POCKET TOOL FOR MANAGING EVALUATION
during the COVID-19 pandemic

UN WOMEN

Contents

INTERACTIVE PDF

The best way to navigate this Pocket Tool is as a PDF. There are links and interactive elements that provide enhanced functionality and enable readers to quickly navigate the different sections and access external links.

Introduction

COVID-19 has been challenging the world in unprecedented ways, and the need to adapt our work is critical to ensure that the United Nations effectively serves those most in need. Evaluations must be guided by the basic mandate of 'do no harm'. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, this has several implications. First and foremost, it means that the actions of the evaluation team must not put themselves and others at risk of infection. It means that the safety of team members and stakeholders, including rights holders, must be at the core of all decision-making processes, and that donors and stakeholders remain informed and engaged throughout all phases of the evaluation. This tool may be useful for evaluation or programme managers conducting research in the current context of COVID-19 and other crisis settings. Given the high number of research initiatives being undertaken by UN Women, the Independent Evaluation Service has developed this pocket tool to share rapid guidance for evaluations; it is equally applicable to research initiatives given their use of similar design, data collection, and analysis considerations.

Gender-responsive evaluation is defined by UN Women Evaluation Policy as: a systematic and impartial assessment that provides credible and reliable evidence-based information about the extent to which an intervention has resulted in progress (or the lack thereof) towards intended and/or unintended results regarding gender equality and the empowerment of women. As a process itself, evaluation is also a means to enhance gender equality and the empowerment of women through the incorporation of gender and women's rights dimensions into evaluation approaches, methods, processes and use. The pocket tool includes practical guidelines for gender-responsive evaluation management and data collection, structured around the four main evaluation phases: planning, preparation, conduct and reporting and follow-up. It contains tips and good practices to aid evaluation teams in determining the best course of action for the gender-responsive evaluation or research exercise in the context of COVID-19, while keeping stakeholders engaged and upholding relevant ethical and data protection protocols.[1]

Principles for gender-responsive evaluation at UN Women include:

Fair power relations and empowerment

Participation and inclusion

Independence and impartiality

Intentionality and use of evaluation

It is a priority for UN Women that evaluations are gender-responsive and will actively support the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women.

See UN Women Evaluation Policy

Determine the best course of action for the evaluation exercise

During this critical moment, UN Women is continuing to take actions to ensure the rights of women and girls are upheld and protected, and due to the current circumstances, it may be necessary to adjust the evaluation strategy as the situation evolves. It is important for UN Women Evaluation Specialists and Decentralized Evaluation Managers to consider the risks of NOT conducting the evaluation vs. the risks OF conducting the evaluation during this time period.
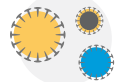
Before reaching a decision in collaboration with the respective country office and/or unit on whether and / or how to modify evaluation or research activities, the following areas should be considered:

- **Key Area #1**: How to proceed with evaluation activities in the context of COVID-19

- **Key Area #2**: How to leverage existing resources and UN Women's integrated mandate

- **Key Area #3**: Whether to proceed with a planned mid-term evaluation

KEY AREA #1:
How to proceed with evaluation activities in the context of COVID-19

Considerations

Will the evaluation provide critical information for the organization's COVID-19 response efforts?

Can rights holders be reached through remote data collection methods?

Is the evaluation required by the donor or organization?

If the answer to one or more of these questions is **NO**, it may be appropriate to consider **POSTPONING OR DELAYING THE EVALUATION/ RESEARCH** activities dependent upon the state of the COVID-19 pandemic.

If the answer to these questions is **YES**, it is recommended to **PRIORITIZE THE EVALUATION** and **CONTINUE WITH AN ADAPTED EVALUATION STRATEGY** that takes into consideration the health and safety of all stakeholders.

If the evaluation will move forward, Evaluation Specialists and Managers should:

- Consider real-time evaluation as a **light process** that produces useful information for quick decision-making in a crisis response environment.

- **Phase** the evaluation activities, prioritize remote data collection or **delay** field data collection.

- Take advantage of **existing secondary data** sources and desk-based analysis.

- Utilize the most appropriate **remote data collection** methods by discussing with programme managers the access of rights holders to mobile phones (and data top-ups), safety concerns, and/or the possibility of engaging a representative of rights holders.

