

**UN-Women’s Response to the Implementation of  
the Resolution on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review  
of Operational Activities of the United Nations System  
in the Context of the Development of UN-Women’s Strategic Plan 2018-2021**

**Summary**

*The adoption of General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the Quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (QCPR) in December 2016 provides clear guidance to the UN development system, including UN-Women, for the upcoming cycle of strategic plans 2018-2021. This is particularly critical in the context of supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. UN-Women is well placed to deliver results set forth in the new QCPR. The Entity sees its role as true catalyst for change by utilizing its composite nature and mandates in a fully integrated fashion. It will continue to play a key role in ensuring that the UN development system as a whole deliver for women and girls, including by ensuring synergies and common approaches across the strategic plans of other UN entities, particularly Funds and Programs. The new generation of UNDAFs represents a key tool to ensure that the work of the Entity at the country level is well positioned as part of UN Country Teams efforts to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls. At the same time, UN-Women will continue to promote enhanced accountability of the UN System on gender equality and the empowerment of women at all levels. Adequate quantity and high quality of funding are critical to ensure the sustainability and continuity of the Entity’s work while maintaining the integrity of the strategic plan. UN-Women will fully leverage the QCPR mandate in order to accelerate progress for women and girls, including through innovation, and improve UN coherence, as well as operational effectiveness and efficiencies.*

**1. Advancing on the UN coherence agenda**

In its decision 2016/1, the Executive Board requested UN-Women “to start early preparations for the next strategic plan, in full consultation with the Executive Board, while taking into account [...] the outcome of the 2016 quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system”. Further to the adoption of General Assembly resolution 71/243 in December 2016, this paper sets out key aspects of UN-Women’s response to the implementation of the QCPR and its implications on the development of the next strategic plan 2018-2021.

The 2016 quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (QCPR) provides great opportunities for realizing significant integration across UN System’s operations to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Given the cross-sectoral nature of gender equality and women’s empowerment, it also represents a key opportunity for UN-Women to advance its mandate and deliver transformative results for women and girls. A fully functioning and coherent UN development system is critical for implementing UN-Women’s mandate to supports efforts to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The new QCPR sets strategic directions for the UN development system that are critical to further strengthening its ability to deliver as one in support to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The resolution introduces and reinforces key elements that are critical for the work of UN-Women over the next four years at all levels, both independently and jointly with other UN system entities.

UN-Women itself is the result of Member States' resolve to achieve greater coherence. Its universal mandate integrates sustainable development, peace and security, humanitarian action and human rights, through normative support, UN coordination, and operational activities. This integration enables the Entity to work cohesively across the pillars of the United Nations and to support Governments to achieve their gender equality commitments.

UN-Women is well placed to deliver results set forth in the new QCPR. Since its establishment in 2010, the Entity has gone through a process of maturity both in terms of strategic positioning and of institutional building and organizational effectiveness. It sees its role as true catalyst for change by utilizing its composite nature in a fully integrated fashion. The midterm review of UN-Women's strategic plan 2014-2017 and several evaluations have confirmed that one of UN-Women's key comparative advantage derives from its composite mandate. It will be essential for the new strategic plan 2018-2021 to leverage this advantage and ensure that its three functions are mutually reinforcing in support of transformative results for women and girls.

UN-Women has played a proactive role - including within key interagency mechanisms such as the Chiefs Executive Board and its three pillars - in providing inputs for the QCPR process and deliberations of Member States. It provided substantive contributions to the ECOSOC Dialogue on the longer term positioning of the UN Development system, including by supporting the development of analyses and perspectives by the UN Development Group (UNDG) on key operational issues that are addressed in the resolution. In this engagement, UN-Women has consistently emphasized the importance of greater system-wide coherence, as well as the need to ensure gender mainstreaming across the work of the UN development system. UN-Women will continue to engage in related processes and fully contribute to implementing the vision set forth in the new QCPR.

