



WCARO 2020

ANNUAL REPORT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	4
ACRONYMS	7
CONTEXT	8
KEY RESULTS	9
Ending violence against women and girls	9
Women's economic empowerment	11
Leadership and political participation	16
Gender mainstreaming in national responses and data collection	17
Women, peace and security	19
Humanitarian actions	21
COORDINATION MANDATE	22
COMMUNICATIONS	23
FINANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY	24
KEY CHALLENGES	26
LESSONS LEARNED	26
FOCUS FOR NEXT YEAR	27

FOREWORD

OULIMATA SARR, REGIONAL DIRECTOR UNWOMEN REGIONAL OFFICE FOR WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

2020 was a particularly difficult year around the world as the COVID-19 pandemic led to widespread illness, deaths, and shutdowns, as well as job losses and rising tensions. In West and Central Africa (WCA) women were particularly vulnerable to the crisis. Groups of women at risk included informal and daily wage workers, domestic workers, migrant and refugee women and girls, women with disabilities, victims of gender-based violence, girls in food insecure households, old women, young girls and female health sector workers.

Prior to the pandemic, small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) created about 80 percent of Africa's job opportunities. Most SMEs in Africa had limited financial reserves, irregular cash flows, and lacked sustainable credit facilities and liquidity to face the economic downturn due to COVID-19. Moreover, the pandemic and its impacts caused a marked increase in violence against women. These impacts were further amplified by the context of challenging security and environmental situations of the WCA region.

To counter these burdens and build medium- and long-term recovery measures, the UN Women WCA Regional Office successfully provided multi-faceted assistance to 'build back better' by strengthening post-crisis socio-economic resilience and addressing structural gender inequalities in different areas of the economy and society. These efforts included:

- Supporting and conducting rapid gender assessments on the impacts of COVID-19;
- Increasing access to services and support for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence through improved hotlines and One-Stop Centres;
- Rallying traditional leaders as HeforShe to lend their voice on ending violence against women and girls;
- Improving economic opportunities for thousands of female farmers;
- Training 7,000 women from 13 countries on how to produce hydro-alcoholic gel and antiseptic soaps;

- Training 600 female mediators for peacebuilding between farmers and herders;
- Distributing over 100,000 masks and other personal protective equipment; and
- Reaching over 700,000 people through awareness-raising campaigns.

The UN Women Regional Office also continued and expanded innovative tools and programmes that helped women, girls and Governments in the region to not only respond to the pandemic, but also to thrive in the face of it and meet development targets.

It will be essential to continue key data collection exercises in each WCA country, including rapid common assessments, and work with teams to ensure that sex-disaggregated data are collected on all aspects of the COVID-19 response, particularly on the economic impacts for women informal workers, the incidence of gender-based violence, unpaid care and ongoing interventions for COVID-19 recovery.

The WCA Regional Office fostered risk-informed solutions for sustainable development by enhancing the understanding of gender dimensions of disasters and climate change in the Sahel Region, as well as proposing means of reducing the vulnerabilities of women and men to disasters through their participation and leadership. UN Women identified gender focal points at the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) and ECOWAS to support the identification of the women-led organizations and women's rights organizations in each country.

In terms of political participation, the WCA Regional Office swiftly adapted its approach to support women's leadership at the local, national and regional levels in time of COVID-19 and the resultant isolation. This was possible by improving legislative practices and policy reforms and frameworks for the promotion of gender balance to effectively increase women's participation as political leaders, in particular in the Central Africa Republic, Liberia, Nigeria and the Republic of Guinea.

The Regional Office is very proud of our 2020 tangible results in all areas of UN Women's mandate. The testimonies of women in this document present valuable examples of human stories of resilience during this unprecedented outbreak. However, an important lesson learned from this report is that UN Women needs to further its advocacy for the application of global norms on gender equality and women's rights and reinforce its partnerships and coordination mandate to provoke real change.

While economic projections around the impact of the coronavirus outbreak remain uncertain, the UN Women WCA Regional Office looks forward in 2021 to continue empowering women's personal and business confidence, with a shift toward decentralization and financing for gender equality through advocacy and expanded partnerships.



OULIMATA SARR

Regional Director

UNWOMEN Regional Office for West and Central Africa





ACRONYMS

AgriFeD	Agriculture Femmes et Développement Durable (or the Women's Empowerment through Climate-Resilient Agriculture Value Chains programme)
BICIS	International Bank for Trade and Industry of Senegal
CAR	Central African Republic
CATI	Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviews
CCA	Common Country Assessment
CO	Country Office
COP	Community of Practice
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DRWRD	Digital Solutions to Enhance Rural Women's Resilience to Disaster
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EMB	Electoral Management Body
EVAW	Ending Violence Against Women
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
GIHA	Gender in Humanitarian Action
MSGI	Minimum Set of Gender Indicators
NSO	National Statistics Office
OSC	One-Stop Centre
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
REFAN	Network of Women Farmers of the North
RO	Regional Office
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
WCARO	UN Women West and Central Africa Regional Office
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
WPSHA	Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action

CONTEXT

In 2020, UN Women's interventions in West and Central Africa have been marked by COVID-19 response initiatives. The region has faced challenges in access to health care systems, widespread shutdowns of school and business closures, and job losses—all disproportionately affecting women and girls. These impacts are further amplified by the context of fragility, conflict and emergencies where social cohesion is already undermined, and institutional capacity and services are limited. In addition to long-standing conflicts in the region, the Liptako-Gourma region (comprising contiguous areas of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) is home to deadly extremist attacks and community conflicts. Another epicenter is the Lake Chad Basin (encompassing Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and Nigeria) due to recurrent violence by Boko Haram, among other groups.