- **Assess** the necessary adaptations will compromise the UN Women quality standards for evaluation (GERAAS) and whether it will still lead to a credible evaluation.[2]

- **Coordinate with UN partners** that are undertaking evaluations in the same area to reduce burden on stakeholders.

KEY AREA #2:
How to leverage existing resources and UN Women's integrated mandate

Considerations

Are there multiple planned evaluations under the same thematic area? Is it possible to strategically combine evaluations into a thematic or cluster evaluation?

Have other evaluations/reviews/audits been conducted by the office that would provide relevant information? Can data collection and analysis methods be adapted to utilize relevant secondary information?

Are UN Women and partners collecting data on COVID-19 in the area of operation that relates closely to the evaluation?

If the answer to one or more of these questions is **YES**, it may be appropriate to consider **COMBINING PROJECT EVALUATIONS INTO A BROADER THEMATIC OR CLUSTER EVALUATION** to increase relevance and reduce burden.

KEY AREA #3:
Whether to proceed with a planned mid-term evaluation

Consideration

Can a planned mid-term evaluation be shifted to a mid-term review?
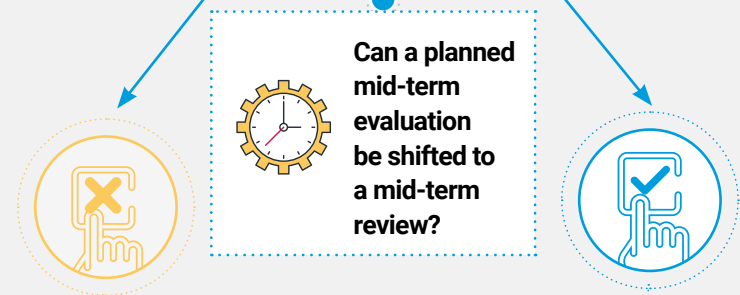
If the answer is **NO**, it may be appropriate to consider a mid-term evaluation which adheres to evaluation standards, but looks mainly at **EVALUABILITY AND PROCESS.**

If the answer is **YES**, consider discussing with donors the possibility of (a) **SHIFTING THE EXERCISE TO A MID-TERM REVIEW**, or (b) cancelling the mid-term evaluation and **ALLOCATING RESOURCES TO THE FINAL EVALUATION**.

PLANNING
PHASE

**PREPARATION
PHASE**

CONDUCT
PHASE

REPORTING AND
FOLLOW-UP PHASE

1. Ensure the health and safety of staff, rights holders, and all relevant stakeholders

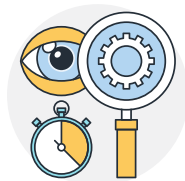**Continuously review the severity of the impact of COVID-19** in the area under evaluation and the resulting constraints/challenges, including travel restrictions.

Ensure that all evaluation field staff have **comprehensive awareness of COVID-19 prevention strategies**, and that they know how to seek medical attention if it is needed.

When needed, **update consultant contracts** to include clauses that reflect the required flexibility on the part of consultants in terms of mission and data collection timelines.[3]

Follow **WHO health and safety recommendations and guidelines** for UN personnel, including administrators, managers and staff members at all duty stations.

Inform evaluation personnel of the **availability of counselling services** for those who are experiencing increased stress or other psychosocial needs.

🔗 Useful links

WHO, "Administrative guidelines and FAQs on human resources, finance and travel matters due to the COVID-19 outbreak"

WHO, "Getting your workplace ready for COVID-19" (2020)

UNMD, "Reducing the Risk of Acquiring Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Recommendations for UN Personnel" (2020)

WHO, "Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak" (2020)

2. Engage stakeholders to ensure the process is responsive to the context, transparent, participatory and inclusive

Stakeholder mapping

- Map the **key stakeholders, including those most vulnerable** to socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 situation,

- whether and to what extent they can **connect via web-based platforms** for teleconferencing, landline telephone connectivity, mobile phone connectivity and internet connection, and

- availability of resources to support them to do so if unavailable/ inaccessible.
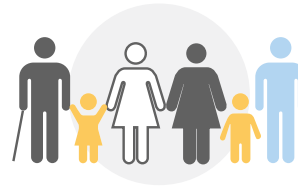
Participation

- Allocate time and resources necessary for maximizing **participation and inclusiveness through remote means** following COVID-19 health and safety protocols.

- A **human rights-based approach** prioritizes engagement of rights holders in defining the issues and solutions from their perspective, which will ensure effective and sustainable approaches grounded in the local context.

