



THEMATIC EVALUATION

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

Final Synthesis Report  
November 2013



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The evaluation also benefitted from the active participation of reference groups. A global reference group was composed of United Nations staff with expertise in gender equality and women empowerment, joint programmes, and United Nations coherence/coordination at corporate level. Five national reference groups were constituted for case studies and were composed of United Nations staff and national partners engaged in joint gender programmes.

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Disclaimer: The text of this report does not necessarily reflect the views of the commissioning United Nations entities and their Executive Boards, the Governments of Spain and Norway or United Nations Members States. The text has not been edited to official publication standards and the commissioning United Nations entities and the Governments of Spain and Norway accept no responsibility for error.

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## **ACRONYMS**

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GEEW	Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDG-F	Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
QCPR	Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review
SWAP	System-Wide Action Plan
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
WHO	World Health Organization

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# FOREWORD

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Since 2006, there has been a steady call for the United Nations system to be more accountable, effective and efficient in its initiatives to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as for overall United Nations reform at country level. The Delivering as One initiative, the significant increase in joint programming processes, the Chief Executive Board (CEB) System-Wide Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2006), and the creation of UN Women in 2010, are some of the key developments in recent years that have pushed forward both the gender and reform agendas within the United Nations system.

More recently, the General Assembly in its resolution 67/226 (2012) reiterated the call to further strengthen work in the United Nations system on gender equality and to use joint programming processes as a way to promote greater coherence among the individual entities of the United Nations system at country level - taking into account the principles of national ownership and alignment with national priorities.

The joint gender programme modality – joint programmes with a specific objective related to gender equality and women's empowerment – provide one way for the United Nations system to operationalize these two important agendas at country level. However, while there has been a rise in the number of joint gender programmes in the United Nations system since 2006, there has been limited evaluative evidence available on this new modality to better understand how they are performing and to capture lessons learned to strengthen them.

To address this, UN Women, UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and the MDG-F, in partnership with the Governments of Spain and Norway, jointly commissioned this evaluation – the first such corporate-level joint evaluation on gender equality and women's empowerment by the United Nations system of this scale.

The findings particularly provide valuable learning for improving the design and implementation of the next generation of joint gender programmes in five key areas: relevance, ownership, accountability, sustainable results and coherence, synergies and efficiency. Lessons are drawn, in particular, from an in-depth desk review of a sample of 24 joint gender programmes and case studies conducted in Albania, Kenya, Liberia, Nicaragua and the State of Palestine.

Despite the learning curve inherent in the application of a new modality, individual joint gender programmes demonstrated the added value of the modality in a number

of important ways including increasing the visibility and legitimacy of gender issues on the national agenda and expanding the opportunity for translating normative gender work into operational initiatives.

However, the evaluation also highlights how joint gender programmes can be improved based on past experience and practice. It encourages that the selection of the joint gender programme modality be a strategic decision based on a clear options appraisal that considers the best way in which to achieve development results on gender equality and women's empowerment within a given operating context. When a joint gender programme is selected, the evidence demonstrates that the modality benefits from an extended design process that allows for development of a shared vision, collective partnerships and a comprehensive capacity development strategy, among others factors conducive to strengthening performance. Other areas for improvement include relevance to national priorities, national ownership and the application of the human rights-based approach. Joint gender programmes also require more focus on accountability to national stakeholders and mutual accountability, as well as further clarification of internal accountability mechanisms. Joint gender programmes will also greatly benefit from efforts to address systemic barriers within the United Nations system.

The evaluation makes four overarching recommendations to United Nations agencies, and national and global level stakeholders involved in joint gender programmes. It also provides sixteen specific suggestions on how to operationalize these recommendations.

We hope that this evaluation will be useful for the United Nations system in general and more specifically for those agencies that continue to come together to design and implement joint gender programmes at country level. Guided by the findings and the recommendations of this evaluation, the joint gender programmes of the future can hopefully realize their high potential to improve the United Nations system contribution to gender equality and women's empowerment at country level through a collective, coordinated and coherent effort.



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Chair, Evaluation Management Group

[UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, and the MDG-F  
in partnership with the Governments of Spain and Norway]

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## Background

The *Joint Evaluation of Joint Programmes on Gender Equality in the United Nations System* was undertaken in a context of transformation and change. Gender equality remains at the forefront of the global development agenda. The 2006 System-Wide Policy for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women<sup>1</sup> paved the way for subsequent reforms and momentum towards system-wide accountability is growing. Gender, increasingly, matters.

Coherence in the United Nations is also gaining momentum. Spearheaded by the Delivering as One initiative, actors are now coming together at global and national levels to create synergies and work jointly, seeking to maximise resources and create better development results on the ground.

In 2012, seven partners - the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund (MDG-F), and the Governments of Norway and Spain - came together to examine the effects of these reforms on joint United Nations programmes on gender equality. The evaluation was conducted from May 2012 to November 2013. It is the first United Nations joint evaluation of gender of this scale.

## What is a Joint Programme on Gender Equality?

A joint programme's thesis is that: *By working collectively, the combined strengths of different entities can be mobilized to generate improved efficiencies and synergies, leading to greater effectiveness and enhanced development results.* A United Nations joint programme on gender equality ('joint gender programme') is 'a joint programme with an explicit objective of empowering women and/or promoting gender equality'.

Joint gender programmes have increased in number since 2006 in particular. The 2007 advent of the Millennium Development Goal Achievement Fund (MDG-F) and the establishment of UN Women in 2010 provided further stimulus.

Joint gender programmes serve a dual purpose:

- *At the operational level*, they constitute a development cooperation instrument for organizing, resourcing and delivering gender equality work at country or regional level.
- *More upstream*, they serve as country or regional-level mechanisms for implementing the United Nations' wider political trajectory towards coherence in the field of gender equality.

The evaluation assessed the effects of joint gender programmes on both these levels.

## Aims of the evaluation

The evaluation set out to assess the:

- Contribution of joint gender programmes to national development results on gender, including intended and unintended results and efficiency in achieving their objectives;
- Extent to which the objectives and results of joint gender programmes were relevant to national and United Nations development goals and policies;
- Sustainability of results of joint gender programmes, including the level of national ownership, national capacity development, and partnerships between the United Nations system and national partners;
- Extent to which joint gender programmes created synergies between and among United Nations entities and partners at national level; and
- Overall level of integration of human rights-based approaches.

The main intended users of the evaluation are United Nations agencies<sup>2</sup> involved in joint gender programmes; the United Nations Development Group (UNDG); donor and partner countries; civil society, particularly women's empowerment and gender equality advocacy groups; and gender-related networks.

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1 CEB/2006/2.

2 For the purpose of this report, 'agency' refers to any United Nations entity.

## Methodology

This evaluation's unit of analysis was joint gender programmes operating at country level, designed and implemented after 2006. Of 113 joint United Nations gender programmes, 80 were eligible for review under this evaluation. A representative sample of 24 – across regions, thematic area, and context – was selected for in-depth desk review.

Field studies were also conducted in Albania, Kenya, Liberia, Nicaragua and the State of Palestine.<sup>3</sup> Other sources of evidence included: over 150 interviews with stakeholders engaged in joint gender programmes in countries and at headquarters, including government, civil society, women's groups and donor agency representatives; a web-based survey of United Nations staff at country level, plus national and donor partners; and deepened analysis and partner interviews on a joint gender programme in Nepal.

Analysis took place against an indicative theory of change developed during the inception phase of the evaluation. The final, tested version of the theory is presented in the main report. Key limitations included the very limited information on results available and the constrained feasibility of comparison with single-agency programmes.

## Main findings and conclusions

### Relevance

The joint gender programmes analysed all prove contextually-relevant to broad national gender needs. They were all aligned with stated national strategies or plans and referenced normative frameworks whose commitments they aimed to serve.

However, due in large part to under-investment in the design process, relevance was compromised by the absence of a consistently clear line of sight to gender priorities on the ground and the lack of a systematic application of the human rights-based approach. These constraints arose from inadequate analytical underpinnings and risk-proofing, insufficient inclusiveness and consultation with intended clients/their representatives, limited identification of rights holders

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<sup>3</sup> Referred to hereafter as Palestine.

groups and scant disaggregation of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. Designs were marked by high levels of ambition in efforts to tackle systemic and deep-rooted gender inequalities within short time frames, with limited resources and with little or no prior experience of the joint gender modality.

Many joint gender programmes therefore showed misplaced confidence in the capability of the national operating architecture and partners, and the capacity of the United Nations system itself, to absorb a joint modality. The challenges for implementation were therefore demanding from the outset, and the learning curve for partners both sharp and steep.

### Ownership

Most joint gender programmes reviewed integrated key dimensions of ownership. Many of the strategies for facilitating ownership were successful. However, these gains commonly lacked a clear understanding of what ownership meant in the context and the importance of a broad-based approach, with a tendency to focus on the joint gender programme modality as an 'end in itself'. Capacity development efforts were individually significant within many joint gender programmes, but went uninformed by comprehensive capacity analyses and ungrounded in a broader strategic approach to capacity development for gender. Capacity development has not been explicitly framed under the broader principle of ownership.

### Coherence, synergies and efficiency

As a new modality, most joint gender programmes experienced difficulties with coherence. Where the surrounding architecture of United Nations system reform was relatively mature, such as in Delivering as One contexts, joint gender programmes benefited from incentives and supportive external frameworks for coordination. The value of an extended design process, and the associated common visioning and partnership for gender, was also clearly demonstrated.

However, the opportunity to develop a common vision and partnership for gender has been missed in the majority of joint gender programmes, as part of the underinvestment in design. This compromised the potential for coherent implementation from the start.

Synergies among United Nations agencies, and between agencies and their partners, improved, but the implications of the joint modality for business practices and ways of working have been imperfectly understood. The absence of clear central guidance, combined with systemic barriers, have been contributing factors. Commitment to the joint modality has been uneven, with ‘business as usual’ prevailing. The roles of Gender Theme Groups and of UN Women have not yet been clarified.

Efficiency has remained unchanged overall. Despite some evidence of burdens transfer from national to United Nations partners, the ‘costs of coordination’ have been both unanticipated and high.

## Accountability

Some joint gender programmes made strong individual efforts to build a culture and practice of accountability for gender equality results. Yet overall, the principle has presented a significant gap. Limited attention was given to strategies for accountability at the design stage, including a lack of systematic monitoring. The primary ‘face’ of accountability was located upwards to the United Nations agency headquarters, rather than lying at national level. Mutual accountability, involving national stakeholders, and downwards accountability, to women and men on the ground, featured little. Host governments and women’s organizations did not always place sufficient demand on United Nations partners to act in a coordinated way. Current financing mechanisms (pass through and parallel) favour the individual accountability of the United Nations agency, rather than horizontal accountability to the joint gender programmes or the United Nations country team.

## Sustainable results and added value

Despite difficulties in design and implementation, some joint gender programmes have delivered individually significant effects at country level. A few broadened and strengthened the gender agenda and supported governments to deliver normative commitments. The evaluation found examples of gender being raised on the political and policy agenda; legislative and governance reforms being stimulated; and contributions to an improved accountability environment. In these contexts, the comparative advantage of the United Nations as a development actor was demonstrated.

## Added value

The joint modality created opportunities for added value, which some (more mature) joint gender programmes have seized upon. Examples include:

- Creating shared understandings of, partnerships for, gender equality;
- Increasing visibility and legitimacy of gender issues on the national agenda;
- Greater embedding of normative frameworks at national level;
- Expanding the opportunity for translating normative gender work into operations;
- Building outreach and synergies on gender;
- Permitting a more multidimensional approach to addressing gender inequality;
- Enhancing the visibility, credibility and resources for the national gender machinery; and
- Improving upstream, results on policy reform and advocacy.

Yet the evaluation finds that in aggregate, the composite body of joint gender programmes reviewed have not delivered results which comprise ‘more than the sum of their parts’. The use of managing for development results techniques has also been limited. The sustainability of the gains made is uncertain, given the lack of clear sustainability strategies embedded.

## Lessons learned and promising practices

Despite these limitations, the first round of joint gender programmes has generated much knowledge and new partnerships, which offer optimism for, and insight into, the possibilities for the future. Major lessons include:

- Delivering as One environments provide a conducive setting for joint gender programmes, supporting harmonization and coordination and helping clear the pathway towards results;
- Successful implementation and the delivery of results within joint gender programmes is strongly connected to a robust analytical basis;
- A detailed and inclusive design process of a joint gender programme is central to developing a common

vision to which partners can align and a precursor for results;

- Realism is essential when seeking coordination and coherence across individual United Nations agencies with their own diverse systems and ways of operating;
- Working to ensure the understanding, capacity and commitment of partners to coherence is key, particularly at leadership level;
- In most instances, the optimal number of United Nations agencies participating in a joint gender programme is no more than four or five;
- The potential for coherence is maximized where the capacity, capability and empowerment of the lead entity is analysed from the outset. The role of the Resident Coordinator, and any existing Gender Theme Group, has the potential to form powerful stimulus for coordination;

- Ownership and sustainability are maximized where accountability is grounded within the national context and understood as truly mutual and core to the development partnership; and

- Clear planning for and designing-in of risk management strategies in advance is essential, particularly in fragile or conflict-affected situations.

The evaluation identified some limited examples of promising practices from the evidence. These include: the establishment of standard joint governance structures; the systematic distillation and dissemination of lessons learned; locating joint gender programme coordinators in government ministries/ departments; the use of performance norms to hold individual agencies and the joint gender programme to account for harmonization; and the development of a common spirit of jointness and an inclusive approach.

## Recommendations

The learning curve for the first tranche of joint gender programmes has been sharp and steep. Yet the evaluation ends with a note of optimism. In a shifting global landscape, going back to an ‘old world’ of bilateral design and implementation, limited coordination and compromised development effectiveness is not a realistic option. This is especially the case for a transversal, and universal, issue such as gender.

The evaluation finds that, while joint gender programmes remain an accepted, and indeed integral, part of the future development cooperation landscape, they also require reform. Change is essential; more of the same, or business as usual, present risks in themselves going forward. The report’s recommendations seek to support this process under three main headlines:

- Joint gender programmes need to be firmly grounded at the country level and to take place in a climate of solidly-founded development effectiveness;
- National and United Nations partners need to make joint gender programmes a strategic option rather than a default choice; and
- The strategies of the 2006 System-Wide Policy must be brought back clearly into view, viewed through a country-level lens and ‘given teeth’ to drive forward the agenda for gender equality on the ground.

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### OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATION 1: TO UNITED NATIONS AGENCIES

**Ensure a clear strategic rationale for joint gender programmes and firmly ground designs in development effectiveness efforts at country level. In order to do so:**

- Make joint gender programmes a strategic choice rather than a default reaction to funding incentives, United Nations reform or donor pressure. Include a clear options appraisal; analysis of the state of gender programming nationally; capacity analysis; and the consideration of other potential modalities;
- Increase the rigour of the design phase by proceeding design with robust analytical underpinnings, making the process inclusive and ensuring that the design reflects the systematization of the human rights-based approach;
- Where conditions permit, UN Women’s role (whose mandate positions them as a logical technical and/or coordination lead) should be clarified and made explicit within joint gender programmes;
- Ensure that key principles of development effectiveness (alignment, accountability, ownership, harmonization and managing for results) are embedded in designs and implementation;
- Harmonization for coherence needs a clear vision and set of strategies from the outset; full commitment from partners and to be followed through, e.g. explicit results statements on coordination, resistance to the use of pass through and parallel funding modalities, explicit resourcing and of coordination mechanisms housed in national structures, and lesson learning strategies integrated and applied;
- A stronger focus on managing for development results, and results-oriented performance reporting, through collective working is required;
- For joint gender programmes to be implemented in fragile or conflict-affected situations, a ‘do no harm’ analysis and the international principles for good engagement in fragile situations, as well as a state-building lens, should be applied as appropriate; and
- Joint gender programmes should be positioned as an opportunity to develop comprehensive capacity development strategies for gender and apply full risk frameworks from the outset.

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## **OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATION 2: TO HOST GOVERNMENTS AND CITIZENS**

**Ensure full ownership of and accountability for joint gender programmes, as part of wider strategizing and capacity development for gender. In order to do so:**

- Locate joint gender programmes as part of clear national strategy for gender equality and women's empowerment, grounded in a broad and inclusive development partnership;
- Adopt stronger leadership, and a more assertive stance towards joint gender programmes in terms of their design, management and implementation, and reporting; and
- Demand full accountability as a condition of implementation and sustaining oversight.

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## **OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATION 3: TO DONORS**

**Accompany demands for rigour and results in joint gender programmes with supportive guidance and a partnership-oriented approach. In order to do so:**

- Raise the technical bar for joint gender programmes' design and implementation, including an emphasis on development effectiveness principles and sound development practice;
- Match demands with supportive guidance to United Nations agencies on the joint gender programme modality;
- Permit a flexible approach, particularly in response to contextual change; and
- Demand results reporting, geared to national strategies and results, and including a focus on capacity development results for gender equality.

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## **OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATION 4: TO UNDG**

**Provide more specific guidance on joint gender programmes while advocating for systemic change. In order to do so:**

- Develop and refine current guidance on when, how and under what conditions to use a joint gender programme modality;
- Continue to advocate for: a revised United Nations business model, which clarifies the role and accountabilities of the Resident Coordinator and United Nations country team in joint programmes and coordinated actions;
- Aim for the removal of systemic barriers and greater harmonization of procedures; and create incentives for the application of the joint modality in gender programming.

# 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

## 1.1 Introduction

The results of this first joint evaluation of joint gender programmes in the United Nations system come at a time of change and reform. The development landscape is shifting, development cooperation mechanisms are changing and United Nations system-wide reform is underway.

At the same time, United Nations contributions to supporting governments to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment are acknowledged to be falling short.<sup>4</sup> In 2012, seven partners - the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund (MDG-F), and the Governments of Norway and Spain - came together to commission this report. Its objectives are to inform United Nations agencies<sup>5</sup> and their partners about:

- The overall contribution of joint United Nations gender programmes to national development results on gender equality and the empowerment of women, including intended and unintended results and efficiency in achieving their objectives;
- The extent to which joint United Nations gender programmes' objectives and results are relevant to national and United Nations development goals and policies;

4 General Assembly resolutions in 2009 and 2011 emphasized improved accountability of the United Nations system on gender equality and women's empowerment. The Delivering as One report of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance and the Environment (A/61/583) cited incoherent, under-resourced and fragmented efforts.

