

IN BRIEF

Lessons from UN Women evaluations in the Americas and the Caribbean

EVALUATION META-SYNTHESIS: ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

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Why is work in women's economic empowerment important?

Women make significant contributions to economies, including as entrepreneurs or employees in businesses, as unpaid domestic caregivers, and as farmers. But women continue to disproportionately suffer poverty, discrimination and exploitation. Gender discrimination means that women often end up in unsafe and underpaid jobs, and remain a minority in management positions. Discrimination also reduces access to economic assets such as land and credit, and limits women's participation in the design of social and economic policies. Women bear the greatest burden of unpaid household and care work, creating time poverty that limits economic opportunities.

Investing in women's economic empowerment (WEE) contributes directly to gender equality, poverty eradication, inclusive economic growth, and sustainable development of communities. UN Women accordingly promotes WEE as a priority strategic area by assisting women in the most vulnerable groups of society in collaboration with governments, civil society organizations and other key actors. This work includes programmatic initiatives aimed at creating legislative and policy frameworks, changing attitudes and perceptions at the societal level, increasing access to social protection, and strengthening income generation capacity. UN Women's engagement in this area builds on international commitments such as the [Beijing Platform for Action](#), the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#), and several other [conventions on gender equality](#), including the Montevideo Strategy and the Santiago Commitment.

UN WOMEN STRATEGIC RESULTS AREAS IN ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT



More policies to promote decent work and social protection for women



More women to own, start and/or manage small, medium and large businesses



More rural women have access to, control and use of productive resources and participate in sustainable agriculture in order to increase their income security, working conditions and resilience to climate change

Source: [Strategic Plan 2018-2021](#)

Which approaches have proven effective for women's economic empowerment?

Through its work with diverse groups including domestic workers, rural/indigenous women and migrant women, UN Women has worked toward integrating the cross-cutting principle of **Leave No One Behind** in promoting economic empowerment, particularly with the most vulnerable groups of society.

In terms of **gender mainstreaming and promoting economic empowerment in public policies**, UN Women's technical support to various government institutions has contributed to strengthening social protection systems, promoting employment, and increasing access to production and financial services. UN Women has also contributed to the generation of gender-sensitive budgets and ensuring funding for gender equality and women's empowerment initiatives. Significant results to which UN Women contributed include: the creation of the National Care System in Colombia; the establishment of a law to improve domestic workers rights in Paraguay; and the institutionalization of a model of financial credit with a gender perspective in El Salvador.

An important line of work in WEE has been the **support to civil society organizations**, contributing to

their strengthening and sustainability. UN Women has offered training in several areas, including finance, technical assistance and accompaniment to these organizations, achieving more significant results through initiatives that have involved different groups of women in a more inclusive way.

Through **comprehensive capacity building processes**, UN Women has been able to contribute to greater autonomy and as a result economic empowerment of women. A key success factor for such training initiatives has been adopting an **integrated approach** that contributes to improvement in women's self-esteem and an internalization of their rights. This is complemented with measures aimed specifically at facilitating women's participation in capacity building activities. For example, providing trainings nearby where women beneficiaries live considerably facilitated their participation in Guatemala, while also reducing the need to significantly adapt their care work. In Ecuador, offering play spaces for children in the care of women training participants facilitated and promoted their attendance, as well as their learning process.

CIUDAD MUJER: Good practices in economic empowerment in times of COVID-19



During 2016, the Ciudad Mujer project was developed in El Salvador, aimed at strengthening and promoting WEE through direct microcredits to women entrepreneurs. The implementation of this project has been a good practice that could be replicated particularly in the current context of crisis to contribute to the COVID-19 socio-economic response.

- Define clearly the beneficiary requirements for the programme, including a guarantee that capital will be used to generate greater income.
- Consider inclusion of vulnerable groups to provide credit access, such as older women and women in areas of elevated poverty
- Link programmes with national regulations to embed sustainability
- Involve local, regional and/or national authorities to foster political will supportive of programme goals
- Adopt an integrated approach, accompanying the credits with training and technical assistance

How can UN Women strengthen its work in women's economic empowerment in the region?

In the current context of the COVID-19 crisis, it is important that UN Women **review and adapt strategic priorities** in the area of WEE considering the emerging needs resulting from the pandemic, as well as strengthen regional learning, coordination and collaboration between offices to enhance its response. UN Women can generate evidence on the impact of the pandemic on WEE from an intersectional approach. It can develop regional dialogue and advocate for policies to stop reversals in WEE, particularly among groups of women in situations of greater vulnerability and exclusion. UN Women can also monitor the effects of public policies implemented as part of COVID-19 response and recovery.

Likewise, it will be crucial for UN Women to promote issues and strategies emerging from future trends in **science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)** as well as closing the digital gap, contributing to women's preparation and competitiveness in these fields. UN Women can: strengthen and develop partnerships with academia, innovation and technology centers; support STEM initiatives in national contexts; develop a regional strategy for STEM plus innovation that incorporates the principle of Leave No One Behind; and adapt

its programs and interventions to help reduce the gender gap in access and use of technology.

UN Women could strengthen its **linkage and involvement in local economic dynamics** through the strengthening of strategic advocacy on key macroeconomic matters that seek to accelerate economic transformations with a gender perspective and that benefit more disadvantaged groups of women.

UN Women could **develop lines of work with men that generate a cultural change in gender roles** so that WEE is designed comprehensively to address not only economic issues but also aspects of leadership, redistribution of care work, and violence prevention. In this respect, a fundamental challenge is how to generate gender awareness and transformation of socio-cultural roles and practices.

In operational matters and based on lessons learned from credit access programmes, UN Women can adapt its programme planning to ensure that WEE programmes have a **medium- and long-term horizon**, contributing to the sustainability of economic initiatives and results.

EVALUATION REPORTS CONSULTED:

- 2020, Regional Evaluation on WEE, Regional Office
- 2020, Win-Win Mid-Term Evaluation, Brazil
- 2020, Country Portfolio Evaluation, [Colombia](#)
- 2020, Country Portfolio Evaluation, [El Salvador](#)
- 2020, Country Portfolio Evaluation, [Mexico](#)
- 2019, Country Portfolio Evaluation, [Guatemala](#)
- 2019, [Strategic Partnership Alliances](#), Bolivia
- 2018, [Women Leading Development](#), Ecuador
- 2018, [Ciudad Mujer](#), El Salvador
- 2016, [Expanding Opportunities](#), Guatemala
- 2015, Country Portfolio Evaluation, [El Salvador](#)

All evaluations available at <https://gate.unwomen.org/>



Review and adapt WEE strategic priorities based on emerging needs resulting from the pandemic



Promote WEE strategies derived from future trends in STEM



Develop work strategies with men to support a change in gender roles



Promote greater involvement in local economic dynamics



Strengthen strategic advocacy on key macroeconomic matters



Plan to finance programmes with a medium to long-term horizon to support the sustainability of women entrepreneur initiatives