



UNDP Gender Equality Seal Assessment

Final Report

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Executive Summary

The Gender Equality Seal is a corporate certification process that aims to recognize good performance of UNDP Country Offices (COs) in delivering transformational gender results. It is seen as a tool for empowering managers and accelerating changes needed to support countries' gender equality goals. The Gender Equality Seal uses minimum quality standards in seven areas or domains (management, capacities, enabling environment, knowledge management, programs and projects, partnerships, and gender equality impacts/results). Country offices are certified based on a review of their achievements and progress in these seven areas. The Seal is also a learning platform that supports capacity building and innovative thinking on gender mainstreaming.

The first pilot phase of the Seal was launched in 2011 in three COs. A second pilot round in 2013-14 included 32 Offices. In 2015-16, 42 COs started a new certification round. Additionally, 35 Country Offices in the Africa Region participated in a baseline exercise to prepare for Seal certification.

In general there is a positive view of the Gender Equality Seal throughout UNDP and it has prompted significant attention and interest. The overall consensus is that the Gender Equality Seal has been an effective tool in driving change that supports gender mainstreaming in Country Offices.

This review was launched to examine the link between the Gender Equality Seal certification process and the quality of gender equality programming (including planned and reported gender equality results). It aimed to learn from the Seal process and help support the Gender Equality Seal as a sustainable and strategic corporate initiative.

The objectives of the review were:

- To learn about the Gender Equality Seal's contribution to improved programming (including planned for and reported gender equality results), considering country programmes that have been certified gold, silver and bronze and country programmes in conflict-affected areas.
- To improve the process, including the methodology, resources required, sustainability of the Gender Equality Seal interventions and recertification.
- To analyze the factors that enable COs to receive Gold certification (what do they have in common).

The methodology for the review included a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, including 49 skype interviews, 3 country missions (including one mission to a crisis-affected CO), online surveys, an 'analysis workshop', and extensive documentation review.

The document outlines both the evolution of the Gender Equality Seal and sets out the current framework, including the processes and the assessment matrix.

Findings

Finding 1: The Gender Equality Seal has been an important catalyst for change at the Country Office level. The overall consensus is that the Gender Equality Seal has been an effective tool in driving change that supports gender mainstreaming in Country Offices. Survey results and interviews also note satisfaction (and in many cases enthusiasm) for the Gender Equality Seal as a tool.

Finding 2: Country Offices participating in the Gender Equality Seal report significant improvements across the domains in the Seal Framework. Participating COs noted numerous specific advancements as a result of their participation in the Gender Equality Seal. There was progress across all seven areas in both Rounds (2013-2014 and 2015-2016). In Round 2013-2014, the highest scoring areas were

partnerships (with 89% of the benchmarks met) and results (80% of the benchmarks met). In Round 2015-2016, partnerships again scored the highest (90% of benchmarks met), while knowledge management was the second highest (with 74% of benchmarks met).

Finding 3: Although there are overall general trends, there is a diversity of scores and ratings across regions, with different elements scoring higher in some regions.

Finding 4: The Seal has resulted in many concrete changes at CO level, with reports that it has contributed to improved programming. Yet it is too soon to know if the Gender Equality Seal has produced improved gender equality development results. Although there were anecdotal examples of improved development results relating to gender equality/women's empowerment, there is no clear evidence that achieving a strong certification (silver or gold) translates into consistent, transformatory gender equality results throughout the CO's programmes. Respondents noted that it was 'too soon' to see results at the programming and results levels.

Finding 5: In certain circumstances, the Gender Equality Seal can be an effective tool for crisis-affected Country Offices. The decision on whether this is an appropriate way to focus gender equality investments in this set of COs should be made on a case-by-case basis.

Finding 6: Balancing the learning and certification elements of the Gender Equality Seal is a delicate process. At the heart of the Gender Equality Seal is the desire to engage Country Offices in a process of reflection and learning. While the certification element attracts many managers and provides an incentive, there is a danger that an over focus on 'ticking boxes' can undermine this learning element. Balancing these two emphases is an important challenge.

Finding 7: There is a tension between the Gender Equality Seal common standard benchmarks based on the Gender Equality Strategy (what are considered minimum requirements for Country Offices) and calls from COs for benchmarks to take the 'country context' into consideration. One of the most common complaints from COs was that the several of the benchmarks were impossible for them to make and therefore 'unfair.' Yet the benchmarks in the Gender Equality Seal are drawn from UNDP's current Gender Equality Strategy (2014-2017). Interviews with intellectual authors of the Gender Equality Seal stressed that they were minimum standards that all COs should put in place. These elements are considered to be essential building blocks required for successful gender mainstreaming.

Finding 8: The current Gender Equality Seal Benchmarking Matrix is complex and comprehensive. There is almost unanimous support for maintaining a focus on operations/internal process in addition to projects and programs. However, there are concerns over the complexity of the matrix and discussion is needed on how to strengthen the focus on gender equality results.

Finding 9: There was overall consensus that the Gender Equality Seal process is working well and there is appreciation for the Seal team's workstyle and support. Further improvements could strengthen the programme.

Finding 10: COs with high certification levels (gold or silver) share common factors. These include a focus on learning, a long history of working on gender equality issues, investment of resources, a dedicated gender equality specialist/technical expert, and a well-functioning Gender Focal Team that shares responsibility for attention to gender equality issues across all Office staff.

Finding 11: Resource shortages limit the potential positive impact of the Gender Equality Seal.

Finding 12: While the Gender Equality Seal is a proven tool to stimulate discussion, raise the profile of gender equality issues, and generate change, sustainability of gains is still fragile, especially in the COs with lower certification levels.

Conclusion

There is a strong consensus and evidence that the Gender Equality Seal is an effective driver of positive change at the Country Office level. COs participating in the Seal initiative report changes in how the Office operates (new tools, new strategies, improved partnerships and new processes) as well as greater understanding of gender equality issues across the whole office. Gold certified Offices talk about changes in organizational culture and renewed commitments (by the CO and by individual staff) to addressing gender equality issues across both programming and operational areas.

Strengths of the Gender Equality Seal include its creative balance of competition with learning/reflection; the focus on mobilizing the entire office in working towards gender equality outcomes (rather than designating this responsibility to an isolated, overworked gender equality focal point); merging operational and programming issues; and providing a concrete roadmap that outlines what a CO needs to do to improve its performance (and thus demystifying gender mainstreaming).

Given the relative youth of this initiative, there was agreement that it is still too soon to assess whether or not the Gender Equality Seal is resulting in improved achievement of gender equality development results by COs.

There is evidence that the Gender Equality Seal can be an effective tool in crisis-affected COs, however, the CO must ensure that the minimum conditions for success in working with the Gender Equality Seal process are present (technical support, staff time, leadership commitment, etc.) before embarking on this process.

While there is wide-spread agreement that the Gender Equality Seal is an effective tool, there were recommendations for improvements. The current Matrix is comprehensive and relatively complex. There were pleas to simply it yet without losing any of the key points, perhaps a difficult request. One weakness of the current matrix is how it assesses gender equality results.

The Review explored what high scoring COs had in common. Interestingly, successful Offices often did not emphasize the certification aspect; rather they focused on what they could learn and how they could improve through participating in the Gender Equality Seal. Staff emphasized that solid work on gender equality took time to build and developed. An experienced and well-qualified gender expert was regularly mentioned as a key element in successful programming and a higher Seal certification. All high scoring offices had strong leaders who allocated resources, led by example, and supported an open and creative environment in the office.

Finally the issue of resources was a constant theme of this Assessment. This was raised in every single conversation and interview. If the Gender Equality Seal is to be successful, it requires sufficient resources to operate – at the CO, headquarters and regional levels. Reflection and building capacities require time, which in turn requires resources. The Gender Seal Team must have the resources to properly manage the number of participating COs and deliver quality advice and support. Poor performers require support to improve and good performers (Gold Offices) would benefit from a concrete incentive fund to continue to move forward.

At a time when many organizations are struggling to generate interest and momentum in gender equality/women's empowerment initiatives and programmes, the Gender Equality Seal offers new insights. COs with strong gender equality programmes and capacities, like the Cuba CO, credit the Gender Equality Seal with being a key factor in their success. The successful institutionalization of these gains will require ongoing investments and continued attention.

Recommendations

The first recommendation is a general corporate recommendation, primarily aimed at UNDP management. The remainder are aimed at the Gender Equality Seal Team and the UNDP Gender Team.

Recommendation 1: Invest adequate resources in the Gender Equality Seal programme, recognizing that it is a practical and effective tool to ensure that COs are capable of supporting the SDG gender equality agenda.

Recommendation 2: Continue with the Gender Equality Seal through the next cycle of UNDP's Gender Equality Strategy.

Recommendation 3: Link the number of COs participating in the Gender Equality Seal in each certification round to the resources available. Greater numbers could be accommodated with increased resources.

Recommendation 4: Review and revise the Gender Equality Seal Matrix in order to: a) reduce the number of benchmarks, b) increase the rigour of the 'results' section, c) clarify expectations in terms of documentation, and d) revisit the benchmarks for crisis-affected COs.

Recommendation 5: If a crisis-affected CO is interested in participating in the Gender Equality Seal, they should be encouraged to review whether or not they have the resources and political commitment to undertake this process.

Recommendation 6: Revise the induction process to include briefings and clear communication with senior managers on the logic and rationale behind the Gender Equality Seal and the factors that have enabled other Offices to succeed.

Recommendation 7: Build in more reflection opportunities (regional workshops, peer-to-peer exchanges, Gold COs mentoring other COs, etc.) with resources committed to facilitate this.

Recommendation 8: Review the suggestions provided in Finding 9 about improvements to see what can be reasonably incorporated into the Gender Equality Seal process given resource constraints.

Recommendation 9: General materials should clarify and reinforce that the Seal benchmarks are minimum standards based on existing UNDP policies and commitments.

Recommendation 10: Establish a fund to be used by Gold Offices for programming experimentation and commit resources accordingly.

Recommendation 11: The voluntary nature of the Seal should be maintained.

Acronyms

BPPS	Bureau for Policy and Programme Support
CD	Country Director
CO	Country Office
CoP	Community of Practice
CPD	Country Programme Document
DRR	Deputy Resident Representative
GEMS	Gender Equality Management System
GES	Gender Equality Strategy
GE/WE	Gender Equality/Women's Empowerment
GFT	Gender Focal Team
GSS	Global Staff Survey
GTF	Gender Task Force
IT	Information technology
RBA	Regional Bureau for Africa
RBAP	Regional Bureau for Asia Pacific
RBAS	Regional Bureau for Arab States
RBEC	Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States
RBLAC	Regional Bureau Latin America and the Caribbean
RSC	Regional Service Centre
ROAR	Results-oriented Annual Report
SOGI	Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity
UNCT	United Nations country team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

1. Introduction

The Gender Equality Seal is a corporate certification process that aims to recognize good performance of UNDP Country Offices (COs) in delivering transformational gender results. It is seen as a tool for empowering managers and accelerating changes needed to support countries' gender equality goals. The Gender Equality Seal establishes minimum quality standards in seven areas or domains (management, capacities, enabling environment, knowledge management, programs and projects, partnerships, and gender equality impacts/results). Country offices are certified based on a review of their achievements and progress in these seven areas. The Seal is also a learning platform that supports capacity building and innovative thinking on gender mainstreaming.

The first pilot phase of the Seal was launched 2011 and included 3 Country Offices. A second pilot round in 2013-2014 included 32 offices, 29 of which completed the process; 25 out of these 29 were fully certified, receiving gold, silver or bronze Seals. In 2014-2015, 34 Country Offices in the Africa Region participated in a baseline exercise to prepare conditions for Seal certification. In 2015-2016, 42 COs started a new certification round. Fourteen were participating for a second time with the aim of improving their certification level.

Overall, there is a positive view of the Gender Equality Seal throughout UNDP and it has prompted significant attention and interest. For example, the 2015 Evaluation of UNDP Contribution to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment noted:

The Gender Equality Seal Pilot is a unique initiative developed by UNDP... The certification process has motivated staff and tapped a competitive vein among country offices volunteering to be part of the pilot process. While it is too soon to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the seal's impact on gender equality results, it is clear that it is motivating change and promoting gender mainstreaming as something tangible and achievable.¹

The same 2015 Evaluation recommended an independent review of the Gender Equality Seal initiative. This assessment was undertaken in response to this recommendation.

This document provides an overview of the Gender Equality Seal process to date, outlines the methodology for this assessment, documents key findings and concludes with a series of recommendations.

Acknowledgements

The lead consultant would like to thank the UNDP staff participating in this review for their time, ideas and reflections. Staff in the Rwanda, Cuba and Programme of Assistance for the Palestinian People (PAPP) Country Offices generously shared their experiences (warts and all) and facilitated discussions with national partners. Staff in numerous COs braved skype technology to share their insights and answer questions. When the technology failed, several people went above and beyond to provide written inputs. The Gender Equality Seal Team (both headquarters and regional advisors) offered candid reflections, patience with logistical difficulties, and positive attitudes. Invaluable support was provided by Joanna Hill (including interviews, document review, logistics, communication and notes). Consultants who have worked on the Gender Equality Seal in the past generously participated in discussions on how the process works, including strengths and weaknesses. This report attempts to do justice to the diversity and richness of these varying perspectives and experiences. Throughout the process, the dedication of UNDP staff to

¹ Independent Evaluation Office (2015). *Evaluation of UNDP Contribution to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*. p. xiii.

advancing gender equality objectives, not just as an organizational obligation but as a core component of both national and organizational development, was clear.

1.1 Scope of the Assessment

The Terms of Reference and the Inception Report set out the following scope for the Assessment.

Purpose

To examine the link between the Gender Equality Seal certification process and the quality of gender equality programming (including planned and reported gender equality results) in order to learn from the process and help develop the Gender Equality Seal as a sustainable and strategic corporate initiative.