5 For the purpose of this report, 'agency' refers to any United Nations entity.

- The overall sustainability of joint United Nations gender programmes' results, including the level of national ownership, national capacity development, and partnerships between the United Nations system and national partners;
- The extent to which joint United Nations gender programmes have created synergies between and among United Nations agencies and partners at national level; and
- The overall level of integration of human rights-based approaches.<sup>6</sup>

The evaluation – the first corporate United Nations evaluation of this scale on gender equality – was implemented from May 2012 to November 2013. Its main intended users are: United Nations agencies involved in joint gender programmes; the United Nations Development Group (UNDG); donor and partner countries; civil society, particularly women's empowerment and gender equality advocacy groups; and gender related networks.<sup>7</sup>

## 1.2 Background

### The changing global landscape

The global context for development cooperation has changed dramatically since 2007. Food, fuel and economic shocks, conflicts, political transitions and social upheavals have reshaped the international agenda. There is greater assertiveness, and a greater international role, for many aid-receiving countries in setting their own development pathways.<sup>8</sup> Some have become donors themselves.

6 The full list of evaluation questions are presented in the Terms of Reference in Annex 1.

7 More details are available from: [www.gate.unwomen.org](http://www.gate.unwomen.org)

8 See Human Development Report 2013 – The Rise of the Global South (UNDP, 2013).

In aggregate terms, many countries are recording substantial economic growth. Yet inequalities – including gender – are unevenly reducing. Women continue to face discrimination in health, education, political participation and the labour market. *A broader social and poverty reduction agenda is needed, in which... inequalities, institutional failures, social barriers and personal vulnerabilities are as central as promoting economic growth*.<sup>9</sup>

### United Nations context for gender equality and the empowerment of women<sup>10</sup>

Consequently, gender equality remains at the forefront of the global development agenda. The Beijing Declaration, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security set the stage. Millennium Development Goal 3 positions gender equality as a development objective in its own right, as well as a powerful lever for achieving other Goals.

A number of measures have recently been taken to increase accountability for United Nations agencies' work on gender. The 2006 System-Wide Policy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment was followed by the 2010 formation of UN Women, whose mandate is to lead on coherence and coordinate the efforts of the United Nations system on gender equality, as well as conduct its own normative and operational work.<sup>11</sup> 2012 saw a General Assembly resolution urging the strengthening of gender-responsive activities at the country level<sup>12</sup>; a United Nations system-wide action plan (SWAP) for gender equality;<sup>13</sup> and new re-

gional architecture of UN Women,<sup>14</sup> all marking steps to progress the 'gender agenda' at country, regional and central levels.

Momentum continued into 2013 with the United Nations Security Council adopting resolution 2106 on sexual violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations.<sup>15</sup> A set of gender statistics which provide common minimum gender indicators at country level were also endorsed.<sup>16</sup> UNDG is also guiding the application of a gender marker by United Nations agencies.<sup>17</sup> In the lead up to the post-2015 development framework, UN Women is leading efforts to include a transformative goal on gender which, if adopted, will provide a clearer and more comprehensive platform to advance gender results on a systematic basis at global and national levels, including within joint programmes.<sup>18</sup>

### 1.3 United Nations coherence, joint programmes and joint gender programmes

#### Coherence and joint programmes

The United Nations system is also under reform. The drive towards system-wide coherence is enshrined in international agreements<sup>19</sup> and was spearheaded by

9 Ibid. p 85.

10 For brevity, the term 'gender equality' within the evaluation is applied to reflect the development concept of gender equality and empowerment of women (GEEW).

11 United Nations General Assembly resolution 64/289 (2011). Other resolutions include United Nations resolution on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting and on Disabilities and those on Women, Peace and Security and Sexual Violence (including 1325, 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960 and 2106) and the 2013 Commission on the Status of Women Agreed Conclusions.

12 United Nations General Assembly resolution A/RES/67/226, Quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system.

13 Available at <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Media/Stories/en/unswap-brochure.pdf>.

14 See the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System; the United Nations SWAP (<http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Media/Stories/en/unswap-brochure.pdf>); and UNW/2012/10 (2012) which complemented the United Nations country team's (UNCT) performance indicators for GEEW (the 'scorecard') introduced in 2008. The third and final level of the accountability framework relates to development results at the country and normative levels, and is currently being developed.

15 United Nations Security Council resolution 2106. S/RES/2106 (2013).

16 United Nations Statistical Commission: Gender Statistics: Report of the Secretary-General. E/CN.3/2013/10, 19 December 2012.

17 UNDG Gender Equality Marker Guidance Note Final and UNDG Financing for Gender Equality and Tracking Systems Background Note (both under consideration).

18 UN Women (2013), A Stand-Alone Goal on Achieving Gender Equality, Women's Rights and Women's Empowerment: Imperatives and Key Components.

19 A/Res/62/208 Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations.

the launch of the Delivering as One initiative.<sup>20</sup> In 2012, General Assembly resolution A/RES/67/226 encouraged the United Nations system to strengthen joint programming processes at the country level where appropriate.<sup>21</sup> *'More must be done quicker, and better, with less.'*<sup>22</sup>

The drive towards coherence emphasizes joint programming at country level. This is: *'the collective effort through which UN organizations and national partners work together to prepare, implement, monitor and evaluate the activities aimed at effectively and efficiently achieving the Millennium Development Goals and other international commitments'*.<sup>23</sup>

Within joint programming lies the development cooperation modality of joint programmes, to which United Nations Member States are committed.<sup>24</sup> These are: 'a set of activities in a common work plan and related budget, involving two or more UN organizations and (sub) national partners...and [which apply] a joint programme document'.<sup>25</sup> Guidance for joint programmes has been developed by UNDG.<sup>26</sup>

Currently,<sup>27</sup> there is no specific guidance available within the United Nations on when, or under what conditions, the modality of a joint programme should be applied, or how 'where appropriate' might be assessed.<sup>28</sup> But its overarching premise, broadly speaking, is that: *By working collectively, the combined strengths of different agencies can be mobilized to generate improved efficiencies and synergies, leading to greater effectiveness and enhanced development results.*<sup>29</sup>

In essence, a joint programme modality is expected to lead to synergies and achievements that are greater than the sum of the component parts.

### Joint gender programmes

Joint United Nations gender programmes emerged from the convergence of multiple flows: the trajectory of United Nations system-wide reform described above (including joint programming); 2005 aid and development effectiveness reforms; and the drive towards greater effort and emphasis on gender equality and women's empowerment. They have grown in scale and volume since 2006 in particular. The 2007 advent of the MDG-F, set up with a contribution from the Government of Spain to the United Nations system, and one of whose first thematic windows was on gender, provided a further stimulus.<sup>30</sup> UN Women was established in 2010, just as the use of the modality was growing.

As part of the wider body of joint programmes above, joint United Nations gender programmes serve a dual purpose. Firstly, at operational level, they constitute a development cooperation instrument for organizing,

20 See Delivering as One, Report of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance and the Environment (A/61/583).

21 United Nations General Assembly resolution A/RES/67/226 (2012) also stressed 'due regard for national ownership, alignment with national priorities and the comparative advantage of individual United Nations agencies at country level; and also to further simplify and harmonize agency specific programming instruments and processes'.

22 United Nations Economic and Social Council (2012). Quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for the United Nations System, Report of the Secretary-General.

23 UNDG (2003), Guidance Note on Joint Programming.

24 Resolution A/RES/6/226 (2012) endorsed the prioritization of the use of pooled, thematic and joint funding mechanisms.

25 In full: 'A joint programme is a set of activities in a common work plan and related budget, involving two or more UN organizations and (sub-) national partners. The work plan and budget will form part of a joint programme document, which will also detail roles and responsibilities of partners in coordinating and managing the joint activities. The joint programme document is signed by all participating organizations and (sub-) national partners', UNDG (2003) op. cit.

26 UNDG (2003) op. cit.

27 At the time of writing (September 2013), UNDP is undertaking a revision of Joint Programmes Guidelines.

28 An issue also flagged in a UNDG review of the joint programme modality. See Downs, C (2013) Joint Programme Mechanism Review, Consolidated Final Report (UNDG) and Independent Evaluation of Delivering as One (2012).

29 Derived from key sources on joint programmes / joint programming including UNDG guidance. See also MDG-F guidelines (available at [http://www.mdgfund.org/sites/all/themes/custom/undp\\_2/docs/MDGJointImplementationGuidelines.pdf](http://www.mdgfund.org/sites/all/themes/custom/undp_2/docs/MDGJointImplementationGuidelines.pdf)).

30 Seven programmes in the sample were MDG-F programmes including Colombia, Morocco, Namibia, Nicaragua, the State of Palestine, Paraguay and Viet Nam. Nicaragua and the State of Palestine were studied at field level. The MDG-F supported a total of 13 joint gender programmes.

resourcing and delivering gender equality work at country or regional level. Secondly, and more upstream, they serve as country or regional-level mechanisms for implementing the United Nations' wider political trajectory towards coherence, within the field of gender equality. Simply put, the theory – and hope – is that *changed development cooperation practices will lead to changes in lives*.

No external definition for a joint gender programme exists. That applied for this evaluation is: *'A Joint Programme with an explicit objective of empowering women and/or promoting gender equality'*.<sup>31</sup>

## 1.4 The evaluation: approach and methodology

### Conceptual approach

Joint gender programmes are not – or should not be – *ends in themselves*. As a development cooperation modality, they form one of the United Nations' arsenals of tools for supporting or catalysing transformational change.<sup>32</sup>

This evaluation recognises the *intent* of joint gender programmes to be embedded within wider international commitments to support development effectiveness, and improve harmonisation and coherence. As such, they form *operational cornerstones* of system-wide coherence. It does not, however, approach them as a *'presumed good'* for undertaking gender equality efforts in all contexts and situations; under all operating conditions; and at all points in time.

Instead, this report's lens is trained firmly on the country arena and the theatre of development cooperation therein. Within the diverse environments in which joint gender programmes have operated, what *results*

*been delivered* for gender equality? What *'added value'* has the joint modality provided? To what extent have programmes responded to their core premise, with results generated through collective action adding up to *'more than the sum of the parts'*?

### Evaluation process

This evaluation's unit of analysis is: joint United Nations gender programmes which have operated at country level; across a range of thematic areas; and which were designed and implemented after 2006.<sup>33</sup>

Prior to the evaluation a comprehensive portfolio mapping and analysis was undertaken by UN Women which identified 113 joint United Nations gender programmes operating from 2001 to 2010.<sup>34</sup> Of these 113, 80 were eligible for review as part of this evaluation and 24 were selected for in-depth enquiry, alongside other sources of evidence. Criteria for selection included programmes that were: designed and implemented post-2006; single-country; and had a budget of over \$100,000.<sup>35</sup> Table 1 provides a summary of the 24 joint gender programmes analysed and full details are set out in Annex 2. Further details on the sampling process are presented in Annex 3. The total value of the 24 joint gender programmes analysed was \$142 million.

Evaluation stages and sources of evidence involved the following:

- A substantive inception phase involving over 90 interviews with a range of stakeholders engaged in joint gender programmes in countries and at headquarters such as government, civil society (including women's groups)<sup>36</sup> and donor agency representatives;

31 Provided within the Terms of Reference for the evaluation. This definition excludes joint programmes that mainstream gender equality, but do not have it as a main programmatic goal, an early decision of the Management Group for the evaluation.

32 *Transformational change is the process whereby positive development results are achieved and sustained over time by institutionalizing policies, programmes and projects within national strategies... this embodies the concept of institutionally sustained results*. UNDP (2011), Supporting Transformational Change: Case Studies of Sustained and Successful Development Cooperation.

33 All joint gender programmes were also designed before the creation of UN Women.

34 UN Women Evaluation Office (2012), Analytical Overview of Joint UN Gender Programme Portfolio, Final Report. Available from [http://www.unwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/EvaluationReport-JPGPortfolioAnalysis\\_en.pdf](http://www.unwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/EvaluationReport-JPGPortfolioAnalysis_en.pdf).

35 The 24 joint gender programmes selected for detailed enquiry were selected on the basis of geographic and thematic area representation; contextual features; programme type; and lead United Nations agency. Unless otherwise indicated, currency refers to United States dollar.

36 The definition of civil society applied for the evaluation includes non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, women's and girls, men and boys' networks and groups, faith-based groups and other community-focused organizations.

**Table 1: Sample of joint gender programmes analysed**

Regions / countries of operation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asia Pacific (Bangladesh, Nepal, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam).</li> <li>• Europe/Commonwealth of Independent States (Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia<sup>37</sup>).</li> <li>• Central and Latin America and the Caribbean (Colombia, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Uruguay).</li> <li>• Africa (Eritrea, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda and Uganda).</li> <li>• Middle East and North Africa (Iraq, Morocco, the State of Palestine<sup>38</sup> and Tunisia).</li> </ul>
Sampling criteria applied
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional diversity (a balanced spread across regions).</li> <li>• Contextual diversity (five joint gender programmes in Delivering as One / self-starter contexts; and six in fragile situations).</li> <li>• Income status (a spread between low, low-middle and upper middle-income countries).</li> <li>• Thematic area (representative coverage across the thematic areas of governance, economic empowerment, education, eliminating violence against women, health including HIV and AIDS, and integrated programmes, i.e. those with multiple thematic strands).</li> <li>• Scale of funding (three categories of less than \$3 million, \$3-\$5 million and above \$5 million).</li> <li>• United Nations agency partners (programmes with more than four agencies, or four or less).</li> <li>• Funding mechanisms (a mix of pooled, parallel and pass-through modalities.<sup>39</sup></li> </ul>

- A detailed desk review of a broadly representative sample of 24 joint gender programmes involving nearly 50 telephone interviews with a range of programme partners;
- A web-based survey of United Nations agency staff at country level, as well as national and donor partners.
- Field study of five joint gender programmes in Albania, Kenya, Liberia, Nicaragua and Palestine;
- Deepened analysis and partner interviews of a joint gender programme in Nepal;
- Further interviews with donor partners; and
- A wider literature review, including single-agency gender programme, thematic, meta and country programme evaluations by United Nations entities, the MDG-F and United Nations system documents/evaluations.

Methodological approaches employed include: a theory-based and utilization-focused approach; and the use of evaluation criteria defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Cooperation (DAC) Network

37 Referred to hereafter as Macedonia.

38 Referred hereafter to as Palestine.

39 The definitions of the funding modalities can be found on the UNDG website <http://mptf.undp.org/overview/funds/jp>.

on Development Evaluation. ‘Participation and inclusion’ were also applied as criteria, for which an initial definition was developed by the Evaluation Management Group based on guidance by the United Nations Evaluation Group.<sup>40</sup> Annex 3 provides more detail on the methodology applied, including the application of these criteria.<sup>41</sup>

The five joint gender programmes studied at field level were selected for a combination of representativeness (of a universe of 80) and diversity of context, scale, thematic area and status of United Nations system reform.<sup>42</sup> Their main characteristics are set out in Table 2:

40 UNEG (2011), Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation: towards UNEG Guidance. UNEG/G(2011)2.

41 In a synthesis report such as this, mindful of audience and the need for brevity, it is unfeasible to document individual sources of evidence for each finding. These are drawn from the evaluation elements above, and from systematic internal tools developed by the Evaluation Team. They are referenced within the text where possible but not repeated throughout. Full triangulation and validation of evidence has been undertaken (see Annex 3 for more detail).

42 See Annex 3 for a discussion of the full sampling process for field studies, including limitations.

**Table 2: Characteristics of field study programmes**

Location	Key context features and income status	Thematic area	Scale (USD)	Partner United Nations agencies (lead in bold)	Status
Albania	Delivering As One; upper middle-income	Governance	\$4.5m	<b>UN Women</b> , UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF.	One of five concurrent joint programmes
Kenya	Early movement towards United Nations system reform; low-income	Integrated	\$36.7m (initial estimated budget of \$56m) <sup>43</sup>	<b>UN Women</b> , ILO, IOM, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), UNDP, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), WHO	One of four concurrent joint programmes
Liberia	Post-conflict/reconstruction; self-starter for Delivering as One: low-income	Eliminating Violence against Women	\$2.8m	<b>UNFPA</b> , Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNDP, UNICEF, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and World Health Organization (WHO)	One of six concurrent joint programmes
Nicaragua	Political change during programme implementation; lower-middle-income	Economic Empowerment	\$8m	<b>UNFPA</b> , Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), UN Women, United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), UNICEF, World Food Programme (WFP) and WHO	One of seven concurrent joint programmes
Palestine	Fragile; lower middle-income	Governance	\$9m	<b>UNDP</b> , <b>UN Women</b> , International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNFPA and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)	The first joint programme implemented (now one of three)
<b>Additional desk research</b>					
Nepal	Fragile; low-income	Health	\$1.1m	<b>UNFPA</b> , UNICEF, WHO	Mainly implemented through NGO partners

<sup>43</sup> Estimate supplied by country stakeholders. The programme is mainly parallel funded and has faced challenges in determining the actual budget.