Transparency

- Allocate **adequate time for feedback** and alert stakeholders about shifting methodologies and/or deadlines in advance.

- **Maintain transparency and accountability** by tracking comments provided by stakeholders and responses from the evaluation team.

3. Define your objectives, scope, and key evaluation questions ensuring a gender perspective and exploration of the impacts of COVID-19

1 **Map existing information**

Conduct a mapping to identify existing information through desk review and conversations with key stakeholders/experts to assess what information needs to be collected through primary data collection.

2 **Assess key barriers**

Assess the key barriers to gender equality and advancing women's rights in the current context of COVID-19 and thus what type of information should be prioritized.
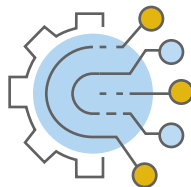
3 **Prioritize & collect data remotely**

✎ Prioritize the issues where there are data gaps and that can be answered through remote data collection with the known limitations to the data.

✎ Understand the safety risks around remote data collection methods on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in COVID-19 context.

5 **Consult stakeholders**

Consult stakeholders on their key questions and priorities.

4 **Consider the most marginalized**

Consider the effects of COVID-19 on the most marginalized groups and determine how this will be addressed in the evaluation/ data collection activities.[4]

🔗 **Useful links**

Gender equality in COVID-19 responses | Emerging gender data on COVID-19 | Engaging marginalized and vulnerable people | More information on managing evaluation in the context of COVID 19

4. Identify appropriate methods for gender-responsive remote data collection

Based on the evaluation or research questions, determine the appropriate remote data collection tools, considering cost, time and access of the target population to the chosen platform. It is also important to consider methodological limitations of the selected tools, which should be made explicit in communications with stakeholders and the related products. **Evaluations should rely on mixed methods and triangulation** (cross-checking different sources and methods) of information to ensure confidence in the findings.

Key issues to consider for all remote data collection

Determine access to communication technology

The respondent (and the data collector) will need to have access to the necessary technology and the confidence to use it.

Take into consideration the factors that may limit participation

Take into consideration the factors that may limit participation for certain demographic groups, such as internet and data-top up access, and technological literacy.

Identify a time that is convenient

Consider the participant's care and work duties.

Distractions and diversions during the data collection will be common

Given the "stay at home" and lockdown restrictions, diversions will be common. Train data collectors to manage situations with calm and tact.

Keep the process brief

Ask straightforward questions without jargon and that respondents will know how to answer. If it is too long, a respondent may drop off.

Prior to undertaking any data collection, teams should have a list of resources

Teams should have a list of resources provided by the Country Office to refer respondents to in case the need is identified – for COVID-19 or gender based violence services (even though no direct questions should be asked about GBV, the resources need to be available in case it comes up during the discussion).

COVID-19-adapted gender-responsive data collection methods

Secondary data

It is critical to maximize utilization of existing information. This can include UN Women sources of information, such as annual reports, monitoring reports, research, reviews, evaluations, audits, publications, and data on social media or campaign reach.

TIPS

Consult with programme managers on the most relevant secondary data sources, including internal UN Women data as well as surveys being conducted by UN partners for COVID-19 response.

Explore the possibility of accessing big data: work with your partners to access programme administrative data, social media analytics, hotline center or radio call in data, etc. It is important to factor in the costs for hiring a team with the capacity to analyze the data and adhere to ethical guidelines specific to the use of big data.

Useful links

UN Women: Can big data be used for evaluation? (2018)

Rockefeller Foundation: rewiring how we measure impact in a post-covid-19 world

Measuring results and data in the age of big data (Pete York and Michael Bamberger, 2020)

Interviews

Interviews allow us to compare different perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders. The key limitation to interviews is that they are time intensive and it may be difficult to cover a lot of questions. However, they are an important means for collecting valid and reliable perceptual data from stakeholders.

TIPS

If an interpreter is needed, ensure adequate time for interpretation is built in and be mindful of the time – **keep the interview focused on the key issues**. Important considerations for interpreters include gender balance, training on bias and GBV sensitivities, and the necessity for sign language should be determined.

Limit the numbers of individual interviewers collecting data as this will support a more systematic approach.

Establish rapport and ensure the participant is in a **private and comfortable space.** Assure the participant of confidentiality – meaning their name will not be tied to any statements in the report (unless approved in advance).