The resolution requested the Secretary-General to develop a system-wide outline of present functions as defined in strategic plans and provide recommendations to address gaps and overlaps through a strategic document to be finalized by the end of 2017. This process, which will be undertaken in parallel to the development of UN-Women's strategic plan 2018-2021 may require that adjustments be made to the respective strategic plans in the course of 2017. UN-Women will work closely with Executive Board members to ensure that both processes are complementary and coherent.

## **2. UN-Women's response to the implementation of the QCPR**

UN-Women firmly believes that the entire 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development must deliver for women and girls, beyond the achievement of SDG 5. To this effect, the Entity aims to leverage cross-sectoral policy approaches that will simultaneously deliver transformative change for women and girls around the world, and advance peace and security, human rights and sustainable development through partnerships.

The new QCPR reinforces the validity of this approach. The centrality of gender equality and women's empowerment as intrinsic and instrumental to sustainable development and the need for investment in the development of women and girls, their economic and political participation and equal access to economic and productive resources and education, has been reaffirmed in the resolution (Preamble). This is a strong confirmation of the centrality of gender equality in the context of operational activities of the UN development

system. UN-Women will continue to play a central role in ensuring that the system as a whole deliver for women and girls.

**a) Greater coherence, coordination and synergies to drive the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

The new QCPR calls for mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development into the work of each UN entity, including by addressing the interconnections and cross-cutting elements across SDGs and targets. The resolution stresses that a whole-of-system response is fundamental to most efficiently and effectively addressing needs and attaining the SDGs.

UN-Women's strategic plan 2018-2021 will be firmly anchored in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, while ensuring the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. The new strategic plan will take a long-term view of 2030, while outlining clear deliverables for the end of the next strategic plan cycle (2021). The midterm review of UN-Women's current strategic plan, conducted in 2016, already demonstrated the important contribution of UN-Women to the 2030 Agenda. This will be further reinforced in the new strategic plan, notably through clear references to relevant SDG targets and indicators, including in the strategic plan results framework.

Promoting gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls is of fundamental importance and, as noted in the new QCPR, has "a multiplier effect for achieving sustained and inclusive economic growth, poverty eradication and sustainable development". Through the QCPR, Member States call upon all UN entities to further enhance gender mainstreaming across their work at all levels.

With its UN coordination mandate, UN-Women is well positioned to provide leadership in this area. The lessons from the evaluation on the UN coordination function provide important recommendations to further improve this area of work. UN-Women will ensure that these recommendations are fully integrated in the development of its new strategic plan. For example, the new strategic plan will aim to more explicitly capture the contribution of UN-Women's coordination function to the achievement of development results.

In addition, UN-Women is coordinating closely with other entities, and in particular UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF, to ensure synergies and common approaches in the development and implementation of their respective new strategic plans. The entity is working with other entities to ensure that their strategic plans include explicit contributions to gender equality and the empowerment of women, in line with their specific mandates, while ensuring that these contributions are complementary across entities. The large number and complexity of targets in the SDGs have the potential to reinforce existing siloes and deepen coordination challenges. UN-Women supports shared results and common indicators across strategic plans to improve coherence and the quality of planning, implementation and reporting.

At the same time, UN-Women's strategic plan will identify priority interventions that promote multiplier effects across all SDGs. The Flagship Programming Initiatives (FPIs) explicitly aim at achieving several SDGs through one set of coordinated interventions bringing together multiple stakeholders around a common theory of change. Therefore, the FPIs constitute a key vehicle for strengthening its coordination functions and provide clear opportunities to capitalize on the vast expertise and capacity available in the UN System to support transformative change for women and girls, beyond the specific contributions of UN-Women. In addition, the FPIs also represent concrete platforms to strengthen multi-stakeholder partnerships around common goals. The importance of innovative partnerships at national, regional and global levels was highlighted in the new QCPR – an approach already spearheaded by UN-Women through the FPIs and other initiatives.

