This chapter explains the requirements for planning decentralized evaluations. It provides guidance on what a decentralized evaluation plan is, why it is needed, who is required to develop it, and by when. It also provides step-by-step guidance on how to develop a decentralized evaluation plan and provides tools for evaluation planning, including how to allocate and track funds for evaluation.
A. DECENTRALIZED EVALUATION PLANNING

When designing a new programme (i.e., strategic note and annual work plan [AWP]), decentralized evaluation needs to be included in the strategic and operational planning. During that stage, managers need to consider what, across the spectrum of all programming, will be evaluated within a given period and allocate appropriate resources. It is essential that planning for M&E take place at such an early stage because:

- The design of the programme affects its evaluability, in other words, how it can be evaluated
- Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) programme results and indicators are foundational to evaluation
- Monitoring results throughout programme implementation is critical to having valid information available for an evaluation
- Time and resources required for the evaluation need to be reflected in work plans and budgets

The UN Women Evaluation Policy establishes that integrated MERPs be developed. The MERP represents an important component of the country, multi-country and regional planning processes, and is an integral part of the development of the strategic notes and AWPs. It is essentially a calendar of all activities related to monitoring, evaluation and research that allows UN Women ROs, MCOs and COs to strategically reflect on their information needs in terms of learning, decision-making and accountability.

The evaluation section of the MERP provides a list of evaluations to be commissioned and managed by UN Women offices during the period of their strategic note. It also provides essential information in terms of evaluation theme, planned evaluation date, evaluation stakeholders and evaluation budget.

The MERPs serve to:

- Prioritize and focus on decision makers’ most critical information needs, especially given scarce resources
- Plan realistically in terms of timing of activities, practical implementation requirements and capacities of offices and partners
- Know in advance what monitoring, evaluation and research activities will be conducted during the strategic note period

- Provide a link to programmatic planning and budgeting at RO, MCO, and CO level

**Evaluation planning requirements**

All ROs, MCOs and COs should develop decentralized evaluation plans in conjunction with country, multi-country and regional strategic notes and AWPs to which they will be annexed.

- MERPs from ROs should align with the strategic plan period
- MERPs from MCOs should align to the UNDAF of one country or to the corporate strategic plan as appropriate
- MERPs from COs should cover the period of their strategic note (e.g., from 2014 to the end of their country’s UNDAF)

All evaluation plans should be reviewed and updated annually together with the development of the AWPs. The evaluation section of the MERP is uploaded into the GATE website to ensure transparency and accountability to stakeholders on UN Women evaluations.
B. STEPS FOR EVALUATION PLANNING

Evaluation planning involves a series of steps that are outlined below. RO, MCO and CO directors and representatives should lead this process with the support of M&E officers and focal points in accordance with the evaluation process standards (see Figure 4).

Box 1.
Criteria for selecting evaluations

Eight key parameters and two levels of priority should be used to select decentralized evaluations (see UN Women Evaluation Policy and Tool 2). The parameters are intended to assist offices in developing realistic evaluation plans based on information needs, not just donor mandates. A selected evaluation must not meet all of the parameters but ideally focus on first-priority parameters while taking into account cross-cutting issues. Feasibility of evaluations, as a cross-cutting issue, should be paid special attention to avoid over-planning.

Eight parameters for prioritizing evaluations:

First priority
1) Relevance of the subject
2) Risk associated with the intervention
3) Significant investment (see below for more details)

Second priority
4) Demands for accountability from stakeholders
5) Potential for replication and scaling-up
6) Potential for joint or UNDAF evaluation

Cross-cutting
7) Feasibility for implementing evaluation
8) Knowledge gap
STEP 1: Identify evaluations to be included in the plan.

Analyse the respective strategic note and identify potential evaluation needs and evaluation commitments. The UN Women Evaluation Policy has established eight parameters for prioritizing evaluations that should be used at this stage (Box 1).

To ensure sufficient evaluation coverage of the office portfolio, one-third of the overall office portfolio during the strategic note period should be evaluated.

There are four primary approaches to evaluation planning that offices can follow to ensure that they are evaluating one-third of the portfolio for the strategic note period:

1) A country portfolio evaluation (i.e., strategic note evaluation)
2) A cluster/thematic evaluation of one of the primary strategic/outcome areas of work that comprises one-third or more of the portfolio
3) An evaluation of one large programme that equals or exceeds one-third of the overall programme/project budget
4) A series of evaluations of a number of individual programmes/projects that equal one-third of the portfolio

With programming being done on a rolling basis, the determination if one-third of the programme portfolio is covered through evaluation must be an iterative process. It is recommended to complete an annual review and update the MERP in the first quarter of its implementation based on the actual office budget.

