

2013 Update of the DFID Multilateral Aid Review (MAR)

Response by UN Women

UN Women is pleased to receive the report of the 2013 MAR Update. The report makes clear the across-the-board progress that UN Women has made in its first two and a half years of existence, in all of the reform priority areas identified in the 2011 MAR. UN Women appreciates the recognition of the increased capacity it brings to bear to gender equality and women's empowerment in comparison with its predecessor entities.

UN Women was established to address problems of under-resourcing, fragmentation and lack of authority that limited the UN system's impact, bringing four previously separate entities together into one unified organization a concrete example of the United Nations reform process. UN Women appreciates the strong recognition in the MAR Update of the role the Entity has played in successfully advocating for gender equality and women's empowerment, and raising awareness of the critical importance of these issues among all stakeholders, leveraging its unique normative, operational and coordination functions. As the MAR Update observes: "Compared to UNIFEM, UN Women plays a stronger normative, operational and coordination role at country and HQ level."

UN Women is particularly gratified that the MAR Update reflects that UN Women has achieved significant institutional strengthening while also putting in place new structures and undertaking an extensive transition and change management process, with a significantly strengthened field presence, and staff aligned according to the needs of the new organization. It has achieved these changes while also delivering results on the ground, as evidenced in its strengthened results reporting, including the publicly available data companion to the Executive Director's Annual Report on the Implementation of the Strategic Plan, which showed UN Women on track to meet 22 of its 28 Executive Board-agreed targets in its priority areas, and only at significant risk of missing 3 of the 28.

In 2011, UNIFEM, as UN Women's largest predecessor entity, was assessed as having a number of challenges and weaknesses of its field presence and institutional systems/processes. The 2013 MAR Update assessed four reform priority areas:

1. Contribution to Results
2. Strategic and Performance Management
3. Transparency and Accountability
4. Cost and Value Consciousness

Progress was identified in all four reform priority areas. As the MAR Update observes "UN Women's reform to give more authority to regional and country offices should improve performance in developing countries; and appropriate systems are in place to strengthen its results focus and evaluation culture. It has improved its cost and value consciousness and has set up systems to promote internal and external transparency and accountability."

In its 2013 report to its Executive Board, UN Women reported results in some 90 countries, in the areas of women's political participation and economic empowerment, ending violence against women and girls, putting women and girls at the heart of the peace and security agenda, and ensuring that laws, policies and budgets work for women and girls. In each of those areas, UN Women achieved results in more countries than the year before. For example, it reported results in twice as many countries in planning and budgeting, over 50 percent more countries in ending violence against women, and almost 60 percent more countries in economic empowerment.

The MAR Update report highlights that “There is evidence that UN Women is striving for continuous improvements and its activities are guided by stronger self-analysis. Compared to UNIFEM, UN Women has developed a stronger results framework and evaluation function.” This was supported by the development of UN Women’s new Strategic Plan (2014-2017), which was recognized by its partners and its Executive Board as a strongly prepared and results focused document, which provides a basis for UN Women’s work until 2017. The Strategic Plan reflects UN Women’s results culture, including use of monitoring and evaluation to ensure that UN Women learns both from what it is doing right, and what it needs to do differently.

Much of the progress that the MAR Update recognizes is a direct consequence of UN Women’s new regional architecture, which realigned UN Women to better focus on delivering results for women and girls on the ground, in the countries where it matters most. UN Women is committed to continue to implement reforms to improve its results focus, transparency and accountability, and cost effectiveness, in order to better support women and girls on the ground.

UN Women has, since its establishment, put in place processes to maximize value for money and generate savings wherever possible. UN Women welcomes the recognition in the MAR Update that “Compared to UNIFEM, UN Women strives for economy in the purchase of programme inputs and collaborates on common procurement; leverages UN system resources rather than building its own structures. UN Women also has a number of good practice systems and policies in place to allow management to pay attention to value for money and cost control. In line with other agencies, UN Women is IPSAS-compliant.” UN Women will continue to develop its operational efficiency and effectiveness initiatives to ensure it operates at full functionality while maintaining tight controls over its underlying cost base. This includes tightening implementation of existing policies to improve reporting and cost tracking, internal control and delegation of authority.

UN Women also welcomes the acknowledgement that “UN Women is signatory of the International Aid Transparency Initiative and has been found fully compliant according to its implementation schedule in the IATI Annual Report 2013.” UN Women is committed to enhancing transparency and accountability for its organizational results and IATI is a critical component of the continued organizational efficiency and effectiveness initiatives.

UN Women was established at a time of economic and financial crisis. It has so far not received the financial support that has met the stated commitment and political recognition of its mandate from donors, although it is unusual among UN entities in having had a steadily growing budget for the last two years. UN Women hopes that the MAR Update will encourage and influence other donors to provide more financial support to UN Women in line with the expectations of Member States when UN Women was established, thus bringing UN Women closer to a more stable and solid financial situation.

UN Women would like to reiterate its appreciation for the 2013 MAR Update. While UN Women recognizes there is progress to be made in achieving excellence in all aspects of its work, it is proud of the progress it has made in the short time since its establishment, and is confident that, if afforded the resources, it can continue to progress to deliver on its challenging and vital mandate and achieve real and lasting results for women and girls. UN Women looks forward to the full MAR in 2015 and continuing the close collaboration and consultation with DFID colleagues that took place during the 2013 MAR Update.