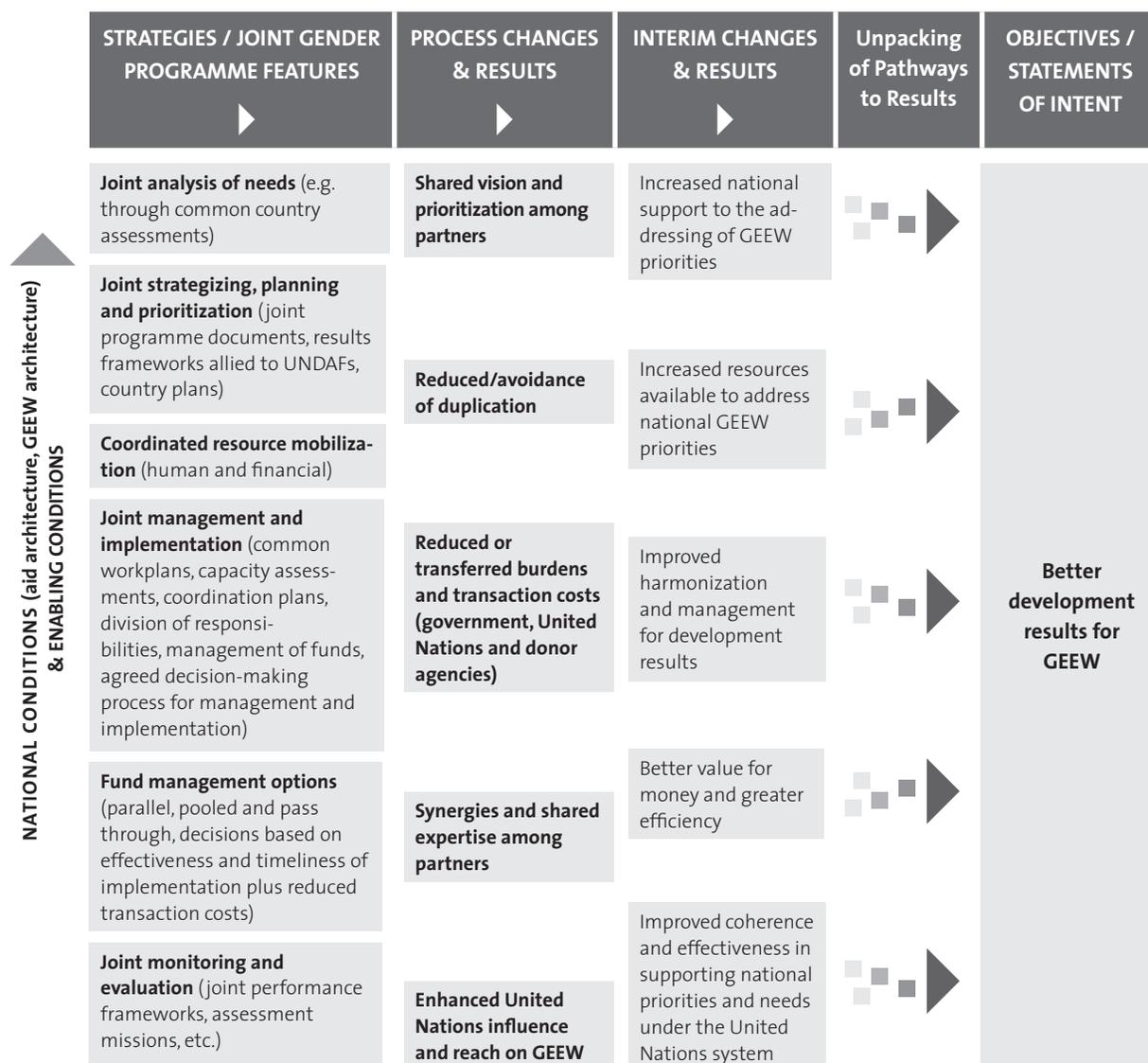
## Theory of Change

Early work in the evaluation set out to apply the basic premise of joint programmes, above, to joint gender programmes specifically. This gave rise to a preliminary theory of change, below, which draws heavily on UNDG guidance.<sup>44</sup>

The preliminary theory of change identified the sorts of strategies a joint gender programme might be expected to apply in its design, and the sorts of process

and interim changes to which these might lead on the journey towards gender equality results. It has been tested and validated by this evaluation. A final consolidated version is presented in Section 3 and in the appendix of supporting materials.

**Figure 1: Preliminary theory of change**



44 UNDG (2003). Op. cit.

## 1.5 Limitations

The evaluation confronted a number of limitations in its execution. These are explained in detail within Annex 3, but two merit early mention. Firstly, very limited results information was available. Many programmes lacked impact level data and few robust evaluations exist. Despite this, a reasonable picture of each joint gender programme was constructed from documentation and interviews to enable analysis against the preliminary theory of change.

Secondly, whilst it was possible to compare joint gender programmes with other types of joint programmes in the five case study countries particularly, the varied timescales, sectors, activities, target areas and partnerships and availability of robust evaluation data limited a full comparative analysis. Comparison with single-agency programmes was limited for the same reasons.

## 1.6 Intent

Finally, while its authors hope that this report provides a useful contribution to the debate on joint gender programmes as a development cooperation modality, providing evidence on what is working, what is not and why, it is important to be clear on its boundaries.

The evaluation focused on country experience of joint United Nations gender programmes, complemented by the perspectives of partner governments, donors, and United Nations staff at headquarter level. It is not an evaluation of joint programming more widely, or of joint programming for gender equality. Nor does it analyse in detail the barriers to coherence, beyond acknowledging their persistence where relevant, since these have been extensively documented elsewhere.<sup>45</sup>

Overall, whilst this evaluation report is geared to use by policymakers, its guiding focus is the intended improvements in the lives of the women and girls, boys and men, which joint gender programmes have sought to create. In fields and factories, markets, offices and houses across the world; sometimes vulnerable and often disempowered; frequently lacking the voice, representation or decision-making power to demand a better future for their families or themselves, they remain the ultimate clients of United Nations gender equality work. It is their interests, needs and priorities which joint gender programmes seek to serve. It is their concerns which this report - despite its focus on a development cooperation modality implemented through the United Nations system - holds as its beacon.

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<sup>45</sup> The UNDG joint programme mechanism review (2013) records the bulk of critiques here; as do the 2012 Delivering as One Independent Evaluation. Also see documents prepared for the 2012 QCPR of the United Nations system.

## 2. FINDINGS

This section of the report presents the evaluation's results according to the following structure:

- Relevance (to national needs, gender priorities and the national operating context)
- Ownership
- Coherence (including synergies and efficiency)
- Accountability
- Delivering sustainable results for gender equality.

Each section is headed by a *summary narrative*, which reflects the main messages of the findings.

### 2.1 Relevance

#### *Summary narrative*

*Relevance to context is central to ensuring that joint gender programmes respond to the needs and priorities of those they intend to serve. Relevance is closely linked to the principle of alignment.*

*The joint gender programmes analysed all prove contextually-relevant, in a broad sense, to national gender needs. All are aligned with stated national strategies or plans; and were endorsed by their host national governments. All have made reference to the normative frameworks whose commitments they intended to serve.*

*At a deeper level, however, the relevance of this first generation of joint gender programmes suffered from lack of a clear line of sight to gender priorities on the ground. Stemming from generally limited or compressed design processes, many programme designs were characterized by insufficient consultation with intended clients and their representatives, and inadequate analytical underpinnings – particularly policy and institutional, political, political economy and fragility analysis. Risk-proofing, especially at strategic and political level, was shallow. These issues have also affected meaningful application of the human rights-based approach to programming.*

*As a result, many joint gender programmes showed misplaced confidence in the capability of the national operating architecture and partners, and the capacity of the United Nations system itself, to absorb a joint*

*modality. Designs were notable for their high levels of ambition to tackle systemic and deep-rooted gender inequalities within short timeframes, with limited resources, and with little or no prior experience of the joint modality. These factors meant that the challenges faced by joint United Nations gender programmes were demanding from the outset and the experience proved a steep learning curve for partners involved.*

#### Full findings

Relevance refers to the extent to which a development cooperation activity is suited to the priorities and policies of the target group, recipient and donor.<sup>46</sup> It is linked to the principle of alignment<sup>47</sup> and underlies the strategy of applying context analysis within the preliminary theory of change.

#### Diverse contexts

The joint gender programmes studied operated in a highly diverse range of contexts, within complex geometries of development cooperation relationships and varying political economies, including:

- Fragile and reconstruction situations (e.g. Iraq, Timor-Leste);
- Countries which have experienced social upheaval and political transition (e.g. Tunisia, Morocco);
- Countries which are still undergoing the democratization process (e.g. Albania);
- Countries which are grappling with an embattled state-building agenda (e.g. Palestine); and
- More stable environments with relatively mature development cooperation architectures (e.g. Uganda, Uruguay).

<sup>46</sup> The OECD DAC criteria for evaluating development assistance are available at <http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/dacriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>.

<sup>47</sup> Under the Paris Declaration, the principle of alignment refers to a) donors basing their support on the partner country's development priorities, policies and strategies ('policy alignment') and b) donors delivering aid as far as possible using country systems for managing development activities ('systems alignment'). <http://www.aideffectiveness.org/The-Paris-Principles-Alignment.html>

Drivers and incentives/enabling factors for the development of joint gender programmes are as diverse as the programmes and their operating contexts. They include:

- Funding – and particularly the 2007 advent of the MDG-F gender window;<sup>48</sup>
- Piloting of the Delivering As One process and subsequent self-starter countries (e.g. Albania, Kenya, Liberia, Tunisia, Uruguay and Viet Nam);
- Stimuli to develop and/or implement national strategies for gender equality (e.g. Eritrea, Liberia, Paraguay, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam); and
- Donor pressure, both to work on gender issues and to progress United Nations reform (e.g. in Bangladesh and Uganda).

The joint gender programmes analysed were the first experience of the new modality, though some (e.g. Liberia and Paraguay) had proceeded into the second phase. Most were designed under severe time and resource constraints and, in some cases, within a matter of weeks.<sup>49</sup>

### Alignment with international commitments on gender (the normative)

All programme designs analysed explicitly cited CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action and the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 commitments, and all explicitly responded to these commitments within their programme strategies. All were therefore conceptually geared towards the normative frameworks whose commitments they were intended to serve.

### Alignment with national gender needs

Similarly, all programme designs analysed recognise and cite broad national gender needs as articulated in national statistics, datasets or strategies. All direct their programme strategies accordingly. No designs

48 Seven programmes in the sample were MDG-F programmes; those in Colombia, Morocco, Namibia, Nicaragua, Palestine and Viet Nam. Two were studied at field level: Nicaragua and Palestine. The MDG-F supported a total of 13 joint gender programmes.

49 For example, the Palestine joint gender programme's concept note was produced over a four week period; by contrast, the Albania design process extended over several months.

lack relevance in this overarching sense; and all were endorsed by their host governments.<sup>50</sup>

### Alignment with national gender priorities

Aligning programme designs with national gender priorities was, however, more challenging. Half of the programmes reviewed had specific thematic areas for intervention, often based on supporting the implementation of a national strategy, such as gender-based violence. The remainder adopted a less prioritized approach, being broad-ranging in nature. Often this breadth responded to thematic areas set out in national strategies and plans and/or continued prior interventions of individual United Nations agencies. Table 3 provides specific examples.

**Table 3: Examples of focused and wider-ranging joint gender programmes**

<b>More focused programmes</b>	Lesotho, Liberia, Macedonia, Nepal, Rwanda
<b>Wide ranging programmes</b>	Kenya, Namibia, Palestine, Uganda, Viet Nam

A feature of design phases has been limited consultations with the women's movement and/or rights holders directly, as the ultimate beneficiaries of the programme.<sup>51</sup> Frequently a function of time constraints, above — and a constraint shared by joint programmes in other thematic areas<sup>52</sup> — this has contributed to the absence, in over half of programmes, of a clear line of sight to gender priorities in the country context, and particularly those identified by women's representatives. This does not hold true for all joint gender programmes — an MDG-F thematic study on gender found design processes of its programmes to be 'complex and comprehensive', involving 'multiple

50 Although in the case of Nicaragua, the initial programme design had to be reworked following the election of a new administration in 2010.

51 Desk study found that, whilst the majority (18 out of 24) of design processes had made efforts to consult with national partners, this had often been shallow or tokenistic; sometimes focusing on one main interest group; and most usually excluding women's representatives or civil society. Programmes in Albania and Viet Nam were exceptions.

52 Analysis of a sample of other joint programmes under the MDG-F, and of single-agency gender programmes, found similar constraints.

partners' and formulated 'in close collaboration' with country governments and civil society organizations.<sup>53</sup> But for those programmes lacking this benefit, the resulting gap has compromised programmes' ability to make informed strategic choices within the wide range of gender needs that many countries face. It has also constrained broad-based ownership, below.

A hallmark of many designs is the breadth and scale of their ambition. Common features include broad-ranging results frameworks with numerous and complex outcomes and little apparent linkage across activities or upwards to results. Resources and time frames are frequently unrealistic,<sup>54</sup> particularly for programmes seeking to tackle deep-rooted and systemic gender inequalities on multiple dimensions. These issues are not unique to joint gender programmes,<sup>55</sup> but their effects on delivering results have been significant, as this report describes.

## Relevance to operating contexts

As a new modality, ensuring that programme designs mesh with national governance and administrative capacity, development cooperation architectures, political trends and absorptive capacities has been a significant challenge for most joint gender programmes. Some of the key gaps arising, and the reasons for these, are set out in Table 4.

For many joint gender programmes, therefore – new modalities in their respective contexts – confidence in

the capability of the national operating architecture and partners, and the capacity of the United Nations system itself, to absorb and manage a joint modality, was largely assumed. In many cases, this has subsequently proven misplaced. This has largely arisen from the lack of a clear analytical base above, including anticipation and assessment of potential risks. There are exceptions – both the Albania and Kenya joint gender programmes adopted a phased approach to help build understanding, capacity and buy in to the joint modality - but even here, the time and effort needed for this was underestimated.

Thus, while joint gender programmes have commonly demonstrated alignment to broad gender needs, their 'fit' with the operating context, and their responsiveness to national gender priorities, has so far proven inadequately broad or deep. On occasion, this has led to questionable relevance:

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53 UNDP/ MDG-F (2012), *The Value added of Joint Gender Programmes*. MDG-F Knowledge Management Initiative for the Gender Window.

54 Evidenced by the fact that 20 out of 24 joint gender programmes analysed required an extension of their timelines. This feature is also reflected in single-agency United Nations programmes. See, for example, UN Women/Arab States Regional Office (2011), Act to end violence against women in Iraq Project 2006-2009 Final Evaluation Report and UNDP Assessment of Development Reports for Bangladesh (2011) and Nepal (2012).

55 Review of single-agency and MDG-F analysis of a range of joint programmes in other thematic areas found that the ambitious nature of designs was a common feature. For example MDG-F (April 2013 draft paper) Translating the Global MDGs Agenda into National Action: the MDG Achievement Fund at work intersectorality, national ownership and "One UN" and MDG-F Thematic Study Papers under different windows

**Table 4: Analytical gaps**

Gaps	Explanation
<b>Analyses of the conduciveness and maturity of the operating context</b>	Commonly not conducted. Many assumptions made <sup>56</sup> about ways of working by United Nations and national partners. Few capacity analyses undertaken of the policy/institutional environment for joint gender programmes, including United Nations and national partners' capacity development needs and ability to work within a joint modality on gender.
<b>Political and political economy analyses<sup>57</sup></b>	Commonly lacking, despite the potentially significant effects of political emphasizes and trajectories on implementation. The power relationships, interests and incentives, or the resistances which underlie gender issues in the country, and within which programmes will operate, are not generally fully explored. <sup>58</sup>
<b>Conflict/fragility screening/ use of a state-building lens<sup>59</sup></b>	Six programmes in the sample operated in these types of environments. Only the Iraq programme was comprehensively conflict-screened, with other designs not reflecting the use of internationally-accepted principles of good practice in fragile situations. <sup>60</sup> A state-building lens was not applied to all programmes operating in fragile, reconstruction or democratizing contexts such as Albania, Liberia, Palestine or Timor-Leste.
<b>Risk analysis</b>	Not applied beyond tactical and operational-level risks and not actively tracked through the programme cycle. Risks surrounding the capacity of national partners to implement programme activities, or to manage any financing – strategic, political and governance risks – commonly inadequately analysed. No joint risk assessments conducted. Where identified, some risks were not necessarily translated into programme design and mitigation strategies.

**Case study example:** *In Palestine, a near two-year gap from design to implementation of the joint gender programme saw the election of the Hamas governing body in Gaza, consequent political paralysis, outbreaks of conflict, and the development of an acute humanitarian*

*situation. The joint gender programme was not, however, comprehensively redesigned to fit the new reality.<sup>61</sup>*

### Human rights-based approaches

All of the joint gender programmes studied explicitly referred to CEDAW and human rights frameworks. However, the application of the human rights-based approach to programming within designs has been patchy. Inadequate identification of specific rights holder groups, and limited disaggregation of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups within categories of programme beneficiaries, arising from the lack of meaningful consultation, above, has compromised the principle of inclusion. Whilst identifying the relevant human rights-based instruments for the programme, few designs systematically connected these to implementation or created synergistic connections to operations.<sup>62</sup> Very few designs contained an analysis of, or made explicit, the human rights issues pertinent to the joint gender programme. An exception was the programme in Iraq, where the Human Rights Office of

56 See Appendix of Supporting Materials

57 'Political economy analysis is concerned with the interaction of political and economic processes in a society: the distribution of power and wealth between different groups and individuals, and the processes that create, sustain and transform these relationships over time.' See <http://www.oecd.org/dac/governance/politiceconomy>. See also Collinson, (2003) Power, Livelihoods and Conflict: Case Studies in Political Economy Analysis for Humanitarian Action, Humanitarian Policy Group Report 13, Overseas Development Institute.

58 See <http://www.gsdc.org/docs/open/PO58.pdf>.

59 State-building is defined as: 'purposeful action to develop the capacity, institutions and legitimacy of the state in relation to an effective political process for negotiating the mutual demands between state and societal groups'. OECD DAC (2009) Concepts and Dilemmas of Statebuilding in Fragile Situations; From Fragility to Resilience. See also the New Deal on building Peaceful States <http://www.newdeal4peace.org/focus/>

60 OECD DAC Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States <http://www.oecd.org/dac/incaf/38368714.pdf>.

61 Example from Palestine case study.

62 Desk review found the majority of joint gender programmes lacked this forward connection.

the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq provided technical guidance on the integration of explicit strategies to address human rights.

Nonetheless, the thematic focus of many joint gender programmes meant that addressing violations of women's rights, such as gender-based violence (GBV), was sought through improving laws and policies and/or strengthening responses to support victims and survivors of such violence.<sup>63</sup> Other rights-focused themes included women's economic, social and political empowerment, and sexual and reproductive rights (as seen in Albania, Ethiopia, Liberia, Macedonia, Nepal and Nicaragua). Yet few programmes included work with men and boys, which is essential in the negotiations for women's rights and gender equality.

In those cases where the application of a human-rights based approach has been more comprehensive and sustained, the main contributing factor was the programmes' ability to leverage other resources available, such as a human rights adviser within the United Nations in Albania and Iraq. However, gaps in the requisite knowledge and skills within United Nations agencies and their partners' systems to operationalize this approach were commonly cited as reasons for its absence.<sup>64</sup>

## 2.2 Ownership

### Summary narrative

*Ownership, as a development effectiveness principle is critical to generating sustainable momentum for change on gender equality. Normative commitments provide host governments and civil society with an especially strong rationale for the ownership of joint gender programmes. Ownership arises mainly from domestic political drivers and incentives, however, it can be facilitated but not externally-generated by the United Nations or any development cooperation modality.*

*The majority of the joint gender programmes reviewed worked hard to integrate strategies for ownership. Many were successful, with aspects of programmes taken over*

63 Eleven of the 13 MDG-F joint programmes in the gender thematic window tackled GBV.

64 Identified in all five case studies and acknowledged as a gap also by some donor agency representatives for their own organizations.