Objectives

- To learn about the Gender Equality Seal's contribution to improved programming (including planned for and reported gender equality results), considering country programmes that have been certified gold, silver and bronze and country programmes in conflict-affected areas.
- To improve the process, including the methodology, resources required, sustainability of the Gender Equality Seal interventions and recertification.
- To analyze the factors that enable COs to receive Gold certification (what do they have in common).

Key research questions

- What is the Gender Equality Seal's contribution to improving programming and development results for gender equality through internal transformation/changes?
- How can we strengthen the certification process (including the timing, benchmarking tool, three levels system, etc.)?
- What are the success factors for the Gender Equality Seal?
- What are the recommendations for future sustainability of the Gender Equality Seal and the changes it brings about?
- Are there specific issues that influence the link between the Gender Equality Seal and improved gender equality programming in crisis-affected countries?

2. Methodology

The Gender Equality team requested a learning exercise, rather than a formal audit or evaluation. Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were used. The reviewer entered into discussions and dialogue with staff where possible.

The first step was the preparation of an inception report that clarified assumptions, developed the theory of change and elaborated the methodology.

The data gathering involved:

- Document review including general UNDP documentation on implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy and documentation related to the Gender Equality Seal (formal and informal reports, draft notes, country-specific documentation, and materials from the Seal Community of Practice (COP)). Particular focus was placed on reviewing documentation (including the Gender

Equality Seal reports, ROAR, and other documents) from seven Gender Equality Seal COs (that had participated in the 2013-14 Round): Afghanistan, Belarus, Cuba, Egypt, Lesotho, Montenegro, and Rwanda.²

- Three online surveys:
 - A repeat of a survey originally conducted for the participations in the 2013-2014 Round (Gender Equality Seal: Effectiveness, Relevance, Value-Added and Lessons) with the new COs applicants for 2015/2016 Round (without the questions that related to the completion of the process). Out of a potential 84 responses, we received 36 for a 43% return rate.
 - A survey for the 15 COs that participated in Certification Round 2013-2014 and did **not** participate in the 2015-2016 Certification Round. Out of 45 potential responses and we received 33 responses, for a 73% response rate.
 - A survey for the 14 COs that participated in Certification Round 2013-2014 and re-applied in Certification Round 2015-2016. Out of 42 potential responses, we received 26 responses for a 62% response rate.

These are very respectable return rates for online surveys.

Three representatives from each CO were asked to complete the Survey (representative of management, member of the gender focal team, and participating staff member).

- Follow-up interviews with COs that had participated in the Gender Equality Seal (with a specific focus on crisis-affected COs – noted with an *): Afghanistan,* Belarus, Colombia,* Democratic Republic of Congo,* Egypt, Lesotho, Montenegro, Nepal,* Somalia,* South Sudan,* and Sudan.* Interviews were also conducted with CO representatives (and the UN Women representative) from Central African Republic CO, even though they have not participated in the Gender Equality Seal to date.
- Interviews with UNDP staff and consultants who have worked intensively with the Gender Equality Seal, including Regional Gender Advisors and the Gender Equality Seal Team at HQ.
- A total of 49 interviews were conducted.
- Three missions to discuss the Gender Equality Seal with Country Office staff and national partners: Rwanda (October 2016), Cuba (November 2016), Palestine (January 2017). These missions involved extensive discussions and interviews with UNDP staff, national partners and development cooperation partners.
- An ‘Analysis Workshop’ was held in New York, November 15-17th, 2016. Participants (members of the Gender Seal Team, consultants working on the Seal and Representatives from COs involved in verifying the 2015-2106 certification round results, for a total of eight participants plus the facilitator) explored preliminary findings and systematized their experience of working on the Gender Equality Seal.
- A Webinar was held on November 2nd to share preliminary findings with the Community of Practice and get their inputs.

² Criteria for the selection of these COs include: COs from different regions, COs certified at different levels and to include conflict-affected COs. The goal was to review a diverse range of experiences.

The methodology included inside/outside perspectives. The leader of the exercise was an external consultant with no previous association with the Gender Equality Seal. She was supported by internal UNDP consultants and members of the Seal team: one who reviewed documents and carried out interviews and one who participated in the Rwanda mission.

As with all methodologies, this one had strengths and limitations. The COs selected for interviews and country missions were not randomly selected. The selection was purposeful, designed to ensure sampling across various experiences. A range of interviews was conducted, enabling a diversity of views to be included in the study. Interviews were open ended, thus quantification of responses was not possible. On the positive side, the discussions on the Seal were wide-ranging and the learning element of the Assessment was maximized through group discussions in the three missions/country visits, as well as the November workshop. The survey responses complemented the more qualitative nature of the interviews and discussions.

3. The Gender Equality Seal – Overview

3.1 Origins of the Gender Equality Seal

Private and Public Sector Certification Initiative

The roots of the Gender Equality Seal are in the gender equality certification programme for private and public sector companies that originated in Latin America. This programme, supported by UNDP's Regional Bureau Latin America Caribbean (RBLAC), outlines a methodology to 'certify' companies that adopt labour policies and practices concerning equality of women and men. This aids in formulating a gender equality policy and actions to move forward. A certifying entity evaluates the company's initiative. On receiving a satisfactory audit, the company is awarded a gender equality seal.

UNDP's Gender Equality Seal³

It appears that different strands came together to build the Gender Equality Seal: UNDP's learning on gender mainstreaming strategies, the RBLAC private sector certification initiative, and inputs from external experts.

First, there was ongoing learning in UNDP on gender mainstreaming. In 2005 UNDP launched an institutional process to strengthen gender mainstreaming, using a framework of three distinct but overlapping institutional domains (political, cultural, and technical), with transformation happening where and when these three changes processes overlapped and supported each other. As well, an external evaluation of gender mainstreaming that same year identified key areas requiring attention: proactive leadership, robust accountability mechanisms, dedicated resources, enhanced capacities and expanded partnerships. The Gender Action Plan 2006-2007 included significant steps to respond to the evaluation.

Moving forward, the Gender Equality Strategy for 2008-2013 (GES) aimed to accelerate gender mainstreaming inside UNDP. The GES included key elements of management systems, enabling policy framework, capacities, knowledge management, alliances and partnerships. There was a strong focus on accountability and institutional development, which in turn influenced the development of the Gender Equality Seal.

³ This section draws on UNDP documentation (including Kalyani Menon-Sen (2012) The UNDP Gender Equality Seal: Quality Certification for Gender Mainstreaming (DRAFT) and interviews with Kalyani Menon-Sen and UNDP staff.

Second, there were the lessons from the RBLAC Certification initiative. The experience demonstrated that certification programmes can be successful tools for accelerating gender equality in the workplace, particularly in generating data and evidence to improve and demonstrate efficiency and results. The success of this initiative inspired UNDP to create a certification process for Country Offices (COs). An internal expert, Neus Bernabeu, guided and advised the first piloting mission on how to adapt the RBLAC methodology to UNDP.

Third, UNDP benefited from external lessons and thinking on gender mainstreaming. An external expert, Kalyani Menon-Sen, participated in ongoing discussions with UNDP staff. These discussions offered opportunities to reflect and bring various strands together in a positive way.

These three processes combined to produce the Gender Equality Seal. The Seal framework is elaborated in the next section.

3.2 Gender Equality Seal Framework⁴

The Gender Equality Seal blends assessment, incentives and reflection. It is explicitly designed to be a ‘fresh take’ on gender mainstreaming. Ideally “the process therefore creates a space for building a shared understanding of the definitions, strategies and goals of gender mainstreaming, identifying gaps and possibilities for synergies, and exploring ways to address them.”⁵

Key elements of the Gender Equality Seal approach include:

- A shift from a “compliance” paradigm to a “change” paradigm. The Gender Equality Seal entails building leadership, strengthening organizational efficiency, and making transformational change. Participation in the Gender Equality Seal is voluntary. This has been identified by UNDP staff as a key element that promotes buy-in (the carrot rather than a compulsory stick).
- An emphasis on the crucial nature of synergies among the various organizational domains (political, technical and cultural), highlighting the linkages among organizational transformation and development results (as the core of gender mainstreaming). The framework encourages the linking of internal changes (human resource practices, for example) with improvements in programming.
- A strong participatory process and potential for motivating the entire CO on gender equality issues (distinguishing the Seal from more traditional ‘audit’ processes). The process encourages critical reflection, learning and innovative thinking on the part of all staff. Attention to gender equality issues is seen as an office-wide task, not just the responsibility of a gender equality specialist or focal point.
- The use of common quality standards/benchmarks across the organization to identify Gold, Silver and Bronze levels of performance. These standards are clearly outlined, contributing to a demystification of ‘gender mainstreaming.’
- The use of existing corporate instruments (Gender Markers, ROAR, Global Staff Survey, etc.) to provide insights into the state of gender mainstreaming and progress toward the achievement of gender equality results.

⁴ This is outlined in UNDP (nd). *UNDP Gender Equality Seal: A Guide for Country Offices/Regional Service Centres/Regional Bureaus*.

⁵ Kalyani Menon-Sen (2012) *The UNDP Gender Equality Seal: Quality Certification for Gender Mainstreaming (DRAFT)*

- The inclusion of an ‘improvement phase’ to support COs as they respond to identified gaps and improve their work on gender equality issues.

The Gender Equality Seal framework uses the metaphor or diagram of a tree (Figure 1). The tree is used to illustrate the relationships between the foundational elements or roots (engendering the organisation) and the fruit (achieving gender equality results and impacts). This image also helps to reinforce the insight that gender mainstreaming is a strategy or means to achieve gender equality (not a goal in and of itself). The tree also signifies the living and growing nature of the organisation. UNDP staff note that this diagram/metaphor has been very useful in helping people understand the logic of the Gender Equality Seal.

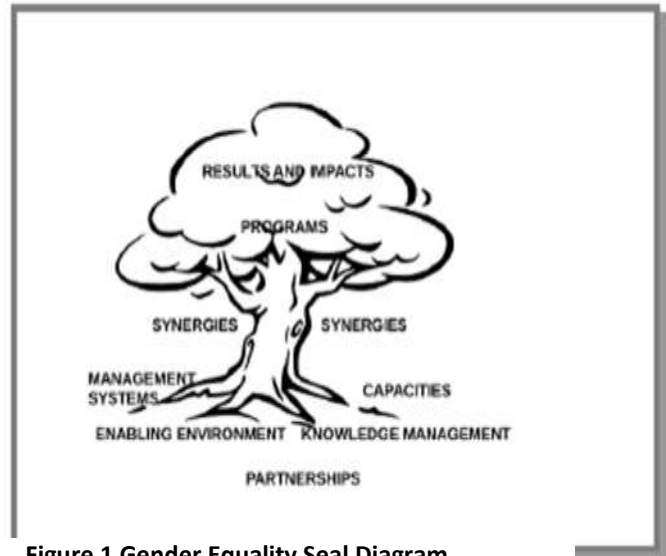


Figure 1 Gender Equality Seal Diagram

The steps in the current Certification Process are:⁶

1. **Online self-assessment.** The CO uses an online version of the Gender Equality Seal benchmarking matrix (Table 1). Guidance documentation suggests that this should be a team effort and not solely the responsibility of the gender focal point or advisor. Each benchmark is scored yes/no. The scoring is based on the assumption that it is relatively objective with few subjective assessments required. Documentation in support of each score is mandatory.

The UNDP Gender Equality Seal Team provides IT assistance during this phase.

The UNDP Gender Equality Seal Team reviews each CO’s self-assessment. They provide feedback and the final results/scores to each applicant. Country Offices receive feedback on how to improve their scores and build an action plan for improvement.

2. **Action Plan for Improvement – Design and Implementation.** Country Offices that would like to be certified prepare an action plan (for 9 months) to address identified weaknesses. The Regional Service Centre and/or the HQ Gender Team provides assistance and guidance on both the formulation of the Action Plan and its implementation.
3. **Final Assessments to Identify Level of Certification.** At the end of the implementation period, COs once again report against the Matrix, uploading supporting documents. Their self-assessment is reviewed by a team of assessors (including the HQ Gender Equality Seal Team, representatives from COs, and possibly extra consultant support). COs scoring 50-69% of the matrix and meeting all the mandatory elements are awarded Bronze. COs scoring 70-79% are awarded Silver.

COs approaching gold certification (at least 80%) receive an assessment mission (composed of 2 members drawn from a pool of trained consultants and UNDP staff). This mission uses a more complex benchmarking matrix with 80 benchmarks (previously more). Table 1 outlines the key elements in

⁶ This process has been refined through the various pilots. Earlier Rounds were somewhat different.

this matrix. The mission concludes with a detailed debriefing and walk-through of the completed scoresheet with the Gender Focal Team.⁷

4. **Certification.** A Certification of the Gender Equality Seal approves the suggested levels of certification for each country office.

The Gender Equality Seal Team offers post-certification support based on the lessons and strategic recommendations from the exercise. Bronze and Silver certificates are provisional and COs can apply for Gold certification after two years. The Gold Gender Equality Seal is valid for 3 years. Gold Country Offices are invited to apply for re-certification after this time.

