



MONITORING, EVALUATION, FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMMES

GOOD PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Introduction

This document aims to capture the lessons learned and best practices in Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) within women's economic empowerment programmes, based on the experience of the Second Chance Education Programme implemented by UN Women in Chile.

The Second Chance Education Programme is a pioneering initiative by UN Women at a global level, carried out simultaneously in six countries: India, Mexico, Cameroon, Jordan, Australia, and Chile. It provides a comprehensive solution for women who, for various reasons, have been unable to complete their formal education and are in vulnerable situations regarding employment and job opportunities. The main objective is the economic empowerment of women in crisis contexts through the enhancement of personal, digital, entrepreneurial, and employability skills, while simultaneously fostering networks among women and connecting them with new development opportunities. It develops a sustainable system of women's empowerment at local, national, and global levels through multisectoral partnerships.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning are key tools for ensuring that the implementation of a pilot programme is carried out with high standards of quality and that the initially set objectives are achieved. Monitoring involves the continuous tracking of actions taken, while evaluation measures the fulfilment of objectives and goals from the planning and design stages through to implementation, allowing for the review and adjustment of the initial design of each initiative. Learning encompasses the systematisation of best practices, lessons learned, and knowledge retained within the organisation to improve project implementation.

In the case of the Second Chance Education Programme, monitoring, evaluation, and learning were crucial and allowed for the systematisation of information generated during the execution of the pilot phase. This enabled the incorporation of improvements throughout the programme's life cycle and the documentation of lessons learned following its implementation.

The first section of this document reviews the concepts, tools, and components of MEL theoretically. The second section will cover the MEL strategy of the Second Chance Education Programme in Chile, complemented by actions taken at a global level to track the programme. The third section summarises the main challenges encountered in MEL for the programme, and finally, the lessons learned from this process.



2. The Importance of Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning in Gender-Focused Social Programmes

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) are fundamental tools in the development of a social programme.

They allow informed decision-making throughout the process, determine the programme's effectiveness and efficiency upon completion, and systematise the lessons learned. MEL is an opportunity to generate information, knowledge, and learning about the processes carried out during the development of a social project (MIMDES, 2007). It also serves as a quality management tool that optimises programme outcomes by generating reliable information and providing clarity on the effects the programme has on its participants and implementers.

A gender-focused MEL recognises that transformative change in unequal gender and power relations is complex and non-linear. This approach challenges conventional notions of evidence, broadens the scope of information capture, questions who grants meaning and power to knowledge generation, and promotes social transformation. It acknowledges that gender inequalities are deeply embedded in social structures, requiring MEL tools to go beyond traditional indicators to capture the complexity of gender dynamics. It is essential to ensure the active and meaningful participation of women and other marginalised groups in the design, implementation, and evaluation processes of programmes to effectively address inequalities, promote gender equality, empower women, and incorporate their voices and perspectives (OXFAM, 2020).

This approach focuses on exposing gender-based discrimination and highlighting how intersecting identities further marginalise specific groups. It is not tied to a specific set of tools but should be applied to MEL processes in general, from project design to outcomes, continuous monitoring activities, learning frameworks and questions, social accountability, and evaluation exercises (OXFAM, 2020).

The processes of monitoring, evaluation, and learning are highly interrelated and complementary, yet distinct, with their own objectives occurring at different stages

of the programme's execution. Monitoring is continuous and permanent (typically with quarterly milestones), evaluation occurs at established periods (before, during, or after), and learning can happen at various points. These processes help identify and address challenges and/or issues in the planning, design, and implementation stages of the project.

The **monitoring** process involves the ongoing collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data through observation and information gathering from programme participants and implementers. Its objective is to examine programme execution and track its management, incorporating adjustments and corrections in real-time (MIMDES, 2007).