STEP 2: Complete the MERP including information on planned monitoring, evaluation and research activities.

The evaluation section of the MERP is divided into two sections. The first section should include all evaluations to be commissioned and managed by UN Women, ROs, MCOs and COs directly, including those jointly managed with others (see Box 2).12 The second section should list evaluations in which UN Women ROs, MCOs and COs are involved but not managing, e.g., UNDAF evaluations.

11 The office portfolio is defined as the total amount of core and non-core resources allocated for programmes and projects, i.e., the Development Results Framework budget.
12 All joint evaluations in which UN Women is participating should be included in Section 2A, as UN Women should be part of the management structure.
evaluations managed by Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, Fund for Gender Equality, or donors. The “Remarks” column can be used to explain the selection including the criteria used for selection, potential evaluability and intended use of findings.

The draft MERP together with the respective strategic note and AWP is shared with the regional evaluation specialists for quality assurance purposes. The regional evaluation specialists will provide technical support to evaluation planning throughout the process.

Tool3. Evaluation plan template

STEP 3: Finalize and seek approval of the MERP as part of the strategic note and AWP approval process.

Draft strategic notes and AWPs, including MERPs, are reviewed and cleared by the RO and HQ-based advisors and thematic clusters, and the IEO (via the regional evaluation specialists). During this process the Director of Programme Division convenes a Peer Review Group that appraises strategic notes, AWPs and the MERP.

Following appraisal by the Peer Review Group, one of two actions will be taken:

1) The Peer Review Group will submit strategic notes and AWPs, including the MERP, that meet the above criteria to the Executive Director/Deputy Executive Director for Policy and Programmes for approval

2) If clarifications or changes are required, the Peer Review Group returns the strategic notes, AWPs and MERP to the relevant office for revision and further appraisal.

Once approved, the M&E officer or focal point uploads the evaluation section of the MERP in the GATE.

STEP 4: Review and update the MERP annually as part of the AWP development process.

ROs, MCOs and COs refine MERPs annually based on their actual office portfolio/investment to ensure that they are on track to evaluate one-third of their portfolio during the strategic note period. Any changes made to the evaluation plan must also be entered electronically in GATE.
STEP 5:  
Track and report on the status of evaluation plan implementation.

The M&E officer or focal point updates the status of each evaluation in the GATE website quarterly. The system generates automated reminders for M&E officers or focal points to update the status of their plans. The head of the office is responsible for monitoring the status of evaluation plan implementation, with information on implementation status being publicly available in the GATE. Drawing on information in GATE, the IEO reports on the status of evaluation plans on a biannual basis to the Executive Director and Senior Management Team and annually to the Executive Board, as well as on an ad hoc basis, such as requests from auditors. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that information be entered in GATE in a timely fashion to ensure accurate reporting to the senior management and the Executive Board.

Figure 4. UN Women evaluation process: planning stage

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13 For details on how to navigate through the GATE System see GATE Guidance, available on the GATE website after logging in.
C. DECIDING ON EVALUATION TYPE AND MODALITY

Evaluation type

Evaluations are defined at UN Women according to the following two sub-types¹⁴ (see Tool 4. Selecting the type of evaluation):

- **Use of analysis:** institutional, policy, strategy, thematic, cluster, regional, programme or project evaluations, or meta-evaluation
- **Timing:** formative (including mid-term evaluations), real-time, summative (including final evaluations) and ex-post evaluations (including impact evaluations)

When deciding what type of evaluation to conduct, the following points should be considered:

- What is the evaluation purpose (i.e., learning, accountability or decision-making)?
- Who is the target audience for the information from the evaluation?
- What kinds of information are needed to make decisions and/or contribute to learning?
- What is the scope of the evaluation (i.e., time frame, geographical representation, breadth of programmes and projects included)?
- What are the resources available to collect the information (i.e., human, financial, time)?
- When is the information needed (i.e., is there a strategic meeting, is the programme coming to an end, etc.)?

Evaluation modalities

Evaluations can be further defined by modalities related to who manages the evaluation:

- **Individual evaluations** are managed by only one organization: UN Women.
- **Joint evaluations** are co-managed by a UN Women section, division, or office and at least one other organization. This can be in the context of a joint programme, including UNDAF and/or Delivering as One UN programmes.

