



REVIEW OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM-WIDE ACTION PLAN ON GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN (UN-SWAP)

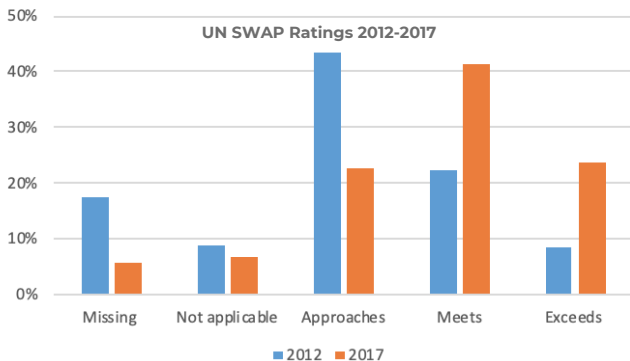
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Background

The System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP) was designed as a system-wide accountability framework to measure, monitor and drive progress towards a common set of 15 performance indicators to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women. The UN-SWAP operationalizes the United Nations System-wide Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women endorsed in 2006 by the United Nations Chief Executives Board (CEB) into a plan of action.

During the first phase of implementation (2012-2017), 66 entities reported on the indicators. The progress achieved against the performance indicators through the implementation of the programme is considerable. Entities meeting or exceeding requirements for all performance indicators more than doubled compared with the baseline figures, with an increase from 31 to 65 per cent. The diversity of mandates and operating models among reporting entities has raised several challenges for the implementation of the Action Plan. The noticeable reduction in “missing” information and “not applicable” rating can be interpreted as a sign of increased ownership among entities.



In 2018, an updated version of the System-wide Action Plan (2.0) as well as the United Nations Country Team Gender Equality Scorecard were launched as complementary accountability frameworks.



Objective and Purpose

The United Nations General Assembly requested that the Joint Inspection Unit undertake a system-wide evaluation of the effectiveness, value added and impact of UN-SWAP as a tool for performance monitoring and accountability which primarily focused on institutional arrangements such as policy and planning, strategic planning, oversight, human and financial resources, organizational culture. JIU reviewed the mechanisms for monitoring and accountability at the level of the UN system as well as within the reporting entities and studied the processes and procedures for the implementation of the programme.



What the JIU found

Commitment of leadership and executive management is crucial to achieving progress

The endorsement of the action plan by the CEB provided system-wide leadership commitment to implement the policy and is a cornerstone of success for the programme. The responsibility of executive managers to take action to create an enabling environment is a key factor in ensuring the effective implementation of the plan and of gender-related components of corporate policies.

UN-SWAP is a useful framework and a credible benchmark

UN-SWAP has proven to be an effective framework for tracking system-wide progress and a useful benchmark and catalyst for advancement towards gender mainstreaming in most participating entities. Capacity for addressing gender mainstreaming has increased in some organizations and UN-SWAP has contributed to fostering dialogue across different business units and has raised awareness of gender-related matters.

UN-SWAP's quality assurance mechanisms are key for credibility

UN-SWAP is based on self-assessment and self-reporting by participating entities. The quality assurance mechanisms found during the review differed widely across reporting entities. This poses a challenge to its credibility and it must be ensured that reporting is not simply a bureaucratic exercise but reflects the real situation of the reporting entity and thereby the system.

UN-SWAP framework would benefit from disaggregated reporting to promote accountability of individual entities and the UN system

The framework provides a truly unique system-wide model for a well-elaborated framework of performance indicators for monitoring of progress on gender mainstreaming in a systematic and harmonized manner. The current system-wide reporting mechanism to the Economic and Social Council can be enhanced by presenting both aggregated and disaggregated figures for individual entities to increase accountability.

The role of governing bodies should be strengthened

The annual letter addressed by UN-Women to the executive management of the reporting entities provides information to place the governing bodies in a position to better assess UN-SWAP compliance and instruct the executive heads to take action. Governing bodies are informed about UN-SWAP achievements in significantly varied ways. In most cases, the UN-SWAP achievements are presented as part of another reporting mechanism on the implementation of gender policies or a report on human resources management. Integrating UN-SWAP in broader reporting requirements to the legislative and governing body as part of corporate results frameworks is a good practice to more effectively involve governing bodies.

Coordination and facilitation of UN-SWAP received positive assessment from the reporting entities

As per its mandate, UN-Women has been the lead agency for coordinating and facilitating the design, development and implementation of the programme. There is a positive assessment from the reporting entities on UN-Women's coordination and facilitation, which is seen as effective and flexible. Existing inter-agency networks (evaluation, audit, strategic planning, human resources, etc.) have been leveraged to support the development and the implementation of the framework. UN-SWAP is seen as a system-wide achievement as most of the reporting entities had a hand in the development of the framework and its implementation.



What JIU Recommends

1 Considering that UN-SWAP is based on self-assessment, quality assurance mechanisms in place in the reporting entities should be assessed regularly to ensure that ratings by indicator are accurate and are appropriately supported by evidence.

2 The members of the CEB are invited to undertake a comprehensive review of the results achieved following the implementation of the first phase of UN-SWAP and endorse the framework as revised in 2018 which was expanded to promote more sustainable achievements by UN Country Teams at the field level.

3 UN-Women is encouraged to review the content of the report formally presented by the United Nations Secretary-General to the Economic and Social Council, notably to indicate the progress made by individual reporting entities, the drivers of success and the challenges they face.

4 The legislative and governing bodies of the United Nations system organizations should review the UN-Women annual letter addressed to executive management that should be accompanied by the measure proposed by executive management to be undertaken to improve compliance with the indicators and expected contribution to gender equality and the empowerment of women.

5 An independent assessment of effective progress towards gender mainstreaming to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women should be undertaken within each of the UN participating organizations, possibly using UN-SWAP as a benchmark.



Methodology and Approach

In accordance with JIU internal standards, guidelines and working procedures, this system-wide review was conducted in a consultative manner. The methodology followed in preparing the report included:



Desk review of relevant documentation such as UN-SWAP guidance and technical note and UN-Women annual letters to executive management of reporting entities showing performance achieved on 15 indicators (2012-2017).



An online survey of UN-SWAP focal points and gender focal points/focal points for women.



Questionnaires to UN-Women, 55 UN-SWAP reporting entities and the Secretariat of the United Nations Chief Executives Board.



A series of interviews with UN-Women officials as coordinator and facilitator of the programme interviews with the Executive Director and the director of the Coordination Division, the members of the UN-SWAP team as well as officials of other departments.



90 interviews conducted with officials of reporting entities selected to achieve a balance taking into consideration their mandate, operational model, location and size.



A focus group held during the Annual Meeting of UN-SWAP and Gender Focal Points in Geneva (October 2018).

ABOUT THE JIU

The Joint Inspection Unit is the only independent external oversight body of the United Nations system mandated to conduct evaluations, inspections and investigations system-wide.

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