*or assimilated by government; and gender, as a result of the joint programme, now higher on the political and policy agenda, and/or showing a positive upwards trajectory (despite limited changes to financial resourcing).*

*However, these substantial gains were not underpinned by sound analysis or a clear understanding of what ownership meant in the context, and its broad-based nature as a development effectiveness principle. Distraction from the issue by the demands of implementing a new modality – and a de facto approach to the joint gender programme as an end in itself – also weakened its application.*

*Capacity development efforts were individually significant within many joint gender programmes. Yet these were commonly not underpinned by either strong capacity analysis or the development of a wider strategic approach – a missed opportunity of the joint modality. Capacity development efforts have also lacked framing within the surrounding wider principle of ownership.*

### Full findings

The principle of ownership is key to generating sustainable momentum for change on gender equality. Its generation is a key expected 'process change' reflected in the final theory of change for joint gender programmes. In their ratification of the CEDAW and Beijing normative frameworks, all countries hosting joint gender programmes have a strong rationale for their ownership.

Ownership as a development effectiveness principle is broad-based.<sup>65</sup> It is also a mainly internal dynamic arising from domestic political drivers and incentives, bound up in localized political economy features.<sup>66</sup> Ownership is particularly challenging where development issues are cross-cutting and not readily located within one pillar of the national governance structure. This is especially the case for gender, which is deeply

65 Commitments on ownership include: 'Partner countries exercise leadership in developing and implementing their national development strategies through broad consultative processes, and translate them into prioritised, results-oriented operational programmes; and Donors respect partner country leadership and help strengthen their capacity to exercise it' (<http://www.aideffectiveness.org/The-Paris-Principles-Ownership.html>).

66 See Booth, D (2011), *Aid effectiveness: Bringing ownership (and politics) back in*. Overseas Development Institute Working Paper 336.

bound up in sociocultural norms and dynamics, and where the national architecture and machinery for gender may suffer from capacity constraints. Ownership of the gender agenda is not something which external actors, such as the United Nations, and certainly not a development cooperation modality such as a joint gender programme, can artificially stimulate, though they can support it through the application of appropriate strategies, as the final theory of change reflects.

Some dimensions of ownership, identified in the literature, which are relevant to gender broadly, and joint gender programmes specifically, include:

- Resources (human, including technical and financial);
- Mutual accountability frameworks;
- Partnerships (multi-stakeholder);
- Broad-based policy and strategy;
- High-level political traction and championships; and
- Collective dialogue and discourse around gender.

## National environments for ownership

Countries where some or all of these elements are present within the operating architecture arguably provide a more 'conducive' basis for the implementation of joint gender programmes. Yet much depends on the capacity of national structures to absorb and manage a joint programme. A programme in Liberia provides an example:

**Case study example:** *In Liberia, case study research found ownership of the 'gender agenda' to be relatively high, reflected in a comparatively strong policy framework, political leadership and clear strategies. But as a reconstruction context, the operating challenges for the joint gender programme included weak national capacity for implementation; extreme resource limitations; a lack of mature civil society; and a lack of gender embedded within national accountability frameworks.*

## Understanding of ownership

The evaluation finds a general lack of clarity or understanding of what ownership of a gender programme actually means in-context, reflected in unclear or imprecise statements in programme designs and/or its interpretation as alignment to a national gender policy

or strategy. None of the programme designs analysed contain explicit and overarching strategies which are broad-based; reflect a core role for women's representatives; and which were implemented from the outset.

## Partnerships for ownership

Even in the absence of clear statements of ownership, however, most joint gender programmes have recognized its importance and worked in partnership with national stakeholders for its stimulation:

- Governments are commonly the lead programme partner, with work tending to be centred on a core Ministry partner (commonly the Ministry of Gender or similar). Fourteen of the 24 joint gender programmes reviewed in the desk study showed evidence of having expanded to other Ministries but there was evidence of some missed opportunities to generate broader cross-government engagement on gender (e.g. in Albania, Nicaragua and Palestine);
- Civil society, including women's organizations, were commonly seen as providing implementing, rather than strategic, partnership which was marked by lesser presence in programme management and governance structures. This has sometimes been a function of limited capacity or nascent status (e.g. Eritrea and Liberia) but overall, civil society engagement, particularly with women's representatives, has thus far been shallow and inconsistent, during both design and implementation of joint gender programmes; and <sup>67</sup>
- The private sector have been only intermittently engaged in programme components, e.g. through their involvement in micro-finance activities in Palestine and in women's economic empowerment and GBV outputs in Kenya.

## Strategies for ownership

Over half the joint programmes analysed contain strategies for addressing at least some dimensions of ownership:

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<sup>67</sup> In Uganda, for example, women's organizations were invited to participate in planning meetings but the United Nations was slow and 'reluctant' to include them as fund beneficiaries (desk study). Conversely, they were strongly engaged in the Albania and Timor-Leste programmes.

**Table 5: Strategies for ownership**

<b>Integration within national strategies/plans</b>	Occurred in all the joint gender programmes analysed <sup>68</sup> both during implementation and as a means for supporting sustainability.
<b>Supporting national strategies/ plan implementation</b>	Over half of programmes reviewed were geared to this. In all cases, plans were based on consultation with rights holders and/or their representatives, though this had largely been assumed by the United Nations rather than tested, e.g. Albania, Colombia, Kenya, Liberia, Palestine, Thailand and Uruguay.
<b>Raising gender on the policy and political agenda</b>	Political traction for gender has been generated in some programmes (e.g. Albania, Kenya, Liberia and Rwanda) through political and financial endorsement of a policy document/ lobbying (though only reflected in financial resourcing to a limited degree).
<b>Supporting the institutional machinery for gender</b>	A major focus of at least 16 of the 24 programmes. In some cases, housing the coordination function within government provided a direct link into, and opportunities for capacity development within, these organs. <sup>69</sup>
<b>Supporting accountability frameworks for gender</b>	Embedding of gender into national or local development performance frameworks has supported the enabling environment for gender. Tools such as gender scorecards, as applied in Albania, have been valuable here.
<b>Strengthening the demand side for gender</b>	Efforts to build networks, federations and partnerships among groups working on gender issues as part of building up the demand side for gender-sensitive reforms are evident - but not yet a systematic approach (e.g. Colombia, Kenya, Macedonia, Morocco, Namibia, Paraguay and Uganda).
<b>Financing for gender issues</b>	National financial resource allocations increased in at least 8 of the 24 programmes (i.e. Eritrea, Liberia, Macedonia, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Uganda, Uruguay and Viet Nam) applied both as a goal within programme design, and as an indicator of national commitment to gender.
<b>Including national partners on governance structures</b>	Participation evident in all programmes, sometimes as a funder requirement (e.g. MDG-F programme guidelines), although mainly weighted towards national government representation and influenced by variable performance (including regularity of meetings), of these committees.

Aligning with and providing support for national strategies on gender equality has ensured that the United Nations is both supporting ownership of the policy agenda, and legitimizing gender as a development

issue in its own right, through the intergovernmental endorsement United Nations engagement provides. There are exceptions, mainly grounded in specific political economy dynamics.<sup>70</sup> But overall, such strategies have provided the United Nations with a sound basis (and usually an accompanying institutional mechanism) for grounding joint gender programmes in nationally-owned processes.

68 Desk study analysis identified a number of ways in which this integration had occurred, which included: integration of the project strategy into national workplans (e.g. programmes in Bangladesh, Lesotho, Macedonia and Viet Nam); embedding project activities or structures into government ones (e.g. programmes in Morocco, Liberia, Paraguay) or a parastatal organization (e.g. Eritrea); dialogue to develop the national gender policy includes the agencies and staff participating in the joint gender programme (e.g. Colombia); taking forward and scaling up project components (e.g. Rwanda).

69 Programmes in Liberia and Palestine are examples (though case study research cited doubts about the location of the coordination unit in Liberia), thus indicating the importance of context-specific analysis on the appropriateness of such a measure

70 In Nicaragua, CSOs were not considered legitimate representatives of the women's movement by the incoming administration in 2010. The programme design was therefore adapted with municipalities as the key implementing partners, and was not redesigned to address systemic weaknesses such as the exclusion of women's groups or some of the more controversial areas around gender violence. This raised the difficult issue of United Nations supporting government-owned, as opposed to nationally-owned, priorities for gender equality.

## Barriers to ownership

Some barriers to ownership remain, however. These have been identified as follows:

1. A narrow understanding of ownership predominates, with the emphasis on duty-bearer inclusion, and lesser priority to civil society or women's representatives;
2. Opportunities for broadening the national dialogue around gender issues have occurred in a few cases only (e.g. Albania, Kenya and Uganda), limiting the possibilities for building and extending ownership to new partners. In many cases this was linked to the lack of a shared vision or identity for the joint gender programme described above and reflected in the theory of change; and
3. A pervasive sense among national stakeholders – government and civil society – that resources, and therefore decision-making power, rest in the hands of the United Nations, as identified in all five field studies.

Critically, a focus on the joint gender programme as an 'end in itself,' rather than as a vehicle for stimulating a shared vision for, and broad-based national ownership of, the 'gender agenda' has also undermined the application of strategies for ownership. This is where a joint gender programme might be expected to create a more conducive environment for national ownership, but the difference with single-agency programmes here remains unproven.

## Capacity development for ownership

Improving capacity, expertise and knowledge of gender issues is a foundation for generating ownership. For this reason, they also constitute a key process change in the preliminary theory of change for joint gender programmes.

All the 24 programme designs reviewed contain at least some strategies for capacity development<sup>71</sup> and 18 prioritize it.<sup>72</sup> Capacity development is reflected in the final theory of change below, therefore. Training and training of trainers was a preferred approach in many cases. Strengthening networks and accountability for gender equality and empowerment of women were less utilised approaches. There appears a trend of growing inclusiveness in approaches to capacity development of national partners, particularly where weaknesses have been learned from, and/or programmes have moved into a second phase.<sup>73</sup>

Such strategies are however commonly individualized and fragmented in nature. Efforts have often been planned in isolation, even across outputs of one joint gender programme, meaning that opportunities for capacity building at wider national and institutional levels have been overtaken by a focus on developing the capacity of individuals or institutions, a focus of particular output areas.<sup>74</sup> Results are often focused on discrete activities, rather than their consequent intended effects for improving the capabilities of the national partnership/agenda, and its ability to stimulate, and follow through, momentum for change.

In none of the joint gender programmes reviewed were capacity development efforts framed as part of a wider, strategic and prioritized strategy which analysed and addressed national capacity gaps for gender equality efforts, explicitly geared to create ownership. Yet capacity enhancement of institutions and

71 Capacity development as defined in the United Nations is 'the process through which individuals, organisations, and societies obtain, strengthen, and maintain the capabilities to set and achieve their own development objectives over time' (UNDP (2009) Primer for Capacity Development. UNDP has identified a five-step capacity development cycle, centred on four core issues of capacity development: institutional arrangements, leadership, knowledge and accountability. These core issues have been used to inform analysis. Available at: [http://www.undp.org/content/dam/aplaws/publication/en/publications/capacity-development/capacity-development-a-undp-primer/CDG\\_PrimerReport\\_final\\_web.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/aplaws/publication/en/publications/capacity-development/capacity-development-a-undp-primer/CDG_PrimerReport_final_web.pdf).

72 Desk study found that extensive efforts had been made in 18 of the 24 programmes reviewed.

73 Such as within programmes in Liberia, Namibia, Nicaragua and Rwanda.

74 This point was made, for example, in the Kenya programme Mid-Term Evaluation (February 2012).

partnerships (rather than of individuals or small units) is a core foundation of ownership, particularly in fragile or resource-poor environments. It is especially key to gender, given the cross-cutting nature of the issue, and often under-resourced national machinery.

The emphasis of capacity development intentions within sample programmes also remained mainly on the side of duty-bearers, particularly where programmes supported the implementation of a national thematic gender strategy or plan. For the majority of programmes, efforts with civil society focused on developing the capacity to deliver programme components (in line with their characterization as implementing partners).<sup>75</sup>

## 2.3 Coherence, synergies and efficiency

### Summary narrative

*Coherence is central to the basic premise of joint programmes generally and joint gender programmes specifically. It is bound up with effects on synergies and efficiency and is core to the theory of change.*

*Where the surrounding architecture of United Nations systems reform has been relatively mature, such as in Delivering as One contexts, joint gender programmes have benefited from both incentives and supportive external frameworks for coordination. The value of an extended design process and associated common visioning, have been clearly demonstrated. Some promising efforts at coherence are in evidence.*

*For many joint gender programmes, however – first experiences with the modality – both internal and external coherence have presented challenges. Under-investment in the design process – the cornerstone of operational coherence – in particular has compromised the implementation of harmonized approaches.*

*Programmes were not always formed as part of a joint programming approach within the United Nations or*

*the wider development partnership – with important effects on burdens for national partners. The conceptual understanding of the joint modality, and its implications for day-to-day coordination, was often inadequate. Capacity for internal coherence has been compromised by the weak analytical basis, above, and the role of UN Women often unclear. With some exceptions, commitment to the ‘spirit of jointness’ has been piecemeal, and often unprioritized. These challenges reflect the steep learning curve that programmes have undergone.*

*Yet systemic barriers – also a key determinant of coherence at operational level – have also formed powerful deterrents. They have been neither explicitly recognized nor adequately targeted by headquarters. Whilst synergies – a key part of the premise for joint gender programmes – have improved, efficiency has not overall, although there is some evidence of burden transfer from national to United Nations partners.*

*Finally, the evaluation has identified a limited but significant set of ‘models’ of joint gender programmes which reflect the different shapes and forms of coherence encountered. These may prove useful to planners and designers of future such programmes.*

### Full findings

Coherence, synergies and efficiency (as defined in the glossary in Annex 5) are interlinked with the core premise for a joint modality, as the preliminary theory of change reflects. The United Nations-wide trajectory for coherence, whose political and strategic dimensions play out in joint programme modalities on the ground, are made explicit in the 2006 System-Wide Policy for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment which stated that:

*‘Notwithstanding the specific mandates of United Nations entities, the overall system must reinforce common goals and consistent working methods in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. This is especially important at the country level in order to allow Member States to interact with a harmonious United Nations team’<sup>76</sup>*

75 Exceptions are programmes in Macedonia, Morocco, Namibia, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Timor-Leste and Uganda where intentions were expressed (and efforts made) to develop the networking and advocacy capacities of civil society groups working on gender issues.

76 United Nations System Wide Policy on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment. CEB/2/2006.

To reiterate: the basic premise of joint programmes – and by extension, joint gender programmes - is that *by working collectively, the combined strengths of different agencies can be mobilized to generate improved efficiencies and synergies [leading to greater effectiveness and enhanced development results]*. This is to the core thesis extrapolated in the theory of change above; and reflected in its integral components such as joint analyses, design frameworks, management and implementation frameworks and accountability frameworks. Many issues raised here are relevant to joint programmes in other thematic areas also.

## Coherence

### External coherence (joint programming for gender equality)

Since all development programmes operate within wider national constellations of development cooperation arrangements, examining joint gender programmes in isolation is misleading. Their situating and understanding in relation to other gender equality development efforts in the country is key, particularly since several countries of operation have seen multiple joint gender programmes operating concurrently.<sup>77</sup>

Where United Nations architectures are more mature in their harmonization, such as those in Albania and Viet Nam, incentives, frameworks and guidance have been available for joint gender programmes to strategize around. Here, joint gender programmes were usefully positioned as part of the wider United Nations development effort within the country, often funded through One United Nations coherence funds or similar, and on occasion identified as flagships.<sup>78</sup>

Conversely, the absence of these frameworks has seen joint gender programmes sometimes projectised or siloed; positioned as multiple ‘packages’ of support

which lacked clear lateral coherence or clarity on how gender equality results would be collectively achieved. This has placed significant burdens on partner governments. In such settings, United Nations efforts at joint gender programming have fallen short of expectations and intent.

In many of the operating contexts analysed, the national gender architecture and operating context is fragmented, poorly resourced and lacking strong leadership.<sup>79</sup> The gender equality ‘theme’ may face more challenges than development issues such as health or education in this respect, but the generally limited analysis of the operating context, described above, has also excluded analysis of concurrent gender initiatives. Whilst some joint gender programmes (e.g. Albania, Kenya and Viet Nam) were explicitly designed and funded to bring a degree of coherence to United Nations gender work in-country, in other cases, the weak analytical base has led to a multiplicity of gender interventions, with much fragmentation and little coherence.<sup>80</sup>

### Internal coherence

For the purpose of this evaluation, internal coherence refers to the extent to which internal design and implementation features of the programme reflect a joint approach. The degree of internal coherence is highly varied across joint gender programmes.

### Understanding of coherence

The evaluation has found an almost universally limited conceptual understanding, by all partners, of the harmonized approaches which the joint modality implies (with the exception of the Uganda programme which benefited from significant prior work and thinking on harmonization). Yet harmonized approaches are crucial if a joint gender programme is to realize more than the sum of its parts. Without it, the implications for operational coordination could not be fully grasped by partners, nor could new ways of working be devised.

77 Examples are Rwanda (nine joint gender programmes), Nepal (two joint gender programmes) and Liberia (two joint gender programmes). Some single-agency gender programmes have also been in operation though the evaluation has not been able to systematically assess these.

78 See for example the programmes in Albania, Iraq and Uruguay. Delivering as One was also not a solution, however, with desk and case study research identifying challenges and barriers related to harmonization in comparable environments which individual programmes were unable to surmount.

79 Evaluative evidence on the 24 joint gender programmes assessed is clear on these limitations. See for example United Nations Rwanda (2012) *Delivering as One Annual Report 2011*.

80 Evidence from Rwanda, Liberia and Nepal among others is clear on this point.

## Drivers for coherence

The following drivers for coherence, understood as a trajectory, were identified:

**Figure 2: Drivers for coherence**



## Designing for coherence

Although the exception rather than the rule, the value of an extended design phase in enhancing coherence is clearly shown in those joint gender programmes benefiting from it, as shown in programmes in Albania, Iraq, Uganda and Viet Nam. The extended design phase period allowed for a common visioning process, sharing of priorities, approaches and experience - as well as the airing of differences among partners. Programmes which have moved into a second phase have noticeably built in extended design as a key lesson learned, such as in Liberia and Paraguay.