¹⁴ A single evaluation can be defined by one or more of the sub-types.
UN Women has a mandate to support the integration of gender equality across UN interagency evaluation work, and the UN Women Executive Board has repeatedly highlighted the importance of UN Women engagement in joint programme and UNDAF evaluations. Joint evaluations can be an effective means to enhance gender-responsive evaluation capacity at the national level and amongst UN Women partners. Joint evaluations, however, require additional efforts in terms of coordination, which need to be carefully reflected upon when planning joint evaluations.

Box 2. When is an evaluation considered a joint evaluation?

The key to determining whether or not an evaluation is a “joint evaluation” is deciding whether or not UN Women is part of the management and decision-making process of the evaluation. Typically, joint evaluations establish a management group that makes key decisions throughout the evaluation process. This is different from a reference group, which is a group of stakeholders established for ensuring the accuracy, relevance, and quality of the evaluation process and products (see Chapter 4). There are various degrees of “jointness” depending on the extent to which individual partners cooperate in the evaluation process, merge their evaluation resources and combine their evaluation reporting. A joint evaluation does not necessarily entail the contribution of financial resources, but it does require UN Women staff involvement in making decisions about the conduct of the evaluation.

UNEG Guidance on Joint Evaluation
D. BUDGETING FOR EVALUATIONS

Evaluation is a core function of the organization. Therefore it is essential that core budget be allocated to evaluation at the office level as part of the overall planning and budgeting process. This core budget allocation should be complemented by cost-sharing budget allocations, e.g., donor commitments for specific programme and project evaluations (Box 3).

RO, MCO and CO directors and representatives are responsible for ensuring adequate resources (both financial and human) for evaluation and that one-third of the office portfolio is evaluated over the period of the strategic note. Evaluation funds need to be adjusted to reflect increases or decreases in actual versus planned AWP budgets.

**Recording and tracking evaluation expenditure**

When calculating the total financial investment in evaluation and recording and tracking all evaluation-related expenditures, the following should be included:

- Conduct of evaluation (direct programme or project investment in the conduct of evaluations, e.g., consultancy costs)
- **Staff costs**¹⁵

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**Box 3.**

**UN Women required level of investment in evaluation**

In line with the organizational target set in the **UN Women Evaluation Policy** of investing 3 per cent of UN Women total budget, including core and non-core, in the evaluation function, COs should ensure that adequate resources are allocated to evaluation. An additional 3 per cent to 10 per cent of the overall programme budget should be allocated for monitoring, reflecting the importance of monitoring not only for programme management, but also for effective evaluation.

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¹⁵ Staff costs refers to a monetary calculation of staff time spent on evaluation related activities, using as basis the total cost of the staff per year. IEO suggests that 5 per cent of M&E focal point time and 15 per cent of M&E officer time be utilized as a standard that can be adjusted to reflect the reality.
• Capacity-building costs (costs related to training UN Women staff and partners, e.g., trainer travel and daily subsistence allowance, participation in evaluation network conferences)
• Communication costs, including dissemination of evaluation results and findings (publication cost, dissemination workshops)

Atlas code O23 should be used to record and report on evaluation expenditures as part of annual reporting. It is important to track evaluation expenditures separately from monitoring expenditures that are tracked under O21. During the annual reporting process, the total annual evaluation-related expenditures should be aligned with what is reported for UN Women Strategic Plan Organisational Effectiveness and Efficiency Framework output 2.3 (extensions for activity code 23 in Atlas).

PLANNING

MONITORING, EVALUATION AND RESEARCH PLANS (MERPS):

Has the M&E officer or focal point supported the MERP process in consultation with concerned programme officers and senior managers? Yes ☒ No ☐

Was the draft plan sent to the regional evaluation specialist for review? Yes ☒ No ☐

Did the MCO or CO representative or regional director submit the MERP together with the strategic note, AWP for Peer Review Group review and approval? Yes ☒ No ☐

Did the M&E officer or focal point upload the evaluation section of the MERP to GATE within one month of approval? Yes ☒ No ☐
• UN Women GATE: http://gate.unwomen.org

• **Tool 2.** Eight parameters for prioritizing evaluation
• **Tool 3:** Evaluation plan template
• **Tool 4.** Selecting the type of evaluation

• UNEG http://unevaluation.org
  • Guidance on Joint Evaluation
• UN Women http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library
  • Evaluation Policy
• UN Women intranet https://unwomen.sharepoint.com/
  • POM, Chapter 2
  • POM, Chapter 5 Evaluation
  • GATE Guidance Note