Table 1: Benchmarking Matrix – 2015/2016		
Area	Indicator	Benchmark (Mandatory Benchmarks are shaded green)
1. Management	1.A Management accountability systems in place and functional	1.1 Senior management ensures that Office Gender Equality Strategy and Action Plan are well aligned with corporate GES 2014-2017. Bronze
		1.2 Performance reviews of senior managers include assessment of their contributions to achieving gender equality results.
		1.3 CO M&E plan integrates gender concerns and includes evaluation of an activity undertaken as part of the CO Gender Action Plan.
	1.B Active and effective Gender Focal Team	1.4 GFT in place and meets mandatory quality criteria. Bronze
		1.5 Atlas gender marker shows at least 15% of Country Office programme expenditures contributing to gender equality outcomes. Gold
2. Capacities	2.A Staff have a basic common perspective on gender mainstreaming	2.1 Orientation on UNDP's commitment to gender equality integrated into induction process for new appointees. Bronze
	2.B CO has adequate technical capacity for gender mainstreaming	2.2 Dedicated gender specialist/gender advisor in place. Silver
		2.3 All programme managers have substantive gender mainstreaming experience.
	2.C Strategic actions taken for building CO gender capacity	2.4 At least 10% of CO learning budget earmarked for gender-related learning activities. Bronze
		2.5 At least two office-wide gender perspective-building events organised in the last twelve months.
		2.6 Recruitment procedures include screening for gender competence.
3. Enabling environment	3.A Corporate policies for gender equality in the workplace localized and implemented	3.1 Work/life policy notified and implemented
		3.2 CO policy on prevention of workplace harassment, sexual harassment and abuse of authority notified and implemented. Bronze
	3.B Corporate guidelines on gender parity localised and applied	3.3 Gender parity targets achieved (40% staff at all levels should be women).
	3.C Open and participatory processes	3.4 At least 50% representation of women in key committees and decision-making bodies.
		3.5 At least 70% of staff feel encouraged to have open and honest discussions with the management.
		3.6 At least 70% of staff feel empowered to express their views in the office.
4. Knowledge management	4.A Knowledge products on gender equality and women's empowerment developed and disseminated	4.1 CO has produced at least one gender-related knowledge product in the last 12 months
		4.2 CO Human Development Report includes a substantive analysis and data on gender inequalities

⁷ The Gender Equality Seal Methodology Guide and Appraisal Toolkit provides extensive information on this phase.

Table 1: Benchmarking Matrix – 2015/2016		
Area	Indicator	Benchmark (Mandatory Benchmarks are shaded green)
	4.B CO communication plan and materials reflect commitment to gender equality concerns	4.3 CO communication adequately integrates gender equality concerns.
		4.4 Guidelines for gender-sensitive language used and disseminated.
		4.5 CO website reflects commitment to gender equality. Silver
5. Programmes and projects	5.A Gender mainstreaming in programmes is guided by global gender strategies and frameworks	5.1 CPD is aligned with the corporate Gender Equality Strategy.
	5.B Systems in place for integration of project concerns in project cycle	5.2 Prodoc appraisal process includes mandatory gender screening and benchmarking against programming guidelines. Bronze
		5.3 Appraisal processes include an assessment of at least one programme/cluster/area of the portfolio of the country office, and taken corrective measure in at least 20% of the projects to address gender equality during the last two years.
	5.C "Gender Equality Potential" of CO programme portfolio	5.4 At least 40% of programmes/projects in the CO portfolio reflect concern for women's participation. Bronze
6. Partnerships	6.A Collaborations with national actors around gender equality goals	6.1 CO has collaborated with the national gender machinery on a substantive gender issue at least once in the current CP.
		6.2 CO has collaborated with at least one key line Ministry on a substantive gender issue at least once in the current CP.
		6.3 CO has collaborated with a women's organisation at least once in the current CP.
	6.B Systematic participation in interagency coordination mechanisms for gender equality and women's empowerment	6.4 UNDP has made at least one substantive contribution to the IA-GTG in the last 12 months
		6.5 Effective collaboration with UN Women in the current CPD.
7. Gender equality results/impacts	7.A UNDP programmes make significant contributions to gender equality	7.1 All programme areas contribute to CO gender equality outcomes: gender equality transformative results reported under 100% of ROAR outcomes over last 3 years.
		7.2 CO has made at least one substantive contribution to advancing women's empowerment and gender equality in the country over the last three years. Bronze
		7.3 CO has made significant contributions to engendering national policy dialogues across sectors.
	7.B CO has contributed significantly to public advocacy on gender issues	7.4 At least one advocacy campaign on a gender issue undertaken during current CP.
		7.5 CO commitment to and actions on gender equality issues highlighted on national media at least once in last 12 months.
Indicator S.A UNDP programmes make significant contributions to gender equality in crisis and post-crisis affected countries. These benchmarks are applicable only to crisis and post crisis affected country offices.		S.1 The CO has made at least one strategic intervention aimed at preventing and/or addressing the issue of sexual and gender-based violence in the last 12 months.
		S.2 The CPD includes at least three interventions specifically directed to increasing women's access to resources and services
		S.3 COs contributions to gender equality in crisis and post-crisis recovery recognized and affirmed by key actors.

The requirements for each level of certification are:⁸

Level 1/Bronze: Full compliance with mandatory actions for mainstreaming; strong partnerships with other key actors; programme portfolio meets minimum criteria for gender-responsiveness.

⁸ UNDP (2015). *Briefing Note for Country Offices – UNDP Gender Equality Seal.*

Level 2/Silver: All of the above. In addition, strong synergies between mainstreaming actions in different organisational domains; gender concerns effectively integrated into the planning cycle; consistent advocacy on gender issues; public visibility and legitimacy as a committed actor for gender equality.

Level 3/Gold: All of the above. In addition, proven expertise in designing and managing gender-transformational programmes across issues; credible and rigorous evidence-base to support claims of gendered impacts of interventions; substantive contributions to the achievement of national gender goals; pro-active engagement with global agendas; role and contributions acknowledged and respected by government counterparts and development community.

3.3 Development Phases

The Gender Equality Seal has gone through various phases in its development.

Initial Pilot (2011-2012)

This first iteration of the tool and process was piloted in 3 countries: Bhutan, Kyrgyzstan and Argentina.

In reviewing the pilot, the validation workshop (June 2012) agreed that the benchmarking matrix did indeed provide a snapshot of the status of gender mainstreaming in a CO. Participants concluded that it was a realistic and desired tool. They made suggestions for changes and a revised tool was developed.

Participants in the workshop recommended an extended pilot process to involve countries from all regions to strengthen the evidence base for the initiative and demonstrate how it can improve gender mainstreaming and deliver gender equality results within UNDP. A gradual approach was recommended, rather than forcing an overly rapid global roll out which could have adverse effects. It was thought that this would address the limited capacities and resources of COs. In addition, there were recommendations related to the future 'packaging' of the initiative, highlighting quality assurance as well as ongoing learning and capacity building.

Second Pilot Phase⁹

Given the recommendations from the first phase, a second, extended pilot was launched in May 2013. Twenty-nine country offices completed the process with representation across all regions. This was a voluntary exercise, introduced via an email from the Associate Administrator to all staff.

The COs received orientation on the Seal mechanism, methodology and timelines through a webinar. COs then completed online self- assessment (July-Sept 2013). COs used a benchmarking matrix (with over 40 benchmarks), assigning Yes/ No scores to key questions and substantiating their ratings with supporting documentation. Their review was then validated by an external assessor. COs received feedback in Aug/Sept 2013 and developed an action plan for improvement. The implementation of the action plan was supported by HQ, regional offices and a roster of consultants.

The final assessment was done in June/July 2014, culminating in certification awards. Bronze was given to COs scoring 50-69% of the online matrix and full compliance of mandatory elements; Silver to those scoring 70-79%. Countries approaching gold certification levels (i.e. at least 80% of the online matrix) received a hands-on assessment mission by external assessors to gather more evidence and confirm status against a special set of indicators (including an additional 40 indicators). Following this rigorous review, high silver and gold offices were certified in June 2015. Also in June 2015, the Gender Equality Seal team

⁹ UNDP Gender Equality Seal Pilot Phase 2: 2013-2014

organized the Gender Equality Seal Journeys Workshop. COs shared learnings from the process and developed recommendations for the next phase.¹⁰

The results showed that the Gender Equality Seal was gaining popularity across UNDP as a holistic framework to support learning, organisational change and sustainable development results. The UNDP Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017 and the 2015 Evaluation of Gender Equality UNDP both recognized the Gender Equality Seal as a key tool to incentivise COs to achieve gender equality results.

RBA Baseline Study (2014-2015)¹¹

In 2014-2015, at the request of the RBA Regional Bureau, the Gender Equality Seal Team conducted a 'baseline' of 35 RBA COs using the online benchmarking tool. In 2016, six additional offices completed the process.¹² The objectives of this exercise included:

- Allow the Bureau managers to better identify the weaknesses and strengths of RBA COs relating to gender equality mainstreaming;
- Create an accurate snapshot of the state of gender mainstreaming in every CO;
- Prepare RBA COs to apply and get certified under the UNDP Gender Equality Seal;
- Identify connections and impact of gender mainstreaming on development results (primarily related to gender equality goals); and
- Tailor strategies and actions for improvements.

COs completed the online tool as an evidence-based, self-assessment exercise. The Gender Equality Seal Team (both HQ and RSC in Addis) provided technical advice and information technology (IT) support. A team of assessors reviewed the CO submissions and assigned preliminary results. COs were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the preliminary assessments before the final status was announced.

The review highlighted areas of UNDP strength and areas for improvement (including capacity development and management attention) across the region. 'Partnerships' was the strongest area of performance, while 'capacities' and 'enabling environment' were the weakest. Staff report that it helped senior managers of RBA better understand the 'state of the art' of attention to gender equality/women's empowerment issues across the Bureau. As a result, RBA made a political decision on gender equality, giving priority to 11 COs and encouraging them to apply to for full certification.

Participants noted that the Baseline Study demonstrated that the Gender Equality Seal showed its "potential to provide a holistic framework for integrating gender into all UNDP's domains of work in order to support learning, organization change and sustainable development results."¹³

Roll Out of Seal (2015-2016)

After the second pilot, the Gender Equality Seal team assessed the process through an online survey and a workshop in New York. They reviewed the process and made adjustments.

In July 2015 a call for participation in a new certification round resulted in 28 new COs responding and 14 COs reapplying for certification (total of 42 COs beginning the process). From September-October 2015, COs conducted the online self-assessment. From November 2015 until September 2016, COs worked to

¹⁰ Gender Equality Seal Team (2015). *UNDP Gender Equality Seal Journeys: Summary Report*.

¹¹ UNDP (2015). *Gender Equality Baseline 2015: Regional Bureau of Africa*

¹² RBA is the only Bureau where all the COs have used the Gender Equality Seal Framework for a self-assessment.

¹³ Ibid, p.13

develop and implement their Action Plans, with a deadline of 30 October 2016 for the final assessment. Thirty-seven COs submitted a final report for certification. At the time of writing, final certification decisions were still pending, however preliminary scoring data were available and these have been used where possible.

Given the feedback on the previous Round, the Gender Equality Seal Team invested more time and resources in the Community of Practice (CoP) and knowledge management. Participants noted the importance of peer-to-peer learning. The CoP became increasingly active, enabling learning (through webinars, talks and responding to queries) and sharing across COs. The Gender Seal Team supported this process via managing the CoP and developing tools and supports. They also responded to specific queries and requests for information. This small team includes the BPPS staff person who manages the Seal (who has additional responsibilities) and two consultants. Regional Gender Advisors in the Regional Services Centres provided technical support to COs. The range of time spent by Regional Advisors was difficult to quantify but all noted that there were more demands for support than they could provide, yet it was often difficult to respond to these requests given new cost recovery policies at the RSCs.

Gender Equality Seal for Regional Centres

Throughout 2016 the Gender Equality Seal worked on a process to adapt the Gender Equality Seal methodology to Regional Centres. This initiative has not been part of this review.

4. Findings

This section outlines key findings from the Assessment; however it is first important to put these findings into context. The Assessment found a wide diversity of responses and experiences. Participation by UNDP staff in the Gender Equality Seal varied widely, depending on their roles, time in that Country Office, background on gender equality issues, etc. While this section attempts to pull out key themes and common insights, it is important to note that there is not just one narrative of the Gender Equality Seal. There were different emphases, observations, recommendations and requests from staff across the Country Offices and Regional Service Centres. This section tries to do justice to this diversity by highlighting the range of views and noting minority opinions as well as common themes.

Finding 1: The Gender Equality Seal has been an important catalyst for change at the Country Office level.

The overall consensus is that the Gender Equality Seal has been an effective tool in driving change that supports gender mainstreaming in Country Offices. Survey results and interviews also note satisfaction (and in many cases enthusiasm) for the Gender Equality Seal as a tool. One hundred percent of those answering the Survey question “Would you recommend the Gender Equality Seal exercise to another CO?” said that they would indeed recommend this experience to other COs.

The Gender Equality Seal transforms the way we do business. So often we pay lip service to gender equality, but Seal enables us to understand the ‘what’ of gender equality. It was a major learning process.”

- Senior Manager CO

Regional Advisors noted new energy and momentum on gender equality issues in COs that engage with the Gender Equality Seal. The ‘hook’ of the certification may be what initially drives some managers, but Regional Advisors also noticed more learning and higher levels of interest across participating COs.

This level of interest is particularly important, given the global disenchantment with gender mainstreaming strategies. At a time when many organizations are struggling to generate enthusiasm and

interest in gender equality strategies, it is encouraging to find a tool/process that is generating excitement.

One of the questions asked during the Assessment was - what makes the Gender Equality Seal work? Why has it been successful and gained traction? The answers to these questions included:

- The certification element is attractive to many staff, including managers. There are ‘bragging rights’ associated with a strong certification. ‘Going for gold’ was mentioned by many Country Offices as a strong incentive and mobilizing call. The Gold certification is a significant recognition. The Cuba Country Office, for example, puts the gold seal on publications as an ongoing recognition. National partners were aware of the Cuba CO’s achievement and saw this as a shared accomplishment.
- The Gender Equality Seal process generates momentum and visibility. By having specific steps and a concrete deadline, Gender Focal Teams are able to generate interest and push for progress.
- The Gender Equality Seal framework/matrix provides a concrete plan to support gender mainstreaming in the Country Office. Many interviewees noted that they had previously lacked a framework outlining what to do and there was confusion regarding their responsibilities for gender mainstreaming. The Gender Equality Seal matrix spells out specific steps that Offices need to take. “It provided a good framework to look at where we are on gender equality.”
- The Gender Equality Seal framework is holistic, bringing attention to the operations side of the Office. This element was noted by many Country Offices as a specific strength of the process. It provided a mechanism to engage the entire Office - from drivers to Country Directors – in discussions of gender equality and women’s empowerment.