If possible, initiate the call with video so that the participant can see you and turn off if there is low bandwidth. Have a plan in place to ensure the participant can still participate or reschedule if the interview is interrupted by technological issues.

It is important to **pre-test interview guides** and ensure evaluation team members have a common understanding of the questions and follow common approaches – ensuring neutral probes and reactions. **No questions related to GBV should be asked**, as this could put the respondent at risk (consult above resources).

Handle difficult interviews with tact and never express own opinions. Remember you can always ask for clarifications, and if the participant is willing, schedule a follow-up.

Useful links

Developing key messages for communities on GBV & COVID-19 (GBV AOR, April 2020)

Poverty Action Lab's Best practices for conducting phone surveys (2020)

Mathematica's Tips to Quickly Switch from Face-to-Face to Home-Based Telephone Interviewing (2020)

COVID-19-adapted gender-responsive data collection methods

Survey

Survey techniques provide a way to obtain anonymous responses and basic quantitative data.

TIPS

✎ When undertaking a survey, ensure that sampling strategies are tailored to local constraints (i.e. mobile phone coverage, internet connectivity, etc.).

✎ **Balance the brevity of the survey with the need to collect comprehensive data** that covers a diverse spectrum of needs.

✎ If integrating questions related to COVID-19 impacts on socio-economic status, these should be based on international standards, adapted as appropriate. Consult data.unwomen.org and a UN Women Gender Statistics Specialist on the formulation of questions.

✎ **No questions directly related to a respondent's experience of GBV** should be asked, as this could put the respondent at risk. There are indirect ways of asking about GBV in the community. Consult a UN Women EVAW Specialist for advice on appropriate formulation and see UN Women Note on Violence against women and girls data collection during COVID-19.

✎ During COVID-19 pandemic, **enumerators should not be engaging in face-to-face data collection** or should be following protocols of local public health authorities (see WHO guidelines for personnel).

🔗 **Useful links**

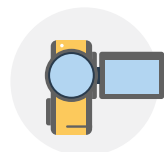For existing population-based questions see:

DHS Questionnairea and Manuals

Labour Force Survey (LFS) resources

Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS)

More information on remote rapid emergency response surveys:

Informing rapid emergency response by phone surveys (2018), by Utz Pape for World Bank Blogs

Participatory video or photo

Participatory video or photo submissions provide an avenue to empower participants to tell the story that they want to tell in the way that they want to tell it. This can facilitate reaching populations that may not be able or feel comfortable participating in more traditional forms of data collection.

TIPS

✎ You will need **adequate resources**, including a facilitator to explain the process and, as necessary, train the participants in how to use their phone to take photos or videos that tell a story. You may need to provide resources to participants such as data to be able to send photos or videos via mobile phone.

✎ Participatory photo or video submission relies on **"storytellers putting their opinions, experiences and feelings into their stories".[5]** For many participants, this may be a challenging exercise as it requires a certain level of vulnerability. Facilitators must ensure that participants feel safe and respected in order to encourage open sharing and discussion.

🔗 **Useful links**

Institute of Development Studies: Participatory Methods

Insight Shares: Insights into participatory video: a handbook for the field

Photovoice: participatory photo

COVID-19-adapted gender-responsive data collection methods

Focus Group Discussions

Focus Group discussions (FGDs) provide insight on a specific topic of concern, through the collection of a range of opinions and perceptions. Online focus groups, however, may present further management challenges in addition to those of the traditional in-person focus group.
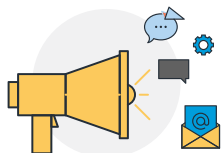
TIPS

✏️ These should be managed by someone with experience leading FGDs, as they can be difficult to ensure everyone's voice is heard and that the conversation does not move off-topic.

✏️ Limit to 5- 8 participants and ensure adequate time, approximately 1.5-2 hours.

✏️ Ensure sensitive issues (e.g. GBV) or relationships are not discussed.

✏️ Online focus groups can pose several challenges, as they are prone to issues of technology, lagging, internet connectivity and interruptions. Before the discussion, verify that participants have the necessary equipment, a strong internet connection, and a location from which to participate that is free of interruption.

✏️ At the start of the conversation, set the ground rules for the discussion. Encourage participants to move to quiet locations, establish how elements like text chat and hand raising are to be used.

