CAP TURING CHANGE IN WOMEN’S REALITIES
A Critical Overview of Current Monitoring & Evaluation
Frameworks

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Introduction:

Over the past few decades, important strides have been made in developing ways to capture a whole range of abstract but vital social realities, and particularly in trying to quantify them. These efforts have been the result of the realization that when policies, resources, and strategies are applied towards building more equitable, sustainable, rights-affirming, inclusive and peaceful societies, we have to devise ways of checking whether they are working effectively or not - whether they are producing the changes we wish to see. This has meant gathering appropriate and concrete information about the size or extent of the problem being addressed, its contours, characteristics and dynamics, and about the lives of the people experiencing them. This in turn demands means of measuring or tracking both the people and the processes of change unleashed in their midst.

While the attempt to assess changes in social realities was certainly a positive development, measurement has become something of a power unto itself in modern times: indeed, one of the hallmarks of modernization is the creation of a range of instruments to measure virtually anything – the size of sub-atomic particles, the health of economies, the rate at which blood is pumped through the heart, the level of democracy and transparency in different countries. Measurement has become such an integral part of our approach to the world that we no longer question its value or relevance. We assume that measurement is a good thing, something that enhances our ability to track change, growth, health, and success.

This assumption has naturally entered the world of social change as well - Edwards and others attribute this to the permeation of the capitalist business model into the domains of philanthropy and international development assistance. Consequently, it is not only assumed that the processes, outcomes and impacts of social change should be assessed but that they can be assessed. In other words, it is taken for granted that the instruments we have at our command for measuring such change are adequate, effective, and sensitive. More problematically, it is assumed that change measurement enhances our ability to make or accelerate positive change. But we need to interrogate all of these assumptions – to determine when and what kinds of measurement are actually useful, versus those that may be meaningless or even detrimental to social change. Such an interrogation has become particularly urgent with the burgeoning demand, particularly from donors, for increasingly elaborate monitoring and evaluation systems of the development and social change projects they support. Social change organizations and activists are spending increasing amounts of time and energy filling in sophisticated LogFrames and compiling various kinds of data, using measures that are thought to effectively track change.

In this document, we attempt to interrogate such assumptions in the context of women’s rights / gender equality / women’s empowerment work, where M&E approaches create particular kinds of challenges. Part I provides a critique of current M&E frameworks as experienced by women’s organizations and movements worldwide, and attempts to articulate some principles and attributes that can engender our M&E approaches. Part II offers a compendium of a large number of M&E frameworks and tools, along with a critical

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analysis of some of their strengths and weaknesses in assessing women’s rights and gender equality processes and impacts.

While we are aware that M&E tools are often not freely chosen but required to meet donor or other needs, we nevertheless hope that this document will help women’s rights organizations and activists to make more informed decisions about their M&E systems, to assess the systems they are currently using more critically and make improvements, to negotiate more effectively about how to best measure their performance and strategies, and most of all, to make internal learning systems a stronger and more central part of their work.

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Women’s empowerment and gender equality initiatives have been under increasing pressure to measure their impact over the past two decades, while at the same time, donor support for certain kinds of women’s empowerment or rights work has decreased, at least partly, because it is considered too slow, amorphous, or intangible. There is growing evidence, in fact, that the lion’s share of investment in gender equality has shifted to a handful of “magic bullets” like microfinance and political representation, precisely because the results of these interventions are far easier to assess. The challenges of measuring change – i.e., of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) – in the context of gender relations, and the social relations within which they are embedded, are somewhat more challenging for several reasons, which are discussed below. The greatest challenge is well summed up in the words of a seasoned activist:

“When you work for women’s interests, it’s two steps forward – if you’re really smart and very lucky! – and at least one step back. In fact, it’s often two or three steps back! And those steps back are, ironically, often evidence of your effectiveness; because they represent the threat you have posed to the power structure and its attempt to push you back. Sometimes, even your ‘success stories’ are nothing more than ways the power structure is trying to accommodate and contain the threat of more fundamental change by making small concessions.”

This quote eloquently articulates a universal truth: transforming gender power relations is the last frontier of social change. While changes in the social power relations of North-South, developed-developing, race, class, caste, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, etc. are also difficult to achieve, patriarchal norms are embedded and normalized within each of these power structures, so that challenging and transforming them is a doubly daunting task. And since gender power is integral to both public and private institutions and relationships, shifting it in one domain does not guarantee that it has been uprooted in another. Thus, investments in women’s empowerment that have demanded “proof” of positive change generally want evidence of a smooth progression, rather than a picture of the messy reality – the steps forward and the steps back – that is closer to the truth.