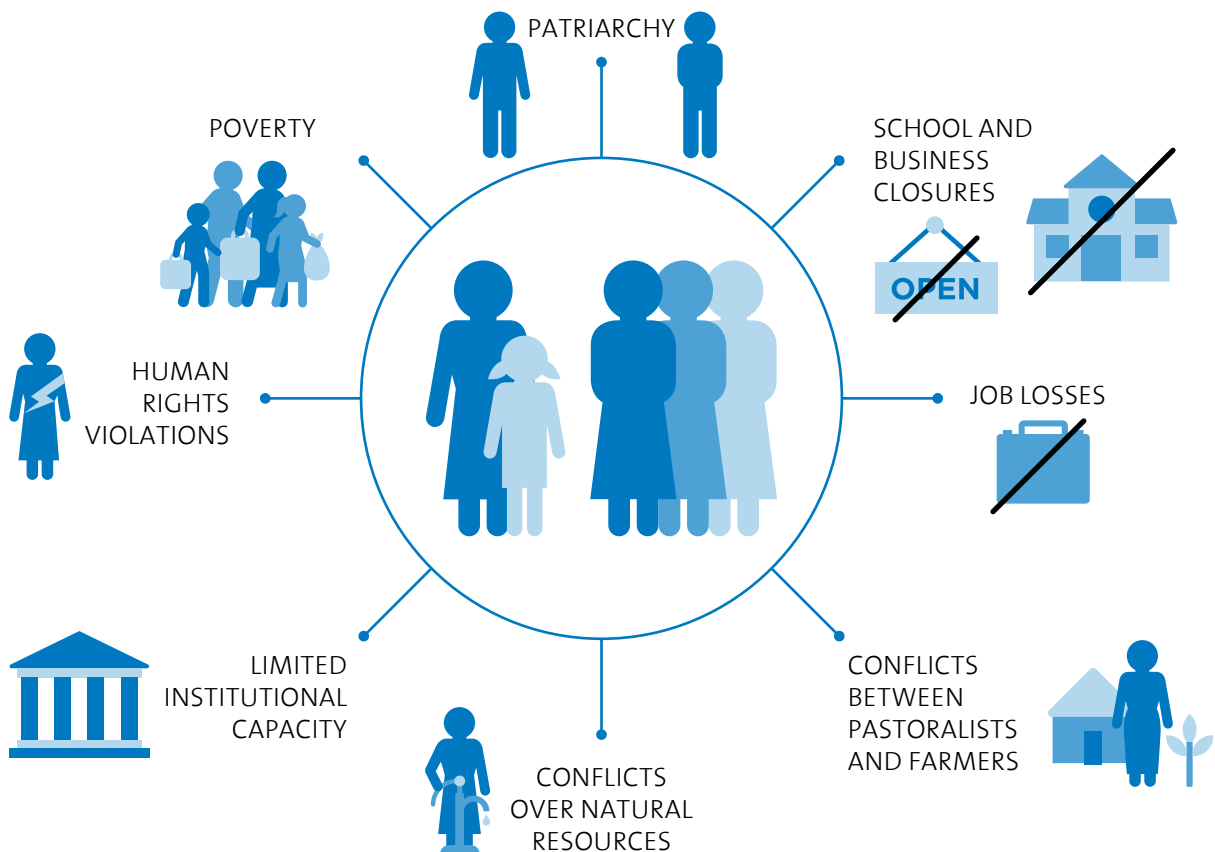
The overall political situation remains a source of concern, and the sub-region continues to face socio-economic challenges and women's rights violations, particularly in countries that lack implementation of the Maputo Protocol, such as the Horn of Africa, the Lake Chad Basin and the Sahel. These challenges have been exacerbated

by COVID-19, as well as social unrest and political instability following elections in several countries.

Despite these persistent challenges, UN Women has successfully provided multi-faceted assistance, including in areas experiencing violent conflict. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has been an opportunity for the Regional Office (RO) to innovate, increase women's resilience to different factors (pandemic, conflict, climate), adapt its annual planning and find new ways to implement programmes and activities.



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KEY RESULTS



ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Beyond the immediate health impacts from COVID-19, the pandemic has also led to increases in the prevalence of violence against women and girls around the world. A study released in July 2020 by the organization Justice and Dignity for the Women of Sahel reported that the rate of domestic violence, physical or verbal, increased by 12 percent during the pandemic in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal. A rapid gender assessment in May 2020 by the Central Bureau of the Census and Population Studies in Cameroon and UN Women showed a 35.8 percent increase in domestic violence. In Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire, NGOs that provided sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) response services reported receiving 25 percent more requests for support from survivors. And in Liberia, the Government reported a 50 percent increase in SGBV in the first half of 2020, and as a result, the president of Liberia declared rape a national emergency in September 2020.

EVAW RAPID COVID-19 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Within this context, the Ending Violence Against Women Regional Office (EVAW-RO) Unit contributed to the collection of substantive and relevant data and information from partners, Governments, and civil society organizations (CSOs) to map the impacts of COVID-19 on the availability and accessibility of services for women and girls who experience violence, as well as measures taken by service providers to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls (VAWG) during the pandemic. The information was uploaded to the UNDP-managed **COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker**.

Through the EVAW Unit, rapid gender assessments were rolled out in Côte d'Ivoire, DRC and Nigeria. These assessments provided comparable data on how COVID-19 is affecting the provision of support to women and the number of reports/calls related to VAWG from police, shelters and/or helplines.

EVAW COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

In February 2020, **EVAW Communities of Practice** (COPs) were created to help Country Offices (COs) in the region solve problems collectively and share good practices that can be replicated. EVAW COPs have helped EVAW Units to effectively coordinate actions, particularly in terms of data collection on SGBV and interventions to fight the rise of SGBV due to the pandemic.

ENDING FGM

Throughout West and Central Africa, UN Women is working with traditional and religious leaders through the Council of Traditional Leaders of Africa to drive a pan-African movement of traditional and religious leaders dedicated to ending child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM) and other harmful practices. To further this, UN Women provided training sessions and facilitated community dialogues. In Liberia, in an effort to end FGM and its increase during COVID-19, **300 traditional practitioners were economically empowered to be self-reliant and gradually abandon the practice of FGM**.

ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL SERVICES

In Cameroon, Central African Republic (CAR), Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal, UN Women strengthened access to essential and quality services for women survivors of violence during the pandemic by building the capacities of national partners and updating the referral mechanisms.

Notably, the Studies and Research on Gender and Societies Group (GESTES) of the Gaston Berger University and UN Women Senegal, in collaboration with several state and civil society actors, set up a **digital web SMS SGBV monitoring and warning platform**. This platform which has integrated with [FEGGU](#) (which collects data on SGBV and FGM), gathers reports of violence sent by email and text message. The collected data are processed and placed in real-time on Google Maps, allowing a local observer to submit a report via their mobile phone or internet to get a victim quicker access to nearby care services.

In Liberia, UN Women has provided grants to 25 grass-roots CSOs and five CSO secretariats to ensure timely support to survivors of SGBV in the most remote communities. In addition, through community outreach and awareness-raising sessions, a total of 1,230 community members now have enhanced knowledge on SGBV and COVID-19 prevention.

The Government of Mali, with technical and financial support from UN Women, rehabilitated a **toll-free SGBV hotline at the National Police Command Center in Bamako** to make it operational. This included supplying radio and computer equipment, publicizing the toll-free number through media, and building the capacities of 200 national police officers to manage SGBV cases, particularly in the context of COVID 19.

ONE-STOP CENTRES

One-Stop Centres (OSCs) provide access to holistic services (health, psychosocial support, legal and police services) to survivors of SGBV under one roof and free of charge. For example, in seven counties in Liberia, 12 fully functional One-Stop Centres were established, and during the year, they provided comprehensive services to 1,739 survivors of SGBV.

As part of its support to Sierra Leone's Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, UN Women established One-Stop Centres within five district hospitals in the country. In 2020, these OSCs recorded over 735 SGBV cases. A free SGBV hotline (116), also launched in 2020, complemented the One-Stop Centres. Media and outreach efforts on the establishment and use of One-Stop Centres reached over 30,000 people.

In Nigeria, UN Women (through the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative) established a One-Stop Centre in Sokoto State and is supporting a One-Stop Centre in Lagos. The Nana Khadija Centre in Sokoto was launched during the COVID-19 lockdown by the Nigerian Minister for Women Affairs, the Governor of Sokoto State and heads of UN agencies in Nigeria. The Centre has provided services to over 200 survivors, roughly 16 percent of whom are male. The Centre has seen a surge in men and boys seeking care for rape and physical violence, and compared to other similar centers in Nigeria, the Center has seen 33 percent more men and boys seeking care. Additionally, the Sokoto State Government, with support from UN Women, established a Government-run shelter to complement the services provided at the One-Stop Centre.