In tangible terms, such joint gender programmes reflected more robust and coherent designs; unified programme frameworks and a clearer division of labour; the use of joint annual work planning processes; more coordinated approaches to geographical coverage; and collective implementation of specific initiatives. Joint gender programmes which also included coherence as a field for accountability (i.e. as an outcome area in programme designs) also demonstrated stronger coordination at the implementation stage (e.g. programmes in Albania and Kenya).<sup>81</sup>

The majority of programme designs, however - lacking the luxury of time for design - present little maturity

in coherence terms. Twenty of the 24 programmes reviewed contained outputs and (sometimes) outcome areas which were neither fully unified nor geared to the achievement of overarching results. Some comprised an aggregation of activities, lacking any vision as to how the joint modality would add value or lead to enhanced results. Other than programmes supported by the MDG-F, and in common with other joint programmes, limited or zero guidance was available from headquarters on the new modality.

Although joint resource mobilization is, in theory, an essential component of joint gender programmes, in practice it has proven challenging. Resource shortfalls and unclear lines of responsibility were evident in some programmes.<sup>82</sup> This is not unique to joint gender programmes but does reflect the lack of lead-in time devoted to developing a clear conceptual understanding of the implications and requirements of the joint modality.

Lead agency choice has affected coherence in two ways.<sup>83</sup> Firstly, where agencies possess the capacity and experience for driving forwards internal coherence, case study programmes have shown positive results here, as in Albania. Secondly, where the lead agency shows the commitment to coherence – through the

<sup>81</sup> Reflected in levels of human and financial investment in coordination.

<sup>82</sup> Most prominently reflected in Kenya case study research, but also arising in interviews for desk study.

<sup>83</sup> Evidence is only available from the five case studies here.

willingness to invest in coordination resources, and to assume leadership for it – similarly positive results have arisen, as in Kenya. Where both of these were lacking – as is the case for the majority of programmes reviewed – coherence has been challenging.

### **Building capacity for coherence**

As explained in Section 2.2, analysis of United Nations and partner agencies' capacity for the application of the joint modality has been commonly lacking. The engagement of Gender Theme Groups in building capacity for coherence has also been varied, reflecting their own status and maturity within United Nations system reform. In some joint programmes, they played a strong role in supporting coherence particularly where providing an accountability function. In others, they remained either information recipients or distanced from the joint gender programme. In some instances, e.g. Kenya, the Gender Theme Group was active in establishing the joint gender programme but was then dissolved or became inactive, despite the wider capacity requirements of mainstreaming gender equality in all United Nations programmes, which cannot be pursued by the joint gender programme structures alone.

United Nations agencies' comparative advantage has most usually been deployed as applying prior areas of experience (a legacy rationale), as opposed to a strategic consideration of how to best maximize results.<sup>84</sup> The technical gender capacity of some United Nations entities was also questioned by some host government interlocutors, who felt that staff allocated to joint gender programmes were inexperienced and excessively junior. Case study research universally found staff time allocations to joint gender programmes to be unrealistic for the realization of ambitious designs. The issue has been compounded by significant turnover and some gaps in assigned responsibilities for joint gender programmes within participating United Nations agencies.

Where high-level gender expertise has been available, a lack of clarity has persisted around how this would

84 This contrasts with bilateral donor experience in establishing Joint Assistance Strategies, where one of the most effective instruments for coherence is an agreed division of labour, based on comparative advantage, with individual donors limiting their sectors of engagement, sometimes even supporting silent partnerships. See for example the Joint Evaluation of Joint Assistance Strategy, Zambia (2010).

be deployed. The role of UN Women at country level, which now holds the coordinating mandate for gender across the United Nations system, has remained unclarified, even after its formation in 2010.<sup>85</sup> Mixed expectations on the value it can 'bring to the table', and the absence of an agreed United Nations country team (UNCT) position on its role, have been compounded by its still varied skills, capabilities and experience at country level.<sup>86</sup> UN Women's Strategic Plan 2014-2017 acknowledges this need 'for more consistent quality in the entity's coordination role at the country level'.<sup>87</sup>

***Case study example:** In Albania, the UN Women-hosted coordination function of the joint gender programme was considered a critical function in enhancing coherence, and supporting the delivery of results. However, UN Women's technical input to programme activities depended largely on the extent to which other United Nations agencies were open to their involvement.*

### **Commitment to coherence**

A less tangible, but still influential, factor was United Nations partner entity commitment to coherence. Country programme and thematic evaluations of United Nations agencies, with the exception of some UN Women evaluations, contain little or no recognition of entity participation in a joint gender programme, calling into question their programmatic coherence on gender equality.<sup>88</sup> Within many joint gender programmes, there is evidence of continued competition and the prioritization of 'guarding territory', often justified as needing to

85 Although most programme design took place before UN Women was created, the role of its predecessor, UNIFEM, in providing technical expertise on gender was also unclear, as evidence from Albania and Kenya, and particularly Palestine, makes clear. Few joint gender programme evaluations, single United Nations agency gender evaluations or country programme evaluations addressed gender equality, or discussed or analysed UN Women's role.

86 UN Women (2013), Report on the evaluation function of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2012 highlights both positive experiences and persistent challenges for the entity in terms of coordination among UN partners, including in joint programmes. Annual Session 2013 UNW/2013/4\*..

87 UN Women Executive Board presentation of the Strategic Plan to the second session September 2013 UNW/2013/6\*.

88 The country programme and single-agency gender programme evaluations reviewed are available in Annex 10.

provide visibility to donor funds received;<sup>89</sup> or disagreements over roles in the joint gender programme, as in Palestine.

Conversely, in a very few programmes - notably those with more mature designs, a supportive surrounding architecture, e.g. Delivering as One, and a strong coordination function, such as in Albania, a 'spirit of co-operation' has prevailed. This has had significant effects in terms of staff motivation, messaging around the joint gender programme, and conveying the principle of coherence to partners. Where this has occurred, it has helped strengthen the spirit and culture for coherence across participating United Nations agencies<sup>90</sup>

### Barriers to coherence

The absence or only shallow presence of the factors above have been the main barriers to coherence – without them, many programmes found it challenging to develop or sustain sufficient internal 'push' for coordination. Four other barriers identified are the breadth of agency inclusion; management arrangements; the lack of shared monitoring, reporting or lesson learning systems; and systemic barriers (see Table 6).

In common with other assessments,<sup>91</sup> this evaluation has found that systemic barriers to harmonize operations in the United Nations have seriously impeded coherence. The application of individual procedures determined at headquarters, particularly in procurement, has reinforced individual entity incentives that militate against the joint spirit and management of joint gender programmes. Parallel and pass-through financial mechanisms (applied in the majority of programmes)<sup>92</sup> have been complex and onerous,

causing delays and high administrative burdens for partners. These barriers have generated resentment from national stakeholders; undermined programme ownership; compromised the reputation of the United Nations; and restricted the willingness of governments to cooperate.

Field study research also found several examples<sup>93</sup> of the 'vision for results' – the primary beacon of women and men, boys and girls, as the main clients of joint gender programmes – being obscured for staff by the energy and effort required to negotiate the complex bureaucracy in which their daily work was entangled. Anecdotal evidence across case studies suggested that United Nations staffs' own line of sight to women and men on the ground has been, for many, obscured by clouds of procedures and bureaucracy.

In terms of entity inclusion, the evaluation finds the tensions of balancing inclusion with efficiency to be shown into sharp relief by joint gender programmes. The challenge of establishing coherence is magnified with increasing numbers of participating organizations, whether United Nations system or national partners.

### Synergies

The evidence finds that joint gender programmes have, by and large, helped to intensify and expand the dialogue on gender equality in all the countries analysed. This has been a significant aspect of value-added of the joint modality and is accordingly reflected in the theory of change.

Specifically, synergies in joint gender programmes have improved:

1. Between the United Nations and its development partners, particularly those engaged at programmatic level, such as donors;
2. Between the United Nations and its national partners (though the depth and breadth of this varies, and avenues are far less developed with civil society and women's groups than with governments); and

89 The Palestine case study research provided the clearest example here although there was also evidence available in the Kenya and Nicaragua case studies and interview data for the desk study.

90 For example, the consensus reached at the launch of the United Nations Secretary-General's Campaign to End Violence Against Women (UNiTE) chapter in Kenya that the joint programme logo rather than 14 individual United Nations logos would be used on materials.

91 Downs (2013), *op.cit.* *United Nations General Assembly Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review 2012 surveys and papers.*

92 Five joint gender programmes used parallel funding only; ten used pass-through only; and three used pooled only (Albania, Iraq and Uruguay). The remainder applied a combination. See sample of programmes reviewed in Annex 2.

93 This issue was raised repeatedly by respondents in interviews for case study research.

**Table 6: Barriers to internal coherence**

<p><b>Breadth of agency inclusion and coverage</b></p>	<p>In <b>larger programmes</b>, coherence was more challenging, as entities grappled with differences, tensions, competition and challenges in finding common ground. This absorbed time and energy during implementation and hindered a focus on results.<sup>94</sup></p>
<p><b>Management arrangements</b></p>	<p>These include <b>programme decision-making; the role of decision makers; information-sharing; and staffing and staff management</b>. Key issues were:<sup>95</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The multiplicity of partners compromised the efficiency and effectiveness of decision-making (e.g. in Kenya and Viet Nam);</li> <li>• Reporting lines have not always been clear, particularly where the coordination function was appointed by one particular entity;</li> <li>• Staffing levels in all five case study locations were low for complex and ambitious programmes;<sup>96</sup></li> <li>• The lack of clear authority and varying levels of engagement by Resident Coordinators and UNCTs directly affected effectiveness, ownership and synergies;<sup>97</sup> and</li> <li>• A lack of clarity around the leadership of the lead/coordinating agency delayed decision-making in some cases (e.g. Liberia and Palestine).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Limited shared monitoring, reporting and lesson learning strategies</b></p>	<p>Comprehensive <b>shared measurement and monitoring strategies</b> have been the exception rather than the rule, with a central coordinator mainly collating and forwarding individual entity reports. Some entities/ individuals were unwilling to 'report twice'.<sup>98</sup> This is linked to externalised sites of accountability, below. <b>Prioritized outcomes, indicators and baselines</b> against which to measure quality and effectiveness of coordination and overall coherence have been mainly lacking. With some exceptions, limited mechanisms for <b>knowledge-sharing or lesson learning</b> have been developed across joint programmes in a country or region.<sup>99</sup></p>
<p><b>Systemic barriers</b></p>	<p>The <b>continued presence of non-harmonized United Nations procedures</b> has constrained coherence, an area where headquarters would be expected to support change. Such barriers have been extensively documented elsewhere.<sup>100</sup> Change, to an extent, is underway,<sup>101</sup> but the gaps between conceptual and operational coherence remain stark.</p>

3. Between and among national partners (major gains here have been the resourcing of gender ministries, providing them with increased visibility and inspiring more confidence in and demand for their support from other national stakeholders).

Within the national-level United Nations system itself, all the joint gender programmes analysed – even those

which have struggled with operational coherence – have led to tangibly stronger relationships and deeper mutual understanding. The many spin-off initiatives, dialogues and partnerships emerging are evidence of this,<sup>102</sup> and perhaps also reflective of the consensus on an optimal number of joint programme partners.

94 The challenges of balancing the trade-offs between coherence and inclusion are highlighted by the Viet Nam programme, which was the first attempt in the country at an integrated approach to gender issues, involving 12 United Nations agencies, 3 national implementing partners and 16 co-implementing partners. The final evaluation (2012) found that efforts at inclusion had at times trumped efficiency.

95 MDG-F reviews of joint programmes across different thematic windows find these factors are also pertinent in other joint programmes.

96 A universal finding from research in all five case study locations.

97 As above, a finding from all five case study locations, and also supported by desk review.

98 Desk review found this in all cases of joint gender programmes reviewed. MDG-F procedures, as stated, were the exception.

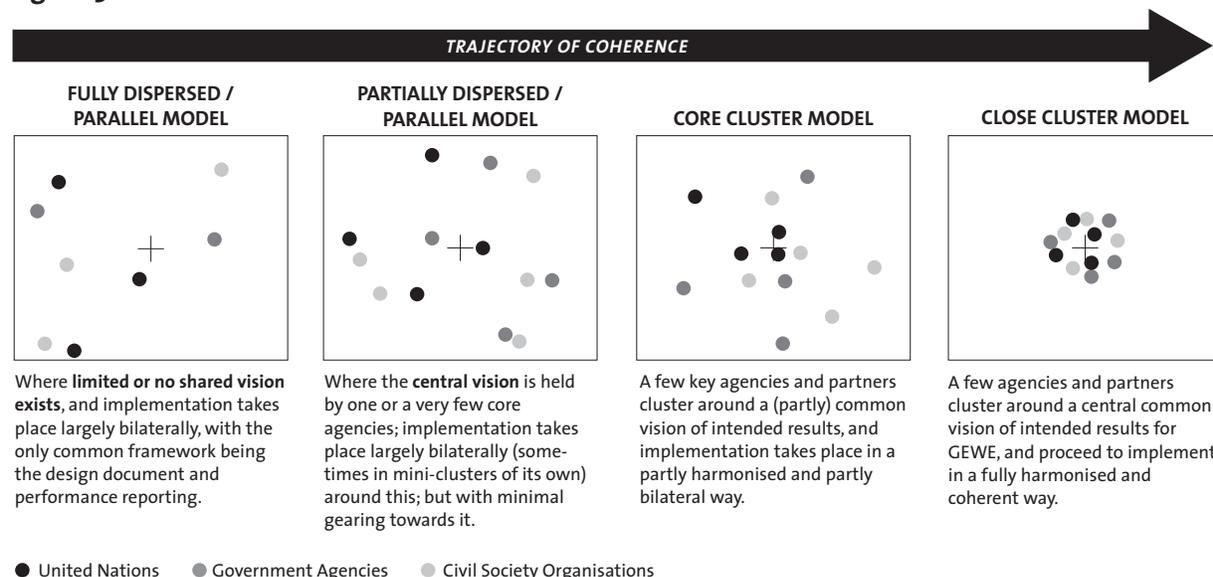
99 MDG-F, as an exception, prioritized knowledge management and held regional workshops on joint programming.

100 See for example Downs (2013) op.cit.

101 See for example General Assembly Resolution A/RES/67/226 January 2013.

102 All five case study locations found new sets of partnerships (and funding bids) emerging, mainly comprising a maximum of four partners.

**Figure 3: Models of Coherence**



No clear evidence exists on whether and how better gender mainstreaming has been triggered in other thematic areas or joint programmes. But there is some evidence of joint gender programmes catalysing, or being poised to catalyse, improved gender mainstreaming in future United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs), e.g. in Albania and Kenya.<sup>103</sup>

### Efficiency

Increasing efficiency on the ‘road to gender equality results’ is core to the central premise of joint gender programmes. It was accordingly an interim change in the preliminary theory of change, on which the evaluation sought evidence.

However, in line with findings from other joint thematic programmes,<sup>104</sup> the evaluation found that the joint gender programme modality did not lead to increased efficiency. Instead, it commonly left the total volume of burdens unchanged or even increased, particularly where the programme was the first of its kind.<sup>105</sup>

Specifically, burdens have:

1. Reduced or stayed the same for government partners (though positive change here, where achieved, has been extremely well received);
2. Remained unchanged for civil society partners, who have largely continued bilateral operations as implementing partners under normal relationships and United Nations administrative rules; and
3. Increased for United Nations agencies, with a universal failure to anticipate the costs of coordination which are also linked to non-harmonized administrative procedures and diverse business models across United Nations agencies.<sup>106</sup>

Even for United Nations agencies, efficiency gains are not clear-cut, with different agencies’ execution/non-execution status in-country affecting efficiency (since the national execution modality permits swifter implementation).<sup>107</sup> The delays in implementation, and the further time required to spend resources experienced by all 24 joint gender programmes analysed, are symptomatic of their initially ambitious timeframes. A requirement for regional authorization for decision-making in some cases, such as in Palestine and Rwanda, has also constrained speed of execution.

<sup>103</sup> Endorsed also by the MDG-F study of the Gender Thematic Window (UNDP/MDG-F (2012) op.cit.) and the 2013 Two Roads One Goal examination of its dual strategy for gender equality programming in the MDG-F.

<sup>104</sup> See for example MDG-F evaluations of joint programmes in the cross cutting themes of Youth Employment and Migration; Democratic Economic Governance and Culture and Development.

<sup>105</sup> This finding is echoed by UNDP/ MDG-F (2012) op.cit.

<sup>106</sup> Cited in all five case studies of the evaluation, and a recurring theme within interviews and evaluative evidence from desk study.

<sup>107</sup> Found in the desk study and the Kenya, Liberia and the Palestine case studies (most notably in the latter).

**Table 7: Domains of accountability**

<p><b>Mutual accountability</b> (donors-national partners)</p>	<p><i>Limited or lacking.</i> Factors such as the creation of governance structures, the inclusion of national stakeholders within reporting structures, and the housing of coordination units within Ministries of Women’s Affairs or similar supported accountability in some programmes, but was not commonly broad-based. National partners have often not sought full accountability over joint gender programmes, and a perceived power imbalance (resting on the United Nations side) persists. Some surprising gaps in results reporting/final evaluations have arisen. National stakeholders have not called United Nations agencies to account for this, and ultimately lacked a full narrative of the joint gender programme in their country.</p>
<p><b>Downwards accountability</b> (to disadvantaged men and women)</p>	<p><i>Lacking.</i> This dimension of human rights has been a major gap, linked to commonly perceived roles of civil society partners as implementing rather than strategic partners. Very few joint gender programmes considered downwards accountability in design, implementation or reporting.</p>
<p><b>United Nations headquarters and country team accountability</b></p>	<p><i>Prominent.</i> Main site of accountability, upwards to headquarters and funders, rather than horizontally within the UNCT. Reporting individualized within agencies. Indications that joint programme achievements not rated as highly as agencies’ own programmes and/or that there was less corporate accountability for these.<sup>108</sup> No entity was accountable for the programme as a whole, particularly with pass-through and parallel fund management mechanisms. Rather, each entity was accountable for its own portion, under its own rules and procedures.<sup>109</sup> Institutional authority of the Resident Coordinator was insufficient to generate wider country team responsibility for gender equality results, with efforts rather individually dependent.<sup>110</sup></p>

However, the ‘costs of coordination,’ while a recurrent theme within the evaluation and in contrast with single-agency gender programmes, are commonly perceived as an investment which promises future benefits. Stakeholders universally agreed that, while far from perfect, the potential of the modality in terms of efficiency is high.