Why do we measure change?

Any critique – gendered or otherwise – of M&E frameworks must begin with the basic question of why we monitor or evaluate at all. In theory, at least, monitoring and evaluation is motivated by at least five basic objectives:

- **To learn** how change happens, what strategies and interventions worked and did not, in order to refine our policies, strategies and interventions for more effective and impactful change – most of all, to grapple with both progress and reversals and build more effective change strategies as a result;
- **To analyze our role in the change process** – i.e., either to attribute credit or locate our contribution to change, and to identify cause-effect relationships;

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3 Personal communication of Sheela Patel, Director SPARC, India, in 1987.
To empower our constituencies – to engage stakeholders in analyzing change processes so that they are also empowered and strengthened to sustain, extend, and expand change;

To practice accountability / build credibility – to our donors, constituencies, other activists, and the public at large, and to build our legitimacy, credibility, and transparency; and finally,

To advance our advocacy for social justice – to demonstrate how change has advanced social justice goals, and mobilize broader support for our change agenda.

In reality, though, M&E is more likely to be done because

Donors require it to ensure their funds have been utilized correctly and to demonstrate to their own constituencies (their governing bodies, contributors, governments, etc.) that they are supporting effective work, the “right” kind of work;

To sustain or obtain more funding or to compete for new grants / contracts – donors are more likely to invest in organizations with a proven track record of work (manifested in the form of concretely measured results!); and / or,

To support public fundraising or advocacy work by showing how successful particular approaches or interventions have been.

It is these sorts of pressures that convert measurement from an activity designed to aid learning into one that evaluates performance and as such, distorts the purpose and potential value of our M&E work. A feminist M&E approach would be motivated primarily by the first set of objectives rather than the second.

Current M&E practice – what isn’t working for women’s rights organizations:

Over the past year, AWID has undertaken a critical review of a wide range of current M&E frameworks, particularly those that are in wide use among women’s organizations. We have gathered and analyzed over 50 frameworks and tools to assess their strengths and limitations. We have also reviewed the growing critiques of the assessment frameworks and tools that are currently predominate in the development sector. In addition, we have had in-depth discussions about M&E with a wide range of women’s organizations and leaders, including a large number of MDG3 Fund grantees and partners and allies of our “Where is the Money” initiative. What follows is a summary of the key challenges of current M&E systems identified through our analysis as well as by women’s rights organizations and activists.

Firstly, we find that very few M&E frameworks actually enable us to understand how change happens or how gender relations have been altered – of locating the most effective interventions for shifting the complex social power relations that mediate women’s access to resources and rights, security and autonomy. Linear frameworks, particularly, tend to describe the goals and activities related to those goals, so that the only thing one can say at the end of a project cycle is whether those goals were achieved and not whether real change was achieved. Many tools thus measure performance, rather than impact or change. This is ironic since an implicit objective of most M&E exercises is to discover the right “formula” for change, so that it can be reproduced or replicated in other locations and contexts.

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The second and related challenge is to know what to measure, particularly in relation to the assumptions or theory of change underlying the intervention or program. Some frameworks like Theory of Change, Making the Case, and SMART attempt to locate indicators related directly to the changes being sought, but with varying degrees of success. This dilemma is now being acknowledged even in “hard” fields like economics, where seemingly invincible measures like GDP have prevailed for a long time (See Box 1). There seems to be a growing trend of questioning even long-standing industry standard indicators for their inability to tell us what is really happening on the ground in people’s daily lives. Within the domain of international aid, where the goal is to catalyze positive change that promotes human rights, economic development, peace, and social justice, M&E frameworks are supposedly created to provide lessons about the relevant intervention in order to guide further action. In practice, however, M&E frameworks and their indicators take on a life of their own, often dissociated from the theory of change, becoming an end in themselves rather than a means. There is ample evidence that measurement is used more as a tool of enforcement and accountability to the donor than a means of changing strategy or learning what works.