Evaluation is a scheduled activity that reflects on programme implementation to incorporate improvements. It can occur before, during, or after the programme's development. "Its purpose is to issue substantiated and communicable evaluative judgments about the activities and results (...) of social interventions and to formulate recommendations that allow decisions oriented towards action adjustment" (Niremburg 2009 in Di Virgilio and Solano, 2012). Evaluation should be understood as a learning and improvement input that supports decision-making. Additionally, it is an applied research process that guides decisions about the programme's future (Di Virgilio and Solano, 2012). Evaluation aims to assess the programme's design, execution, and results.

Learning is the process through which information generated from monitoring and evaluation is reflected upon and intentionally used to continually improve a project's capacity and achieve better results. At the project level, learning involves identifying effective practices and factors most influencing outcomes, allowing the replication of successful strategies in similar projects. At the organisational level, results

from different projects can be compared to determine which ones contribute to the organisational mission (IRC, 2021). For UN Women, learning helps determine how and to what extent a project contributes to the Country Office Strategic Note and the Organisation's goals. Additionally, learning from various projects can guide the strategic development of new projects and opportunities for resource mobilisation. It is important to have instances where results are shared with partner institutions, the intervened communities, and donors to strengthen accountability, transparency, and institutionalise learning opportunities.

Pilot programmes, especially the Second Chance Education Programme, present a unique window of opportunity to evaluate, monitor, and systematise their execution. This is crucial for achieving the objective of drawing conclusions that enable scaling and long-term sustainability. Understanding the programme's effects on participants and analysing how well the programme's objectives are met is fundamental. Evaluation and monitoring results generate essential information for learning about resource use, aiming to account for the capital utilised.



Photo: UN Women/Pablo Sanhueza

Stakeholders Involved in MEL

The following table outlines the questions each stakeholder should consider during the MEL process throughout the implementation of a social programme.

TABLE 1: Questions Stakeholders Should Answer During Implementation

Direct Implementation Partners	<p>Is the institution contributing to the long-term change proposed? (Strategic Note, Cooperation Framework)</p> <p>Are the project's activities on track?</p> <p>What are the challenges and opportunities of the intervention?</p> <p>What is working well? What and how can it be improved? What could be done better?</p>
Implementing Organisations	<p>Is the target population being reached?</p> <p>Are the relevant activities being conducted to achieve the objectives?</p> <p>Are all available resources being utilised?</p>
Donors	<p>What lessons were learned during the project, and under what conditions can it be replicated?</p> <p>What other potential interventions could develop capacities not covered by the project?</p>
Participants	<p>Does the programme meet the participants' needs?</p> <p>Are the participants receiving the activities and outputs proposed by the programme?</p>

Source: Developed by author based on the MEL Plan for the Second Chance Education Programme



Photo: UN Women/Pablo Sanhueza

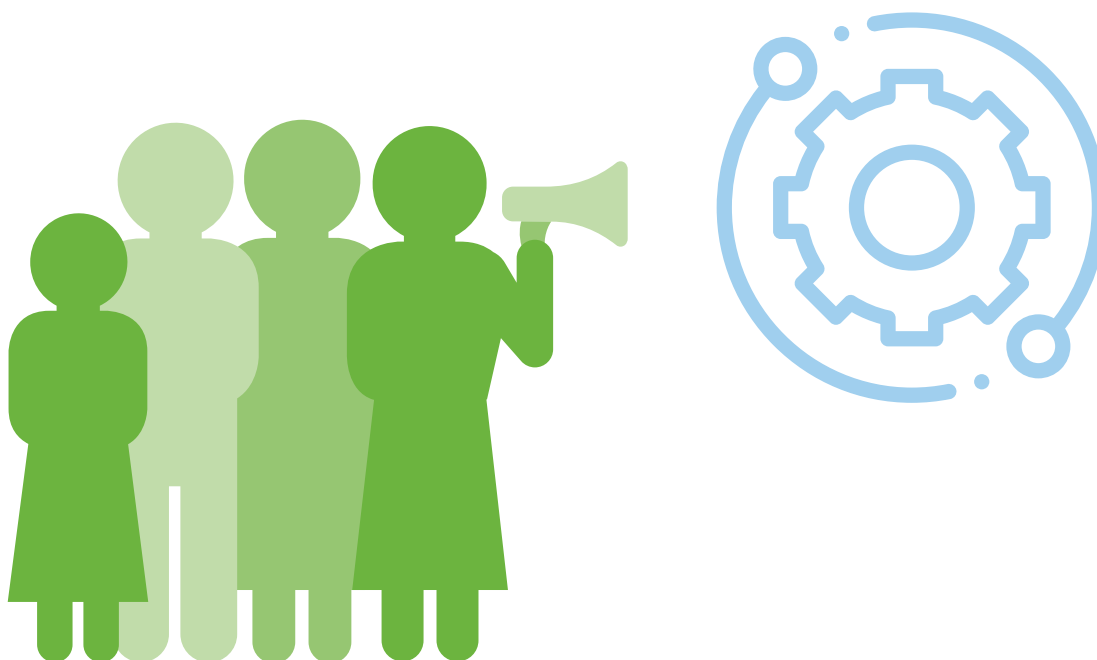
Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning in the Project Cycle

