WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM EVALUATIONS OF PROJECTS FUNDED BY THE UN TRUST FUND TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?

A meta-analysis of evaluations managed by UN Trust Fund grantees between 2015 and 2019

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SUMMARY

This meta-analysis is based on evidence from 30 evaluation reports commissioned by UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund) grantees at the end of their projects. The reports are a subset of a total of 79 evaluation reports determined to be of high quality through a meta-evaluation exercise, and cover projects implemented between 2015 and 2019. This meta-analysis aims to extract evidence of what works and what doesn’t work in ending violence against women and girls (EVAW/G) to contribute to knowledge generation and dissemination. It is a step towards developing an evidence and learning hub with quality-assured material and credible data from existing projects that can inform people and organizations working on EVAW/G.

The range of projects supported by the UN Trust Fund offers an opportunity to delve deep and examine the different ways in which projects were designed and their impacts on reducing violence. The reduction of violence is determined by a complex mix of factors, including the voice and agency of survivors, the extent of participation and dialogue within communities, the level of understanding of how behaviours change and norms shift, and knowledge around how to design services to work better for the communities they serve.

A deeper understanding of what works as well as what doesn’t will be useful for future project design or management for the UN Trust Fund as well as others working in the field of EVAW/G. Therefore, the intended audience for this report are donors such as the UN Trust Fund, civil society organizations (CSOs) and practitioners that implement programmes to end violence against women and girls as well as researchers interested in furthering the field.

The first objective of the meta-analysis was to ask: What are we learning from evaluation findings on ending violence against women? How are projects designed to be effective at reducing violence? What can we learn from the different strategies designed to make the projects effective, and at what levels is change being affected? To this end, the meta-analysis used an ecological framework to assess strategies for reducing violence at three critical levels: the individual, community and structural levels.

Secondly, what are we learning about the characteristics that determine the effectiveness, sustainability and impact of UN Trust Fund projects? The meta-analysis interrogated promising strategies, challenges faced and mitigating actions that contribute to achieving impact, effectiveness and sustainability in EVAW/G.

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WHAT DID THE META-ANALYSIS CONCLUDE AND RECOMMEND?

EFFECTIVENESS

Conclusion 1: UN Trust Fund projects, regardless of the form of violence they address or their setting, effectively promote positive attitudes and beliefs. They raise awareness on EVAW/G at the individual level and provide important lessons on how to translate that awareness into action.

Recommendation 1: Trainings and awareness sessions promoting gender equitable attitudes at the individual level are the cornerstone of EVAW/G programming, but in order to be effective in bringing change, they must be designed or adapted from the ground up, with clear calls to action and behaviour change.

Conclusion 2: UN Trust Fund projects have adopted various effective strategies to shift harmful social norms related to VAW/G, but some deep-seated norms remain hard to shift within three years.

Recommendation 2: Social norms change on EVAW/G is essential to bringing change at scale, but must account for significant time and skills, and intensive community engagement.

Conclusion 3: UN Trust Fund projects that anticipate barriers to action throughout the life cycle of a project have been effective in inducing collective action for EVAW/G.

Recommendation 3: Similar to inducing action at the individual level, awareness-raising at the community level should have clear calls for collective action, and work on reducing barriers to it before, during and after project implementation.

Conclusion 4: UN Trust Fund projects are effective in working with key secondary beneficiaries to improve service delivery and strengthen institutional responses when strategies for engagement with service providers and policymakers are well planned, focused and meaningful.

Recommendation 4: Projects must carefully design, manage, and plan the terms of engagement with service providers and policymakers so that the “ask” is meaningful, practical and feasible for both the implementer and the secondary beneficiary.
Conclusion 5: UN Trust Fund projects that anticipate the challenges that women may face in asserting their independence, and find ways to mitigate these, have been effective in reducing VAW/G.

Recommendation 5a: While investing in strategies to help women become changemakers, projects should also consider mechanisms and strategies for sustained support to alleviate the burden that women might feel for being the primary agents of change.

Recommendation 5b: Projects that use economic empowerment strategies must ensure that women are able to sustain their activities beyond the life cycle of the intervention.

IMPACT

Conclusion 6: Almost half the projects in the sample have measured impacts and observed reductions in men’s perpetration of or women’s experience of VAW/G, but each evaluation has measured it differently, which points to the challenges of measuring VAW/G goals within short time frames and with restricted resources. Critically, however, UN Trust Fund projects have led to significant impacts on precursors such as self-efficacy and self-identity, and have had unintended consequences, both positive and negative. This shows the cascading effects of project activities well beyond the stated overall project goals.

Recommendation 6: Expand the scope of the data set, and the types of data, measures and themes in future evaluations, analyses and studies to take advantage of the full range and scope of UN Trust Fund projects.

SUSTAINABILITY

Conclusion 7: While the project cycles may be limited, and finding channels for financial sustainability may be difficult, projects can still find pathways to continue their work even after UN Trust Fund support ends.

Recommendation 7: CSOs should look at different forms of sustainability, over and beyond the scale-up of the project, by institutionalizing project results, investing in networks and building ecosystems.
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UN TRUST FUND

The above conclusions and recommendations have a number of implications for the UN Trust Fund as a grant-maker and organization dedicated to capacity development and knowledge-sharing across grantees.

For example, on funding and project length, the UN Trust Fund will want to consider whether to extend the minimum project length beyond three years; whether to allow more flexibility in issuing no-cost extensions to projects; and whether to provide more flexibility in funding through contingency budgets to help grantees “go the last mile” in EVAW/G interventions and ensure sustainability. The UN Trust Fund may wish to revisit guidance for both applicants and grantees to ensure projects are manageable for CSO size and experience rather than being too aspirational; to provide more guidance on how to devise strategies for subgroups within beneficiary groups, in order to reach the most marginalized; and to effectively engage service providers and policymakers in a sustainable manner.

Furthermore, since this meta-analysis is limited to end-of-project evaluation reports, future work should expand the scope to incorporate other types of project data, such as periodic monitoring reports. The 30 projects considered in this meta-analysis are only a small subset of the total number of projects funded by the UN Trust Fund. For perspective, in 2019 alone, the UN Trust Fund funded and managed 137 projects. Widening the data pool will enable a more thorough understanding of a number of questions and themes that are useful and relevant to ending VAW/G.

Taken together, data from UN Trust Fund projects constitute a valuable resource both for those interested in advancing knowledge in the field of EVAW/G and for practitioners to learn from other on-the-ground experiences. This report recommends that the UN Trust Fund seeks partners to continue to mine this data, including to look at projects across settings or by specific themes (such as work with men and boys, on economic empowerment or on ending harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, chhaupadi or child marriage). Future analyses should involve grantees in learning and co-creation of conclusions and recommendations to make the findings most relevant to practitioners in the EVAW/G field.

SCOPE OF META-ANALYSIS

30 EXTERNAL EVALUATIONS

26 COUNTRIES

79 INDEPENDENT, EXTERNAL FINAL EVALUATION REPORTS

APPROACH & METHODOLOGY

4 STAGES

- Identification of entry points & research domains
- The creation of a database with associated codes for each domain of interest
- Data extraction and analysis of themes with contrasting examples
- Co-creation of a set of conclusions & accompanying recommendations

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