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**Box 1: Why GDP Won’t Do**

The Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, set up by French President Sarkozy nearly 18 months ago, headed by Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz, supported by fellow Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen and several others, has concluded that highly esteemed indicators of economic growth, such as GDP, can be misleading; as such, new indicators incorporating a notion of lifestyle and national well-being are required. Indeed, Stiglitz writes in a hard-hitting piece entitled “The Great GDP Swindle”, “In our performance-oriented world, measurement issues have taken on increased importance: what we measure affects what we do. If we have poor measures, what we strive to do (say, increase GDP) may actually contribute to a worsening of living standards. We may also be confronted with false choices, seeing trade-offs … that don’t exist.”

“It is time for our statistics system to put more emphasis on measuring the well-being of the population than on economic production.” President Sarkozy established the Commission because of his conviction that current economic measures often indicate levels of economic progress that are far higher than citizens’ actual experience, particularly since these indicators tend to hide high levels of inequality and disparity within societies.

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In this context, we must also question whether our frameworks confuse or conflate short-term change with sustainable change. Women’s rights organizations and their allies from around the world – such as the activist quoted earlier – have learned that while power structures often accommodate some degree of challenge and may appear to change, ultimately deeper transformations in the status quo do not necessarily occur. In some cases, a strategy that has worked in the past may not work again even in the same context, given the prior change that has been achieved.

We have also seen that women’s movements and other social movements with a strong

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gender equality focus are sometimes more successful in creating sustained change. However, **most existing M&E tools are not designed for tracking movement building or movement impacts.** They have been developed to measure the work of individual organizations and often, single projects or interventions. We have yet to design frameworks that can capture the results of larger-scale women’s empowerment processes that build collective power and deeper change, including accounts of cohesive success as well as challenges and backlash.

The inherent narrowness and **inappropriateness of current M&E systems for multi-layered formations, such as transnational or regional networks, coalitions, membership-based organizations, and re-granting organizations, like women’s funds,** are being increasingly critiqued. Our recent study of M&E challenges faced by recipients of the MDG3 Fund awards revealed that in these complex architectures social change initiatives involve multiple actors working at different levels and locations. The agency responsible for assessing and reporting progress and impact to their donor has to collate and synthesize information from all these levels and present them as though they were part of one single change intervention. The entity receiving the grant is also required to tease out and establish its own contribution to the change process, using tools that are simply not designed to handle this level of complexity. Many of these “INGO” (international or transnational NGOs) structures are facing serious funding challenges because it is harder for them to prove their value given current assessment tools. They are questioning the high level of accountability demanded from them when their donor partners – such as bilateral agencies – are not accountable in any concrete way for the way they choose to allocate their resources!

**The linearity of many tools** – especially widely used methods like the Logical Framework or “LogFrame” – **have proved to be problematic** because they flatten change processes into cause-effect relationships that cannot capture and measure complex social changes, and may even mislead us about how these occur. The logframe has, for this reason, been described as the “simple linear” theory of change model, since it attempts to establish uni-dimensional causal chains. The assumptions underlying each part of the LogFrame – that x intervention led to y effect, which led to z change - are also limiting because they cannot incorporate the many other change dynamics that may occur in an intervention. In a SIDA study of NGO experiences with the Logical Framework Approach,

“... one NGO respondent commented that the focus is often the logical framework – to look at the expected achievements laid out in the matrix – rather than the work itself. As a result the emphasis of monitoring and evaluation systems based on the LFA is often upwards accountability to the donor, to show whether the intervention is delivering the outputs and impact as proposed.”

Recent attempts have been made, however, to make the LogFrame both more modest and less flat – a major bilateral, for instance, has put “risks and assumptions” into the frame, and limits measurement to “verifiable indicators”. And many women’s organizations are discovering some of the advantages of using this tool – such as the ability to track smaller, positive steps that raise morale and measure performance. Nevertheless, the tool is at best

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9 AWID/Mama Cash / HIVOS. 2009, op.cit. P.8
10 Bakewell and Garbutt, 2005, op.cit. P.10
a supplement to other methods that better accommodate complexity and challenges from both within and throughout the change process.