Consequently, improved efficiency is not reflected within the final theory of change for joint gender programmes, below, since it remains unproven as an interim result. The transfer of burdens from government to the United Nations has been retained, as a process-level result; however, since some joint gender programmes have provided evidence of this.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Reviews of individual participating agencies own country programme/development results evaluations reflect an absence or cursory treatment of experience and achievements from joint gender programmes (and indeed of joint programmes in other thematic areas).

<sup>109</sup> Also found by Downs 2013 (op.cit.).

<sup>110</sup> Findings here are consistent with the Independent Evaluation of Delivering as One

<sup>111</sup> This held true in all five case studies. The desk study found that burdens had only reduced in three cases (Albania, Lesotho and Viet Nam) with the reductions being on the government side in all cases.

## Models of joint gender programmes

Analysis of the different dimensions of ‘jointness’ in the programmes reviewed, and their application in the case studies in particular, gave rise to four potential models of joint gender programmes which are discussed in Figure 3.

These models do not represent a ‘quality continuum’ of joint gender programmes, with the ‘close cluster’ model on the right hand side presenting the ‘ideal’ scenario. Rather, they indicate a documented trajectory of jointness, along which past programmes have progressed – and along which future programmes may travel on the road to gender results.

Clearly the starting point for any joint gender programme significantly depends on the prevailing national and United Nations context at the time. When conducting country case studies, many respondents highlighted the trajectory of change embarked upon as a more appropriate measure than an absolute position.

Equally important however, is that the status and trajectory of coherence in a particular country or region are explicit and understood from the start, in order that they can provide clear incentives and focus for joint gender programmes. Being conscious of the factors which support or might constrain coherence; recognizing the possible trajectory of change; and

having a shared goal in sight, may help future designs locate themselves on the continuum and design-in strategies for coherence from the start.

## 2.4 Accountability

### Summary narrative

*Accountability is a key strategy for improving United Nations efforts on gender equality, as the theory of change and 2006 System-Wide Policy sets out. It is also a critical part of adopting a human rights-based approach.*

*Some joint gender programmes have made strong individual efforts to build a culture and practice of accountability for gender equality results. Yet overall, the principle has represented a significant gap.*

*The issues here are common to many joint programmes, but they remain a barrier to realizing intended aims. Limited attention to accountability dimensions at design stage; failure to prioritize strategies for its addressing, including a lack of systematic monitoring; and a systemically vertical approach, have located the primary 'face' of accountability upwards to headquarters, rather than horizontally within the UNCT or to the joint programme itself.*

*The principle has not been consistently understood or treated as mutual accountability involving national stakeholders, or (particularly) downwards accountability to the men and women whose priorities joint gender programmes should seek to serve. National partners have not always demanded the focus on accountability to national stakeholders that this principle implies.*

*Current financing mechanisms also undermine accountability. Specifically, pass through and parallel funding systems reinforce entity incentives which are contrary to the spirit and ethos of the joint modality and which externalize reporting.*

### Full findings

Mutual accountability is central to all development activity. It implies a reciprocal commitment, with national actors and development partners each presumed to hold each other to account.<sup>112</sup> It is highly contingent

<sup>112</sup> The Fourth High-level Forum on Aid Effectiveness defined accountability as 'mutual accountability and accountability to the intended beneficiaries of our cooperation, as well as to our respective citizens, organizations, constituents and shareholders, is critical to delivering results'.

upon political economy factors, and it is a key aspect of the human rights-based approach to development.

For gender particularly, accountability is heavily dependent on the ownership of the agenda, the nature of the discourse and the relationships between the gender actors in the country.<sup>113</sup> It remains a core principle of joint gender programmes however, as for any development cooperation intervention. The 2006 System-Wide Policy committed the United Nations system globally to strengthening and developing accountability mechanisms in a coherent, coordinated and consistent manner.<sup>114</sup>

Mutual accountability was reflected in the preliminary theory of change through joint monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems. However, the evaluation found the different dimensions of accountability of joint gender programmes (including mutual evaluation) to have proven challenging. The three main domains are presented in Table 7.

Accordingly, accountability is reflected in the final theory of change as an aspect which could and should be integral to a joint gender programme, but which the evidence of this evaluation has not found to be yet borne out.

Weaknesses in accountability stem from the following factors. Many of these are systemic, arising from factors beyond joint gender programmes themselves:

1. Upwards lines of programme / staff reporting / financial management to entity headquarters, rather than lying in-country;
2. A lack of clarity or formalization around the role of the Resident Coordinator, with a less engaged individual failing to call entities to account – indicative that visible leadership, while critical, cannot be assumed for joint gender programmes;
3. A lack of tools/enforceable sanctions to check or prevent bilateral implementation, poor coherence

<sup>113</sup> The evaluation notes that ownership of the gender agenda is not a panacea for accountability – even in Rwanda, a highly conducive context for gender programming and with very strong ownership, a multiplicity of joint gender programmes has undermined their accountability.

<sup>114</sup> United Nations System-Wide Policy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, CEB/2/2006

or performance, overlap or duplication during implementation;<sup>115</sup>

4. A lack of joint monitoring and reporting, with (in the main) a central focal point collating and presenting individual results reporting;
5. A lack of feedback loops to inform programme decision-making;
6. A lack of organizational incentives for coherence/harmonization, and clear disincentives;
7. An emphasis on reporting for funding/activities, rather than reporting for results for gender equality (managing for development results); and
8. A lack of demand for accountability by partner governments<sup>116</sup> and insufficient investment by joint gender programmes in systematically stimulating this demand, e.g. through strengthening of women's organizations/movements.<sup>117</sup>

The evaluation heard considerable and repeated frustration from staff and partners with the lack of United Nations agencies' accountability on the ground. It is clear that national partners – who, as for ownership, play a crucial role in grounding accountability within national priorities and results systems – have however not always stepped up to hold programmes and United Nations agencies to account – symptomatic of the wider power imbalance indicated above.<sup>118</sup>

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115 An illustration of this is provided in the mid-term evaluation (2012) of the Kenya Joint Gender Programme which reported under-performance in generating revenue and lack of accountability on the part of individual United Nations agencies that made financial commitments to the joint gender programme but did not deliver on planned activities

116 Case study research found several joint gender programmes where final results reporting did not take place as it was not demanded or insisted upon by host governments or women's organizations.

117 A global comparative analysis, drawing on data from 70 countries over four decades, found that women's movements ("the autonomous mobilisation of feminists in domestic and transnational contexts") were key to enacting policy change around violence against women, more important than a nation's wealth, leftist political parties, or number of women politicians (Htun et al 2012).

118 Desk and case study research found significant examples of perceived power imbalance across the sample of joint gender programmes reviewed, with national stakeholders often voicing concerns that power, resources and decision-making ability rested with the United Nations agencies involved.

Some more mature joint gender programmes have made efforts to overcome these barriers, and to create a 'culture of accountability,' grounded in the national context. Drivers and incentives include:

1. Employing and empowering a central coordinating function, where entities were called to report on performance (such as in Albania and Liberia) – though in many cases, this was considered largely oriented around process monitoring, and to 'lack teeth', needing greater substance, leadership and results orientation);
2. Including coordination as an outcome area, forcing agencies to report on and account for coordination and harmonization, with strongly positive benefits (e.g. in Albania and Kenya);
3. Embedding programme management and coordination functions within central government ministries, which also helped maximize government's interest in accountability (e.g. in Liberia, Macedonia and Palestine);
4. Efforts to integrate incentives for accountability within their programmes, such as performance norms in the Kenya joint gender programme; and
5. A strong focus on M&E, feedback loops and course correction, e.g. as required by MDG-F procedures.

It is also noticeable that where the pooled funding modality has been used and located at the country level, such as in Albania, Iraq and Uruguay, there is evidence of stronger interest and engagement from the Resident Coordinator and UNCTs, although under Delivering as One accountability still primarily remains with individual headquarters.<sup>119</sup> Such efforts are commendable but present examples of challenges to the prevailing system - rather than consistent efforts, supported by the surrounding structures of accountability.<sup>120</sup>

It has not been possible to compare accountability within joint gender programmes with single-agency

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119 Independent Evaluation of Delivering as One.

120An appraisal reporting format for UNCTs set up in 2010 provided some hope of improvement, with gender featuring within reporting areas. However, the evaluation did not encounter examples of its use.

gender programmes.<sup>121</sup> However, notably greater visibility of accountability issues occurs within joint gender programme evaluations, albeit mainly highlighting shortcomings in horizontal, mutual and downward accountability and the persistence of vertical accountability. Other studies echo these findings<sup>122</sup>

## 2.5 Sustainable results

### Summary narrative

*The joint gender programmes reviewed mostly show some progress and promise in their delivery of results. At national level, many have — despite weaknesses in their design, delivery and coherence of implementation — delivered significant effects, not just within their designated targets, but moving into broader progression of the ‘gender agenda’. They have, to different extents, supported national governments to respond to their normative commitments and expanded the opportunity for translating normative gender work into operational results.*

*Beyond these individual results, some joint gender programmes have also satisfied their core premise of delivering ‘more than the sum of their parts’ within the national arena. In raising gender on the political and policy agenda; in stimulating legislative and governance reforms; in improving significantly the accountability environment, the ‘radar screen’ for gender has in some cases shifted, and the United Nations’ comparative advantage as a development actor for gender has been shown.*

*Overall, however, while some individual results are powerful, the evaluation finds that in terms of the composite body of joint gender programmes examined, expectations of the joint modality in terms of comprising ‘more*

*than the sum of the parts’ have, in the current generation of joint gender programmes, thus far fallen short. The use of managing for development results techniques — a core commitment of the 2006 System-Wide Policy for gender and of wider development effectiveness commitments — has also been limited.*

*Whether the gains made will be sustainable is unfeasible to assess at this stage. For joint gender programmes which have focused on improving the enabling environment, through policy, legislative or governance reform — arguably where the United Nations’ greatest comparative advantage lies — sustainable change has been made, and will likely continue. In others, ungrounded in ownership or clear vision of sustainability, results are potentially lacking in resilience.*

### Full findings

Despite challenges in coherence, accountability and ownership, joint gender programmes’ ultimate aims are to improve the lives of disadvantaged men, and particularly women and girls, on the ground. What, then, have they delivered since 2006 for these main clients?

Key questions here were:

1. What have been the results delivered for \$142m of United Nations and donor investment since 2006 in 24 joint gender programmes?
2. In the light of findings on relevance, ownership, coherence (including synergies and efficiency) and accountability, do these results respond to the central premise of a joint gender programme? Have joint gender programmes, in their delivery of results, reflected ‘more than the sum of the parts’?
3. Are any results achieved sustainable?

The three high-level results in the final theory of change, below, reflect the three key areas in which joint gender programmes aim to generate change, namely: the realization of national and international norms and commitments on gender equality and the empowerment of women; a better quality of life for disadvantaged and vulnerable women and girls, boys and men; and more equitable development. Along the road to these results lie a number of interim changes and results for the United Nations, its partners and the operating context.

<sup>121</sup> Since few single-agency programme documents or evaluations discuss accountability (though almost all evaluations of joint gender programmes do). Inadequate monitoring and reporting was a common theme in country programme, and programme/project evaluations.

<sup>122</sup> Review across the eight windows of the MDG-F found that governance structures, monitoring and evaluation, and communication strategies, especially when accompanied by transparency and decision-making which included national partners, supported accountability, but that progress was hampered by capacities, United Nations procedures and an inability to enforce decisions. UNDP/MDG-F (2012b) An Evidence-based Review of MDG-F Experiences to Date: A Contribution to the QCPR Process.

In reporting on results achieved, this section of the report focuses mainly on the interim changes and results column of the final theory of change.

In common with other studies,<sup>123</sup> this evaluation encountered a number of challenges in reporting on results.<sup>124</sup> Aside from individual programme-level challenges, the results for individual joint gender programmes were discrete and not easily summated. With this caveat, results have been analysed from all 24 joint gender programmes under consideration, validated as far as feasible,<sup>125</sup> and collated. Reporting here is based on this collation.

## Normative and operational results

Mainly for the reasons above, there is little evidence of impact-level results from joint gender programmes - either in aggregate or by individual programmes.

However, there is evidence that, as development efforts which have applied the development cooperation modality of joint gender programmes, some joint programmes have 'changed the radar screen' for gender in their countries. As the theory of change below reflects, they have increased the prioritization of gender equality results in the national setting. In so

123 The evaluation screened a sample of final evaluation reports from the 24 countries and MDG-F Thematic Reviews for the cross cutting themes of youth employment and migration; democratic economic governance; and culture and development.

124 As always within relatively limited three-year programmes (five years at most), higher levels results are difficult to identify and report on. Many programmes report on activities (trainings delivered, for example) rather than results (what changes or improvements happened as a result of these activities). Six joint gender programmes had at the time of analysis experienced interruption, e.g. due to political changes or a resurgence in conflict, or have not been completed; or need further time to deliver higher level results. Review of other single-agency gender and joint programmes in other thematic areas has identified similar issues.

125 Results from field studies were validated and triangulated with other evidence sources in country. Those derived from the desk study were based on programme reporting systems, validated through evaluative evidence (where available) and interviews. However, they satisfied minimum criteria on robustness of evidence, namely two or more of the following: reported by the programme; validated through independent evaluation or mid-term review; and/or confirmed through interview with a stakeholder external to the programme.

doing, they supported governments in meeting their Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW commitments, and the creation or development of stronger and more inclusive development partnerships for gender equality. The main three routes to achieving this were: the achievement of thematic results for rights holders; a strengthened reformed policy, legislative and accountability environment for gender; and a strengthened demand-side for reform.

Main categories of results in their support of these normative aims are summarised in Table 8. They are listed in detail in the Results Tables attached at Annex 9. The appendix of supporting materials provides a list of pathways applied by joint gender programmes to achieve them, as well as the exogenous and endogenous supporting factors and barriers revealed in the pursuit of results.

**Table 8: Key categories of results**

<b>Thematic results for rights holders</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced tolerance and an increase in the number of GBV cases reported.</li> <li>• Improved women's civil and political participation.</li> <li>• Improved maternal health and greater access to education for girls and women.</li> <li>• Economic empowerment, including increased access to assets and services, and increased employment.</li> </ul>
<b>Reforming/strengthening the policy, legislative and accountability environment for gender</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased national financial allocations to gender-related priorities.</li> <li>• National plans, strategies or frameworks for gender equality developed or implemented.</li> <li>• Legislative reforms/strengthening the judicial system to be more gender-responsive.</li> <li>• A strengthened accountability environment for gender equality.</li> <li>• Institutional reform/improved gender mainstreaming.</li> </ul>
<b>Strengthened demand-side for reform</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater capacity of women's groups/representatives.</li> <li>• Greater awareness of gender-related rights.</li> <li>• Greater networking and advocacy capacity among women's groups.</li> <li>• Strengthened national evidence base on gender issues.</li> </ul>

These results are individually significant for the national environments in which joint gender programmes have operated. Beyond the level of individual results, some programmes demonstrated evidence of powerful and high-level changes including raising the visibility of gender on the political agenda; bringing partners, entities and funding together and stimulating legislative; and policy reforms, inter alia the improved policy and institutional environments of the theory of change below. Whilst no systematic evidence has arisen on the confrontation of resistances, in these programmes at least, — which included those in Albania and Viet Nam — the gains created through the joint modality constitute, within the national sphere, ‘more than the sum of the parts’. They are also indicative of the potential added value of the joint modality, below.

These results are broadly comparable with those from single-agency and other thematic area joint programmes, which indicate gains such as capacity, policy and legislative gains; progress towards multi-stakeholder partnerships; and increased knowledge and visibility<sup>126</sup>. No major difference in the level or density of results created arises (though the evidence base here is limited).

Critically, however, across the composite set of joint gender programmes analysed, the results created do not, in aggregate, satisfy the ‘more than the sum of the parts’ criterion. Some programmes have delivered a ‘basket’ of results which could in all likelihood have been achieved by a set of individual agencies. Others show some limited additionality, in particular triggering of synergies, but not (yet) in a volume commensurate with the effort and resources put in. Overall, therefore, in terms of the composite body of joint gender programmes examined, expectations of the joint modality in terms of comprising ‘more than the sum of the parts’ have, in the current generation of joint gender programmes, thus far fallen short.

### Concentration of results

The greatest concentration of results falls into the category of reforming/strengthening the policy, legislative and accountability environment for gender.<sup>127</sup>

126 See, for example, MDG-F thematic reviews on youth employment and migration; democratic economic governance; and culture and development

127 Acquired through systematically mapping results identified from analysis of each joint gender programme onto these categories and identifying areas of greatest density, i.e. where programmes have most concentrated effort and where results are tangibly evident. See Annex 9 for more details.

The area where the smallest concentration of results is reported is within the third category, of strengthening demand side structures to advocate for reform.

These findings are consistent with the picture, above, of United Nations joint gender programmes which have focused their efforts and resources most densely (in aggregate) on stimulating national-level changes through work primarily with duty-bearers. Such effort is based on the premise that enhancing the conduciveness of the environment will — in theory at least — allow space for transformational change to begin, or for momentum towards it to be gained.

Arguably, this is an appropriate space for United Nations joint gender programmes to concentrate their resources and effort. Given the United Nations’ core identity as an intergovernmental forum, and its access — which other actors may lack — to high-level policymakers, it is here that some of the most strategic reforms can be made, and ultimately the greatest changes effected. The pitch of joint gender programmes, while insufficiently engaged with gender priorities and women’s representatives, has been at an appropriate level, therefore.

### Results in focused versus broad programmes

No discernible distinction emerges in levels of results between thematically concentrated programmes, and those which have opted for a broader, multisectoral model. However, smaller, more focused programmes have proven able to deliver more tangible results in the typical time frame of a joint gender programme.<sup>128</sup> Larger-scale programmes, whilst undoubtedly more ambitious, have mostly focused their efforts on policy, institutional and legislative reforms — and, in the case of Kenya, constitutional change. These gains, as reflected below, were entwined with the United Nations’ role as an agent for policy reform, and a facilitating agent for normative-operational connections. In aiming to tackle more systemic issues, wider programmes with multiple partners present greater challenges for coordination and accordingly coherence.

### Implementation models and results

Similarly, no direct link can be robustly proven between the implementation models adopted by the five cases

128 Examples being joint gender programmes in Lesotho, Macedonia, Nepal and Rwanda.

studied at field level, and the level of results achieved. However, it is noticeable that the sole (self- and evaluation team-assessed) 'core cluster' model (Albania) also demonstrated significant high-level effects on the policy, legislative and institutional environment. Conversely, those programmes characterised as less coherent models (Liberia Phase 1 and Palestine) — which are notably also highly challenging environments for joint gender programmes — encountered more difficulties in delivering their results.