MEL occurs at all stages of the project cycle, and it is crucial to start planning MEL strategies during the programme design phase. It is also important to determine a closure strategy for MEL.

TABLE 2: MEL in the Project Life Cycle

Design	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Develop a theory of change and a logical framework that serve as a roadmap for project development.2. Define the requirements, costs, and personnel dedicated to the project's monitoring, evaluation, and learning.
Planning	<ol style="list-style-type: none">3. Create the MEL Plan, which serves as a guide for information gathering, management, and use.4. Establish information gathering and management systems (utilising available technological tools).
Implementation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">5. Collect data ethically using appropriate methodologies and disaggregation. Review the quality of the collected information.6. Analyse and present the data to understand performance, make decisions, and implement necessary adaptations.
Learning and Closure	<ol style="list-style-type: none">7. Register, store, and share lessons learned, results, and adaptations to maximise learning and provide evidence for future programmes.

Source: *Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) Manual, IRC Standards, Practices, and Guidelines, October 2021*



3. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Experience in the Second Chance Education Programme

The first step in creating a Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) strategy for a social project is to develop a MEL Plan. This plan should detail objectives, activities, stakeholders, indicators, tools, timelines, mechanisms, responsibilities, and more.

Main Monitoring Objectives

Monitoring involves the development of consolidated quarterly reports based on programme activities and reports produced by each implementer.

The **monitoring strategy** facilitates tracking activities conducted within the programme framework, achievements reached in each period, and maintaining a register of participating women and their profiles. This information is used as input for decision-making according to the programme's progress and the contingencies of each reported period. Monitoring indicators also include providing feedback to implementers and, if necessary, taking measures at the territorial level.

The objectives of the monitoring strategy are:

- To understand the programme's progress quarterly and take necessary actions based on the results.
- To provide complete and relevant information for decision-making during the programme's execution.
- To generate information on the programme's outcomes and determine possible ways of scaling and sustainability.
- To understand the experiences of women during their participation in the programme.
- To share information on the results obtained by the implementing institutions.



Photo: UN Women/Pablo Sanhueza

Main Evaluation Objectives

The primary objective of the evaluation is to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of the programme's implementation.

It aims to recognise how the programme, with its improvements and adaptations, represents and validates an intervention model that meets the specific needs of women in the country.

- To review how the programme is meeting its objectives according to previously established criteria.

- To determine best practices, innovations, and lessons learned following the pilot programme's implementation.

- To provide recommendations based on evidence gathered during this process.

A gender-focused and participatory approach is considered, involving key partners such as alliances with relevant institutions in different sectors, implementing institutions, and the voices of the participants themselves.