One of the main challenges was to mobilize all staff. While it was true that colleagues in the Program had much more knowledge and commitment in the area of gender, this was not the case at the Operations level. This process has made it possible to fill these gaps and above all to bring our actions and interventions into coherence.

- Programme Staff, Gold Office
- The emphasis on the Gender Focal Team or Gender Task Force can shift the responsibility for gender equality actions away from the gender focal point or specialist, broadening out who pushes the agenda forward.
- Through the Gender Equality Seal, Offices build their evidence base, documenting what they have done and achieved on gender mainstreaming. In the assessment missions, staff noted that they were surprised by what they were already doing but not reporting or recognizing. They also said that the Gender Equality Seal framework helped them to identify where more work was needed.

While national partners were generally unaware of the details of the Gender Equality Seal programme, they expressed appreciation for UNDP’s work on gender equality issues. In all three COs visited during this Assessment, national partners noted that UNDP had a specific role to play on gender equality/women’s empowerment given the size and scope of UNDP’s programme and role (even in countries with an active UN Women presence). UNDP has a strategic position from which to advocate on gender equality issues. They can open doors for UN Women and national partners, broadening out discussions. Partners were also appreciative of UNDP’s technical support. For example, national partners in Rwanda noted that although there was a politically supportive environment in the country to advance gender equality objectives, there were still many challenges on how to do this across different sectors, programmes, and Ministries.

"It was too much pressure. Maybe I will enjoy next year."

- Survey Respondent

Yet it is important to note that there was not universal contentment with the Gender Equality Seal. There was a small minority of respondents who were not as positive on the Seal process. One CO found it frustrating to have put in effort, made progress, but then not be given credit if the benchmark was not

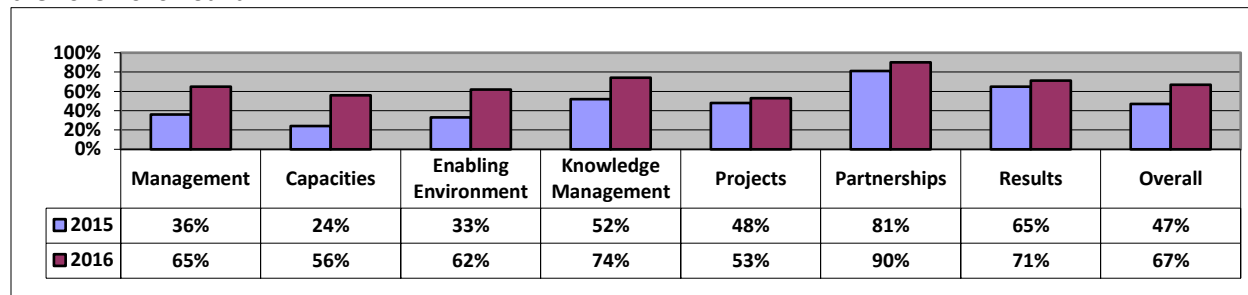
achieved. There can be demotivation when scores go down or when people find the process overly technical. As one person noted "The reason we didn't get a higher certification seems highly technical. Perhaps it's not worth the effort for us to participate if we are not judged on effort and do not get recognition for the progress that we have made."

Finding 2: Country Offices participating in the Gender Equality Seal report significant improvements across the domains in the Seal Framework.

Participating COs noted numerous specific advancements as a result of their participation in the Gender Equality Seal. There was progress across all seven areas in both Rounds (2013-2014 and 2015-2016). In Round 2013-2014, the highest scoring areas were partnerships (with 89% of the benchmarks met) and results (80% of the benchmarks met). In Round 2015-2016, partnerships again scored the highest (90% of benchmarks met), while knowledge management was the second highest (with 74% of benchmarks met). Figure 2 outlines the overall improvements noted in each area in the 2015-2016 Round. Table 3 summarizes progress in two Rounds, comparing the scores to the perceptions of what area provoked the most discussion in the Office.

The biggest improvements (overall) were seen in the domains of management, capacities, and enabling environment. The fewest gains were in the projects area. This is not surprising as it is difficult to redesign projects during the action plan period.

Figure 2: Average percentage of benchmarks achieved in each Gender Equality Seal area at the start and end of the 2015-2016 Round



In addition to these general gains, documentation from the Gender Equality Seal reports reveals significant forward movements in a number of areas. Concrete examples of changes are noted in Box 1.

Box 1 – Examples of Changes Reported As a Result of the Gender Equality Seal

2015-2016 Gender Equality Seal Round

Improved Office Gender Equality Strategies and Action Plans (from 49% of COs meeting this requirement in 2015 to 83% at the end of 2016).

Stronger internal mechanisms to lead on Gender Equality/Women's Empowerment. Almost all participating COs now have a Gender Focal Team in place that meets mandatory quality criteria (compared to 62% at the start of the period). This is a crucial shift to end the isolation of Gender Equality Focal points who often struggle on their own to lead gender mainstreaming strategies.

Increased investments in building CO capacity on gender equality women's empowerment (just under four-fifths of participating COs dedicated at least 10% of the Office's learning budget to gender-related learning activities (compared to 16% at the start of the process).

Improved integration of recruitment procedures including screening for gender competences. At the start of the process no office was doing this. By the end over 60% of COs had built this element into their recruitment procedures.

Progress on implementation of CO policies on prevention of workplace harassment, sexual harassment and abuse of authority. While only just over half of the participating COs noted that they now meet this requirement, this is a substantial improvement from the start of the process when only 1 CO had this in place.

More equal representation of women in key committees and decision-making bodies. 92% of COs report at least 50% of women on these bodies (compared to 59% at the start of the process).

Almost all participating COs now use guidelines for gender-sensitive language in their communications (92 % compared to 41% at the start of the process).

2013-2014 Gender Equality Seal Round

Improved cooperation with national partners with growing recognition of UNDP's leadership on gender mainstreaming. In the 2013-14 round, there was an increase of 22 percentage points in Seal Country Offices collaborating with key line ministries on substantive gender issues, from a baseline of 53% of Country Offices scoring positively in the performance benchmark in 2013 to 76% in 2014.

Improved attention to gender equality issues, results and indicators in programme planning and reporting. In the assessment, 33% of staff surveyed said that this was one of the key changes resulting from the Seal. There has been an improvement of 22 percentage points in Seal offices reporting results on gender equality, with offices scoring 74% in 2013 to 97% in 2014.

Increased engagement by senior managers on gender equality. This is indicated by an improvement of 45 percentage points in Country Offices showing a key gender-related result in the Results & Competency Assessments of senior managers, from 19% in 2013 to 64% in 2014; and a 34% increase in Country Offices with senior management heading Gender Focal Teams - an increase from 63% to 97%.

Better understanding by staff of gender equality. 40% of those surveyed said this was a key change resulting from the Seal. There was an increase of 53 percentage points in the performance indicator showing staff have a basic common perspective on gender mainstreaming an increase from 25% in 2013 to 76% in 2014.

Other changes in Country Offices were quite diverse. For example survey participants reported that they had seen the most changes in 'better understanding of gender equality issues' (41%) and 'improved integration of gender equality /women's empowerment outcomes' (34%).¹⁴ Specific changes noted by representatives from Country Offices include:

- Several COs noted specific programmes focusing on gender equality/women empowerment as examples of improved programming and gender equality results (for example, Montenegro's work on violence against women, PAPP's work on judicial justice for women, Nepal's work on

¹⁴ The other choices were: more programming specifically dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment issues, more time is now available to work on gender equality /women's empowerment issues; improved enabling environment in the CO, and other.

women in micro-enterprise shifting more to the economic empowerment approach). Respondents noted that not all of these initiatives could be attributed to the Gender Equality Seal as some were started before the Office began the Gender Equality Seal process.

- Offices with high certification levels talked about changes in organizational culture. They thought that the Gender Equality Seal had been instrumental in bringing about these changes. Staff in the three COs visited as part of this Assessment noted new discussions on gender equality issues that went beyond programming to raise issues related to inter-cultural assumptions, personal life and (in one case) issues relating to sexual identities. The Rwanda CO and the PAPP CO were proud of the videos the offices had made as communications tools and because of the issues they explored.¹⁵
- Many Offices reported new internal processes and tools related to programming: a new country-specific gender equality strategy and new checklists or guidance materials, for example.
- Many Offices reported improved understanding of gender equality issues across the Office and improved capacity. For example a staff member in a Gold certified office noted: “Now we have greater understanding across the whole office of what ‘gender equality’ means. Now it is everyone’s work, not just the responsibility of the gender equality focal point. Gender mainstreaming is playing a more prominent role in our programming discussions.”
- One CO (crisis-affected) noted that they were working to strengthen cooperation and linkages among projects on gender equality issues. If successful, this would be a significant driver of gender mainstreaming.
- Training (in person, with a good facilitator, with an engaging methodology) was often cited as a key team building process.¹⁶ These sessions were often identified as crucial investments.
- On the operations side, specific changes included use of gender inclusive communications guidelines, movement toward gender parity in staffing (including hiring women drivers), improving the balance of men/women on decision-making committees and others. One striking observation from the three missions carried out for this Assessment was the keen interest on the part of Operations colleagues to engage with the Gender Equality Seal process. In Rwanda, for example, UNDP staff on the operations side of the house, spoke with pride about the advances they had made and were looking to strengthen this element even further (exploring additional options in procurement, for example).
- Several offices noted the importance of the documentation process required by the Seal and that they gained a better understanding of what they were doing on gender equality and where the gaps were. “We were able to see the bigger picture,” noted one manager.

"The Gender Equality Seal is an accelerator. COs that have gone through the process do different things. They are trying to change and move forward."

- Regional Gender Equality Advisor

"Although the Gender Equality Seal can be challenging, it has helped to raise the profile of gender equality issues. It has generated senior management commitment and it has increased our understanding of the issues."

- Regional Gender Equality Advisor

¹⁵ The Rwanda CO video can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmHYJIXG-RM> and the PAPP video can be found at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=57ZKg_QYq2Y

¹⁶ It is interesting to note that there was little enthusiasm for online gender equality courses.

Table 3: Gender Equality Seal Average Scores for Each Area Compared to Survey Question						
	2013 (initial self-assessment)	2014 (final score)	2015 (initial self-assessment)	2016 (final score)	Survey Question: Which of the 7 elements provoked the most discussion & learning in your Office	
					2013/14 Participants Repeating in 2015-2016 (could pick more than 1)	2013-2014 Participants Not Repeating in 2015-2016 (could only pick 1)
1. Management	52%	83% (2 nd highest)	36%	65%	45% (highest)	21% (2 nd highest)
2. Capacities	30%	59%	24%	56%	23%	9%
3. Enabling Environment	45%	51%	33%	62%	35% (2 nd highest)	3%
4. Knowledge Management	44%	60%	52%	74% (2 nd highest)	12%	6%
5. Projects	47%	62%	48%	53%	27%	18%
6. Partnerships	82% (highest)	89% (highest)	81% (highest)	90% (highest)	27%	0%
7. Results	75% (2 nd highest)	80%	65% (2 nd highest)	71%	27%	27% (highest)
Overall	52%	68%	47%	67%	Other: 8%	Other: 15%

Finding 3: Although there are overall general trends, there is a diversity of scores and ratings across regions, with different elements scoring higher in some regions.

Comparing the average scores across regions highlights differences across regions. Table 4 ranks the seven Gender Equality Seal areas by level of achievement for each Regional Bureau from the 2013-2014 Round. Although there are general trends ('partnerships' scoring high in almost all Bureaus and 'enabling environment' scoring low), it is interesting to note significant variations. For example on average participating COs from RBLAC score much higher on capacities than COs from other regions. Average regional scores on 'Enabling Environment' range from 37% to 67%, a significant difference. Similarly the average score on 'Programmes' ranges from 51% to 75%. Despite these differences, the 'overall scores' average is similar from one region to another (with the exception of the RBA).

Table 4 Percentage of Benchmarks Achieved By Region and By Seal Area (in descending order) (2013-2014 Round)				
RBA	RBEC	RBAS	RBAP	RBLAC
Partnerships (85%)	Results (94%)	Partnerships (97%)	Partnerships (95%)	Partnerships (84%)
Management (82%)	Partnerships (89%)	Management (87%)	Management (91%)	Results (80%)
Results (73%)	Management (77%)	Results (83%)	Results (81%)	Capacities (80%)
Programmes (57%)	Knowledge Management (65%)	Programmes (71%)	Programmes (75%)	Management (78%)

RBA	RBEC	RBAS	RBAP	RBLAC
Capacities (53%)	Programmes (64%)	Knowledge Management (70%)	Knowledge Management (65%)	Enabling Environment (67%)
Knowledge Management (48%)	Enabling Environment (64%)	Capacities (58%)	Capacities (58%)	Knowledge Management (64%)
Enabling Environment (37%)	Capacities (50%)	Enabling Environment (50%)	Enabling Environment (53%)	Programmes (51%)
Overall 60%	Overall 70%	Overall 72%	Overall 73%	Overall 71%
Source: Data provided by Gender Seal Team				

Regional Advisors noted that different offices face different challenges when working with the Gender Equality Seal framework. For example, COs in middle income countries find it difficult to score well on benchmarks relating gender equality advisors and gender equality markers, driving their scores down in these areas.

Finding 4: The Seal has resulted in many concrete changes at CO level, with reports that it has contributed to improved programming, yet it is too soon to know if the Gender Equality Seal has produced improved gender equality results.