## **b) Promoting coherence at the national level**

The UN development system will be called to implement common planning frameworks that integrate the three pillars of UN work, based on joint analysis and comparative advantages. While greater coherence at the global corporate level is essential, many achievements have already been registered at the country level. UN-Women will build on existing successes and work towards the improvement of relevant mechanisms to bring greater coherence and synergy in the work of UN country teams.

At the country level, the use of the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) as a strategic instrument will be of fundamental importance for UN-Women's work. A new UNDAF guidance has been prepared by the UN Development Group in anticipation of many of the elements of the QCPR, such as for example, the need for a whole-system response and synergies, and the increased linkages between humanitarian action, development and sustaining peace. UN-Women played a leading role in the development of the new UNDAF guidance, including by co-chairing the group that developed the new guidance. The new generation of UNDAFs, which positions gender equality as a key programming principle for UN country teams, is intended to promote greater coherence and will drive the work of the Entity at country level, including through its continued support to UN country teams in ensuring effective gender mainstreaming.

An efficient and effective Resident Coordinator System is critical to the implementation of the Entity's mandate. In spite of its considerable financial constraints, the Entity has fully contributed to the global cost-sharing agreement for the Resident Coordinator System. The ongoing review of the global cost sharing modality is a good opportunity to ensure that resources are made available – in time and in full - from across the UN system. UN-Women will continue to monitor internal implementation of mutual accountability arrangements established by the UNDG Management and Accountability System (MAS) for the functioning of the Resident Coordinator System. The Entity concurs that a functioning firewall is a key factor in the successful implementation of the MAS.

As in previous resolutions, the new QCPR continues to emphasize the centrality of national ownership and the role of the UN development system in strengthening national capacities. UN-Women's programmes to date have been found by independent evaluations to have a strong alignment with national priorities and this will remain a key driving principle of the new strategic plan. Similarly, the midterm review of the current strategic plan showed that UN-Women primarily focuses on developing national capacities, with 45 percent of programme funds in 2015 dedicated to this category of work. In addition to continuing to provide policy advice, normative support, leverage partnerships and foster south-south and triangular cooperation, UN-Women will scale up its work on capacity-building for gender statistics, a key requirement to enable the implementation and monitoring of progress on the 2030 Agenda. All these elements have been emphasized in the new QCPR resolution and UN-Women will thus contribute to their implementation.

UN-Women is committed to ensuring strong reflection of gender perspectives in humanitarian action<sup>1</sup>. Gender equality and women's empowerment are integral to ensuring global development and prosperity for all, by breaking the cycle of poverty caused by conflict, recurring natural disasters and a lack of resilience and preparedness. The QCPR calls on the UN development system to enhance coordination of development efforts with humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding efforts. This represents another major area of potential added-value by UN-Women, which will be reflected in the new strategic plan. Already, UN-Women has been working to fully integrate its women, peace and security work with humanitarian action by promoting consistency and sustainability in addressing gender equality concerns across the humanitarian, peace and security and development continuum. The Entity is working to address the gender equality gap in the provision of adequate humanitarian services, and to support other UN entities to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment are integrated into their crisis, preparedness and humanitarian response. UN-

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<sup>1</sup> See [UN-Women and Humanitarian Action](#), background note prepared for the 2017 first regular session of the EB

Women maintains its role as Co-Chair and Secretariat of the Gender in Humanitarian Action Reference Group within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), and will continue to advocate for full membership to the IASC.

UN-Women also aims to program across the humanitarian, peace and security and development continuum in its thematic priorities. For example, UN-Women has developed an integrated approach to its work on women's access to justice by designing, implementing and monitoring interventions across different phases of development and fragility. UN-Women works with other UN entities to enhance practitioners' capacities by bridging the development, peace and security, and human rights agendas on women's access to justice. This approach addresses the pernicious cycle of violence against women and girls regardless of the context and the consistent manner in which violence continues in the post-conflict context even after peace agreements are signed.

