

## 2. Gender-responsive Evaluation for Accelerating Progress on the SDGs

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The issues we face in the current global context, such as poverty, protracted conflict, climate change and intersecting inequalities, are complex and multifaceted—as are their solutions. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development tackles these global challenges by proposing a comprehensive political framework to guide global and national policy actions. The Agenda makes it very clear that gender equality is critical for achieving sustainable development. The interconnections and linkages of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the solidarity in addressing intersecting global inequalities and the emphasis on the 2030 Agenda as accountability tool are important dimensions and driving factors for the gender-responsive implementation of the SDGs.

### **WHAT ROLE CAN GENDER-RESPONSIVE EVALUATION PLAY IN ADVANCING THE SDGs?**

UN Women is the United Nations organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. To support the mission of UN Women, its Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) has a mandate to promote gender-responsive evaluation in the United Nations system and with national partners. UN Women defines gender-responsive evaluation as an evaluative lens that helps to reduce inequalities and reach out to those who are traditionally most marginalized and left behind. Gender-responsive evaluation considers the structures that contribute to gender inequalities, challenges these structures and aims to advance the realization of women's empowerment, gender equality and women's human rights. This

approach is particularly promising to the implementation of the SDGs as two specific goals, Goal 5 and Goal 10, are dedicated to gender equality and reducing inequalities.

Gender-responsive evaluations are not something completely new. A gender lens is more and more often deployed in national evaluation systems and evaluations of United Nations agencies and other actors. Several lessons could be drawn from this experience. First, to unpack the nature of gender and social inequalities, it is critical that evaluators deploy gender analysis and human rights analytical tools and treat gender and social inequalities as systemic. Second, in line with the “no one left behind” principle, evaluators should break the hierarchy between the evaluator and the “evaluated”, respect the knowledge of both and bring the voices of those left furthest behind to the evaluation process. Third, we should view evaluation as a political activity, not a value-free assessment, and use it as part of the change process. Finally, the use of mixed-method approaches to understand systemic and complex change has proven to work well for gender-responsive evaluations.

Despite progress made during the last two decades, gender disparities persist in many countries. According to the UN Women report, *Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the Agenda for Sustainable Development*,<sup>96</sup> globally there are 122 women aged 25-34 living in extreme poverty for every 100 men of the same age and group. Up to 30 percent of income inequality is due to inequality within households, including between women and men. In 18 countries, husbands can legally prevent their wives from working; in 39 countries, daughters and sons do not have equal inheritance rights; and 49 countries lack laws protecting women from domestic violence. Therefore, the gender-responsive evaluation that keeps an eye on inequalities can play an important role in supporting achievement of the SDGs for everyone. It is an approach that can accelerate progress, as it goes beyond measurement of indicators and helps to answer the questions: Are we doing the right things for gender equality? And are we doing those things right?

### **WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE TO ENSURE THAT GENDER-RESPONSIVE EVALUATIONS ENHANCE VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW PROCESSES?**

With two years now having passed since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, several countries around the world have instituted a system to conduct regular and inclusive national reviews of progress. The voluntary national reviews are serving three purposes. Primarily, they facilitate the sharing of experiences and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Second, they seek to strengthen policies and institutions of governments and to mobilize multi-stakeholder support and partnerships. Third, the national reviews assess how the principle of leaving no one behind has been mainstreamed in the implementation of the SDGs.<sup>97</sup>

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96 UN Women, ‘Turning Promises into Practice: Gender Equality in the Agenda for Sustainable Development’, 2018, pp 20 -21.

97 United Nations Division for Sustainable Development and Department for Economic and Social Affairs, High-level political forum on sustainable development, ‘Handbook for the preparation of voluntary national reviews’, 2018.

Forty-three countries presented their voluntary national reviews to the high-level political forum in 2017. A brief internal analysis by UN Women showed an encouraging trend in terms of the integration of gender perspectives in the reviews. Although the level and depth of treatment of gender issues varied among countries, over half of the countries referenced SDG 5 and 25 countries referred their use of sex-disaggregated data. Gender equality was also stressed as a cross-cutting issue in most reviews. However, most of reports did not provide information on how gender perspectives would be mainstreamed in the implementation of national sustainable development strategies. Negative social norms and gender stereotypes, violence against women and girls, including harmful practices, women's unemployment, the gender pay gap and unpaid care and domestic work, have been mentioned as key impediments for progress towards achievement of gender equality at the national level.<sup>98</sup>

The adoption of the voluntary national reviews created an opportunity to further advance national monitoring and evaluation systems and address more systematically the challenges of availability and quality of disaggregated data and evidence-based information across the SDGs. As such, if undertaken properly and supported by robust evidence and quality data, the reviews can serve as drivers of progress through furnishing relevant information on the impact of national development plans and policies across a range of social, economic and political domains. Nonetheless, the success of these reviews hinges largely on the quality of data and evidence, the inclusiveness and participation of all relevant stakeholders and the ability of countries to regularly monitor and periodically evaluate the implementation of the SDGs. This involves, among many other factors, a strong national evaluation system with a strong human rights and gender lens.