Sierra Leone OSCs



UN Women established **"One-Stop Centres"** within five district hospitals

OSCs recorded over **736 SGBV cases**

 **116** free GBV hotline launched in 2020

use of One-Stop Centres reached over **30,000 people**

Nigeria OSCs



UN Women established One-Stop Centres in the Federal Capital Territory and Sokoto State to **address SGBV** and promote **women's and girls' rights to sexual and reproductive health**

the center has seen **33 % more** men and boys seeking care for rape and physical violence



Liberia OSCs



Twelve fully functional One-Stop Centres were established in Montserrado, Bong, Margibi, Grand Bassa, Riverge, Grand Gedeh and Bomi

1,739 survivors of SGBV



When Laure, her mother and sister first came to the Nana Khadija One-Stop Centre in Sokoto, they had all suffered physical and sexual abuse by Laure's father for years. Her mother lacked access to formal education and economic support apart from her husband's family. She did not know how she and her daughters would survive if they left his house. However, one day she made the decision to report the abuse to the police, who in turn, referred Laure's mother and the girls to the Centre for medical services. Once there, they gained so much more.

Initial medical examinations revealed repeated sexual assault on the two young girls (both under 10 years old). Both Laure and her mother began receiving counselling sessions and other psychosocial support. Eventually, with the support of the Centre, her mother decided to permanently move Laure and her sister away from their father. At the recommendation of the Centre, Laure's mother enrolled in the Neem Foundation's second chance education programme. Now she and Laure are both back in school. The Centre also recommended Laure's mother for livelihood support from the Sokoto State Ministry for Women and Children Affairs to start a small business.

Laure's mother is now a voice of support and encouragement to other survivors, especially during the Centre's monthly survivor support group meetings



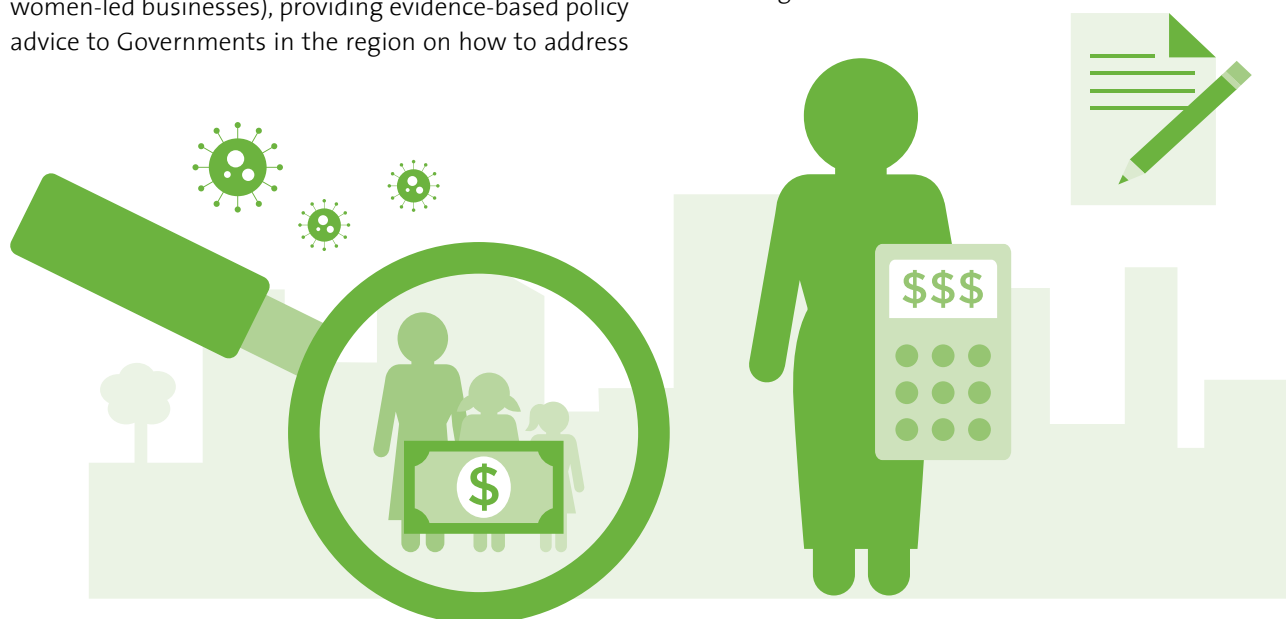
Laurel and her mother © Saratu Muazu-Bello, Nana Khadija One Stop Centre Sokoto

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a large economic impact on women and girls with many women, particularly entrepreneurs and women in the informal sector, losing all or part of their income due to the pandemic and related restrictions. As a result, the Women's Economic Empowerment Unit (WEE) shifted its focus to supporting Country Offices and Governments in identifying key economic impacts of the pandemic (e.g., on female employment, particularly in the informal sector, and on women-led businesses), providing evidence-based policy advice to Governments in the region on how to address

these impacts, and ensuring that women's needs were considered in fiscal stimulus packages and economic recovery strategies.

The RO also supported COs' strategic partnerships with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for engendering fiscal stimulus packages in Niger and Nigeria and with the African Development Bank's Affirmative Financial Action for Women in Africa in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Nigeria, and Senegal.



COVID-19 POLICY GUIDANCE

UN Women released eight (8) policy briefs, guidance notes and socio-economic assessments of COVID-19 impacts on women, including a brief on priority interventions to support women working in the informal sector, guidance notes on how to integrate gender in socio-economic impact assessments of COVID-19, and a regional policy brief on the impacts of COVID-19 on women-led businesses in Africa.

In early 2020, the RO, through the WEE section, organized the first regional capacity-building event on gender and macroeconomics for about 30 UN Women and IMF staff from seven regional Country Offices. Topics included gender analysis of macroeconomic policies and gender-responsive climate investment reforms.

In October 2020, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and UN agencies, including UN Women, jointly organized a two-day virtual meeting of Ministries of Gender on the theme **‘Prevention and Response to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Upholding the Rights of Women and Girls within the Framework of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond’**.

The meeting was aimed at articulating comprehensive ECOWAS prevention and response strategies that address the direct and indirect impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the rights and well-being of women and girls in West Africa.

FINANCE

WCARO also took over the overall coordination and knowledge management of UN Women’s global pilot project **‘Digital solutions to enhance Rural Women’s Resilience to Disasters’** (DRWRD), which supports the development of digital micro-insurance solutions adapted to the needs of female farmers.

In November 2020, WCARO, in collaboration with FINDEV Canada, supported a ‘reverse mentoring event’ between development financial institutions and African female fund managers who invest in women-led businesses. The dialogue identified constraints and co-created solutions to improve the flow of finance to women-led SMEs in the region.

TESTIMONY OF MS. COUMBA TOURÉ, Chair of the Cooperative Gomnikondeye de Niafunké

Due to the actions against women during the crisis, I moved to the region of Mopti. Our group was selected by our peers and the NGO Subaahi Gumo to receive 500,000 CFA (around \$900) in financial support from UN Women. Through this support, we were first oriented on Resolution 1325, which we were unfamiliar with before. It was the first time we heard about this important document and we understood that it is made for us women.