✏️ Ensure that all participants have successfully connected their audio/visual components and clarify when the 'mute' option should be used.

✏️ If you plan on recording the focus group, make sure to obtain video recording consent forms from all participants prior to the discussion.[6]

🔗 **Useful links**

Further insights on conducting remote focus groups:

Insights for conducting real-time focus groups online using a web conferencing service (2017), by James Kite and Philayrath Phongsavan

COVID-19-adapted gender-responsive data collection methods

Some crowdsourcing methods include:

Online discussion platforms: as an alternative to focus groups, there are platforms available that can customize an online group discussion and allow for conversations to be held over several days to allow respondents time to participate and add their comments.

Facebook groups – This option features a way to gather data via prompts and discussions among members. These groups tend to have high levels of participant engagement and provide flexibility for participants and researchers alike. The researcher can customize controls and privacy levels of the group, however, the participants will not be anonymous.[9]

App-based approaches – Some app-based technologies such as Ushaidi provide services to numerous sectors and civil society to help improve the bottom up flow of information. Safetipin has several tools and services that can help urban stakeholders make cities and neighbourhoods safe and inclusive.

Crowdsourcing

Crowdsourcing has been defined as "a large number of people actively reporting on a situation around them, often using mobile phone technology and open source software platforms".[8] Through online recruitment, participants can be from any geographic location.

TIPS

Choose which data collection instrument are most accessible to participants, and **strategically recruit interested contributors** based on the necessary data collection tasks.

Consider what methods will result in **the right quantity, quality, and demographic sample of contributors.**

Communicate clearly with contributors to ensure that they understand their role and the desired data to be collected.

Decide how to **incentivize participants**, including based on behavioral design considerations. [7]

Useful link

How to Use Crowdsourcing Effectively: Guidelines and Examples (2014), y Elena Simperl

1. Follow ethical guidelines

As always, evaluation teams must adhere to the **ethical principles and guidelines** pertaining to gender-responsive data collection. All team members should be briefed on ethical guidelines and protocols, and a code of conduct should be signed prior to engaging in the data collection to ensure a common understanding on the approach to be taken. UN Women evaluation personnel may refer to UNEG guidelines for ethical conduct in evaluation, which seek to ensure credibility and the responsible use of power and resources.

🔗 Useful links

UN Women Information Security Policy

 UNEG Ethical Guidelines (2008)

COVID-19 How to include marginalized and vulnerable people in risk communication and community engagement

JPAL's Data Security Procedures for Researchers (2018)

Key issues to consider for all remote data collection

Always ensure the "do no harm" principle guides decisions. Consider in what ways the evaluation/research activities may put members of the community at risk, and how these risks may be mitigated.

Provide information on support services available to the participant.

Review and amend ethics and safety protocols and data collection tools if methodological approaches have been changed after the evaluation inception phase due to unforeseen or emergent issues.

Consider the 'affective atmospheres' of conducting any kind of social research in a pandemic, when normal routines are disrupted, and many people are feeling uncertain.[10]

Understand how the current context affects the most disadvantaged and marginalized, and ensure these issues are addressed in the evaluation design and implementation, including data collection methods.[11] Weigh the benefits/ risks of engaging these groups vs other forms of data collection or postponing the exercise.

Data storage and protection recommendations[12]

Adhere to **UN Women Information Security Policy and Guidance.**

Original data (i.e. Interview notes, meeting notes) will be retained in **confidential files** until completion of the evaluation. The director of evaluation shall determine an appropriate time for further retention, after which such data shall be securely disposed of in accordance with any Agency policy on the disposal of records following data security guidance.

Databases of unpublished information on individual project activities shall be securely stored and available for use only by the Evaluation Office staff and consultants.

Ensure that all devices used for data collection, and electronic document files are **password protected**.

Keep **signed consent forms** and other documents that include participant names, separate from documents containing participant data. Electronic files should be kept in separate folders that have different passwords.[14]

To ensure the protection of the rights of the participant, **recordings of audio are not recommended.**

Avoid storing any research records on portable USB flash drives. If such storage is temporarily necessary, records should be copied to a **secure server** as soon as possible and deleted from the less secure temporary storage devices.[13]

Deidentify participant's names and replace all potential identifying information with codes.[15]

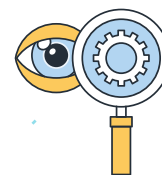# 2. Collect data ensuring a gender-responsive approach

TIPS FOR ENGAGING WOMEN AND VULNERABLE GROUPS

1 Leverage formal and informal partnerships and networks

Local partner organizations can refer new participants; leverage systems of data that already exist on the ground, community liaisons, partner organizations.

