utility of Evaluations

101. There were some good practices in the dissemination of evaluation findings. The dissemination of each corporate evaluation was accompanied by a webinar and other communications materials.

102. IES and the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional office jointly developed a series of ten brief (4-page) knowledge management products based on evidence from 19 evaluations conducted in the region during 2009-2015. The series included key findings and lessons learned from evaluations in a variety of thematic areas and a list of relevant decentralized evaluations.

103. As of October 2019, ESARO was in the process of engaging a consultant to develop similar knowledge products based on 26 decentralized evaluations conducted 2015-2018, which IES planned to jointly fund.

104. A HQ manager also noted the *Transform Magazine* - a booklet with key evaluation results developed by IEO/IES since June 2015. The interviewee reported that *Transform* made results readable and guided the division with the application of results. Since the inaugural issue of *Transform*, 16 subsequent issues were produced.

Monitoring the Use of Evaluations

105. The GEOS established by the IEO (December 2013), developed nine Key Performance Indicators (KPI) on the use of evaluations. Annually, country COs and MCOs were required to report on each of the KPIs with KPI 9 showing the percentage of offices that reported using any evaluation to inform programming. In its 2018 annual report, IES indicated that 86 per cent of field offices had self-reported on having done so. At the June 2019 informal briefing on evaluation to the EB, a delegation noted that KPI 9 does not capture the use of evaluations well and expressed a desire for improved monitoring of evaluation use.⁵⁹

106. In addition, the GATE system required offices/divisions to update the status of the implementation of action plans for management responses on a quarterly basis.⁶⁰ However, the implementation was self-reported by responsible units with no independent verification.

107. IES reviewed the status of the implementation of key actions reported in GATE and reported this to senior management biannually and to the EB annually through its annual reports. Several stakeholders expressed the need to monitor the implementation of key actions through periodic discussion at senior management meetings.

⁵⁹ Observation of Executive Board sessions-summary.

⁶⁰ GATE Website User Guide (IEO, January 2015), p. 21.

108. Use of evaluation results was considered a challenge by stakeholders. High turnover combined with limited knowledge management practices and weak project management practices was seen to hamper the use of evaluation. Stakeholders interviewed generally identified use of evaluation results as a key challenge and an area for improvement. Insufficient capacity to absorb and act on evaluation results was repeatedly cited.

109. Also impacting the utility and relevance of evaluation results was turnover and vacancies in the Entity. For example, one regional director *ad interim* had not seen or heard of corporate evaluations. At HQ, for three of the six corporate evaluations completed since 2016, the client HQ division/unit had gone through a leadership change. At the regional level, as of July 2019, two of the ROs had an *ad interim* appointment and two others had a new Director. At the country level, 54 per cent of country representatives surveyed had held their positions for less than a year. New hires and temporarily appointed staff were often unaware of the evaluations that were conducted prior to undertaking their positions or did not see them as relevant to their work.

VI. Conclusion

110. Overall, UN Women's evaluation function was relevant to the Entity. The scope of UN Women's evaluation function met the criteria set by the Secretary General in ST/SGB/2018/3.⁶¹ Evaluation findings were communicated to governing bodies and the volume and coverage of reports adhered to ST/SGB/2018/3. UN Women had a high-quality evaluation policy that its Executive Board endorsed, though aspects of it were not current, and was in the process of being updated.

111. IES produced high quality corporate evaluations that met the minimum volume requirement set in the Evaluation Policy. To varying degrees of involvement, it also assisted in producing a volume of decentralized evaluations that exceeded the threshold of the Policy. Senior management and other stakeholders found corporate evaluations to be relevant and useful in informing the ongoing change management process.

112. While resources devoted to evaluation fell below the 3 per cent threshold specified in the Policy, there nevertheless seemed to be ample resources for the evaluation function to meet accountability and learning needs.

113. Delivery of the 2014-2017 CEP was incomplete and delayed. Delays in producing evaluations undermined their relevance. With respect to efficiency, the Evaluation Policy made IES the hub for evaluation in the Entity, allowing for institutional knowledge and capacities to be developed and an efficient use of evaluation resources.

114. In addition to evaluation activities that were conducted under the auspices of IES, evaluations were produced elsewhere in the entity with varied input from IES. Decentralized evaluations were controlled by implementing units, though these should not be considered independent evaluations. The quality assessment of reports indicated that the evaluations directly produced by IES were of higher quality than evaluations produced by others across the entity.

114. By using a model where the Entity outsourced the conduct of evaluations to consultants or to firms, UN Women missed the opportunity to build capacity and institutional knowledge among its evaluation staff and underutilized IES skills and capacities. The cost-efficiency of contracting out

⁶¹ United Nations. 2018. "Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation." <https://undocs.org/ST/SGB/2018/3>.

evaluation services while IES had a full team of evaluators was questionable given that IES only produced on average one corporate report annually.