Since most of us are widows and have no outside support, we are the ones who cover our small expenses. Before this support, we were totally ignorant of marketing techniques and that was the cause of many of our problems and failures in our income-generating activities.

With the money we received, we started manufacturing soap concentrates. All the members of the cooperative work together. In addition to soap making, we now can contribute weekly 250 CFA (\$0.45) per member for the tontine (or annuity shared by subscribers to a loan or common fund).

Today, two members of the cooperative are members of the Coordination of Women’s Associations and NGOs of Mali (CAFO) in Niafunké.



AGRIFED

The **Women's Empowerment through Climate-Resilient Agriculture Value Chains programme** (also known as Agriculture Femmes et Développement Durable or AgriFeD) is currently operational in six West and Central African countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal). The ultimate goal is to improve economic opportunities for more than 500,000 women in over 15 countries in the region, build community resilience, remove bottlenecks for women's participation in rural value chains, and maximize impact while minimizing risk through interventions focused on SDGs.

For example, by 2021 the AgriFeD programme aims to empower 30,000 Senegalese women farmers by promoting their access to:

- Ownership and control of agricultural land;
- Technologies and training to increase their productivity while improving their environmental practices;
- Financing by training entrepreneurs to apply for loans; and
- Value-added markets by training entrepreneurs to learn more innovative business practices (packaging, labeling, etc.).



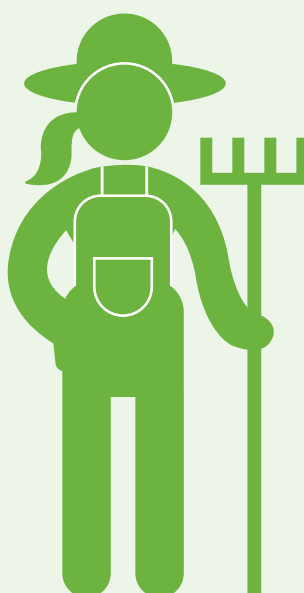
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CLIMATE-RESILIENT AGRICULTURE VALUE CHAINS PROGRAMME

**Empower 30,000
Senegalese women farmers**



goal is to improve economic opportunities for more than **500,000 women** in over 15 countries



In Senegal, UN Women contributed to the COVID-19 response through the 'Household Food Basket' initiative. With multi-partner funds collected from UN Women, BNP Paribas and the Ministry of Women, 231 metric tonnes of rice and 23 tonnes of cereals were purchased from 285 women's supplier organizations (AgriFeD beneficiaries) and distributed to vulnerable families. This initiative directly affected 1,495 women entrepreneurs who mobilized 8,550 women. The income generated by these women-led businesses contributed to improved livelihoods of 7,767 vulnerable families. In addition, women farmers were trained on how to monitor crop growth and increase agricultural production using sensors, as well as on seed multiplication to increase agricultural productivity. UN Women provided technical support to the 16,000 members of the Network of Women Farmers of the North (REFAN) to improve their financing opportunities. And a partnership with the

International Bank for Trade and Industry of Senegal (BICIS) led to the establishment of a revolving credit line adapted and accessible to women farmers.

With the support of UN Women Mali's AgriFeD program, more than 66 hectares were secured on behalf of 2,049 programme beneficiaries. Seven videos were produced by the AgriFeD programme and uploaded to the Buy From Women platform. These videos demonstrated techniques for pesticide and natural fertilizer production. As a result, 1,122 women were able to produce natural pesticides made from the products of trees on their own land. In addition, AgriFeD-related actions have enabled 45 groups with 6,922 members (6,791 women and 131 men) to purchase potato seeds. The income generated over the 2019-2020 season by 12,194 beneficiaries of the AgriFeD Mali programme is estimated to be \$250,000.

AGRIFED ACHIEVEMENTS



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UN Women provided technical support to the
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of the Network of Women Farmers of the North (REFAN)



The income over the 2019-2020 season by
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BUY FROM WOMEN PLATFORM

Great strides were made in expanding the UN Women **Buy from Women digital platform**, a mobile and web-based platform that acts as a one-stop shop for female smallholder farmers, cooperatives and entrepreneurs to better control their assets and business; connect buyers and suppliers; find information and receive alerts on weather, climate, extension services and market opportunities; and access financial services.

In Mali, the Buy from Women platform was expanded from the commercialization of agricultural products to other sectors, including handicrafts, jewelry, antiseptic soaps and hand sanitizers to support women-led businesses and contribute to fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 1,300 women smallholders and entrepreneurs are registered on the platform. In Liberia, 120 women benefited from capacity-building training through an early trial of the Buy From Women platform (expected to be deployed throughout the country in early 2021). Development of the Buy from Women platform is also ongoing in Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal, where it is expected to be deployed in 2021.



Over 1,300 women
smallholders and entrepreneurs
are registered on the platform

COVID-19 RESPONSE

In Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal, UN Women supported women producing masks and other basic protective equipment, as well as the distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE) to female essential workers. The WEE Unit implemented a **virtual regional advisory service to train/retrain women** already involved in AgriFeD in the production of hydro-alcoholic gel and antiseptic soap. In all, 7,000 women from 13 countries were trained online. (In some countries, participants included women living with HIV.) This allowed the women to diversify their income and repurpose their businesses to better manage the crisis, as well as to contribute to the fight against COVID-19 in rural areas through the commercialization of their products.



**7,000 women from
13 countries**
were trained online

For example, in Cameroon, 90 women were trained to make reusable barrier masks, and 150 women received startup kits for the healthy and hygienic manufacture of reusable barrier masks, hydro-alcoholic gel and soap. In Côte d'Ivoire, UN Women supported women entrepreneurs, particularly women in the fashion industry, to produce protection masks. In Senegal, 200 people living with HIV developed skills in the manufacture of hydro-alcoholic gels and antiseptic soaps, helping them diversify their sources of income. In Sierra Leone, UN Women supported the production of 12,000 facemasks for school children and market women.

Aye Sangaré is 51 years old, a widow, a mother of two children and a resident of the Benkadi women's association in Mopti, Mali. "I was having financial difficulties. I was not able to provide for the basic needs of my children," said Aye. "Previously, our group had only a few materials for soap making and never received any funds for production. We used to produce five cartons of soap in a month, with 20 cartons sold at 4500 CFA francs (\$8.40) per carton. Thanks to this project, we produce 20 cartons each month, and each carton is sold for 5000 CFA francs (\$9.32), and our profits are shared at the end of each sale among the members of the association. Now I can pay for food, for my children's health expenses and school supplies."



© Saratu Muazu-Bello, Nana Khadija One Stop Centre Sokoto/Nigeria

LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

2020 was an important election year in the region, with elections held in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia and Niger. The pandemic disrupted political processes globally, creating new challenges to women's leadership and participation. Much campaigning, voter engagement, and governmental and parliamentary decision-making shifted online. However, women often had less access to online platforms and social media than men. In response, UN Women adapted its women's political participation projects and activities across the region.

For instance, UN Women promoted women's leadership in the COVID-19 response among Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), judicial bodies and those charged with government finance decisions. The EMB in Cameroon launched a campaign to promote safe voter registration for women, and UN Women provided electoral administration staff with individual PPE.