Although there were anecdotal examples of improved development results relating to gender equality/women’s empowerment, there is no clear evidence that achieving a strong certification (silver or gold) translates into consistent, transformatory gender equality results throughout the CO’s programmes. Respondents noted that it was ‘too soon’ to see results at the programming and results levels. They said that this type of change takes time and that it could only be properly assessed after several years of investment and a new CPD cycle.

When asked for changes that had resulted through their participation in the Gender Equality Seal, the majority of the people interviewed noted changes at the CO level: improved awareness, development of new tools, strengthened processes, improved attention in hiring processes, etc. This was echoed by the surveys with the highest ranked change in country offices being ‘a better understanding of gender equality issues and gender mainstreaming on the part of CO staff’ (41% of respondents).¹⁷

There were examples of improved planning practices and improved focus on gender equality results. For example, staff in one CO (crisis-affected) noted that they now make deliberate efforts to include outputs that address the needs of women. They try to ensure that every initiative has at least one GEN2 output and identify opportunities for GEN3 programming. They saw this as a direct result of their engagement with the Gender Equality Seal.

This Review attempted to determine if COs achieved improved gender equality results after participating in the Gender Equality Seal, through a sample review of ROARs and gender marker reports for eight COS. In general, it appeared that there had been improvements after each CO’s participation in the Gender Equality Seal. However it is difficult to assess what motivated these improvements: participation in the Gender Equality Seal, improved ROAR instructions, more familiarity with ROAR procedures, something

¹⁷ It is important to point out that the second response was ‘improved integration of gender equality/women’s empowerment outcomes’ with 34%.

else or a combination of all of these factors? As well, it is difficult to make clear year on year reporting and determine the extent to which gender equality transformative results are actually being achieved.

This challenge encountered in this Review highlights an ongoing challenge for UNDP. Current reporting mechanisms fail to capture and reveal progress on the achievement of gender equality results at the Country level. Current processes do not answer the question: are we achieving more/better gender equality results this year compared to last year. This challenge was noted in the *2015 Evaluation of UNDP's Contributions to Gender Equality*. That evaluation found it necessary to develop its own five-point Gender Results Effectiveness Scale, as there was no current mechanism in place with UNDP's reporting structure.¹⁸

Many of the people interviewed were optimistic that the changes at the Office level (improved capacity, new tools, new procedures, etc.) would eventually result in improved programming which would lead to improved results. Respondents believed that it was just too early to see the results yet. The point was made that it would be important to see changes in a new CPD cycle, as there was often limited flexibility to initiate new programmes (or substantially redesign existing programmes) once a CPD cycle was mid-way through.

Finding 5: In certain circumstances, the Gender Equality Seal can be an effective tool for crisis-affected Country Offices. The decision on whether this is an appropriate way to focus gender equality investments in this set of COs should be made on a case-by-case basis.

A key question for this assessment was whether or not the Gender Equality Seal is an appropriate and effective tool for crisis-affected Country Offices. Given all the time pressures and the difficulties of working on gender equality issues in these contexts, is the Gender Equality Seal a useful process for a Country Office to undergo?

The Gender Equality Seal is a solid method with a strong bottom-up approach. It enabled us to reflect on our gender equality work.

- Senior Manager, Crisis-Affected CO

The answer is complicated. First, staff pointed out that the Gender Equality Seal was not developed with crisis-affected country offices in mind. It was designed for a 'typical' CO, based on the requirements in the Gender Equality Strategy and other organizational commitments

related to gender equality.

Second, the vast majority of people interviewed from crisis-affected country offices and in the mission to PAPP stressed that it was very important for UNDP to address gender equality issues in times of crisis (both protracted and rapid onset), as well as conflict prevention and resolution. Interviewees noted that the global community had commitments to promote women's participation (such as United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and related resolutions) and that UNDP had specific commitments to include a gender analysis and address gender inequalities in conflict/disaster-affected contexts. Respondents also pointed out that gender equality issues are highly relevant in these situations with women and men affected differently and that a gender analysis was important in understanding local and national dynamics. It was also argued that there was often an urgency and opportunity to

"Gender has become a common theme in our Office. It is no longer a footnote or aside or annex."

- Gender Advisor, Crisis-Affected CO

Before we talked of gender mainstreaming but it ended there. That has changed.

- Programme Manager, Crisis-Affected CO

¹⁸ The Evaluation noted: "UNDP currently does not have a measurement standard to systematically track the type, quality and effectiveness of its contribution to gender results and also captures the context of change and the degree of its contribution to that change." p. xxvi

address women's participation, issues such as violence against women, and 'build back better.' Those interviewed made a clear case that 'crisis should not be an excuse to put gender equality issues to the side.' Rather it should be part of the process of understanding local dynamics and supporting transformative change.

Third, there was significant support for the Gender Equality Seal as a worthwhile exercise for crisis-affected countries. Interviewees said that the basic framework (seven issue areas) was just as relevant in crisis-affected countries as it was in non-crisis COs. All COs needed capacities, management structures, partnerships, knowledge management capacities, etc. if they were to successfully address gender equality issues in their programmes and achieve gender equality results. Those interviewed noted that the Seal provides a blue print to do this. Some noted that the Gender Equality Seal provided the push to dedicate resources, raise the profile of gender equality issues and invest in training. People pointed to the success of DRC in gaining Gold certification, noting that this achievement by a CO in a conflict affected country was inspiring.

Table 5 compares the scores of several crisis-affected COs with the average score in two Certification Rounds. It is interesting to note that the crisis-affected COs score well within the general range of most COs. The crisis-affected COs do not congregate at the bottom of the list. In some cases they score above average in specific categories and there is no obvious pattern of systematic weaknesses.

A minority opinion was that the Gender Equality Seal was too complicated for crisis-affected COs and that it was not the most effective way for COs in their circumstances to advance gender equality goals. They thought that a 'slimmed down' model, with fewer benchmarks and lower requirements would be appropriate. "It's too difficult for the crisis-affected CO," said one respondent. They requested that the tool be made more country specific.¹⁹ A small minority of staff in crisis-affected COs requested that the overall benchmarks be adjusted for them, as they had structural difficulties meeting them (similar to the arguments presented in Finding 7 on common standard benchmarks). For example staff from the Afghanistan CO pointed out that 60-70% of their budget was spent on security initiatives (primarily salaries) therefore it would be impossible to meet benchmarks relating to the Gender Equality Marker. In addition, staff in crisis-affected COs noted that working on gender equality issues was more difficult in their contexts and allowances should be made for these factors.

However, there also was a consensus that the CO (in particular senior management) had to make the commitment to invest in the Gender Equality Seal, that the process could only be effective if the CO made the Gender Equality Seal a priority. One senior manager in a crisis-affected CO noted: "I would recommend the Gender Equality Seal to other crisis-affected COS, but you need to guarantee that you have the resources in place to properly dedicate to the Seal (not just one gender focal point)." This point was echoed and repeated by many respondents. Thus the Seal may not always be the best option for all COs. The minimum conditions for success should be in place (see Finding 10) before the crisis-affected CO participates in the Seal process.

¹⁹ Other staff voiced strong opposition to this suggestion. They said that the standards should not be lowered. "If you lower the bar, people will only go for the minimum and they won't achieve results in the end," said a gender advisor from one crisis-affected CO.

Table 5: Gender Equality Seal Scores in Crisis-Affect COs, compared to the Overall Average Scores (all scores are percentages)								
	Management	Capacities	Enabling Environment	Knowledge Management	Projects	Partnerships	Results	Overall Score
2013-2014 Round								
DRC	100	83	67	40	57	100	100	77
Somalia	88	83	67	100	71	100	100	84
PAPP	63	17	22	80	57	100	75	52
Sudan	62.5	17	22	40	67	100	75	55
Average Score	83	60	51	60	62	89	80	68
2015-2016 Round								
South Sudan	80	33	50	75	60	60	60	63
Colombia	40	67	67	100	60	100	80	74
Afghanistan	80	50	25	75	60	100	100	70
Average Score	65	56	62	74	53	90	71	67

Third, there was a strong consensus that the current three benchmarks for crisis-affected countries were of limited usefulness. All three do relate to programming (is the programming addressing sexual and gender-based violence; increasing women’s access to resources and services; and are the contributions by the CO recognized by key actors). There were questions why these particular elements had been selected, rather than, say, women’s political participation (a key post-crisis issue). These indicators seem to be somewhat de-linked to the rest of the framework with its focus on structures and processes. One suggestion was to mine the revised UNDP commitments to gender equality in post-crisis/recovery situations for applicable indicators.

Finally, staff from several crisis-affected countries noted that the lack of documentation in French and Spanish made extra work and took extra time, both of which made participation more difficult.

Finding 6: Balancing the learning and certification elements of the Gender Equality Seal is a delicate process.

At the heart of the Gender Equality Seal is the desire to engage Country Offices in a process of reflection and learning. While the certification element attracts many managers and provides an incentive, there is a danger that an over focus on ‘ticking boxes’ can undermine this learning element. This is a balance that COs have to struggle with and the tone is often set by senior managers (see Finding 10 below on the common factors of success of gold COs).

The Seal methodology allows us to find the feet to ‘walk the talk’. We tend to forget that it starts with ourselves. The winning card is to participate. We should put less emphasis on the competition.

- Senior Manager, Crisis-Affected CO

A majority of those answering the survey question related to the balance between ‘learning’ and ‘certification’ thought that the learning element should be strengthened or emphasized more thoroughly (See Table 6). This was echoed in the interviews by people who warned against reducing the Gender Equality Seal to a ‘tick box exercise’ and over-emphasizing the gold/silver/bronze ratings.

However, the certification element was identified as a strong motivating factor for many managers (and staff). “We’re going for gold” was a rallying cry in many offices. So there is a creative tension between these two elements.

There is not a ‘solution’ to this tension; however, the search for the right balance should be kept in mind in the next phases of the Gender Equality Seal. Additional resources would enable the Gender Equality Seal team to invest in more tailored mentoring and support to COs and increase opportunities for staff to learn and reflect.

If the number of COs participating in the Gender Equality Seal increases, the learning element could be compromised. The high demand for participation in this past round (initially 42 COs) placed a strain on the Gender Seal Team’s ability to provide individualized support and guidance to COs.

Table 6: Responses to Survey Question: The Gender Equality Seal is both a learning tool and an assessment tool. What do you think of the balance between these two elements in your CO?			
	2013-2104 participants also participating in 2015-2106 Round	2013-2014 participants NOT participating in 2015-2016 Round	Overall percentage of respondents
The learning aspect should be strengthened	58%	50%	53%
The assessment aspect should be strengthened	15%	9%	12%
The current balance is just right	27%	34%	31%
No opinion	0%	9%	4%

Finding 7: There is a tension between the Gender Equality Seal common standard benchmarks based on the Gender Equality Strategy (what are considered minimum requirements for Country Offices) and calls from COs for benchmarks to take the ‘country context’ into consideration.

The benchmarks in the Gender Equality Seal are drawn from UNDP’s current Gender Equality Strategy (2014-2017). Interviews with intellectual authors of the Gender Equality Seal stressed that they were minimum standards that all COs should put in place. These elements are considered to be essential building blocks required for successful gender mainstreaming.

Yet one of the most common complaints from COs was that the several of the benchmarks were impossible for them to make and therefore ‘unfair.’ They felt like the game was stacked against them, impossible to win, before they even started. They argued that the Matrix should be adapted to and recognize country contexts: smaller country offices, countries with a national context that makes it difficult to reach gender parity staffing targets, and COs in middle income countries where they have less control over programme expenditures.

The most commonly criticized benchmarks relate to gender marker targets (1.5), a dedicated gender equality specialist in place (2.2), and gender parity targets in staffing (3.3).

COs working in a One-UN context also noted that they found it difficult to report on some benchmarks, as initiatives may not specifically be recognized as UNDP initiatives. For example 7.5 asks for evidence of references to UNDP in the national media. In a One-UN CO, media references may be more general to the United Nations, even though UNDP was the main driver behind the initiative.

Another dimension raised by several COs was the strict ‘yes/no’ benchmarking rating system. COs are only given credit if they reach a specific target that is the same for all COs. The current system does not reward effort or progress towards this target. For example, a CO may have made progress on gender parity in staffing, moving from 20% to 30% women. This could have involved significant investments and be seen by the CO as a great improvement. However, since the CO has not met the benchmark, they are scored 0. Several interviewees noted that this was discouraging and a disincentive to participate.

These requests from COs raise issues for the Gender Equality Seal Team and Gender Equality Seal in general. A decision needs to be made to either keep the Seal as a common benchmarking process with minimal aspirational standards (as is the current structure) or move to alternative rewards structure that emphasizes effort. The latter would be a different type of system. If the decision is to stay with the current focus (which is the recommendation of this consultant), then the rationale for that choice has to be clearly communicated to CO staff. Initial briefings (before decisions to participate are made) should clarify the thinking behind the Seal, noting that it may not be the ideal tool for all COs, and that certification is based on common standards that all Offices should meet.

Finding 8: The current Gender Equality Seal Benchmarking Matrix is complex and comprehensive. There is almost unanimous support for maintaining a focus on operations/internal process in addition to projects and programs. However, there are concerns over the complexity of the matrix and discussion is needed on how to strengthen the focus on gender equality results.

The Benchmarking matrix itself was the subject of much discussion during this Assessment. The first point to note is that there was also most unanimous support for the emphasis in the Gender Equality Seal on internal UNDP processes, structures and practices (such as human resources and more inclusive decision-making in the Office). Staff felt that these were key issues – both in their own right and in supporting improved programming. Issues such as gender parity in staffing were seen as key organizational priorities and commitments that required attention, investments, and focus. It was also noted that given that UNDP was encouraging national partners to address gender inequalities and gaps, it was only right that the organization looked to address their internal gaps and inequalities.

The Seal process helped me build capacity and expertise. I learned how important it is to build a supportive environment in the Office so that all staff can speak out on gender issues.