TABLE 3: Evaluation Questions and Criteria

Criterion	Question
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are the programme's design and objectives relevant to meet the needs and aspirations of the target population and UN Women's priorities?• Is the programme aligned with the strategic note of the office, globally? And with the cooperation framework?
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To what extent were the programme's expected results achieved?• Were the indicator targets met?
Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To what extent does the management structure of the intervention (human, financial, and administrative resources) support programme execution efficiency?
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To what extent were capacities developed to ensure the sustainability of efforts and benefits?• To what extent is the programme replicable and scalable?

Source: *Second Chance Education Programme Results Review Report*

Main Learning Objectives

The main objectives of learning activities are to provide evidence and insights for the next steps of the programme, focusing on scaling and sustaining the initiatives.

For the Second Chance Education Programme, this involved creating concise documents detailing the women's experiences across various initiatives implemented throughout the programme¹.

Finally, a systematisation process was conducted to be shared with other stakeholders, especially within the organisation, to document achieved results and the best implementation strategies.

¹ Access the documents at www.tuoportunidad.org in the Impact Stories and Studies sections.

Theory of Change and Logical Framework

First, it is essential to develop a Theory of Change and/or Logical Framework according to the project's objectives, components, and activities. Having information from previous project implementations is crucial for planning with greater certainty regarding the programme's outcomes. This theory should include the indicators, goals, and means of verification to be used at each project phase.

Being a global programme with local solutions, it has a global Logical Framework. However, it was necessary to work with a local MEL strategy, where products, components, activities, and indicators were adapted to local implementation, and specific tools were created for data collection.

TABLE 4: Evaluation Questions and Criteria

GOAL: To contribute to promoting gender equality and the economic empowerment of Chilean women.	
PURPOSE: Women improve their job skills through acquiring employability, empowerment, personal skills, and networking.	
Component 1: Women Trained in Job and Entrepreneurship Skills	Subcomponents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 Women participate in gender-transformative activities, women's empowerment, and life skills enhancement. 1.2 Women are trained in digital tools for self-learning and interaction in learning communities. 1.3 Women access focused support through mentoring. 1.4 Women participate in mentorships focused on employability, entrepreneurship, and personal development. 1.5 Women are linked to an entrepreneurship and employability ecosystem, including public, private, and third sector organisations. 1.6 Women strengthen trust and associativity through forming a women's network during and after programme participation. 1.7 Women are trained as mentors to become change agents in their communities and for programme participants.
Component 2: Women Trained in Leadership and Become Change Agents in Their Communities	Subcomponents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1 Women enhance their personal and leadership skills. 2.2 Women access personalised support.
Component 4: Young Women Access Job Opportunities in Traditionally Male-Dominated Fields	Subcomponents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.1 Women attend job readiness workshops. 4.2 Women are supported by mentors in job search and placement.
Component 5: Refugee Women Access Income-Generating Opportunities	Subcomponents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5.1 Women have access to Spanish language courses. 5.2 Women participate in informative workshops on the Chilean labour market. 5.3 Women are supported by mentors in job search and placement.
Component 6: Establishing Partnerships with Public, Private, and Civil Society Institutions	Subcomponents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6.1 Partnerships with institutions offering contributions to the economic empowerment of participants. 6.2 Partnerships with institutions for programme scaling. 6.3 Partnerships with institutions for resource mobilisation.

Source: MEL Plan Second Chance Education

Roles in the Project's MEL

The Plan should outline the roles each actor plays both within and outside the programme. Identifying the responsibilities for MEL tasks is crucial, especially for the Second Chance Education Programme, which involves allied institutions, implementing organisations, a local team, and a global team.