## Managing for development results

The core commitment of the 2006 System-Wide Policy to ensure clear and coherent management strategies to achieve results, were notably absent in the joint gender programmes. This was linked to the absence of an *ex ante* shared vision and impact-level results which reflect intended changes for women and men on the ground.

The use of oversight and performance management is also a commitment of the Policy.<sup>129</sup> The evaluation finds mixed performance here, with some good example of course correction following the mid-term review stage, such as under the MDG-F model, where programmes could not receive the next tranche of funding unless changes recommended by mid-term evaluations had been either made or their rejection justified. Seven joint gender programmes of the 24 in this evaluation had final evaluations available.<sup>130</sup> For others, evaluation has been either a 'missed' stage in the process and/or no plans towards it were in place.<sup>131</sup>

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129 'Reviews of tangible results in gender mainstreaming through external and internal programme evaluations, gender audits and peer reviews are some of the important tools for assessing the impact of the work of the United Nations system, especially at the country-level' (CEB/2006/2).

130 Namely Bangladesh, Colombia, Macedonia, Morocco, Nicaragua, Paraguay and programmes in Bangladesh, Colombia, Macedonia, Morocco, Nicaragua, Palestine, and Paraguay

131 The requirements of the MDG-F, under which funding was linked to addressing issues raised at the mid-term review stage, was a major contributor here. In the absence of this requirement, programmes have shown gaps in results reporting and evaluations. The Albania joint gender programme, for instance, simply did not conduct results reporting/evaluation post- 18 months into implementation.

## Sustainability of results

It was not possible to robustly assess the sustainability of results, given that some programmes are ongoing, some only recently completed, and most are of short duration. However, strategies for sustainability have been assessed in the sample of joint gender programmes reviewed,<sup>132</sup> and inferences drawn regarding possible future trajectories.

Around half of the joint gender programmes for which evidence was available showed two or more clear strategies for sustainability. The main emphasis was on supporting ownership and sustainability among duty-bearers by, for example, strengthening capacity within national gender, or equivalent, ministries. The often fragmented approach to capacity development, explained in Section 2.2 above, meant sustainability was often compromised. However, the efforts undertaken merit its inclusion in the final theory of change.

Some larger or more mature joint gender programmes were designed to ensure sustainability through, for example, focusing on legislative, policy or governance reforms, constitutional reform, and the creation of an improved national evidence base and greater accountability on gender equality.<sup>133</sup> Barring dramatic reversals, these gains will likely continue.

However, shallow or partial strategies for sustainability, and/or their weak or belated operationalization, were a recurring weakness in most joint gender programmes examined. These were exacerbated by some of the limited efforts at ownership, risk management and accountability described above. In particular, the virtual exclusion or tokenistic representation of civil society in management and governance structures, or lack of meaningful participation in decision-making in many joint gender programmes, combined with a lack of comprehensive and strategic-level risk analysis, undermined both ownership and sustainability. Furthermore, exit plans were universally developed late or not at all. All these limitations leave results potentially lacking in resilience.

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132 Such strategies include: embedding programmes within national systems and structures; the absorption of project components by national stakeholders; increasing national capacity; working for legal, governance and constitutional reforms; and enhancing the accountability environment.

133 Though few programmes have focused on social and attitudinal change – Kenya being one exception.

# 3. FINAL THEORY OF CHANGE

Chapter 1 of this report set out the preliminary theory of change for joint gender programmes, whose testing and analysis has informed the findings above. This process has resulted in a final theory of change, below, which may help support the development of new joint gender programme designs for different contexts.

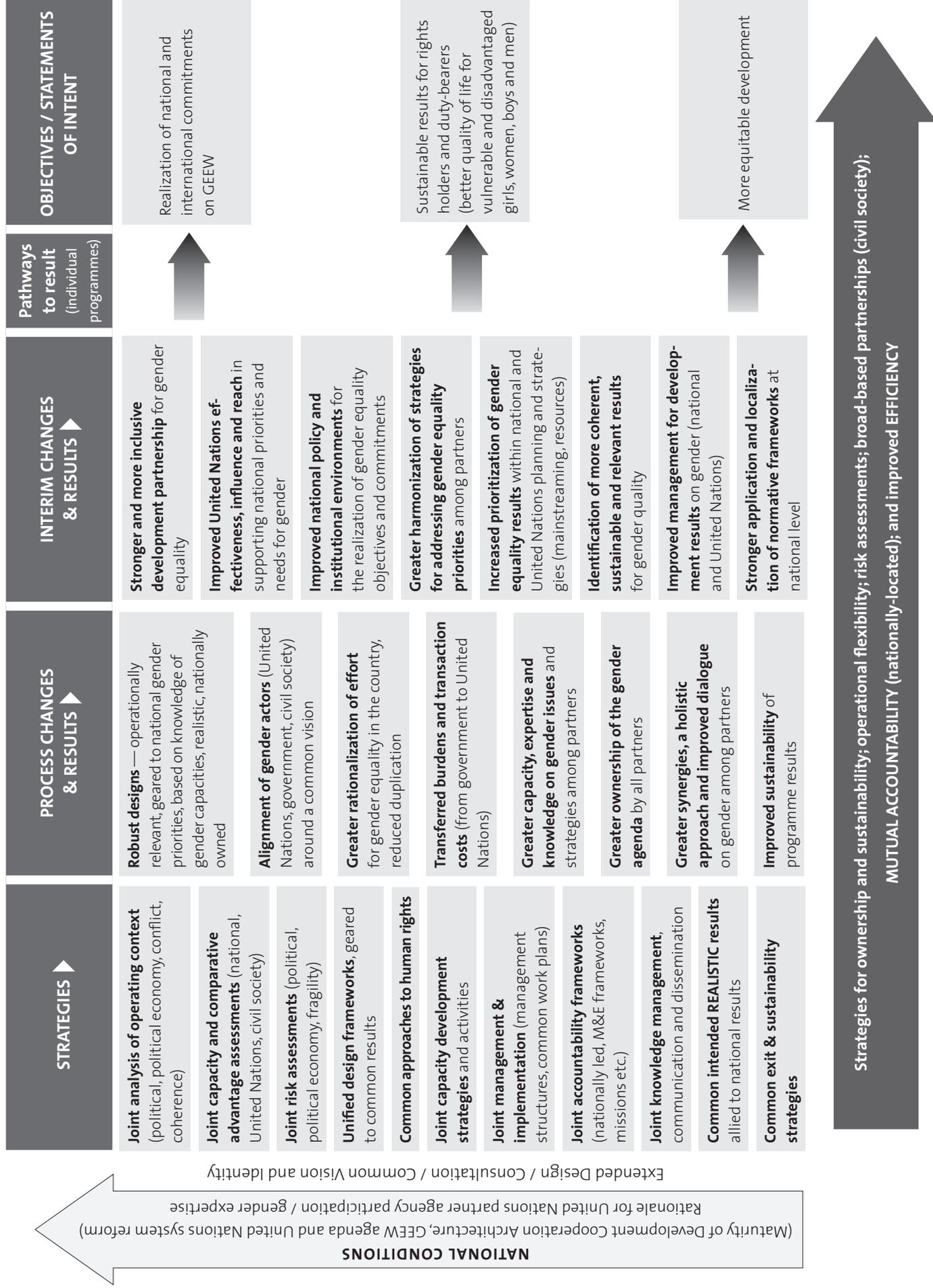
The final theory of change in Figure 4, remains true to the core theory — and hope — of joint gender programmes articulated at the start of this report: namely, that changed practices in United Nations design and implementation of joint gender programmes will lead to changes in lives. It presents the pathways along which the joint gender programmes can be reasonably expected to travel, in order to achieve their ultimate objective of transformational change.

The final theory of change contains elements which were not present in the preliminary theory, as well as refined versions of initial components. Aspects which could and should be fully integrated into a theory of change for joint gender programmes, but which this evaluation found to yet be borne out, are represented by the underlying arrow in Figure 4. These are: strategies for ownership and sustainability; operational flexibility; risk assessments; and broad-based partnerships. Combined, these aspects support greater mutual accountability, which should be nationally located, and improved efficiencies.

The theory provides only a broad and universal framework. Travelling within diverse and rapidly-changing contexts from changed ways of working, to changes in lives, implies progression along a range of different pathways, at varied speeds and through diverse interim stages and steps. As this evaluation has made clear, none of the joint gender programmes examined had developed their own individual theory of change; and none proved able to deliver fully against the universal theory presented here. Yet, through testing and grounding in solid evidence, the broad framework should support the development of localized theories of change for a new generation of joint gender programmes. At a more practical level, information gathered during this evaluation to support those designing and implementing the next generation of joint gender programmes is provided in the appendix of supporting materials.

The exceptions are joint gender programmes being designed for fragile and conflict-affected situations. For these initiatives, individual theories are more usefully developed in context. Some approaches relevant to this specific category of joint gender programmes are set out in Section 5, Box 1.

**Figure 4: Final theory of change**



# 4. CONCLUSIONS

## A new opportunity

Although multi-donor approaches have been applied in bilateral development cooperation for many years, joint gender programmes were, at the time of design and implementation, a relatively new modality in the United Nations.<sup>134</sup> Building on the momentum embedded in the process of wider systemic reform, they opened up new avenues for operational coherence among agencies at country level. In doing so, they also provided opportunities for new partnerships, greater efficiency, and ultimately, enhanced development results for gender equality and women's empowerment. It is this core premise on which all joint gender programmes were built.

## Design

From the outset, therefore, many joint gender programmes have attempted to break new ground. Yet challenges emerged from the start. The design process — far more than the resulting artefact of the programme document — is the foundation of a programme's ability to deliver its results. It provides the main opportunity for a common vision to be developed, a partnership formed, priorities agreed and differences aired. It is particularly crucial for joint gender programmes, given the complex nature and diverse understandings of GEEW. As such, it is a specialist task.

Many joint gender programmes have underinvested in this, dedicating only limited time and resources. Whilst all the programmes reviewed align with national strategies and plans in a broad sense, designs are notable for their over-optimism — of the operating context, and of United Nations and partner capacity for implementation. Weak analytical underpinnings have led to uncertain responsiveness to context, and the line of sight to women's priorities and human rights has been frequently obscured. Risks have been insufficiently identified, planned for or mitigated. Few

joint gender programmes have had the time or opportunity to develop a shared vision — the cornerstone of coordinated delivery on the ground.

Overall, in underinvesting in design, the opportunity to develop a common vision, collective partnership and capacity development strategy to tackle the challenging and deep-rooted issues of gender inequality has been unavailable to many joint gender programmes. The foundations for coherent implementation were therefore precarious from the start — and the resulting learning curve steep for all involved.

## Coherence

Further along the road, the course of implementation for joint gender programmes has proven far from smooth. Delivering as One has provided a supportive framework and incentives but overall, an imperfect understanding has prevailed of the implications of the joint modality for business practices and ways of working. This has been compounded by the lack of clear central guidance from headquarters, and by systemic barriers, which have diverted effort and attention from substantive action; obscured the focus on results and impeded development effectiveness. These difficulties are not limited to joint gender programmes, but present a powerful case for reform.

Commitment to the joint modality for achieving transformational change from all partners has also been uneven at best. Whilst grappling with systemic barriers and donor demands, United Nations agencies have — with some notable exceptions — all too frequently operated in a 'business as usual' mode, with examples of the concern to 'hold territory' trumping a spirit of cooperation. Bilateralism has often predominated, and 'shared activities' presumed to equate to a joint approach. Lesson-learning and knowledge-sharing strategies have, in the main, gone unprioritized. The role of the Resident Coordinator and Gender Theme

<sup>134</sup> The Portfolio Review conducted by UN Women found joint gender programmes in operation since 2001, albeit in much lower volumes pre-2006.

Groups in supporting coherence, both external and internal, has gone unclarified; and, in some cases, underutilized.<sup>135</sup>

In the joint gender programmes studied here, therefore, the theory of connection between the upstream policy coherence implied by both the United Nations global development agenda and system-wide reform, and the operational coherence of country-level joint gender equality programming, as a vehicle for its implementation at country level, has thus far proven flawed. For gender particularly, the presence of multiple partners needs extra attention to building a shared vision for gender equality, ironing out differences, and plotting the prioritized pathway towards transformational change. In their inexperience, many joint gender programmes failed to plan or implement for this from the start.

Finally, and specifically for joint gender programmes, the function and use of gender expertise within programme implementation has been often unclear. The mandate and role of UN Women as the global standard-bearer for gender equality has been established; but this evaluation has found its field level capacity highly variable, and its role in joint gender programmes unclarified. Whilst in some instances it has provided a valued facilitation and negotiation service, its technical input on the design and implementation of programmes has been largely dependent individual agencies' respective openness to engagement, rather than as a systematized process. This situation is un conducive to the collective advancement of gender equality goals, and warrants change.

## Ownership and accountability

Many joint gender programmes have embedded strong individual strategies to generate ownership. In many cases, these have been successful, with gender raised to a higher level on the political and policy agenda nationally.

<sup>135</sup> The UNDG Performance appraisal reporting format for United Nations Resident Coordinators/Humanitarian Coordinators/designated officials and the UNCT provided an opening in that one of five functional areas identified (United Nations advocacy, resource mobilization and strategic partnerships) specified application to human rights and gender equality, but expectations were left open to diverse interpretation.

Yet competing forces — such as an upwards focus to agency headquarters rather than a solid determination to ground programmes in countries — have meant that ownership has not, in aggregate, been coherently planned or strategized for from the outset. Whilst constraining effectiveness and sustainability, this also reflects a missed opportunity to create or build on an inclusive national partnership for gender.

Accountability has been neither prioritized, nor adequately grounded by United Nations agencies at country level. Programmes have faced heavy demands to show quick results from donors, often within unfeasible timeframes and without the requisite supportive action. National governments — while willing partners in all cases — have often failed to call their United Nations counterparts to account or to prioritize gender equality as a development theme. Downwards accountability to beneficiaries has been a secondary consideration, part of the limited application of the human rights-based approach.

Programmes also found themselves unsupported by a coherent United Nations business model; including lack of clarity on 'where the buck stops' on coherence and coordination. Imprecise lines of Resident Coordinator and UNCTs authority for joint programmes (and varied willingness and interest to engage); and the limited use of national execution modalities have compounded these difficulties.

The mutual dimension of accountability has also been subsumed by an all-too-frequent de facto treatment of the joint gender programme as an 'end in itself', with accountability therefore lying primarily upwards to headquarters. Yet mutual accountability is a foundation of any development intervention. It should underlie the culture, spirit and concentration of effort of any joint gender programme from the outset.

## Efficiency

The promise — core to the central premise of joint gender programmes — that the modality would lead to reduced burdens and improvements in efficiency has not, on the evidence of this evaluation, been borne out. The 'costs of coordination' have been both unanticipated and high; they have also been acutely compounded by systemic barriers, above.

This is a wider issue than joint gender programmes specifically. Without supportive action from within the United Nations system itself, the potential of joint programmes more broadly will remain unrealised, since the incentives, drivers and accountability requirements for greater efficiency lie beyond and outside individual programmes.

## **Fragile and conflict-affected settings**

The joint gender programme modality has encountered most difficulties in fragile, post-conflict and reconstruction settings. The premise for, and global commitment to, coherence is even more critical in these locations. Yet it is here, at the operational face of some of the most globally challenging geographies, that the difficulties are magnified most. High levels of commitment, capacity and risk tolerance are needed; as well as a highly flexible approach.

At the same time, the bar for applying the joint modality is, or should be, higher in these environments, where the risks of weak or limited harmonization translate more immediately into risks of weakened delivery. The joint gender programmes studied in these contexts have, in the main, experienced neither the sort of detailed options appraisal, conflict-sensitive design process nor risk analyses so essential for successful implementation in these challenging environments. Results delivery has accordingly struggled.

## **Achieving results**

Despite the many challenges they faced, this evaluation has found that all the joint gender programmes examined have supported governments to meet their normative (Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW) commitments, albeit to varying degrees. Some individual programmes have delivered powerful results at country level, bringing gender to the forefront of national dialogue and policy, and changing the game on gender. Others have failed to move beyond the ‘sum of their parts’ and delivered results commensurate with their largely bilateral implementation models. Strategies for managing for (collective) development results have experienced only limited implementation.

Where a more coherent programme model was applied, additionality has been demonstrated - through

the emergence of a shared vision; appropriate deployment of comparative advantage; the gearing of activities towards intended results; and via transparent and joint performance monitoring. Yet to date, at aggregate level, the composite set of joint gender programmes analysed here has not, in their totality, realized results that constitute ‘more than the sum of the parts’.

## **A platform for learning**

The issues highlighted by this evaluation are symptomatic of the very steep learning curve that joint gender programmes have undergone. Programmes and their stakeholders lacked a full understanding of what the joint modality implies; how it could most effectively be harnessed to maximize efficiency and improve effectiveness; and what added value coordination could deliver – in essence, a clear theory of change.

Flaws in the theory of connection between the upstream political coherence of United Nations system-wide reform, and the operational coherence of joint gender programmes as a vehicle for its implementation at country level, reveal a lack of maturity in this first tranche of joint gender programmes. This does not undermine the validity of the joint gender programme modality itself, but does highlight the currently-misplaced nature of the question as to whether joint gender programmes lead to better results for GEEW than single-agency programmes.

Rather, in considering the application of a joint gender programme modality, the question that confronts designers, commissioners and national stakeholders is whether a joint gender programme, in its full form, is the ‘best fit’ modality for the particular context. Or whether, in fact, other modalities and forms of cooperation, which may be no less ‘joint’ in nature, are more appropriate in specific situations and at particular times. It is this systematic options appraisal, inclusively done, which has been omitted in the joint gender programmes studied here.

The evaluation also finds, in sum, that the joint gender programmes reviewed here do not yet fully respond to the components and commitments of the United Nations’ 2006 System-Wide Policy for gender equality and the empowerment of women – namely:

accountability, results-based management, oversight through evaluation, monitoring, audit and reporting, the allocation of human and financial resources, capacity development of United Nations staff; and coherence, coordination and knowledge/information management. More work here still needs to be done.

## Moving forward

Despite the challenges and shortcomings documented, this evaluation ends with a note of optimism. Clearly, the majority of joint gender programmes analysed here encountered challenges. Few have managed to realize their ambitions as intended, and many, in fact, have struggled. The learning curve for all involved has been sharp and steep.