- Programme Manager, Crisis-Affected CO

Second, many interviewees – both by skype and during the missions – requested a simplification of the matrix. They were often overwhelmed by the number of benchmarks and – at times – confused by what was being requested. In many cases, the confusion was resolved through discussions with the Gender Equality Seal Team,

webinars and other supports, but it often took time to work through the issues. As well, although the Matrix was revised following the 2013-2014 Round, CO staff still felt that it could be simplified. Table 7 notes that a significant majority of people participating in the survey found the matrix to be difficult or somewhat difficult.

Table 7: Survey Question: How did you find working with the Gender Equality Seal Matrix?		
	Participants from the 2013-14 Round also participating in the 2015-2016 Round (% of respondents)	Participants from the 2013-2104 Round not participating in the 2015-2106 Round (% of respondents)
Easy	19%	21%
Somewhat difficult	58%	70%
Difficult	12%	6%
Other	12%	3%
Total	100%	100%

A second major concern with the matrix is that it does not sufficiently explore and emphasize the achievement and reporting on gender equality results. The ultimate goal of the Gender Equality Seal is to promote improved development results related to gender equality and women’s empowerment, yet this section of the matrix is not weighted more than the other sections.

Furthermore, it is very interesting to note that the ‘results’ area is consistently one of the domains with a high score. For example, in the 2015-2016 Round the average score on the ‘results’ area was 71% making it the third highest scored area (out of seven). Intuitively one would expect to see lower scores on this area, given the widely held assertion that it is too early to see strong development results relating to gender equality due to the Gender Equality Seal process. The average score for offices’ capacities to do gender mainstreaming is only 51%. It seems somewhat odd that offices lack capacities, but still manage to score well on gender equality results. This suggests that the benchmarks on gender equality results do not sufficiently capture whether or not the CO is achieving gender equality results across all of its programming on a consistent basis. Clearly this requires correction and adjustment.

The Seal has to focus on internal dimensions but it also has to have a stronger focus on programming. The instrument as it is currently structured is not enough on development results. We need a more sophisticated approach to gender analysis.

- Regional Gender Advisor

A gap in the matrix is the absence of a specific benchmark or indicator relating to gender analysis. There are benchmarks related to the quality of gender analysis in the CPD and to project screening, but these do not tackle head-on the capacity to carry out a gender analysis and whether or not this is being done regularly. This is a flaw, given the finding in the 2015 Evaluation that this is a particular weakness. “The lack of gender analysis explains to some extent why so many UNDP gender results are gender targeted, gender negative or gender blind.” (p. xx). Members of the Gender Equality Seal Team noted that there had been discussions on the importance of including this element in the Matrix, but they had difficulty formulating an appropriate benchmark. There are no current processes in place to track the use and/or quality of gender analysis in UNDP’s programmes and projects. Having the Gender Equality Seal Team assess individual projects or programmes from each Country Office to determine the quality of the gender analysis was deemed not feasible as the workload would have been tremendous.²⁰

Another potential gap in the framework is the lack of assessment of whether or not evaluations incorporate gender equality perspectives. Benchmark 1.3 does refer to the CO M& E plan but there is no

²⁰ One tool being increasingly used in RLAC is a ‘portfolio review,’ or assessment of a CO’s entire programme from a gender equality perspective. Regional advisors note the success of this tool in identifying strengths and gaps in gender analysis and results.

attempt to monitor the extent to which evaluations commissioned by the CO regularly incorporate attention to gender equality issues. Again, there is no easy answer to fill this gap. A specific easy-use-benchmark is not obvious.

Finding 9: There was overall consensus that the Gender Equality Seal process is working well and there is appreciation for the Seal team’s workstyle and support. Further improvements could strengthen the programme.

Overall, CO representatives were satisfied with the process or steps in the Gender Equality Seal process. Eighty-one percent of participants in the first round and 85% of participants in the second round said that they would not change anything in the process (or steps).

One consistent comment from Country Office staff was appreciation for the support and work style of the Gender Equality Seal Team. Staff noted the community building attitude, the positive support, and the constructive feedback that was consistently provided by the Gender Equality Seal Team – primarily the HQ staff.

During the missions and throughout the interviews, CO staff did note how the process could be strengthened and improved. Table 8 outlines remarks and suggestions related to each step in the process.

The COs that had experienced a certification mission found this to be a significant time investment but a worthwhile experience. They found the ‘certifiers’ to be knowledgeable. The discussions during the mission were positive and generally motivating for staff.

Table 8: Comments on Gender Equality Seal Process	
Step	Comments (from Surveys, Interviews and Missions)
Before making the decision to engage in the Gender Equality Seal	<p>The pre-Seal process could be improved through providing a good briefing to management on what the Gender Equality Seal involves. The commitment required should be clear to Offices before they start on the process.</p> <p>The timing of the Gender Equality Seal process was raised by numerous respondents: Could the Gender Equality Seal be conducted prior to the start of planning a new CPD in order to influence the design and resource allocation? Also the annual timing was a concern. There was a request to avoid setting Gender Equality Seal deadlines in months that corresponded to UNDP reporting deadlines in order to minimize the clash of heavy work periods.</p>
Initial online self-assessment by COs	<p>The majority opinion is that this works well. This was seen as an important step in systematizing the documentation relating to gender equality/women’s empowerment. However some of CO staff surveyed indicated that they would like to have more time to ensure a participatory process in their Office (37% in 2013-2104 and 28% in 2015-2016).</p> <p>Other suggestions included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure documentation in languages other than English (primarily Spanish and French); • provide more initial briefings/capacity-building on the process, content, benchmarks, etc.; • make the online platform more user friendly (especially for COs with poor internet connections); • develop a FAQ (frequently asked questions) sheet.
Feedback from Gender Equality Seal Team.	<p>General satisfaction with this feedback, but there were several requests for more country-specific recommendations (in other words, they felt that the recommendations provided were overly generic). In one case, a survey respondent noted that the follow-up conversations with the Gender Equality Seal Team were useful in clarifying the feedback.</p> <p>Several survey respondents and interviewees stressed the importance of each CO having a dedicated gender equality advisor and that this was something that should be stressed and supported by HQ in their feedback and comments.</p>

<p>Action Plan implementation period</p>	<p>Approximately two-thirds of those surveyed thought that the HQ support (including webinars, resources, ad hoc communications) provided during this period was satisfactory. The support from the Regional Service Centres was viewed slightly less positively, but still had a more than 50% positive rating.²¹</p> <p>Suggestions to make this step more effective included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend this period. Make it longer than 9 months. Changes take time. • Hold more webinars and CoP events in French and Spanish. • Support more face to face training/capacity building. • Provide funds for initiatives. • Facilitate more support from the RSCs. • Build in more proactive support from the Gender Seal Team. Perhaps they could check in half way through the period with each CO to see how they are doing? • Support peer-to-peer learning with more exchanges among COs. • Continue to collect specific good practices. • Regional Service Centres unable to respond to all the requests for assistance. • Expand the use of 'portfolio reviews.' This has been used successfully in RBLAC. It helps to address the challenge that the 'how' of gender mainstreaming in programmes is still difficult. • Link the timing to the budget cycle to make it easier for COs to allocate resources.
<p>Final reporting</p>	<p>COs reported similar concerns with the online platform at this stage as well. They also found it stressful to assemble all the documents required. At times there is still confusion over exactly which documents are to be submitted.</p> <p>Some offices reported technical problems and missing benchmarks on a purely administrative basis (for example, problems generating the technical report showing that staff had completed an online course).</p> <p>One office requested that verification missions be sent not just to COs that were looking to be validated as Gold. They thought that their score would have been improved if a mission were to visit and understand the realities on the ground of what they are trying to do.</p>
<p>Certification mission</p>	<p>There is general agreement that the Gold certification mission is worthwhile, but very intensive – both for the CO staff and for the assessors. In the first Round, COs found it difficult to assemble new documentation for the additional benchmarks in the Gold Matrix. This confusion appears to have been minimized in the 2015-2016 Round as the Gold Matrix was shared with COs at the start of the process. However, no Gold Certification Mission had been carried out as of the writing of this report, so it is not possible to comment on the updated process.</p>

Finding 10: COs with high certification levels (gold or silver) share common factors.

A research question for this Assessment asked what the successful offices had in common. Were there things that Gold and Silver certified offices did that contributed to their success? What advice would they have for other Offices who hoped to do well on the Gender Equality Seal?

The following factors were consistently noted:

- Successful Offices did not focus on the certification side. Successful managers warned against seeing the exercise as 'box-ticking' and narrowly focussing on the benchmarks. In order to be successful, it was important to emphasize the learning elements in the

I think the first thing is to not consider this exercise as an end in itself. Very often when you embark on a certification process, you work not to change things in depth but just to get a prize. This process needs to transform people and things and shake up habits and lines that just happen first.

- Manager, Gold Certified Country Office

"Our work on the Gender Equality Seal had benefits beyond the certification process itself. The Seal provided a common thread that brought the House together. We strengthened our ability to look at gender dimensions in all aspects of our work, both programming and how our office functions."

- Senior Manager, CO with Gold Certification

²¹ Regional Service Centre support during the process of improvement was: Satisfactory (2013-2014: 52%; 2015-2016: 64%); Partially satisfactory (2013-2014: 32%; 2015-2016: 31%) Not satisfactory (2013-2014: 16%; 2015-2016: 6%). There were 'Not satisfactory' answers for the same question regarding HQ support.

Gender Equality Seal. And ironically, the Offices that did not focus on the certification aspect often did well in the certification process.

- Successful Offices generally had a long history of work on gender equality. They had built up capacity and experience over a number of years before embarking on the Gender Equality Seal. For example the Montenegro CO (certified Gold in the 2013-2014 Round) noted that they had at least eight years of solid investments in gender equality capacity, partnerships, leadership and programming before they participated in the Seal. Thus they were able to use the Gender Equality Seal to structure and report on their work and reflect on what they were already doing. Interviewees noted that an Office could not realistically expect to go from a very low overall score to a Gold score in one year. This type of improvement takes several years of focused and dedicated work, as well as consistent investments.
- Successful Offices had strong leadership and support from senior management. Box 2 outlines concrete ways that managers demonstrated their support for the Gender Equality Seal.
- Successful Offices invested resources (human resources, financial resources, time, etc.). Improvements in gender equality processes require work, budgets and staff time.
- Successful Offices tended to have a strong, senior gender equality specialist. Offices with specialists (for example, Cuba, Montenegro, and Somalia) noted the importance of this person in providing leadership on gender equality issues. They also noted that it was extremely important that this person was senior, well qualified, and had access to senior management. “The Gender Advisor has been a key person with vision and passion.” Yet it is important to note, that in successful Offices, the Gender Advisor is not seen as the person responsible for all actions. They provide technical support and advice, enabling all CO staff to understand gender equality issues and incorporate them into their work. More than one CO Senior management advised other COs not to participate in the Gender Equality Seal process if they did not have a dedicated gender specialist, as they saw this as indispensable for the process.
- Successful Offices had an effective and functioning Gender Focal Team. Successful offices have GFTs with representatives from all parts of the Office and are chaired (in practice, not just on paper) by a senior manager. The GFT members are responsible for actions taken in their areas of responsibility and report back to the GFT on progress. Meetings are held regularly.
- Successful Offices effectively mobilized and involved the whole office. For many offices, the involvement did not stop at the Gender Focal Team. Members of the GFT took actions back to their work groups or colleagues and engaged a wide range of participations in discussions, activities and initiatives.
- Successful Offices have partnerships with other UN entities and national organizations (government and non-government) working on gender equality/women’s empowerment issues. These partnerships help to strengthen UNDP’s understanding of issues and can be the basis for transformatory programming.

Box 2: Leadership by Senior Managers

The gender mainstreaming literature stresses the importance of support from managers and their crucial role in leading and facilitating change. The following factors were identified as the concrete ways UNDP CO senior managers can demonstrate and exercise leadership on gender equality generally and on the Gender Equality Seal in particular:

- Allocate scarce resources (human and financial).
- Attend training sessions (all the way through, not just make opening remarks and then leave).
- Chair the Gender Focal Team and provide direction.
- Make the Gender Equality Seal a standing item on management and staff meetings.
- Facilitate the focus on learning and capacity-building, not just the ticking the boxes to achieve certification.
- Drive the process, but let others lead.
- Support an open environment in the Office that supports discussion and creativity.

Finding 11: Resource shortages limit the potential positive impact of the Gender Equality Seal.

CO staff constantly noted that resource shortages hinder their ability to work on gender equality issues generally and to achieve a higher Gender Equality Seal certification in particular. Resources came up in every interview and conversation.

In order to meet the Gender Equality Seal benchmarks COs must invest scarce resources in gender equality-focused programming (generally and in GEN3 programmes), in human resources (full-time gender specialist), and in staff time. Staff consistently said that they lacked the resources to advance on this agenda, that work was often done in addition to already full work days and that gender equality work was one of the first things to be cut then time got short. There were numerous requests for more resources from headquarters for in-person training, for dedicated specialists, for GEN3 programming, for surge capacity – for work on gender equality/women’s empowerment generally and for work on the Gender Equality Seal in particular (initial briefings for all staff, assistance in uploading documents, etc.).

The availability of resources to work on gender equality mainstreaming also has an impact on the Seal.²² People noted that there are few opportunities for exchanges among offices, visits by the Gender Seal Team to COs, regional workshops, etc. As well, the Gender Seal Team at HQ is small and often challenged by the workload.

Finding 12: While the Gender Equality Seal is a proven tool to stimulate discussion, raise the profile of gender equality issues, and generate change, sustainability of gains is still fragile, especially in the COs with lower certification levels.

As was noted above, the primary conclusion of this review is that the Gender Equality Seal has been an effective process to catalyze change and improvements at the Country Office level. However, it is important to note that this change is still fragile.