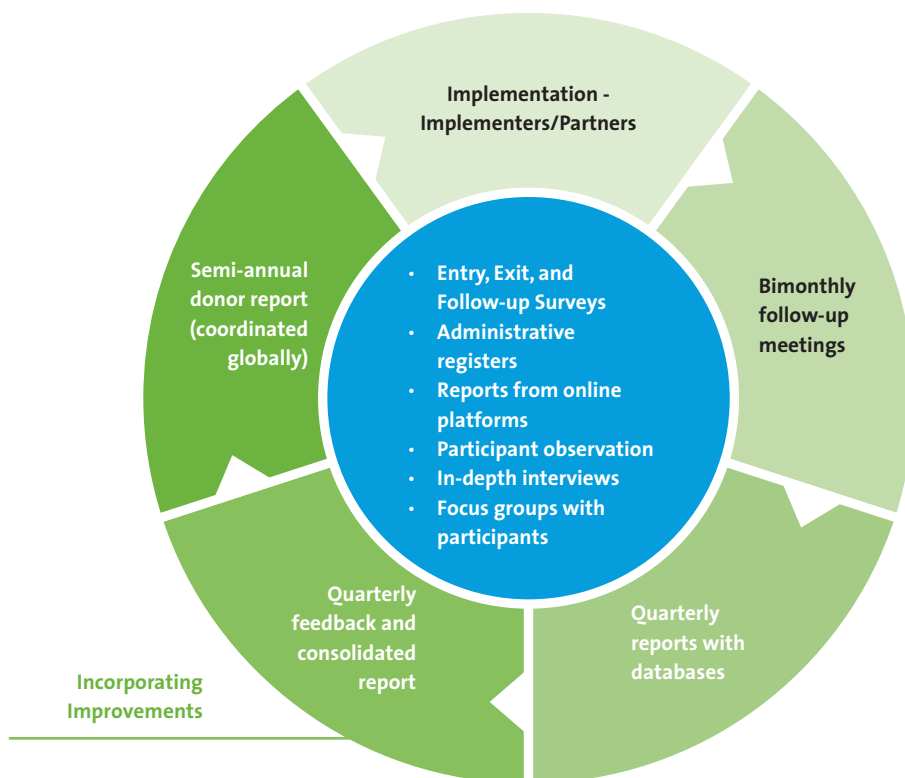
It is essential to establish the MEL-related activities in contracts/agreements with external institutions. For Second Chance Education, these activities include conducting Entry, Exit, and Follow-up Surveys, compiling databases with attendance registers, and detailing the contents of quarterly reports, where the quality of information is thoroughly reviewed at each submission.

Feedback Mechanisms of the MEL System

Feedback mechanisms are essential for incorporating improvements and modifications in programme implementation. For the Second Chance Education Programme, a mechanism is established with implementing institutions to review indicators and progress quarterly and to examine project advancements bimonthly. In these sessions, results, challenges, lessons

learned, and conclusions for the period are shared, and possible improvements to the programme design are discussed. All tools from the MEL Plan are utilised to make informed, result-based decisions. Additionally, there are review sessions with the global team to report results to the donor.

IMAGE 1: Feedback Mechanism Second Chance Education Programme



Source: Developed by author

Tools and Instruments for Information Gathering

The tools and instruments for information gathering are essential for capturing the experiences of the participants, implementing institutions, and the practices of the teams responsible for executing the programme initiatives. These tools must be adapted and tested in the environments where they will be applied, especially surveys. In the case of Second Chance Education, these instruments form the baseline, exit, and follow-up measures of the programme's effects on the participants' lives.

It is imperative to use policies to safeguard individuals' identities at all times, ensure the secure storage of information, and adhere to UN Women's personal data protection policy.

For Second Chance Education, both quantitative and qualitative information was used, as described below.

Instruments for Gathering Quantitative Information

1. Entry Survey

This instrument collects participant characterization, preferences, and skills at the programme's start. It is administered by sending a link through implementing institutions, and data are stored on the KoboToolBox platform. The information is consolidated and associated with attendance registers for quarterly reporting.

2. Attendance Registers

Attendance registers for synchronous programme activities, necessary for programme certification, are maintained by implementing institutions and submitted quarterly along with the entry survey.

3. Online Course Registration

Registers progress in the virtual material available for participants to reinforce learning during the programme. Implementers are responsible for tracking participant progress and reporting quarterly.