#### **c) Strengthening accountability of the UN System for gender equality and the empowerment of women**

Consistently with the new QCPR, UN-Women will continue to promote enhanced accountability of the UN System on gender equality and the empowerment of women. The UN System Wide Action Plan for gender equality and the empowerment of women (UN-SWAP) continued to propel progress in key performance areas of accountability for gender mainstreaming. In 2016, over 90 per cent of UN entities reported to UN-Women on the 15 common indicators of the UN-SWAP framework, leading to greater coherence and harmonization within and across the UN system in its work on gender mainstreaming. Evidence shows, for example, that UN entities which developed and adopted specific gender policies meet twice the number of performance indicators than those without.

Since its introduction in 2012, the UN-SWAP has supported systematic improvements in gender mainstreaming across the UN system. UN-Women has been proactive in leading discussions on development of methodologies for tracking gender-related SDG results – a key element in promoting accountability.

Work is underway to develop a new generation of the UN-SWAP (UN-SWAP 2.0) and a corresponding country level scorecard, to ensure that UN entities and UN Country Teams sustain progress in institutional compliance, and promote greater accountability for gender equality results. The new UN-SWAP and scorecard make explicit references to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, promoting a strong alignment between the gender equality work of all relevant entities and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Performance Indicators for the UN-SWAP 2.0 have been developed with a focus on normative and development results, as requested by the Chiefs Executive Board. In 2017, the system for reporting on SDG-related results for gender equality and the empowerment of women will be put in place.

Furthermore, the Secretary-General noted that management reform must ensure that the UN reaches gender parity at all levels. He pledged to develop a clear roadmap, with benchmarks and timeframes, to achieve parity across the system well before the target of 2030. UN-Women will continue to provide key support to these efforts, including to ensure the achievement of the gender parity target in Resident Coordinators' appointments.

These elements will constitute important components of the strategic plan 2018-2021.

#### **d) Fit-for-purpose funding and pooled financing mechanisms**

The QCPR calls for a sustainable funding approach, including through more predictable, flexible, effective and efficient voluntary funding, confirming that core resources are the bedrock of UN operational activities, and that non-core resources should represent a complement to and not a substitute for core resources. The resolution also recognizes the need to mobilize multiple funding sources, deepen partnerships with relevant stakeholders, and further explore innovative funding approaches to catalyze additional resources.

Adequate quantity and high quality of funding are critical for the UN development system and UN-Women. Regular (core) resources are the bedrock of the Entity's activities and are key to ensuring the sustainability and continuity of its work. As a voluntarily funded organization, UN-Women requires a level of predictability of funding to enable it to carry out its mandate. The current financial environment, including the adverse impact of exchange rate movements, is challenging the Entity's capacity to deliver results at expected levels.

The Entity is committed to implementing its financing strategy, which was presented to the Executive Board in 2016<sup>2</sup>. The strategy aims to deepen core contributions, widen the donor base, seek private and voluntary sector engagement, and enhance transparency and accountability. It also focuses on attracting high-quality, soft-earmarked non-core resources by strengthening its programming, leveraging UN pooled financing within the UNDAF, emphasizing innovation and expanding its engagement with the private sector. The strategy will be reflected in the preparation of the strategic plan 2018-2021 and to inform projections for the integrated budget 2018-2019.

If UN entities are to deliver results that are tailored to national needs, more flexible and predictable funding will be critical. However, as noted in the recent funding analysis of the Secretary-General, "current funding trends are for the most part moving in the direction of reduced flexibility and predictability, and greater fragmentation of resources".<sup>3</sup> This represents a major challenge for UN-Women and other entities of the UN development system, notably in developing an accurate integrated results and resources framework. In the context of the structured dialogue on financing at the Executive Board, it will be essential to reflect on how mutual accountability can be enhanced in regards to funding, so as to preserve the integrity of the strategic plan and support the implementation of planned results.

Inter-Agency pooled funds and agency-specific thematic funds have demonstrated to be well suited to support integrated approaches to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by improving aid coordination and coherence and bridging the silos between development, humanitarian and peacebuilding assistance. The abovementioned Secretary-General report notes that an estimated 15-20 percent of non-core expenditures should be channeled through interagency pooled funds in order to support enhanced system-wide coherence. Until now however, only 16 programme countries reached the 20 percent threshold, with the majority of countries below the 5 percent ratio. This will require greater efforts between the UN development system and donors in order to meet the standards set by the QCPR.