In CAR, **an emergency hotline** (the '1325 Green Line') was created by the UN peacekeeping mission's (MINUSCA) Office of Gender Affairs, UN Police and UN Women, in collaboration with the CAR Gendarmerie. The hotline, named after UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), is manned by call center operators specialized in the protection of women. They relay calls they receive from women on election-related violence to the CAR authorities for interventions. The hotline also facilitates the pursuit of justice for victims. The 1325 hotline will also be used for the dissemination of messages related to the civic education campaign to encourage women's participation in elections, as well as for an electoral process without violence. The hotline will remain operational through the planned CAR local elections in November 2021.

UN Women in CAR also created a pool of 135 national trainers to assist and coach 540 potential women candidates. UN Women helped increase the number of female voters by facilitating 4,221 birth certificates for women that enabled them to register to vote. Additionally, UN Women trained 850 volunteers (502 women) to increase women's participation in elections. About 1,350,000 people were directly reached by the activities of the community volunteers.

An emergency hotline



was set up in Central African Republic by UN Women and its partners



In Niger, UN Women implemented recommendations by the UN Needs Assessment Mission and the National Independent Electoral Commission for the electoral cycle 2019-2021. UN Women also supported national accountability mechanisms to monitor the quota law implementation; a countrywide advocacy strategy on gender equality and women's political participation; UN coordinated efforts on capacity-building and technical assistance to electoral stakeholders; the creation of a cadre of qualified women leaders and aspiring candidates, including through mentorship programmes for young women interested in politics; and strengthening capacities of elected and appointed women public officials.

In Liberia, UN Women supported capacity-building focused on mobility, outreach and communications in the context of COVID-19 for 20 female candidates during the midterm senatorial elections.

UN Women and UNDP facilitated a series of consultations and meetings that led to the creation of the **Network of Locally Elected Women in Guinea** (with over 60 members). UN Women also helped strengthen the capacities of 53 women leaders from 37 political parties and CSOs on gender and equality issues in political actions and platforms.

In Côte d'Ivoire, a virtual youth platform of 40 CSOs resulted in an action plan for the involvement of young women and men in the electoral process.

In March 2020, in partnership with the Musée des Civilisations Noires in Dakar, Senegal, UN Women launched a two-year exhibition, **'African Women and Political Leadership'**, that showcases women political leaders in Africa.



UN Women launched a two-year exhibition
that showcases women political leaders in Africa

*Women's march for peaceful elections,
December 2020, Bangui (CAR)*

GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN NATIONAL RESPONSES AND DATA COLLECTION

The Women Count programme provides up-to-date data on gender-specific SDG indicators. Under the leadership of the UN Women Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO) and WCARO Women Count Units, National Statistics Offices (NSOs) in Africa now have a **minimum set of gender indicators (MSGI)** to easily identify gender data gaps and therefore, interventions to remedy them. These MSGI will facilitate harmonization of gender indicator initiatives by national, regional and international bodies. The African Statistical Commission endorsed these in October 2020.

UN Women WCARO and ESARO, along with the Economic Commission for Africa and the African Development Bank, led two virtual workshops and trainings October-December 2020 for National Statistics Offices and Ministries of Women of all African member states: (1.) Communicating Gender Statistics (148 attendees from 28 countries) and (2.) Time Use Surveys (over 100 registrants from 25 countries). Through Women Count, WCARO also participated in two webinars: one in Cameroon on the centrality of data in United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) Programming Principles, and one in Nigeria to the UN Gender Thematic Group on their role in promoting development, collection and use of gender statistics.

In the context of COVID-19, accurate sex-disaggregated data on incidence, hospitalization and testing are crucial to understanding the outbreak's transmission and its related impacts. Most countries, however, are either not collecting or not making such data available, making it difficult to assess the pandemic's impact on women and girls and heightening the vulnerabilities of the most vulnerable.

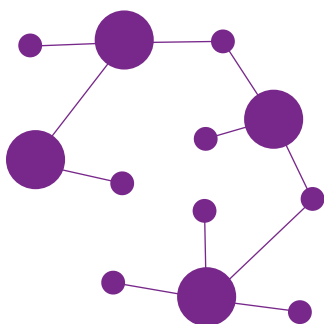
To fill this gap, UN Women produced and published the most comprehensive data available on the health impact of COVID-19 by sex and age. These data are updated regularly and available through a dedicated COVID-19 section in the [Women Count Data Hub](#).

UNDP and UN Women put in place the **COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker** that monitors policy measures enacted by governments worldwide to tackle the COVID-19 crisis and highlights responses that have integrated a gender lens. It includes national measures that are directly addressing women's economic and social security, including unpaid care work, the labour market and violence against women. It also provides guidance for policymakers and evidence for advocates to ensure a gender-sensitive COVID-19 policy response.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UN Women WCARO is spearheading the implementation of **Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) Rapid Gender Assessments** across the region. In addition to gender, data can be disaggregated by area of residence (urban or rural), level of education, sex of head of household, disability (self-reported) and age. Information is collected on coping strategies, incomes, discrimination, and security, aimed at rapidly assessing changes experienced at the individual and household levels due to COVID-19. Between July and November 2020, UN Women conducted interviews in six countries (CAR, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Senegal and Sierra Leone, the only country where the National Statistic Office undertook data collection themselves). On average, 2,500 people were interviewed in each country.



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In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UN Women WCA-RO is spearheading the implementation of

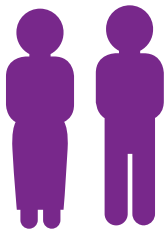
Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) Rapid Gender Assessments

The results that have been released from Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Central Africa Republic and Guinea show that on average more than 75 percent people saw a reduction or total loss of income due to the COVID-19 pandemic; 55-84 percent said the pandemic negatively impacted their emotional/mental health (55 percent in Guinea and 84 percent in CAR); 68-87 percent said they had to adopt at least one adaptation strategy to manage the crisis economically (e.g., eating less or borrowing money); only 11-57 percent received some form of government assistance during the crisis (11 percent in Côte d'Ivoire, 57 percent in CAR); and 18-45 percent said there has been an increase in domestic violence since the start of the pandemic (18 and 19 percent in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, 45 percent in CAR). DRC, Niger and Togo will participate in this project in 2021.

Additionally, gender was mainstreamed into United Nations Country Team-led (UNCT) COVID-19 socio-economic impact assessments and response plans in most of the countries in the region. For example, in Sierra Leone, UN Women deployed six gender experts to five districts to ensure gender equality was mainstreamed into the national and district responses. The experts conducted a training of trainers in COVID-19 response for 10 staff members in the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs.

In addition, the RO supported the Common Country Assessment (CCA) development process in Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Mauritania, and the CCA revision process in Cape Verde, Congo (Brazzaville) and Senegal. This led to final CCA documents that are gender mainstreamed.

CATI RAPID ASSESSMENT RESULTS



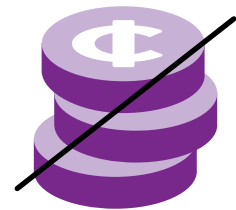
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WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

The Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action (WPSHA) Unit produced a policy brief, **‘The Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the Context of COVID-19 in West and Central Africa’**, which outlined how women bear the heavy load in the fight against COVID-19, as well as the brunt of social unrest and economic downturns. The brief offers a series of recommendations that include:

- Taking gender into account in the mechanisms for coordinating the response to COVID-19;
- Strengthening the role of defence and security forces and judicial actors for the prevention of violence against women and girls;
- Adjusting national action plans for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in the context of COVID-19;
- Continuing to provide humanitarian assistance to displaced populations; and
- Prioritizing the implementation of current regional programmes and strategies for peace and security and stabilization, even after the COVID-19 crisis.