4. Exit Survey

This instrument gathers participant experiences during the programme to determine immediate results. It also provides insights for programme implementation

improvements. Administered via the KoboToolBox platform, it collects data from all programme participants globally.

5. Follow-up Survey

Conducted six months after programme completion, it assesses programme impact, specifically on new entrepreneurship, job opportunities, and changes in economic status for participants and their households. It also explores mentorship formation and whether participants have become mentors in their communities. This survey is also administered via KoboToolBox, with additional reinforcement through email and SMS by UN Women.

Instruments for Collecting Qualitative Information

1. Focus Groups

In order to incorporate the voices and experiences of the programme participants into the analysis, focus groups are conducted with women who have completed all the programme activities. The main objective of this activity is to understand the most and least valued aspects according to the participants, learn about their experiences, and listen to their firsthand suggestions that could enhance the programme's impact and experience.

One-hour sessions are held via the virtual platform ZOOM, with at least 10 graduates invited (with an expected participation of at least 6 women per session). A set of questions is used to guide the conversation to obtain the desired information.

2. In-depth Interviews

Semi-structured in-depth interviews are conducted with representatives of the implementing institutions, as well as the programme's tutors and mentors. These interviews explore the main characteristics of the programme, the difficulties faced along the way, their perceptions of the programme's implementation, the relationships they have established with the participants, and the connections they have built with other allied institutions. These interviews provide different perspectives on the programme's execution

and help identify critical points in its design (such as organisational structure and the scope of interventions). Additionally, space is provided for suggestions that could help deliver better services, improve participants' experiences, and strengthen the programme's impact.

3. Participant Observation

Participant observation is conducted wherein the MEL consultant actively participates in the activities carried

out by the executing organisations at all stages of the programme. This allows for an understanding of how the activities are being implemented and provides insight into the participation of the beneficiaries. It is important to note that this activity is limited to one cycle of participation per institution to avoid interfering with or altering the interactions and behaviours of the implementers or participants.

Presentation of Results

The tools used to present results in the Second Chance Education programme mainly consisted of quarterly monitoring reports, "results review"² reports, and knowledge products that captured the experience of the initiatives developed under the programme. Similarly, findings were presented in meetings arranged with internal and external teams.

Based on the programme's objectives, it is possible to identify the main results and impacts of the programme on various aspects of women's lives through entry, exit, and follow-up surveys. Through coordinated work with the global team, a visualisation panel of the programme's main results has been created both globally and locally.

The Power BI dashboard, which is updated in real-time with survey data, presents information on the programme's outcomes, highlighting a positive impact on digital skills, agency and empowerment, income generation, and unemployment. // In the dashboard developed in Power BI, which is updated in real-time with the information from the surveys, the number of women who have started and completed the programme, and the women who have responded to the follow-up survey are presented. This provides information on the programme's outcomes, highlighting a positive impact on digital skills, agency and empowerment, generation of new income, and unemployment.

In terms of baseline data, a characterisation of participants is presented in terms of age, household size, number of children, area of residence, number of hours dedicated to unpaid work, education level,

membership in indigenous communities, employment status, motivations, and access to digital devices.

The exit line contains information on the courses taken by participants, feedback on the programme, participation in support networks, and initial results in terms of employment, new businesses, and the programme's effects on their personal skills, financial situation, new training opportunities, among others.

Finally, there is the "Impact Monitor," which measures results in terms of agency and empowerment, digital skills, employment, and obstacles faced by women in achieving their goals by comparing the entry survey with the exit survey.

It's worth noting that each of these results can be viewed by country, implementer, survey date, and age range.



² Within the MEL Plan, evaluation activities are established. In the case of the Second Chance Education Programme, they are referred to as "results review" activities, as they were conducted by the MEL consulting firm rather than an external institution or individual, following the guidelines of UN Women.

4. Challenges and Learnings in Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning of Gender-focused Social Programmes

Here are the main challenges and learnings identified in the monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) process of the Second Chance Education programme, which serve as valuable experience for the execution of other gender-focused programmes and set precedents for future projects implemented by the Office of UN Women in Chile and globally.