As was outlined above, during the 2015-2016 Round there were two examples of COs scoring lower than they had in the previous Round. There were also examples of lower overall average scores on specific benchmarks. This suggests that institutionalization may not yet be fully established.

Third, there are benchmarks that COs consistently have trouble meeting. The following were received less than a 50% score in the 2015-2016 Round:

- 1.5 Atlas gender marker shows at least 15% of country office programme expenditures contribute to gender equality outcomes (11%);

²² The 2015 Evaluation notes that financing for the core gender team at UNDP has been declining in recent years. (p. xiii).

- 2.3 All programme managers have substantive gender mainstreaming experience (28%);
- 3.5 At least 70% of staff feel encouraged to have open and honest discussions with the management (42%);
- 5.5 CO has developed at least one gendered cross-practice initiative in the current CP (31%);
- 7.2 CO has made at least one substantive contribution to advancing women’s empowerment and gender equality in the country over the last 3 years (31%).

It is also interesting to note that in the 2015-2016 Round, the average score on several benchmarks dropped during the Action Plan phase:

- 5.1 CPD is aligned with the corporate Gender Equality Strategy (dropped from 70% – 60% of COs meeting this benchmark);
- 5.5 CO has developed at least one gendered cross-practice initiative in the current CP (41% to 31%);
- 7.2 CO has made at least one substantive contribution to advancing women’s empowerment and gender equality in the country over the last 3 years (62% to 31%).

There were various examples of work on gender equality issues slowing, stopping or even going backwards in specific COs. A change in personnel can mean a change in priorities. The loss of a key staff person can mean the loss of a champion or staff member with gender equality expertise. A natural disaster can push gender equality issues to the margins.

Most of these ‘backward steps’ appear to occur in COs with lower certification levels. One hypothesis is that institutionalization of gains remains fragile until a significant level of change (such as Gold certification) has been achieved. Staff in Gold Offices were confident that they had turned a corner on gender mainstreaming and that new ways of working were now truly embedded in the office. Given the wide-spread ownership of responsibility and the level of knowledge and skills on the part of staff, they were convinced that they could sustain current gains and make even more advances. Time will tell.

However the Cuba CO offers an encouraging example. It was certified Gold in the 2013-2014 Round. The Office continues to display a high degree of attention to all Gender Equality Seal elements and is developing innovative programming that addresses a range of gender equality/women’s empowerment issues. A dedicated gender equality specialist is a key resource across all the programming areas and there is strong participation on gender equality issues across all the Office staff. Staff expressed their desire to continue to learn and improve. They suggested the development of a new Gender Equality Seal: platinum that would challenge the Gold offices even further and support them in the quest for truly transformative gender equality results. They suggested a specific programming fund be made available to Gold Offices as a reward for good performance. This fund could be used to develop cutting-edge GEN3 initiatives.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

There is a strong consensus and strong evidence that the Gender Equality Seal is an effective driver of positive change at the Country Office level. COs participating in the Seal initiative report changes in how the Office operates (new tools, new strategies, improved partnerships and new processes) as well as greater understanding of gender equality issues across the whole office. Gold certified Offices talk about changes in organizational culture and renewed commitments (by the CO and by individual staff) to

addressing gender equality issues across both programming and operational areas. The missions carried out as part of this review found enthusiasm and energy to address gender equality/women's empowerment issues in programmes that were doing well on the Gender Equality Seal.

Strengths of the Gender Equality Seal include its creative balance of competition with learning/reflection; the focus on mobilizing the entire office in working towards gender equality outcomes (rather than designating this responsibility to an isolated, overworked gender equality focal point); merging operational and programming issues; and providing a concrete roadmap that outlines what a CO needs to do to improve its performance (and thus demystifying gender mainstreaming).

Given the relative youth of this initiative, there was agreement that it is still too soon to assess whether or not the Gender Equality Seal is resulting in improved achievement of gender equality development results by COs. Staff felt that this type of change would take longer to achieve and measure, and that the results of the positive changes in office procedures and awareness would take several years to translate into consistently improved programming that delivered transformatory gender equality results.

There is evidence that the Gender Equality Seal can be an effective tool in crisis-affected COs, however, the CO must ensure that the minimum conditions for success in working with the Gender Equality Seal process are present (technical support, staff time, leadership commitment, etc.) before embarking on this process. The Seal process does involve the investment of resources and the Office must be prepared to make that investment if they are to see the payoff.

While there is wide-spread agreement that the Gender Equality Seal is an effective tool, there were recommendations for improvements. The current Matrix is comprehensive and relatively complex. There were pleas to simply it yet without losing any of the key points, perhaps a difficult request. However, a weakness of the current matrix is how it assesses gender equality results. It appears that the current benchmarks do not adequately assess whether or not the CO is actually achieving transformatory results relating to gender equality / women's empowerment across the range of its programming. An alternative approach would bring more rigour to the assessment in this area and avoid the pitfall of a Country Office receiving a positive certification yet still designing and implementing sub-par programming from a gender equality perspective.

The Review explored what high scoring COs had in common. Interestingly, successful Offices often did not emphasize the certification aspect; rather they focused on what they could learn and how they could improve through participating in the Gender Equality Seal. Staff emphasized that solid work on gender equality took time to build and developed. An experienced and well-qualified gender expert was regularly mentioned as a key element in successful programming and a higher Seal certification. All high scoring offices had strong leaders who allocated resources, led by example, and supported an open and creative environment in the office.

Finally the issue of resources was a constant theme of this Assessment. This was raised in every single conversation and interview. If the Gender Equality Seal is to be successful, it requires sufficient resources to operate – at the CO, headquarters and regional levels. Reflection and building capacities require time, which in turn requires resources. The Gender Seal Team must have the resources to properly manage the number of participating COs and deliver quality advice and support. Poor performers require support to improve and good performers (Gold Offices) would benefit from a concrete incentive fund to continue to move forward.

The Gender Equality Seal has grown and expanded in five years. The number of COs expressing interest and wanting to participate is impressive. Yet, this has stretched capacities and – at times - challenged the programme. Many COs desire the certification, but not all understand the nature of common standards

and benchmarks that are based on agreed UNDP commitments. Ongoing conversations are required in order to clarify and clearly communicate the rationale for the programme and what is required to be successful.

At a time when many organizations are struggling to generate interest and momentum in gender equality/women's empowerment initiatives and programmes, the Gender Equality Seal offers new insights. COs with strong gender equality programmes and capacities, like the Cuba CO, credit the Gender Equality Seal with being a key factor in their success. The successful institutionalization of these gains will require ongoing investments and continued attention.

5.2 Recommendations

The first recommendation is a general corporate recommendation, primarily aimed at UNDP management. The remainder are aimed at the Gender Equality Seal Team and the UNDP Gender Team.

Recommendation 1: Invest adequate resources in the Gender Equality Seal programme, recognizing that it is a practical and effective tool to ensure that COs are capable of supporting the SDG gender equality agenda.

Corporate investment in the Seal would demonstrate that gender mainstreaming - as a practical way forward to achieving better gender equality results - is an organizational priority. This would demonstrate UNDP's leadership on gender equality and contribute to ensuring that corporate commitments and minimum standards set out in the Gender Equality Strategy become a reality.

Recommendation 2: Continue with the Gender Equality Seal through the next cycle of UNDP's Gender Equality Strategy.

Given the work and investment to date, it would be useful to continue with the Seal for several more certification rounds. This is the expectation of many COs looking to improve their ratings.

Given the successes to date, there is still more potential in the Gender Equality Seal. It has not yet reached the end of its usefulness. Given the extensive investments in developing the Seal, it would be unfortunate not to reap additional returns from at least two more cycles.

However, this recommendation is premised on the assumption that there will be sufficient resources to manage the programme at an acceptable level.

Recommendation 3: Link the number of COs participating in the Gender Equality Seal in each certification round to the resources available. Greater numbers could be accommodated with increased resources.

In some ways, the Gender Equality Seal has been a victim of its own success. Forty-two COs applied to participate in the 2015-2016 Round. While this demonstrates a high level of interest in the programme, it also appeared to strain the resources of the small but effective Gender Equality Seal Team. A determination of COs with the greatest interest and potential could focus the available resources in a meaningful way.

With a manageable number of participating COs, the Gender Seal Team can support each participating CO, deliver timely feedback and ensure quality assurance. Given current resource constraints, attempting to provide assistance to more than 25 COs at one time is unrealistic. If the demand is high from COs, UNDP should demonstrate its commitment to gender mainstreaming with increased resources.

Recommendation 4: Review and revise the Gender Equality Seal Matrix in order to: a) reduce the number of benchmarks, b) increase the rigour of the ‘results’ section, c) clarify expectations in terms of documentation, and d) revisit the benchmarks for crisis-affected COs.

As was noted in the Findings section, there is much in the Gender Equality Seal Matrix that is working well (inclusion of a range of issues, clear benchmarks, etc.). However, a number of possible improvements were identified:

- Simplify the matrix. There were many requests to reduce the number of benchmarks. In some cases there appears to be duplication. As well, the process would be more manageable for COs with fewer benchmarks.
- Increase the importance of the results section. This could be done through refocusing the benchmarks so that they more closely address the achievement of gender equality results across all programming areas. (Some suggested weighting the results section more heavily but it appears that this would not address the issue, as the current benchmarks are easily achieved by COs).
- Clarify documentation requirements. Despite several rounds of the Gender Equality Seal, COs still find it difficult to understand exactly what is required in terms of ‘evidence’ for each benchmark.
- Revise the 3 benchmarks for crisis-affected COs. Staff from crisis-affected offices generally felt that these benchmarks were different than the other benchmarks in the matrix as they address specific programming issues. Suggestions were to look at UNDP’s commitments under the UN Security Council Resolutions on women, peace and security and the new corporate guidance on gender equality issues in conflict and recovery situations for more appropriate benchmarks.

Recommendation 5: If a crisis-affected CO is interested in participating in the Gender Equality Seal, they should be encouraged to review whether or not they have the resources and political commitment to undertake this process.

This Review found that the Gender Equality Seal could be a useful undertaking for crisis-affected COs, but not under all conditions. It should not be automatically assumed that this is the best tool for a crisis-affected CO. However, if the CO is willing to invest the resources in the Seal process, there will be positive outcomes.

Recommendation 6: Revise the induction process to include briefings and clear communication with senior managers on the logic and rationale behind the Gender Equality Seal and the factors that have enabled other Offices to succeed.

Offices considering participation in the Seal should ensure that they have the ‘conditions for success.’ There should be briefings and individual conversations with managers in order to clarify expectations and requirements. In particular the points from Finding 10 on the common success factors of gold COs could be reviewed in order to ensure managers understand the process, what is required from them, and whether or not their CO has the possibility to do well in the Gender Equality Seal. Given the fundamental role leadership plays in a successful Seal certification and experience, their understanding of and commitment to the process is essential.

A ‘pre-screening’ with a minimum required score could be developed. This would allow the team to focus on COs that have a strong probability of doing well.

If COs do not meet the minimum requirements to participate in that particular round, a specific package to support their efforts could be developed, and resources committed to do this. This would enable them to move forward, even if they are not formally involved in the Certification process.

Recommendation 7: Build in more reflection opportunities (regional workshops, peer-to-peer exchanges, Gold COs mentoring other COs, etc.) with resources committed to facilitate this.

If the Gender Equality Seal is to continue to function as a vibrant, experimental, status-quo-challenging initiative, it must stay fresh and innovative. Again and again both gender equality specialists (in COs and RSCs) and regular staff expressed an interest to learn more and share more. They were keen to learn from other COs through workshops, staff exchanges and other modalities.

The ‘aha’ moments on why gender equality matters and how a good gender analysis can inform programming and results, happen when people have the space to think, share and reflect. In the missions conducted for this review, staff constantly noted the importance of training and group discussions.

Recommendation 8: Review the suggestions provided in Finding 9 about improvements to see what can be reasonably incorporated into the Gender Equality Seal process given resource constraints.

Finding 9 identifies a number of suggestions to improve the Gender Equality Seal process. In particular, the Gender Equality Seal Team could consider expanding the ‘action plan’ period to one year and ensuring that deadlines avoid clashing with busy moments in UNDP’s reporting year.

Recommendation 9: General materials should clarify and reinforce that the Seal benchmarks are minimum standards based on existing UNDP policies and commitments.

It is important to recognize that several benchmarks do pose problems for many COs (in particular, having a gender equality specialist, staffing parity targets, minimum targets for the gender equality marker). Yet, these are recognized as minimum standards in a gender mainstreaming strategy and to successfully support the achievement of gender equality results.

The Gender Seal Team has to be able to explain to COs that face difficulty meeting these benchmarks that this is part of the challenge of corporate standards.

Recommendation 10: Establish a fund to be used by Gold Offices for programming experimentation and commit resources accordingly.

While Gold certification in and of itself is a reward and significant recognition, establishing a fund for use by these high performing offices would offer an additional motivation. In an environment of shrinking resources, it would serve as a concrete incentive mechanism and reward good practice. It could also support innovation and result in positive programming initiatives that could inspire and inform other offices.

Recommendation 11: The voluntary nature of the Seal should be maintained.

Although several people participating in the review argued that the Gender Equality Seal should be made mandatory for all COs, this would be a strategic mistake. The Seal works when there is commitment and buy-in – on the part of both managers and staff. This would be difficult to establish if it were made mandatory.

Annexes

Annex 1 – Original Terms of Reference – later modified



UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Terms of Reference

LTA Individual Contractor

Beth Woroniuk

Terms of Reference²³ for UNDP Gender Equality Seal Assessment

Background

The Gender Equality Seal is a corporate certification process that recognizes good performance of UNDP Country Offices (COs) in delivering transformational gender results. It is a tool for empowering managers and accelerating changes needed to support countries' gender equality goals. The Gender Seal establishes minimum acceptable quality standards. Country offices are certified based on a review of their gender equality accomplishments. The Seal is also a learning platform that supports learning and innovative thinking on gender mainstreaming.