Inclusion of evidence generated from evaluations in voluntary national reviews would provide critical information about which strategies worked and which did not, and how these could be adjusted for greater impact. Evaluations with a gender and human rights lens can also assist in the triangulation of information to increase the reliability and validity of national review processes. Gender-responsive evaluations allow for the voices of the most vulnerable to be heard and understand what the barriers are, what the issues are and what policy issues needs to be tackled. An effective follow-up and review architecture should therefore have a gender lens at its heart to accelerate and advance gender equality and social justice in the context of the implementation of the SDG agenda.

In a nutshell, to keep gender equality at the center of implementation efforts, the evaluators should frame their critical inquiry around the following strategic questions:

- What is the availability of gender data, statistics and analysis to effectively monitor progress for women and girls?

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98 UN Women Internal Note, Summary of 2017 voluntary national reviews to the high-level political forum.

- How do national policies align with the gender equality and “no one left behind” principles and values of the 2030 Agenda? And how could the gender-responsive investments in national policies be prioritized?
- Who is accountable for gender-responsive processes and institutions? And how could accountability be strengthened through reporting, stakeholder participation and voluntary national reviews?

## WHY GENDER-RESPONSIVE NATIONAL EVALUATION CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT?

As pointed out by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), the concept of national evaluation capacity development has been evolving from a historical pattern of evaluation being carried out primarily in the context of development cooperation, towards a new paradigm where evaluation is nationally owned and an intrinsic part of good governance.<sup>99</sup> In this context, the development of national capacities to demand and conduct high-quality gender-responsive evaluations is a key contributor to achieving more effective development for women, men, boys and girls.

Nonetheless, the challenge often faced in many developing country contexts is that national policies and programmes are not always substantiated with findings and evidence gathered through evaluations. From a gender-equality perspective, even in countries that have well-developed national evaluation policies and systems, it has been shown that these often neglect a direct reference to gender equality and women’s empowerment.<sup>100</sup> This is in contrast to the near universal ratification of the key international normative frameworks and the presence of policies and action plans for gender equality and the empowerment of women in many countries.

The SDGs need to be adapted to national contexts, per specific sets of constraints and opportunities. As such, initiatives to strengthen evaluation systems need to be tailored to the situation and context of a given country. Further, a strategy for developing national evaluation capacities must be comprehensive and integrate strategies that address both technical and political considerations.<sup>101</sup> As illustrated by UNEG, the effective development of national evaluation policies and systems depends on a number of overriding influences such as: (1) political will for change; (2) the rate of development of monitoring and evaluation frameworks and systems; (3) leadership vision on the potential use of monitoring

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99 UNEG, in partnership with UNICEF, UN Women, UNDP, United Nations Volunteers and UNAIDS, ‘National Evaluation Capacity Development: Practical Tips on How to Strengthen National Evaluation Systems’, 2012, p. 8.

100 Bamberger, M., M. Segone and S. Reddy, ‘National Evaluation Policies for Sustainable and Equitable Development: How to Integrate Gender Equality and Social Equity in National Evaluation Policies and Systems’, 2015, p. 27.

101 ESTEP, ‘Final Report on the Framework to Analyse the Development of Evaluation Capacity in the EU Member States’, 2nd edition, 2007, p. 5.

and evaluation for public decision-making; and (4) an enabling environment.<sup>102</sup> This type of systemic approach takes into consideration individuals, the institutional framework and the enabling environment. The focus should therefore be on strengthening existing institutional capacities and fostering an enabling environment rather than focusing solely on the training of individuals.<sup>103</sup>

### HOW TO IDENTIFY ENTRY POINTS TO BROADEN THE BOUNDARIES OF THE GENDER-RESPONSIVE EVALUATION IN SDG REVIEW AND EVALUATIONS?

A growing number of countries are developing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) policies and systems to more systematically and holistically assess progress towards their development objectives. As gender equality and women's empowerment are central to delivering on economic, environmental and social development, it is critical that they be considered as part of these systems. As defined by Bamberger, Segone and Reddy,<sup>104</sup> national evaluation policies provide a normative framework for the commissioning and conduct of evaluations, while national evaluation systems operationalize the principles outlined in the national evaluation policy. Embedding gender, a cross-cutting issue, in that normative and operational framework ensures that countries will consider and better understand whether economic, environmental and social development is being achieved for women, men, girls and boys.