Yet for many joint gender programmes, the shared vision and operational coherence so fundamental to working jointly, have emerged towards the end of implementation. Much knowledge has been gained – not only about the joint modality itself; but about how to embed its intentions in operating contexts; how best to work for gender results in a collective partnership; how different models of coherence play out in practice; and how to anticipate barriers, and develop mitigation strategies to manage them. New partnerships have emerged, and more joint initiatives developed and initiated.

These, and other instances of added value, stand testament to the possibilities for the future. In the shifting global landscape of today, going back – to an ‘old world’ of bilateral design and implementation, limited co-ordination and compromised development effectiveness – is an unrealistic option. This is particularly the case for a transversal, and indeed universal, issue such as gender equality and the empowerment of women.

While the pace of United Nations system reform change is slow, the demands for accountability on gender are rising. In the lead-up to 2015 and beyond, GEEW remains ‘unfinished business’.<sup>136</sup> Progress is underway and the efforts set out at the start of this report – from the 2006 System-Wide Policy and successor Action Plan, through to the impetus for a post 2015 transformative goal on gender equality, women’s rights and women’s empowerment – all augur well for positive change.

Joint gender programmes form part of this shift. They remain an accepted, and indeed integral, part of the future development cooperation landscape. Yet, on the evidence gathered here, they also require reform. They must build on their learning to date, continue to challenge systemic barriers, and rise to meet the expectations of their partners, whilst holding their ultimate aims, and their ultimate clients, as a beacon still clearly in view.

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<sup>136</sup> OECD DAC (2013) op.cit.

# 5. LESSONS LEARNED AND ADDED VALUE

As the Conclusions above indicate, this first ‘tranche’ of joint gender programmes in the United Nations system has provided much learning for all partners involved. This section sets out some of the key lessons arising, to support the improvement of future joint gender programmes, derived from the findings above. It also indicates where the potential of the joint modality to add value for gender equality results is reflected, in some promising practices identified.

## 5.1 Lessons learned

Firstly, at the conceptual level, the evaluation finds that the core premise of joint programmes requires modification for joint gender programmes, based on the evidence gathered here. As follows:

*Though working collectively, the combined strengths of partners (national and United Nations) can be mobilized to generate improved synergies, leading to greater effectiveness and enhanced development results for gender equality and women’s empowerment.*

Efficiency, having proven a flawed assumption of the modality thus far, is not reflected in this change.

Secondly, and at a more operational level, the following lessons learned, if applied within the designs of new joint gender programmes, should help operationalize the theory of connection between upstream and operational-level coherence. They should also support the United Nations to better manage and leverage those factors which are under its control, to support the implementation and realization of the theory of change. These lessons learned include:

- Delivering as One environments, where appropriately leveraged, can provide a conducive setting for joint gender programmes, supporting harmonization and coordination, and help clear the pathway towards results;
- Successful implementation and the delivery of results within joint gender programmes are strongly connected to a robust analytical basis, including the positioning of programmes within the operating and national political architecture, and of the maturity of the operating context/United Nations system reform;
- A detailed and inclusive design process of a joint gender programme is the cornerstone of operational coherence – it is central to developing a common vision, aligning partners behind this, ensuring adequate integration of a human rights-based approach to programming, and a precursor for results;
- Working to ensure the understanding, capacity and commitment of partners to coherence is also key, particularly at leadership level. Embedding this as a performance management requirement helps ensure sustained attention to it during implementation;
- Realism is essential when seeking coordination and coherence across individual United Nations agencies with their own diverse systems and ways of operating. United Nations country team management commitment and leadership can help push the boundaries of the possible, including in relation to joint resource mobilization, the allocation of staff time and appropriate incentives for joint work on gender. Support from United Nations system-wide change and headquarters is key;
- Large-scale joint gender programmes have the potential to address systemic gender issues and stimulate inclusive ownership and accountability for gender equality and empowerment of women. However, larger numbers of partners also present challenges in terms of resource requirements for ensuring coherence. In most instances, therefore, there is an optimal maximum number of participating United Nations agencies (preferably no more than four or five);

### Box 1: Suggested approaches for joint gender programmes in fragile and conflict-affected settings

- Results which, whilst geared to the long term state-building agenda, also contain short-term intentions linked to the immediate reconstruction or transition needs of the context;
- Application of a state-building lens in design and implementation;<sup>138</sup>
- Ongoing contextual analysis, including of the drivers and gender dimensions of conflict;
- More frequent monitoring and reporting, with clear feedback loops into programming;
- Flexible, regularly-reviewed programme strategies, use of course correction; and
- Prioritizing risk identification, monitoring and mitigation rather than as an ‘add-on’.

Aspects of the state-building lens in joint gender programmes may include: building up the institutional capacity of the State, both centrally and locally, to develop and implement gender-sensitive policies, strategies and programmes; enhancing the contract between State and citizens through the reinforcement of an inclusive partnership for gender equality; and continuing to build up the legitimacy and representativeness of the State through efforts on political participation for women.

- The potential for coherence is maximized where the capacity, capability and empowerment of the lead agency is analysed from the outset – and their role, remit and responsibilities fully understood and agreed by all partners from the start, including distinctions with the role of administrative agent and their role in monitoring and reporting. The role of the Resident Coordinator, and any existing Gender Theme Group, has the potential to form a powerful stimulus for coordination;
- Ownership and sustainability are maximized where accountability is grounded within the national context and understood as truly mutual, core to the development partnership; and backed up with robust results frameworks and clear oversight from the Resident Coordinator; and
- Clear planning for and designing-in of risk management strategies in advance, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected locations, is key to ensuring timely delivery and contextual sensitivity.<sup>137</sup>

<sup>137</sup> See OECD (2011) Supporting Statebuilding in Situations of Conflict and Fragility: Policy Guidance. ‘The overall goal for the international community is to support and enable the emergence of states that (i) are capable, accountable and responsive, and (ii) are rooted in an ongoing nonviolent and robust exchange with society about the distribution of political power and economic resources and the adaptation of society and institutions.’ (p. 22).

Finally, implementing joint gender programmes in fragile and reconstruction settings is a special undertaking, requiring an intensive focus on political factors, capacity levels, and on the specific features and fluidities of the context. Some key approaches are outlined in Box 1.

## 5.2 Added value

Despite the challenges and limitations experienced by the joint gender programmes studied here, the evaluation has identified some examples of added value of the joint modality. These are not consistent across the full set of programmes examined, occurring only in a few cases where operating conditions were conducive, and where the joint modality has been effectively leveraged for additionality. They do, however, stand testament to the potential added value of the joint

<sup>138</sup> See OECD (2011) Supporting Statebuilding in Situations of Conflict and Fragility: Policy Guidance. ‘The overall goal for the international community is to support and enable the emergence of states that (i) are capable, accountable and responsive, and (ii) are rooted in an ongoing nonviolent and robust exchange with society about the distribution of political power and economic resources and the adaptation of society and institutions.’ (p. 22).

modality for improving gender results. Such potential needs to continue to be aimed for and assessed.<sup>139</sup>

- Creating shared understandings of, partnerships for and a common discourse around gender equality - Even where these were not present at the outset, and their absence constrained implementation and performance, most programmes built shared understandings, partnerships and language;
- Increasing visibility for gender issues on the national agenda and legitimizing this – Examples have arisen where a joint gender programme has been the first or an early example of joint United Nations programming in a country, or (particularly) where programmes have been large scale;
- [Linked to the above] Greater embedding of normative frameworks at national level has taken place in some programmes, through the resourcing and implementation of a joint gender programme geared towards the realization of their commitments;
- Expanding the opportunity for translating normative gender work into operations - Some programmes have extended the reach of entities with a particular normative agenda (such as UN Women) into sectors and opened up by partnerships with other entities;
- Building outreach and synergies on gender - A few programmes enhanced synergies with other ministries, entities or departments who previously did not recognize the centrality of gender in achieving their own goals and objectives, in some cases leading to the adoption of gender-sensitive approaches by national stakeholders beyond the core Ministry;
- Permitting a more multi-dimensional approach to addressing gender inequality - Some programmes, even if only at activity level, brought together different approaches to gender equality to create a more holistic approach;
- Enhancing the visibility, credibility and resources for the national gender machinery - By resourcing and enabling the lead Ministry to fulfil its mandate, some programmes were able to take on a stronger leading role among partner ministries which helped

legitimize its role and strengthen relations with civil society; and

- Improving upstream, results on policy reform and advocacy - A joint United Nations approach appears, in some cases, to have greater potential to deliver results on upstream change through a combined approach to policy influencing (particularly notable in more ambitious programmes).

### 5.3 Promising practices

The evaluation has also identified some examples of promising practices from the evidence. These are limited, but include:

- The MDG-F's achievements in establishing standard joint governance structures at national level; investments in performance management, M&E; and the distillation and dissemination of lessons learned;
- The location of project coordinators in government ministries and departments, such as in Liberia, where the context is judged to be conducive;
- The use of performance norms geared to coordination, such as in Kenya, which actively hold individual entities, and the programme itself, to account for efforts at harmonization; and
- The development of a common spirit of jointness and inclusive approach, such as in Albania, which, while intangible, went a considerable way to enhancing partnerships and clearing the pathway towards results.

These examples, whilst not providing evidence of performance of joint gender programmes, offer insight into the possibilities for the future.

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<sup>139</sup>None of the country programme evaluations analysed assessed the modality in terms of its added value over other programme options.

# 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

## 6.1 Background to the recommendations

A lack of ex ante deliberation, design constraints and implementation shortcomings may have characterized the joint gender programmes reviewed, but simply attributing limitations to a lack of experience, with the assumption that greater experience will automatically lead to improvement, is not enough. Change is essential. More of the same, or business as usual, present risks in themselves; particularly in the shifting global landscape of today.

Systemic change, a revised business model, and system-wide United Nations coherence are longer-term ambitions. Yet whilst this journey is navigated, potentially actionable steps<sup>140</sup> lie on the 'road to gender equality results' along which all joint gender programmes should travel, if their potential is to be realized, and transformational change take place.

In providing recommendations to stimulate change and reform, we return to three key concepts set out at the start of this report to shape and inform our recommendations. As follows:

1. Joint gender programmes need to be firmly grounded at the country level, so that action on GEEW can take place in a climate of solidly-founded development effectiveness;

2. Partners – national and United Nations - need to make joint gender programmes a strategic option rather than a default choice. Whilst the evaluation does not set 'minimum thresholds' for the joint gender modality, mindful of its status as a political commitment, it does emphasize the need to 'raise the bar' in its selection. More proactive ex ante deliberation should help partners explicitly anticipate the challenges inherent to, and maximize the benefits of, the joint modality. It should enable better risk identification; improve the chances of efficiency gains; and make the modality a better 'fit' for the countries, national partners, and, most importantly of all, men and women on the ground whose interests, needs and priorities joint gender programmes aim first to serve.

3. Finally, the 2012 System-Wide Action Plan for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment should be brought clearly into focus, viewed through a country level lens and 'given teeth,' to drive forward the agenda for gender equality on the ground. Current United Nations system initiatives related to a post-2015 transformative goal on gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment are of fundamental importance towards this end, as are efforts towards a comprehensive United Nations accountability framework which brings country and normative results into view alongside the more process-focused Action Plan and associated performance indicators.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup>Subsequent to the evaluation, the UNDP publication Making Joint Gender Programmes Work (UNDP, 2013) has provided some good practice on the design of joint gender programmes and key criteria for success.

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<sup>141</sup> An inter-agency working group, chaired by UN Women, on accountability for gender equality development results at country and normative levels will make a proposal to the Chief Executive's Board (CEB) for Coordination on this third level of the comprehensive accountability framework.

## 6.2 Recommendations

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### OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATION 1: TO UNITED NATIONS AGENCIES

#### Ensure a clear strategic rationale for joint gender programmes - and firmly ground designs in development effectiveness efforts at country level

Operationalizing the recommendation:

- i. Make the decision on a joint gender programme a **strategic choice rather than a default reaction** to funding incentives, United Nations reform or donor pressure. This implies a clear options appraisal, which requires the United Nations and partners to 'make the case' for the joint modality from a development effectiveness and comparative advantage perspective, including in-country capacity of the stakeholders involved. It also implies
  - a) analysis of the state of gender programming nationally, as it sits within broader country programming and
  - b) the consideration of other potential modalities, which embed the principle of jointness, but which may be differently implemented, such as silent partnerships, basket or challenge funds.
- ii. **Increase the rigour of the design phase** for joint gender programmes. Specifically:
  - a) Precede design with robust analytical underpinnings, including political, political economy, conflict/fragility, human rights and operating context analyses. Ensure designs are built on solid capacity analyses of all partners, including United Nations agencies, and include the capacity for coherence;
  - b) Make design inclusive (including the guidance of the Gender Theme Group where appropriate); well resourced (human and financial, including technical expertise for gender and human rights); broad-based; and incorporate strategic visioning/realistic measurement and results frameworks geared to the realization of common intended results; and
  - c) Ensure that design reflects the systematization of a human rights-based approach.
- iii. **The role of UN Women** whose mandate positions them, where conditions permit, as a logical technical and/or coordination lead, should be clarified and made explicit within joint gender programmes;
- iv. The following key principles should be integrated into design and implementation:
  - **Alignment** should focus on the articulated priorities of rights holders (including those of women's organizations) and from a human rights perspective, rather than generalized national needs;
  - **Accountability** should be shifted in perspective, from upwards to United Nations headquarters, to being truly mutual, human rights focused and centred on the country level. The role of the Resident Coordinator and the UNCT in holding programmes and partner agencies to account should be formalised – including but going beyond the use of tools of performance measures or scorecards. Joint monitoring and performance reporting should be both a precondition of funding and monitored throughout.
  - **Ownership** requires explicit strategies, which are articulated from the outset and linked to capacity development strategies, below. Mechanisms for ownership during implementation should be broad based – including representatives of women's organizations and other appropriate agents of change - and tracked through reporting;
  - **Harmonizing for coherence** also needs a clear vision and set of strategies from the outset, full commitment from partners, and to be followed through. The premise of the joint modality should be core to the visioning process, and embedded within monitoring and reporting requirements. An explicit results statement on coordination within results frameworks should be included. The use of pass through or parallel modalities, which actively militate against harmonization, should be resisted. Coordination mechanisms should be explicitly resourced and housed in national structures (not necessarily government) to increase

the location of accountability at national level. Lesson-learning strategies should be integrated and applied throughout.

- Underpinned by a shared vision, joint gender programmes need a stronger focus on **managing for development results** through collective working, and clear monitored, measured, evaluated and reported upon. Activities do not need to be all jointly implemented, but need to be geared towards a common set of results, with clear upwards and horizontal linkages. Performance reporting needs to be frequent, joint, results-oriented and required. Comparison of the joint gender modality with single-entity models needs to be included in the design of country programme and thematic evaluations;
- v. For joint gender programmes to be implemented in **fragile or conflict-affected situations**, Do No Harm analyses, and the international principles for good engagement in fragile situations, as well as a state-building lens, should be applied as appropriate, and on an ongoing basis. A separate theory of change should be developed for programmes in these situations, which includes the elements indicated in Section 4 above.
- vi. Designs should be centred within a **full risk framework** from the outset – analysis of strategic, political, political economy, capacity and governance risks, as well as the risks of the joint modality itself, is essential. Mitigation strategies, and ongoing risk management processes, should be explicit, and frequently reviewed. This is the case for all joint gender programmes, without exception, and particularly - those in fragile or conflict-affected situations.
- vii. Joint gender programmes should be positioned as an opportunity to develop comprehensive **national capacity development strategies** for GEEW. This should fit with national capacity development strategies; reference UNDP’s capacity development framework; include both duty-bearers and rights holders; and be partnership-oriented, inclusive and cross-cutting.

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## **OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATION 2: TO HOST GOVERNMENTS AND CITIZENS**

### **Ensure full ownership of, and accountability for, joint gender programmes, as part of wider strategizing and capacity development for gender**

Operationalizing the recommendation:

- i. **Locate United Nations joint gender programmes as part of clear national strategizing for GEEW** which is grounded in a broad and inclusive development partnership, nationally-led and cross-government in nature, and which is grounded in clear intended gender equality results;
- ii. **Adopt stronger leadership, and a more assertive stance**, towards United Nations joint gender programmes in terms of their design, management and implementation, and reporting;
- iii. **Demand full accountability** as a condition of joint gender programmes’ implementation, and be vigilant in sustaining oversight.

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## **OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATION 3: TO DONORS**

### **Accompany demands for rigour and results in joint gender programmes with supportive guidance and a partnership-oriented approach**

Operationalizing the recommendation:

- i. **Raise the technical bar** for joint gender programmes’ design and implementation, as a condition of funding, including an emphasis on development effectiveness principles and on the sound development practice garnered from many years of experience with joint development efforts;
- ii. **Match demands with supportive guidance** to United Nations agencies on the joint modality, drawing on experience from sector-wide approaches, basket funds, silent partnerships and other joint modalities;

- iii. **Permit flexibility of approach** where justified, in particular in response to contextual change, to constructively accompany United Nations agencies on the 'road to gender equality results'; and
- iv. **Demand results reporting** which is geared to national strategies and results and include a focus on capacity development results for gender equality.

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#### **OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATION 4: TO UNDG**

##### **Provide more specific guidance on joint gender programmes while advocating for systemic change**

Operationalizing the recommendation:

- i. **Develop and refine current guidance** on when, how and under what conditions to use a joint gender programme modality, including its strategic orientation, design features, expectations on coordination, and what a 'successful' joint programme looks like; and which includes clear criteria for United Nations agency participation in a joint gender programme based on internal capacity, experience and comparative advantage.
- ii. Continue to advocate for:
  - a) **A revised United Nations business model**, in the form of: (i) authority and decision-making power for coherence and coordination issues resting with the Resident Coordinator; (ii) the Resident Coordinator heading an inclusive governance mechanism which is nationally-led (iii) governance mechanisms embedding systems for horizontal and mutual accountability of Resident Coordinators and UNCTs and (iv) the application of national implementation modalities where possible;
  - b) **The removal of systemic barriers** and greater harmonization of the procedures which currently impede coordination and mitigate against the delivery of results on the ground;
  - c) **The creation of incentives** for the application of the joint modality in gender programming: e.g. in job descriptions; through key performance indicators; and/or embedding joint reporting within annual performance reporting and evaluations.











in partnership with