Four years and two successful pilot phases after the Seal was launched in 2011, 32 out of 177 UNDP country offices (17.51%) applied to the Gender Seal pilot phase 2. Whilst 29 (16.38%) completed the process, 25 (14.12%) were fully certified, receiving gold, silver or bronze Seals. 3 received gold (Cuba, Egypt, Nicaragua).²⁴ This year (2015-16) 28 countries are taking part in the Seal and 24 are taking part in the Baseline preparation exercise for the Seal. The Seal has come to be recognized in the organization as a tool for resolving the question of fragmented gender mainstreaming efforts/successes by providing a holistic framework for integrating all UNDP's domains of work in order to support learning, organizational change and sustainable development results. It's also recognized as a tool for empowering managers and accelerating changes needed to support countries' gender equality goals.

We would like to assess whether the Gender Equality Seal is a tool to accelerate internal, institutional change only; or if the Seal's holistic approach has a real impact on both internal transformation that in turn improves development results. The GADN Theory of Change²⁵ is useful for framing this. The assessment will focus on the process of the Gender Seal, the strengths and challenges of the process and lessons learned for rolling out as a corporate certification initiative. It will also assess what impact the institutional changes have had on development results. The focus of the assessment will be on learning from the Seal and the changes it has brought about, in order to improve the Seal as a corporate certification process in the future. We would also like to learn from the Seal experience of countries in crisis/ post-crisis situations in order to strengthen the Seal.

²³ Using template TORs for Evaluation of UNDP contribution to Gender equality and women's empowerment

²⁴ UNDP Gender Equality Seal Pilot Phase 2: 2013-2014

²⁵ <http://gadnetwork.org/gadn-resources/2015/3/6/untangling-gender-mainstreaming-a-theory-of-change-based-on-experience-and-reflection>

The mandate for this assessment is found in the 2015 Gender Evaluation of the Gender Equality Strategy.²⁶

Purpose

To examine the link between the Gender Equality Seal certification process and the quality of gender equality programming (including planned and reported gender equality results) in order to learn from the process and help develop the Gender Equality Seal as a sustainable and strategic corporate initiative.

Objectives

- To learn about the Gender Equality Seal's contribution to improved programming (including planned for and reported gender equality results), considering country programmes that have been certified gold, silver and bronze and country programmes in conflict-affected areas.
- To improve the process, including the methodology, resources required, sustainability of the Gender Equality Seal interventions and recertification.
- To analyze the factors that enable COs to receive Gold certification (what do they have in common).

Key research questions

- What is the Gender Equality Seal's contribution to improving programming and development results for gender equality through internal transformation/changes?
- How can we strengthen the certification process (including the timing, benchmarking tool, three levels system, etc.)?
- What are the success factors for the Gender Equality Seal?
- What are the recommendations for future sustainability of the Gender Equality Seal and the changes it brings about?
- Are there specific issues that influence the link between the Gender Equality Seal and improved gender equality programming in crisis-affected countries?

A useful way of conceptualizing the assessment and TOR is Gender@Work's framework connecting organizational change; institutional change and gender equality. For an organization intervening to change gender-biased institutions, change must happen outside the organization and within. The organization itself must have certain capabilities and cultural attributes. An analysis of what we are trying to change within the organization and how the organization has changed towards this ideal is important. The framework can guide an assessment of what changes the organization has experienced in each of 5 spheres (including Politics; organizational politics; Institutional culture; organizational process; programmatic interventions). Where these conditions are present, we can assume that it makes it more likely that the organization will promote gender equality and improve its impact and development results.²⁷

²⁶ Evaluation of UNDP contribution to Gender equality and women's empowerment, 2015

²⁷ <http://www.gendertatwork.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Gender-Equality-and-Institutional-Change.pdf>

Methodology

An important initial exercise will be to develop a Theory of Change for the Gender Seal's contribution to Gender Equality during the time frame. This will highlight the logic underpinning the approach, its assumptions and risks.

The assessment will take a participatory, learning approach. As we are looking at the changes brought about as a result of the Seal, much of this is based on a qualitative assessment of staff's perceptions and also review of relevant documentation.

We will include user-friendly participatory tools, and a mix of methods for triangulation, within the constraints of the budget and practicalities of what can be done over the phone/ online. We can ask staff to tell a story reflecting on the most significant changes, using visual methods such as timelines. We will also pay attention to who we interview including a mix of participants including top management, res rep, programme staff, those who are and are not part of the seal team, to understand change from different perspectives. The approach will enable people to reflect on change at an individual and institutional level. For example:

- As a result of the Seal, what has changed for you and your way of thinking?
- How are these changes affecting your work and the organization? (special attention to development results)
- If this process were to continue, what do you see as the next change needed?
- Given your organizational and country context, do you see the changes you have identified actually happening in the future? What more do you think will happen?

Analyzing the way people articulate the changes, will enable an understanding of how people are talking about gender and whether there has been a shift in understanding towards a systemic approach. In reflecting on the process, people will share the strengths and challenges.

The data collection approach likely to include (*most appropriate methods and sampling to be finalized by consultant*):

1. **Stakeholder analysis.** An important initial exercise will be to identify the institutional entities and individuals within UNDP involved in planning, management and implementation of Gender Seal activities; the primary target groups of Seal initiatives; and different partners.
2. **Documentation reviews.** The assessment will review the information produced by the gender seal process, both by the gender team, regional offices and from the COs, particularly using information already collected on sharepoint/gender seal intranet, including webinars (veteran country seal talk), journey report etc.
3. **Review of tools** such as the benchmarking matrixes, certification reports, guidelines, online self-assessment tool, etc.
4. **Focus group with gender team** We will carry out a focus group to raise key questions and test survey (include key change story)
5. **Survey.** (see appendix of countries and appendix of questions) Four years and two successful pilot phases after the Seal was launched in 2011, 28 countries have been certified at varying levels of achievement. We will survey a total of 32 COs that applied for the Seal in Phase 2 and Phase 1.

This includes 29 COs that completed the process. 25 currently hold the seal. 3 gold (Cuba, Egypt, Nicaragua); 3 high silver (Cambodia, Nepal and Somalia); 11 Silver (Bahrain, DRC, El Salvador, Fiji MCO, Lesotho, Madagascar, Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, Nigeria and Peru) and 8 bronze (Afghanistan Belarus, Guinea, Kosovo, Niger, Programme of Assistance for the Palestinian People, Rwanda, and Sudan). 4 countries (Ethiopia, Jamaica, Mozambique, Zambia) did not receive enough scores to achieve certification and they will also be included.

In addition, those that had formerly held the seal, but where this had lapsed, will also complete a survey. The surveys will explore the organization and workforce profile, motivation for seeking the seal, assessment experience, benefits of achieving the seal, reasons for not continuing with the seal (where appropriate), and overall satisfaction. (*sampling to be finalized as part of design*)

6. **Country/regional telephone interviews.** Follow-up interviews with a cross section of COs that currently or formerly held the Seal to supplement the predominantly quantitative data captured by the survey. The follow-up interviews will focus on the organizational journey through the process of achieving the Seal including preparation, assessment, feedback and improvement. Interviews will seek to understand the motivations and benefits of achieving the Seal and reasons why some COs decide not to continue with the seal.
7. **Consultations/ interviews.** Interview gender team (regional and HQ)
8. **Consultations/ interviews** Interview independent assessors (consultants) who work as seal assessors to explore their perspectives on the seal process, the impact of the seal certification and barriers and enablers to accreditation within the current seal.
9. **CO visit** to carry out focus groups, interviews for a more in depth understanding of staff perceptions and the changes that have taken place on the ground.

Timeframe for the assessment process		
Activity	Responsible	Timeframe 2016
Preparation, Desk Review and Inception Phases		May-June 2016
TOR Developed and reviewed by Gender team <i>and any necessary approvals</i>	JH, RL	April/ May
Recruit Consultant	JH, RL	May
Preparatory desk review	Consultant,	May
Draft assessment design :	Consultant,	15 June
Work on instruments	Consultant/ JH	Late June-e July
Session with Seal team – finalise design, instruments, interviews/ focus groups with Seal team and others in NY	Consultant	-e July
Data collection and Analysis Phases		July-Sept 2016
Data collection (document analysis, interviews, sessions with COs etc.)	Consultant, JH	July/ Aug
2 CO visits	Consultant	Early Sept
Data analysis	Consultant, JH	Sept

Report Finalization and Review Phase		Sept -Oct 2016
Preparation of key findings document	Consultant, JH	Mid Oct
Workshop to discuss key findings (NY/ Regional/via skype)	Consultant,	Oct
Preparation of 1st draft report	Consultant JH	Oct
Revision to 1st draft	Consultant	Oct
<i>Necessary approvals</i>	RL	Oct
Production Phase		Nov 2016
Final report editing and formatting	Consultant, JH	Nov
<i>Approval, publication/ dissemination</i>	RL	Nov

Expected outputs

- Effective assessment preparation and design, including data collection methods
- Draft outline report
- Findings and recommendations draft report
- Final assessment report.

Travel

The consultant is expected to undertake at least one official mission. The travel will be arranged and cost will be paid by UNDP. The UNDP policy on travel for consultants will apply. Where two currencies are involved, the rate of exchange shall be the official rate applied by the United Nations on the day the UNDP instructs its bank to effect the payment(s).

Institutional Arrangement

Under the overall supervision of the Policy Advisor on Gender Mainstreaming or her designate, the Consultant will provide weekly updates on the progress of the work identified in these terms of reference.

The consultant will work in close coordination with the gender team focal point for this exercise.

All information reviewed and generated, including the Seal certification framework and guidelines, remains the property of UNDP. The consultant will not share any documentation with external partners.

Annex 2 – People Interviewed

Regional Gender Advisors

- RBEC: Bharati Sadasivam and Barbora Galvankova
- RBLAC: Eugenia Piza-Lopez and Barbara Auricchio
- RBAP: Koh Miyaoi
- RBAS: Lina Alqudwa and Kawtar Zerouali
- Unable to schedule with RBA: Odette Kabaya and Viviane Ralimanga

Gender Equality Seal Team

- Raquel Lagunas, Senior Gender Advisor,
- Veronica Muoio, Consultant – Gender Equality Seal Team
- Jesus Sanchez Mugica, Consultant – Gender Equality Seal Team

Consultants/Previous staff involved in the Seal

- Kalyani Menon-Sen
- Natalya Navarro
- Jocelyne Talbot
- Ivonne Urriola
- Neus Bernabeu

Somalia

- David Akopyan, Deputy Country Director
- Amren Yasin, Programme Specialist
- Victoria Ijeoma Nwogu, Gender Specialist

Colombia

- Carolina Melo, Gender Specialist
- Inka Mattila, Deputy Country Director
- Daniel Vargas, Coordinator Strategic Support Unit

Afghanistan

- Ghulam Rasoul Fariwar, Programme Analysis/Governance Unit
- Nadia Nivin, Head of Governance Unit

Central African Republic

- Natasha Van Rijn, Transition Advisor
- Aboubacar Koulibaly
- Rokhaya Paquita, Programme Officer and Gender Focal Point (written inputs)
- Chantal Kingue Ekambi, UN Women

South Sudan

- Kennedy Chibvongodze, Team Leader: Partnerships and Management Support Unit
- Anou Borrey
- Magure P. Kibi, HR Unit

DRC

- Gaston Osango, Operations Manager
- Judith Suminwa, Coordinator, Governance Pillar/Programme
- Priya Gajraj, Country Director
- Alfredo Teixeira, Deputy CD/Programme

Sudan

- Abdul Rahman
- Zeinab Shaddad, Gender Focal Point

Nepal

- Sophie Kemkhadze, Deputy Country Director

Montenegro

- Kaca Djurkickovic, Gender Adviser*
- Tomica Paovic, Democratic Governance Team Leader*
- Miodrag Dragisic, UNDP MNEARR*

Lesotho

- Johan Bogh, Gender Focal Point, Parliamentary and Civil Society Affairs Officer*
- Christy Ahenkora, DRR*
- Mantsekhe Masupha, HR Analyst*

Belarus

- Viacheslav Selegeiko, Head of Strategic Support Unit*
- Ekaterina Paniklova, Deputy Resident Representative*
- Tatyana Buhayeva, Human Resources Assistant*

Egypt

- Heba Wafa, Local Development and Gender Team Leader
- Ignacio Artaza, Country Director
- Naglaa Arafa, Governance Team Leader

* Interview conducted by Joanna Hill

Annex 3 – Proposed Theory of Change

To date, the Gender Equality Seal has been operating with an implicit theory of change. During the Assessment, there have been discussions on what this theory would look like if set down on paper. This annex summarizes these discussions and attempts to make the Gender Equality Seal Theory of Change explicit.

The main assumptions in this theory of change include:

- A gender mainstreaming strategy at the Country Office level must address structural issues (management structures, enabling environment, capacities, knowledge management and partnerships) and explore the linkages and synergies among these issues.
- Progress will be made when there are discussions and learning opportunities for the entire CO staff. These discussions should prompt ‘clicks’ or ‘aha’s on the part of the staff building a greater understanding of gender equality issues – in the office, in programmes and projects, in the national context, in their personal lives, in UNDP as a whole, etc.
- Reflection and learning are key. The CO must make the time in busy and over-crowded schedules to hold inter-action training sessions and discussions that engage and involve staff in the process.
- Leadership is important. Staff take their cues from senior management. If senior managers engage in this discussion and signal its importance, then staff will follow this example.
- Although the discussion starts in the CO, it is important to involve national partners and other UN entities.
- Important inputs into the CO discussions include experiences from other COs, sharing of tools through the Community of Practice, advice and moral support from the Gender Equality Seal Team and discussions with national partners.
- Sufficient resources must accompany the process – both at the Country Office level and to support the work of the Gender Seal Team.

**Figure: Draft Theory of Change
Country Office Level**