These countries have adopted different approaches with respect to integrating gender into national evaluation policies and systems. A mapping of national evaluation policies conducted in 2015 estimated that of the 16 countries with a formal national evaluation policy and system, only two made explicit reference to gender.<sup>105</sup> The mapping found that national evaluation policies and systems tended to focus on process and did not include cross-cutting issues. When gender equality was addressed, the focus was generally narrow and did not consider issues of power, access and participation. Nonetheless, while only two countries refer directly to gender, a greater number of countries have integrated gender into their evaluation practice formally and informally.

These different experiences generated a number of good practices and lessons learned for integrating gender equality into national evaluation policies and systems, specifically:

- Linking to national gender policies, gender action plans or gender-related legislation;
- Highlighting international conventions on gender and women to which the country is a signatory;

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102 UNEG 2012, p. 8.

103 Segone, M. and J. Rugh (Eds.) *Evaluation and Civil Society: Stakeholders' Perspectives on National Evaluation Capacity Development*, 2013.

104 Bamberger, Segone and Reddy 2015.

105 Ibid.

- Integrating gender in national development strategies, as well as indicators to measure progress on gender equality and women's empowerment;
- Integrating a gender lens into poverty analysis;
- Incorporating gender into social accountability systems, e.g., social observatories, citizen report cards.

## HOW DOES UN WOMEN WORK IN PARTNERSHIPS?

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for global partnership and international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building and to mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources. The global multi-stakeholder partnerships are based on the assumption that everyone has a part to play: governments, parliamentarians, volunteer organizations for professional evaluation, the United Nations, universities, women's organizations and other interested groups. Only by their working together can change be achieved in the interconnected domains of enabling environment and institutional and individual capacities for evaluation.

Starting from the assertion of EvalPartners, the Global Parliamentarian Forum for Evaluation and EvalGender+ that partnership is a key working strategy for wider impact and transformative results in the evaluation field, the UN Women IEO actively engages in developing and supporting evaluation partnerships to strengthen gender-responsive evaluation.

From 2013 to 2015, UN Women was co-lead of EvalPartners with the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE). EvalPartners made significant contributions in driving the global evaluation agenda by declaring 2015 as the International Year of Evaluation. This was reinforced when the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 69/237 on evaluation capacity-building for the achievement of development results at country level, which further energizes the global evaluation community around evaluation of the SDGs. In the context of EvalPartners, UN Women also contributed to launch of the Parliamentarian Forum to ensure that women parliamentarians are at the table in debating and developing national evaluation agendas. EvalPartners, UN Women and the African Development Bank also played an important role in supporting the establishment of the African Parliamentarians Network for Development Evaluation and a women parliamentarians group for evaluation in the Arab States region.

By co-leading EvalGender+, the multi-stakeholder partnership to promote the demand, supply and use of gender-responsive evaluation in the context of the 2030 Agenda, the UN Women IEO helps leverage existing initiatives to strengthen gender-responsive national monitoring and evaluation systems. Within the EvalGender+ "no one left behind" initiative, UN Women provided technical support to 11 countries or regional networks on how to evaluate SDGs with an equity-focused and gender-responsive lens. These include Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Colombia, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Zimbabwe, the Asia-Pacific Evaluation Association and the EvalMENA network.

By facilitating peer mutual support programmes and South-South initiatives, UN Women works to strengthen the institutional capacity of voluntary organizations for professional

evaluation. The capacities of individual evaluators, including on gender-responsive evaluations, are also improved through innovative and cost-effective e-learning programmes and open knowledge management systems.

With the purpose of providing guidance on how to integrate gender equality issues into national evaluation policies and systems, a guidance note, “National Evaluation Policies for Sustainable and Equitable Development: How to Integrate Gender Equality and Social Equity in National Evaluation Policies and Systems”, was published by EvalPartners, UN-Women and the IOCE. UN Women in partnership with UNEG, EvalPartners, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation also published “Evaluating the Sustainable Development Goals with a ‘No one left behind’ lens through equity-focused and gender-responsive evaluations”. Several other toolkits and guidance were developed to support partners and the evaluation community at large to effectively advocate for national evaluation policies and systems that are equity-focused and gender-responsive.

## CONCLUSION

A key principle that guides gender-responsive evaluation is national ownership and leadership, which means that evaluation should be country-driven and ensure leadership of evaluation processes by both rights holders and duty bearers. To this end, the development of national capacities to demand and conduct high-quality gender-responsive evaluations is a key contributor to achieving more effective development for women, men, boys and girls, a key priority of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The National Evaluation Capacities Conference 2017, which was organized under the auspices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Independent Evaluation Office in collaboration with various partners, provided a great opportunity to advance and amplify the importance of gender-responsive evaluation in the implementation of the SDGs. The pre-conference training and the various presentations by different partners including UN Women not only facilitated the creation of a critical mass of gender advocates but also helped to leverage partnerships for maximum impact. Such collaboration among UNEG members and national and non-State partners needs to be sustained to ensure that evaluation is front and centre in national review processes and M&E systems, which is key for advancing the commitments of the 2030 Agenda into actual results.

## ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

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