Under the leadership of the WPSHA team, a flagship programme has been drafted for strengthening women’s leadership and protection for peace and security in the Central Africa region. The programme complements initiatives to accelerate the women, peace, and security agenda in a harmonized and coordinated manner throughout the region.

UN Women is now a member of the Alliance Sahel Gender Group, a coordination mechanism that provides support for security and development of the Sahel region. The Group’s objective is to ensure prioritization of gender equality and women’s empowerment (GEWE) by donors in the region.

The **‘Support for the implementation of cross-border cooperation activities in the Liptako-Gourma region’** (designed in partnership with the Liptako-Gourma Authority, UN Women and other UN agencies, including the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel) began in 2020. UN Women’s work in this programme is focused on fostering dialogues, fighting SGBV and building three Peace Hubs.

In CAR, UN Women supported women’s organizations in peace consolidation-related initiatives, including an agreement between UN Women, the Association of Women for the Promotion of Entrepreneurship (AFPE) and the African Women Leaders Network and the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Family and Child Protection for activities related to resilient agriculture in the context of climate change.



In DRC, UN Women engaged in a Joint Program with United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) and UNDP to reintegrate women and girls formerly associated with armed groups in a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration program in Rutshuru Territory. UN Women opted for a carefully designed and sequenced approach to include male gender champions, traditional and other community and opinion leaders in different discussion groups and trainings to sensitize them to gender considerations.

In Niger, UN Women trained **600 women mediators for peacebuilding between farmers and herders** in the Maradi and Dosso regions. Thanks to strong advocacy with the authorities, religious and traditional leaders, these mediators were accepted and supported in their role. Their awareness-raising and mediation actions contributed to reducing over 600 rural land conflicts between farmers and herders, which used to claim lives every year. The mediators also carried out activities around the management of conflicts between families and intra-family conflicts, which impacted over 1,400 people.

In Sierra Leone, 190 Community Peace Ambassadors (115 Female and 75 Males) were trained in COVID-19, SGBV, psychosocial counselling and community peacebuilding. They are currently resolving conflicts at the community level in targeted communities.

In 2020, UN Women also entered in partnership with the Lake Chad Basin Commission for the successful implementation of the regional programme on resilience. As a result of the programme, 5,227 women and 688 men have been reached through a variety of activities, such as capacity-building on advocacy, risk mitigation and climate change adaptation, protection, SGBV prevention and response; distribution of emergency and livelihoods kits; dialogues on gender norms, human rights, SGBV and access to land, as well as cash for work opportunities.



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TESTIMONY OF Fatma Ousmane Baby, Peace Laboratory (KIDAL)

I was involved in the resolution of a conflict around a well between herdsman and the women domestics in charge of the water chore. The herdsman are hostile to any female presence around the water point,



and this often generates conflicts. I conveyed this message to everyone involved in the dispute, “The well belongs collectively to the whole community.” This message was understood by all, and since then, the well has been used by all peacefully.

HUMANITARIAN ACTIONS

Under the Gender Equality in Humanitarian Action (GIHA) Unit, UN Women supported the development and implementation of assistance and resilience programmes for internally displaced women and female refugees, including a regional programme on resilience implemented in Cameroon and Nigeria.

A **network of GIHA experts** was established with support from UN Women. The objectives of the network are to improve the gender mainstreaming of humanitarian plans and programmes, capacity-building of humanitarian actors and advocacy on key challenges faced by women and girls in humanitarian settings. An annual plan was developed, and activities will be implemented in 2021.

In Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria, UN Women provided support to Ministries of Gender to produce radio broadcasts on COVID-19 in local languages. Capacity-building sessions for the media on information management in health crises related to gender and COVID-19 were also organized.

In Liberia, a programme under the COVID-19 Emergency Response Window (through the Women's Peace and

Humanitarian Fund of which UN Women is a member) was implemented in 10 communities in three counties, supporting 4,884 beneficiaries directly and 13,890 indirectly.

In Nigeria, UN Women worked with the Ministry of Women Affairs and women-led CSOs to distribute food, hygiene kits and PPE to the most vulnerable women in 17 states and is implementing a cash-based intervention targeting 10,000 vulnerable women and girls most affected by COVID-19.

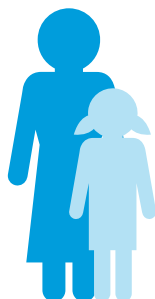
In Cameroon, CAR, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone, UN Women provided protective equipment (masks, hydro-alcoholic solution, soap, etc.) to vulnerable women. In Liberia, UN Women distributed 680 hand-washing buckets, 14,235 masks, 721 hand sanitizers, and 92 bags of rice (25 kg each) to vulnerable and marginalized persons, communities and institutions in need. In Niger, UN Women procured and distributed PPE to 15,500 beneficiaries. In Senegal, UN Women distributed 35,000 masks, 972 containers of bleach, 4,170 bottles of hand sanitizer and 1,150 bars of soap, as well as information on protective measures.

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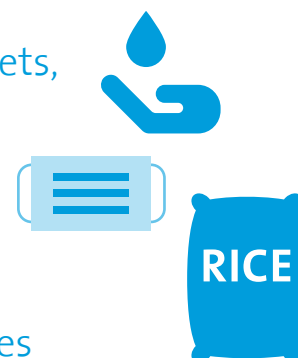


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COORDINATION MANDATE



In 2020, WCARO played a crucial role in furthering the UN Women coordination mandate for gender equality and women's empowerment in West and Central Africa.

The Regional Office contributed to the development of a Regional Gender Theme Group (RGTG) advocacy note by providing recommendations to ensure that the needs of women and girls were fully reflected in COVID-19 national response and recovery efforts. In addition, more than 120 partners and UN personnel from the region participated in a webinar organized by the Regional Gender Thematic Group under the leadership of UN Women for the celebration of African Women's Day in July 2020. Attendees were sensitized on transformational leadership for a gender-sensitive response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

WCARO also led initiatives on strengthening capacities related to the main accountability tools for supporting gender mainstreaming in the context of the new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) and the repositioning of the UN Development System. More than 120 personnel from 13 UNCTs (representing 24 UN entities) strengthened their knowledge and expertise and acquired new skills on how to undertake a UNCT-SWAP Gender Equality Scorecard. The training drew on the experiences of UNCTs from Cameroon, Liberia, and Mali.

120 personnel and staff from 14 UNCTs (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, CAR, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Togo) representing 10 UN entities acquired skills and competencies on the Gender Equality Marker (UNCT GEM) and its application in the framework of

the COVID-19 response. WCARO also provided technical support to two country/programme presence offices in developing the concept note.

The Regional Office provided policy advice as well as normative support to countries such as Mauritania, Chad, Burkina Faso through the G5 Permanent Secretariat and the G5 Sahel Women's Platform. The platform acts as a medium through which women can seek equal participation and leadership on peace and security issues.