Cost recovery is also a critical aspect of the financing strategy of UN-Women. Consistently applying the Board approved cost recovery rate is a necessary, but not sufficient, step towards full cost recovery. The inclusion of all direct costs in donor agreements is also critical, particularly for a small Entity such as UN-Women. The Entity will continue to strengthen its cost recovery framework by providing offices with the necessary guidance and tools, and by raising awareness, both internally and externally, on the important implications of cost recovery for the sustainability of its programmes.

#### **e) Using innovation to leverage new opportunities and improve operational effectiveness**

The QCPR emphasizes that achieving the SDGs while leaving no one behind requires a UN development system that is effective and efficient. It also stresses that supporting access to science, technology, innovation and knowledge management is a key area in which the UN development system is expected to support in strengthening national capacities.

In order to meet this requirement, UN-Women will continue to take an organizational approach to leverage and embed innovation Entity-wide, including in its programming and business processes. Such an approach creates a 'bias towards action', empowering UN-Women staff with the capacity to generate new solutions

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<sup>2</sup> See [Structured Dialogue on Financing: UN-Women's funding overview, gaps and financing strategy](#)

<sup>3</sup> [SG Report: Funding Analysis for the implementation of GA/67/226](#)

that dramatically accelerate development impact for women and girls, and that promote flexible operational processes, adaptable in a rapidly evolving context.

Innovation in UN-Women emphasizes a human-centered approach, and draws on scientific advances to influence behavioral change, alter power relations and address harmful societal norms and attitudes in non-traditional ways. UN-Women also leverages the opportunities provided by information and communication technologies (ICT) to disrupt “business as usual” and to bring a selection of potentially high impact innovations to scale. The importance of ICT is recognized in the 2030 Agenda as well as other key normative outcomes, such as WSIS+10 (A/RES/70/125).

Through an ecosystem of integrated solutions, UN-Women is bringing partners together to create synergies and economies of scale, reaching out to those most likely left behind, and fostering their effective access to education, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in a cost effective manner.

Given that UN-Women has embraced a decentralized model and structure, access to data becomes critical for the proper functioning of the Entity. UN-Women is also committed to leveraging ICTs to enhance its operational efficiency, including its financial management, results management; pipeline management; human resources management and donor management functions. The bulk of UN-Women new operational information systems should be rolled out by end 2017.

As they represent a major opportunity to scale up results and realize efficiency gains, the leveraging of innovation, including ICTs, for both development results and institutional strengthening will constitute a key aspect of the strategic plan 2018-2021.

#### **f) Fostering operational efficiency**

The QCPR emphasizes that integrated action by the UN development system requires the adoption of flexible, cost-effective and collaborative models for field presence to meet specific challenges and needs of partner countries.

The evaluation of UN-Women’s regional architecture provides useful lessons and recommendations to meet these requirements. After discussion at the 2017 first regular session of the Executive Board, UN-Women will be working to align its field presence with the principles outlined in the QCPR.<sup>4</sup> UN-Women is committed to leveraging other agencies’ presence and systems to avoid duplication of UN operational capacity, thereby allowing UN-Women to calibrate its operational presence depending on its programming engagement at the country level.

In addition, to ensure timely delivery of results, the Entity is reviewing and streamlining its business processes and programming guidelines. UN-Women aims to better align headquarter functions with the needs of field offices, optimize field support, and ensure robust systems for the stewardship of resources. UN-Women remains committed to transparency and has taken steps to significantly improve its reporting under the International Aid Transparency Initiative.

Ensuring organizational effectiveness and efficiency will continue to be a focus of UN-Women’s strategic plan, including through the development of a dedicated results framework to measure performance on these critical institutional enablers.

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<sup>4</sup> See [Management Response to the Evaluation of the Regional Architecture of UN-Women](#).