2 Understand the environment

Do a rapid assessment of women's cell phone/internet use in the chosen environment. In insecure areas, women often have less access to cell phones than men, and this can bias reported outcomes.

3 Use a recognized phone number

Many people, especially women in oppressive environments, will avoid picking up calls from phone numbers they do not recognize. Make sure the phone number that will be used is widely circulated and advertised to participants.

4 Use a female surveyor/interviewer

In many contexts, it is much easier to get women to respond/feel safe if a female surveyor is calling.

5 Be strategic with timing

Determine the best times of day to reach women to ensure that they are comfortable answering the phone (they may be uncomfortable when their partner is home, times of day when care duties are heavy, etc.).

6 Use the right language

Ensure the target population's primary language (or local dialect) is utilized which helps participants feel comfortable. Avoid stigmatizing language in recruitment materials that might link a participant to an incriminating or vulnerable identity or experience. Avoid academic jargon.
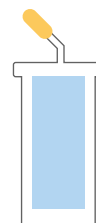
7 Consider power dynamics

For example in many contexts, it may be beneficial to appeal to the men of the household, to encourage the women to respond, especially in situations in which women are not the primary owners of the phone.[16]
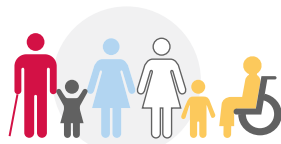
3. Analyse your data from a gender equality perspective

**Ensure a plan for analysis is determined from the beginning:**

Review and analyse your data sources

to assess whether existing information is adequate to understand how program results may be affected by gender difference and inequalities.

Always disaggregate data by sex & age

If possible, disaggregate data by other population variables (ethnic group, sexual orientation, geographic location, disability status, etc.) and compare across variables. These comparisons reveal existing inequalities that may affect women's participation rates, and access to services.[18]
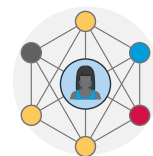
Use a gender analysis framework

(or combination of frameworks) to assess power relations, underlying socio-cultural influences and structural barriers, and the extent to which the results are gender transformative (i.e. ensuring sustainable change across various dimensions of informal/formal, systems/individual change). Analyze gender responsiveness of results aggregated from secondary data by applying frameworks such as the Gender Results Effectiveness Scale.[19]

🔗 Useful links

Gender at Work Framework

Oxfam's "How to" Guide to measuring women's empowerment

Compilation of gender analytical frameworks

4. Validate the data

It is important to engage your stakeholders after analyzing preliminary data to ensure there are no gaps in information, misinterpretation or factual errors.

This also helps to ensure the priority issues are highlighted. It is important to ensure credibility of the process by maintaining the independence of the evaluation team and it is critical to engage stakeholders to ensure the report is useful.

Examples of qualitative data validation methods:

Triangulation

Triangulation is a data validation strategy in which more than one method is used to collect data on the same topic.

This strategy consists of collecting data using two or more methods, followed by comparing and combining the results to capture different dimensions of the same findings.[17]

Respondent validation

Respondent validation can also be used to validate data. This could entail inviting those that participated in the data collection efforts to interpret the information collected through an online discussion. Research that has been analysed and condensed, should still be recognized by participants as authentic. Involving participants at this stage has the potential to refine the evaluators/researchers understanding .[20]

Share your findings

At a time in which the news, advice and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are changing rapidly, people may feel they are being overloaded with information.

Thus, it is important to present information in appealing ways and keep text short and action oriented. Webinars are a good way to present key findings and engage in discussion.

UN Women requires all evaluation products and management responses are uploaded within 6 weeks of finalization to the publicly accessible evaluation database GATE.

TIPS

Use active voice and keep documents **concise**.

Invest in **good design and infographics** to make data and statistics interesting and engaging to readers

Be **selective** in the information you choose to present.

Present findings in different ways to different audience types to best meet their needs and interests.

Avoid using technical language and academic **jargon**.

🔗 Useful links

UN Women Branding Guidelines and Publication Templates

UNDP Independent Evaluation Office Infographics

Stephanie Evergreen tips on visualizing data

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Endnotes

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