Through the Spotlight Initiative, UN Women, UNICEF, UNDP and UNFPA have continuously strengthened their collaboration to eliminate violence against women and girls.

In addition, the ERAW Unit built a partnership with ECOWAS to promote gender equality, prevent VAWG and increase access to quality response services for survivors. UN Women and ECOWAS have commissioned studies on legislation, policies and implementation of SGBV response measures by member states and partners, CSOs and other non-state actors. The findings will help to develop a Regional Action Plan against SGBV.

In the second quarter of 2020, WCARO created a West and Central Africa Coordination Network of UN Women staff and personnel engaged in activities in the region. Through an online platform on Teams, the network acts as a common space to create synergies and strengthen UN Women's coordination efforts and the development-humanitarian nexus. Three meetings were held in 2020 with discussions around the UN Women coordination mandate, sharing good practices and tools, and peer-to-peer learning.

More than 120 staff and personnel of

**13 UNCTs representing
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120 personnel and staff from

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10 UN entities**

have acquired skills and competencies on the Gender Equality Marker (UNCT-GEM) and its application



**SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS**

COMMUNICATIONS

During 2020, UN Women reached over 570,000 people in West and Central Africa through messages about COVID-19, SGBV, women's rights and their access to transitional justice mechanisms, women's leadership, gender equality and the importance of women's participation.

In Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Senegal, UN Women shared these messages through social media. For instance, in Nigeria, social media campaigns around community surveillance and response to SGBV during COVID-19 reached 188,869 persons. In Cameroon, UN Women produced a video to raise awareness about the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls, particularly those working in health care facilities. In Côte d'Ivoire, in partnership with Gondwana City Productions and TV5 Monde, UN Women produced videos to raise awareness on EAW. The videos received 544,037 views on social media.

Throughout the region, UN Women shared messages over the radio. For instance, in DRC, 32 radio programmes were broadcast on the importance of women's leadership, gender equality and the importance of women's participation. These programmes reached 35,600 people.

In Benin, CAR, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo, UN Women launched awareness campaigns to engage men and boys, address violent masculinities, challenge gender stereotypes and disseminate information on available support services. Liberia saw a successful roll-out of the HeForShe Strategy with 10,000 men having signed up.

In CAR, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Niger and Nigeria, UN Women organized trainings for community health workers on awareness raising, social mobilization and sensitization activities.



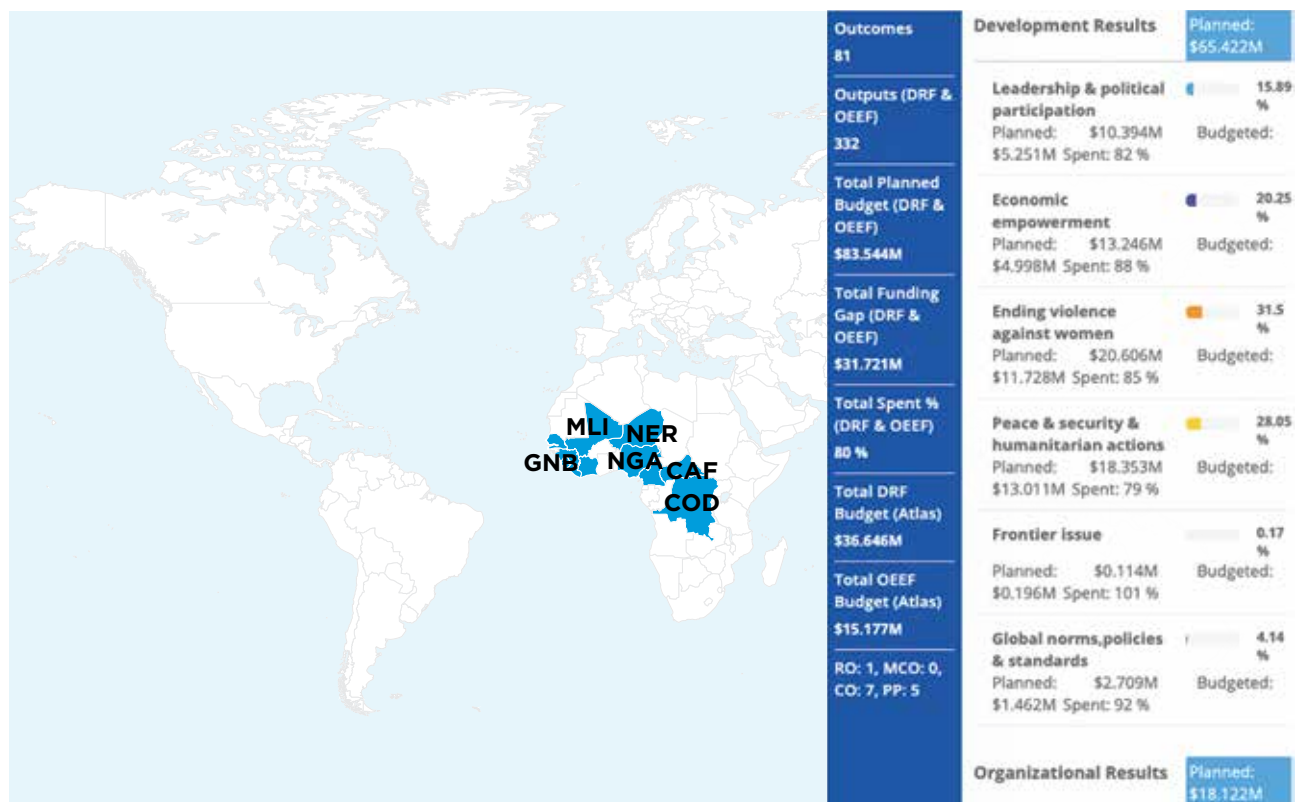
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FINANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

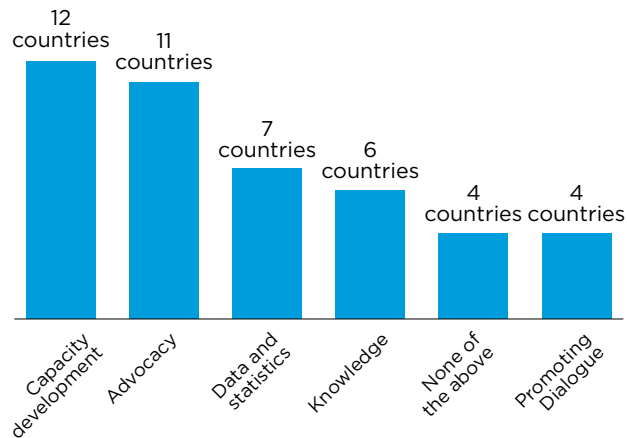
In this difficult and unusual context, WCARO exceeded its revenue target by more than \$5 million. The UNBoA audit of the Regional Office, CAR, Niger and Senegal Country

Offices took place October-December 2020 and was successful with only one minor audit recommendation.