115. Also impacting efficiency was the turnover of M&E officers and focal points in the field, which created challenges for capacity to be developed and sustained.

116. In terms of effectiveness, structures and oversight mechanisms existed for the evaluation function to be independent. RES reported directly to IES (rather than to the regional directors) and IES had allies in protecting its independence-- e.g., Member States, and the EB. However, with IEAS incorporating IES, the direct reporting line of the IES chief to the ED was broken, which violated the prevalent Evaluation Policy as stated, though not necessarily in principle since the IEAS Director is an oversight role with functional independence.

117. IEAS incorporating IES also had the effect of reducing the senior-most staff member of the function from D-1 to P-5, presumably accompanied by a loss of senior evaluation expertise and without a direct reporting line to the ED. Incorporating the evaluation function under IEAS 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.

118. Challenges to having an effective evaluation function included having M&E officers and focal points who were not sufficiently skilled, trained, and who have insufficient guidance materials and coaching resources to perform their duties. Difficulties in attracting appropriate evaluation consultants were reported, particularly in the field.

119. By having all evaluations and their quality assessments available on its public website, IES was transparent about the evaluations that were produced, though it could add information on the cost and the TORs of outsourced reports. The quality assessment system that IES used was credible and reliable.

VII. Recommendations

OIOS makes four important recommendations as follows:

A. With respect to policy and planning, the Executive Director and the Director of IEAS 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.

B. The Director of IEAS should ensure that the CEPs follow the priorities set in the Evaluation Policy, anticipate the needs of the organization and that IES delivers on the CEP in a timely manner.

Indicators of Achievement:

- The CEP abides by the priorities set in the evaluation policy;
- IES delivers the major corporate evaluations indicated in the respective CEP within the time frame indicated in the CEP.
- Transparent and timely reporting on changes to CEP.
- Review of the methodology of the calculation of the implementation rate (KPI4).

- C. **The ED should ensure that IEAS, as custodian of the evaluation function in the Entity, is responsible for all evaluation activity -- all corporate evaluations should be conducted in-house and IES, 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 IEAS and the Senior Management Team, and IES is responsible for all major evaluations.
 - Number of corporate evaluations and high-value decentralized evaluations that IES conducts each year.
- i. **IEAS 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 EB, and the authorship of past corporate evaluation reports is explicit on the title page.

- D. **With respect to UN Women personnel away from HQ critical to the production of evaluations,**
- i. **IES should re-examine the roles and responsibilities of each Regional Evaluation Specialist to ensure that there is greater standardization in their interpretation and discharge; and**

Indicator of Achievement:

- Reviewed and standardized roles and responsibilities of each RES.
- ii. **IES should develop on-boarding 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 per cent of M&EOFs that have M&E training as part of their on-boarding process;
- Proportion of M&EOFs that attended at least one coaching session per year; Proportion of M&EOFs who feel capable of fulfilling the M&EOF job responsibilities.

Annex A: Management Response from the Executive Director, UN Women on the OIOS Inspection of the UN Women Evaluation Function

1. 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 UN-Women.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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).
5. In reference to Recommendation C, 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.
6. 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.
7. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

Annex B: Comment by the Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Management Response Contained in Annex A

1. OIOS thanks 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 C relating to ensuring independence of all major evaluations, that the Entity does not accept.
2. There is a conflict of interest when implementers of initiatives manage evaluations of said initiatives. While the 2012 evaluation policy limits IES' role in decentralized evaluations to a quality assurance function, the best practice would be for IES, 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 they fund. Large, donor-funded initiatives are significant aspects of the Entity's programming. Rather than evaluations of such initiatives being outside of the bounds of IES' management, they should be as essential a part of IES' work as they are to the work of UN Women.
3. To minimize the conflict of interest inherent in implementers managing evaluations of their initiatives, and to better satisfy donors' needs, IES 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.
4. Nevertheless, OIOS is pleased that UN Women fully accepts Recommendations A, B, and D and part of Recommendation C.
5. With regard to Recommendation C, as UN Women has not accepted the recommendation for IES to manage the evaluations of large initiatives, the risks associated with non-implementation of this recommendation is accepted by UN Women management. Accordingly, Recommendation C is revised as follows for monitoring purposes, reflecting the partial acceptance of this recommendation:

Revised Recommendation C: The Executive Director should ensure that IEAS, 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 IEAS and the Senior Management Team.

Number of corporate evaluations that IES conducts each year.

- i.* **IEAS 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 EB, and the authorship of past corporate evaluation reports is explicit on the title page.