- **The MEL process has resulted in identifying areas where the programme has achieved better results and strengthening those areas where the greatest challenges have been encountered.** Continuous improvements in programme implementation have been made based on results.
- **Having a results framework with indicators with concrete definitions and verification methods that represent the local reality and respond to both local and global reports.** This approach avoids having an excess of indicators with undefined definitions and ensures that verification methods are standardised across all countries implementing the programme.
- **Testing information gathering tools at the local level.** Verification tools, such as surveys designed and implemented with questions associated with indicators, allow for objective measurement of achievements. Standardised information gathering tools (global surveys) are a significant contribution to results measurement. It is essential to test these tools locally to ensure they are adapted to the reality of participating women. The use of platforms like KoboToolBox has advanced consolidated information globally. However, participants, at least in Chile, were not familiar with this platform, so efforts have been made during synchronous programme instances to address concerns and provide guidance on completing surveys. A sensitisation strategy directed from the global level to all programme stakeholders (partner institutions, implementers, and participants) is necessary to highlight the role of collected information in the programme's continuous improvement and the protection of personal and sensitive information.
- **Creating follow-up instruments for participants after completing the programme to measure impact.** Conducting surveys six months after women have completed the programme allows for an understanding of the programme's real impact. However, response rates have been lower than expected, necessitating mitigation strategies to encourage participants to respond. Surveys conducted at the end of the programme have provided insight into immediate results and determined the relevance of activities throughout the programme that had the most significant impact on project results and impacts.
- **Having consolidated databases with data from all participants, incorporating baseline information, programme activity attendance, and programme results,** has provided an effective tool for decision-making, meeting both internal and external reporting requirements, and providing information about women for disseminating new opportunities specific to participants' profiles.
- **Having a knowledge product development plan** has enabled the programme to make available material that systematises its initiatives, good practices, lessons learned, and challenges throughout implementation, generating public goods accessible to the organisation and other institutions within the framework of developing gender-focused social programmes.

- Throughout the programme's development, **documents reflecting the implementation methodology of initiatives have been produced, serving as inputs for future implementations.** Over the last year of implementation, materials have also been developed to support the resource mobilisation

process, effectively communicating the programme's impact on participants. It is important to emphasise that for these products to have a greater impact, they must be aligned with the institution's communication and resource mobilisation strategy.

Photo: UN Women/Pablo Sanhueza



5. Recommendations for the creation of a Gender-focused Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning System for programmes

Planning and Design Phase

- Develop a MEL Plan at the beginning of the programme that allows for flexibility in its implementation and includes review sessions where improvements and adaptations to the programme can be incorporated based on updated and relevant programme information.
- Maintain a limited number of indicators to guide programme implementation and account for its short, medium, and long-term results. These indicators should align with the planning tools of the institution both locally and globally, such as the Global Strategic Note³ of UN Women and the local strategic note of each Country Office, as well as other documents defining the organisation's priorities, such as the Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework in Chile.
- Ensure the active and meaningful participation of women and other marginalized groups in all stages of the project to effectively address inequalities and promote empowerment.

Implementation Phase

- Establish mechanisms for the analysis and reflection of project execution to inform decision-making based on updated and relevant programme information.
- Include information from various sources and stakeholders to have a comprehensive understanding of the implementation, results, and impact of a programme. Incorporate both qualitative and quantitative information by using diverse data collection methods.
- Incorporate midterm and final evaluations into the planning process to assess the progress towards achieving programme objectives and expected results, considering the criteria established for implementing gender-focused programmes.

Closure Phase

- Systematise lessons learned from programme implementation and create opportunities for sharing this information with all project stakeholders (implementers, donors, partners, etc.).

³ The Strategic Note of UN Women is a planning document for the upcoming years that incorporates the strategic priorities of the institution, its objectives, and its key expected results.

6. References

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UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities: Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems; Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy; All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence; Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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