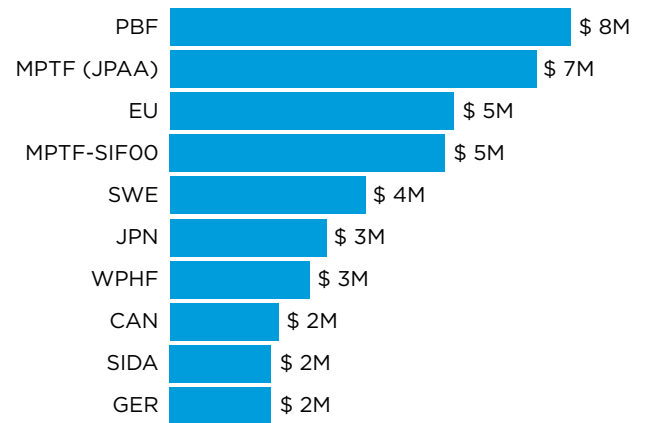
Breakdown of Regional Budget by Development Results



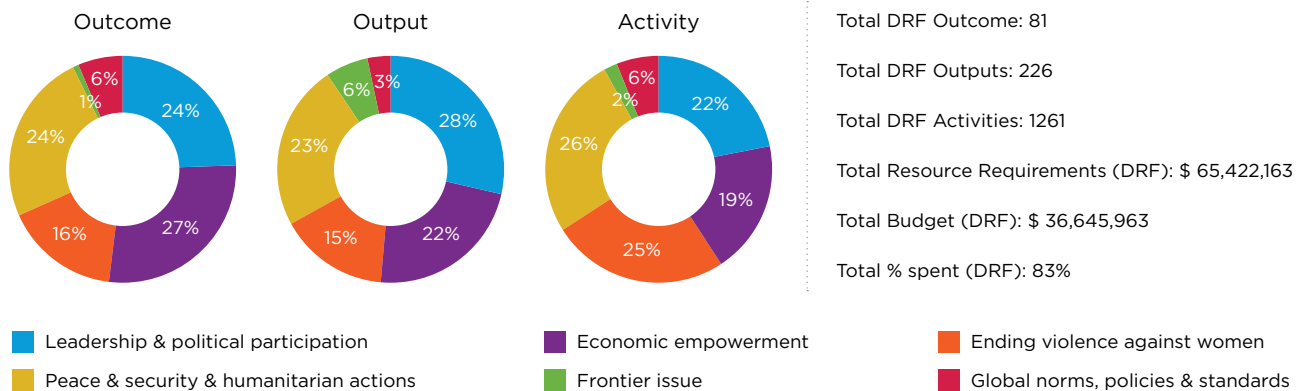
Type of UN Women Contribution at the Output Level



Top 10 Donors



Development Results, Activities, Budget, and Outputs



KEY CHALLENGES

- There were delays in project implementation and a lack of gender equality positioning amid pandemic-related priorities, as well as setbacks in terms of women's participation, women's empowerment and the fight against violence in the COVID-19 context.
- Financial institutions are giving large macroeconomic subsidies linked to COVID-19 mitigation and recovery, but these rarely account for women and girls' specific needs or consider the related increases in gender-based violence.
- The lack of dedicated funds has real consequences for gender-based violence programming, and, without necessary gender mainstreaming, emergency funding may detract resources from initiatives addressing women's human rights and empowerment, which are often perceived as less urgent.
- A lack of qualitative and disaggregated data was a burden across the board. Different methods of collection and disparities in information sources caused difficulties for resource allocation and prioritization.
- The pandemic exposed disparities between women in urban and rural settings, particularly women farmers and women engaged in the informal sector.

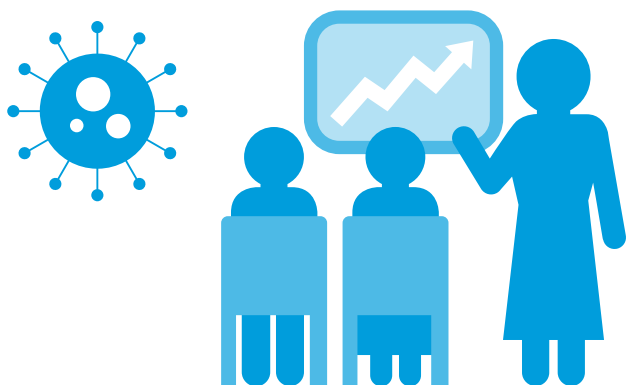
LESSONS LEARNED

The lessons learned during this year often stemmed from the outbreak of COVID 19. For sustained policy gains and improved outcomes for women and girls, the innovative approaches and activities created during the pandemic need to be prioritized and funded for 2021 and beyond.

WCARO will develop stronger cross-sectoral SGBV programmes to attract interest from donors who have not previously supported such efforts. UN Women will also include SGBV in broader macroeconomic planning and responses in areas such as food security, poverty alleviation and longer-term humanitarian and development response strategies.

There is a great opportunity for gender mainstreaming through engendering CCA and UNSDCF processes by engaging with Country Offices, particularly with the UNCTs and RCOs of countries where UN Women is not physically present.

UN Women cannot address the issues facing women and girls in the region alone. Thus, UN Women will place an even greater emphasis on partnerships and engage donors on emerging trends to ensure programmes are aligned with donor needs, vision and priorities. The work on Women's Economic Empowerment will be particularly important in this regard. UN Women will also strengthen partnerships with youth-led organizations dedicated to fostering youth engagement and leadership.



FOCUS FOR NEXT YEAR

While the pandemic has opened the door to policy reform in critical areas for gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE), such as social protection for informal workers, unpaid care, or gender-responsive budgeting, the door is likely to close quickly in 2021 as countries start implementing austerity measures. Thus, there is a window of opportunity to position key GEWE reforms now. UN Women will further develop its role as a convener and mobilizer with the ability to influence the actions and financing decisions of diverse actors.

Focus will be placed on large initiatives to change behaviours and foster positive social norms. Top priorities will be on working closely with traditional chiefs, combined with strong normative support for more gender-responsive normative frameworks, policies and institutions that are skilled and sensitized to fight against all forms of violence, enhance women's political participation and economic empowerment.

The RO will draft a regional coordination strategy to foster strategic partnerships with regional bodies and provide specific technical advice to UNCTs vis-a-vis the application of UNCT-SWAP and GEM tools, as well as early-stage engagement in the CCA and UNSDCF processes, including in those countries where UN Women does not have a country office.



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Underlying all these efforts will be an emphasis on collecting qualitative, accurate and disaggregated data to be able to monitor and measure changes in the region in terms of GEWE. Initiatives for data collection and statistics will be developed based on best practices and lessons learned from the COVID-19-related rapid gender assessments, which resulted in valuable information during the pandemic.

2021 will be a key year for UN Women with the design of a new Global Strategic Plan and a new Regional Strategic Note—all in the context of an ongoing change management exercise and the arrival of a new Executive Director. The year will be marked by the Generation Equality Forums in Mexico (March 2021) and in Paris (June 2021). The RO places a strong emphasis on partnering with youth in this journey.

2021 will also be a unique opportunity to address the lessons from the pandemic and also from the context of conflicts and climate hazards. Each challenge requires a stronger emphasis on women and girls' resilience while addressing their immediate needs through adequate business models and a stronger UN Women presence in humanitarian settings. To this end, UN Women will increase its footprint in some countries and define differentiated, yet impactful, operational models in countries where it has no physical presence. Ultimately, UN Women aims to foster more creative, innovative and locally-tailored approaches to improve the lives of women and girls.





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