A hugely important factor, particularly for activists working in the developing world, is the political assumptions underlying many M&E frameworks. These are macro-political assumptions about the way the world and society works – that democratic rights, law and order, an impartial judiciary and police, due process and access to redress, rights of association, civil liberties, an independent media, etc. are inevitably present and surrounding change processes in a larger safety net. In reality, few of these conditions can be presumed to exist in many of the contexts where women seek radical change. The contextual realities are more likely to include: growing number of attacks on women human rights defenders and the growing incidence of femicide (Guatemala), the violent removal of democratically elected regimes by juntas of various kinds (Honduras), weakness or impotence of even democratically elected regimes (Pakistan), violent extremist movements antithetical to women’s rights (Taliban, Bajrang Dal in India, Iran), humanitarian and natural disasters (in 2009, India, China, Philippines), wars and civil conflicts (Sri Lanka, Sudan, Congo, Cote d’Ivoire), rogue states and leaders (Zimbabwe), suspension of civil liberties and most rights (Honduras, Zimbabwe, China), mass displacement (Darfur, Congo, Sri Lanka) ecologically- and economically-induced migration (India), human trafficking (Russia, Eastern Europe, Indonesia, Philippines, India, Sri Lanka), revival of barbaric and primitive penalties for “errant” women like whipping, stoning and honor killings (Nigeria, Pakistan, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia), and populations devastated by global pandemics (Botswana, South Africa). These are the catastrophic realities against which legions of women’s rights actors operate; abnormalities that are all too normal in much of our world. How many M&E frameworks actually enable or allow these factors to be represented as integral elements affecting every project or intervention? And if they do not, then these are very fundamental flaws, since women everywhere are more severely affected by these forces than men, which deeply affect any change intervention that aims at transforming their realities.

Similarly, most tools do not allow for tracking negative change, reversals, backlash, unexpected change, and other processes that push back or shift the direction of a positive change trajectory. How do we create tools that can capture this “two steps forward, one step back” phenomenon that many activists and organizations acknowledge as a reality and in which large amounts of learning lay hidden? In women’s rights work, this is vital because as soon as advances seriously challenge patriarchal or other social power structures, there are often significant reactions and setbacks. These are not, ironically, always indicative of failure or lack of effectiveness, but exactly the opposite, evidence that the process was working and thus creating resistance from the status quo as a result (see Box 2). Of course, not all negative changes are signs of progress – they may also provide evidence that our strategies are ineffective or that women need to build greater collective power. Interrogating the forces pushing back or complicating change is critical, and yet this does not really find a place in our current M&E frameworks. Many women’s groups are afraid to even report these backward steps since it could impact their funding flows, losing valuable learning insights for all.

Some women’s rights activists and their allies consequently propose that we need to develop a “theory of constraints” to accompany our “theory of change” in any given
context, in order to create tools for tracking the way power structures are responding to the challenges posed by women’s rights interventions.12

**Box 2: Why Tracking Negative Shifts Matters**

Impact evaluations of micro-credit programs for women’s economic empowerment in India, where this is a dominant form of investment in women, have found some interesting facts: the more successful the program in raising women’s income levels, the more likely male earners in the household tend to shift responsibility for the household’s economic security onto women, who earn less and work less regularly, while also taking control of the women’s income.13 Women themselves report increased violence as a result of tensions around their newfound economic power, especially where lending schemes exclude men.

In another Indian case, a violence-against-women intervention14 was declared a failure because the impact evaluation found that the expected outcome — viz., increased reporting to and filing of complaints with the police — did not occur. A deeper enquiry found that the focus on police and legal remedy was the problem — women were afraid of the police, whose record in committing atrocities on poor women, including rape, ensured that no woman would voluntarily seek their help in dealing with violence from other men15. Instead women had developed community-level strategies that were beginning to have some impact, but could that not be measured through the indicators identified, such as police complaints.

For similar reasons, tracking less tangible but vital gender equality interventions is quite difficult with current M&E instruments. For instance, women’s organizations engaged in building capacity through training and other means, including research and knowledge building, challenging dominant perspectives and discourses, changing public attitudes, playing support roles to other movements or networks, engaging in policy advocacy, shifting public attitudes through campaigns, and consciousness-raising with women, all find it quite challenging to show the impact of their work. Consequently, they are compelled to measure their processes, outreach, and outputs (number of training programs held, number of participants, publications, attendance at rallies and meetings, etc.), rather than the results of the process. And many such organizations, especially those working at the global level, have found it very difficult to receive adequate levels of funding since they are asked to demonstrate impact in ways that are untenable for them. We have yet to create effective M&E tools for this critical range of activities and strategies, which is the core work of thousands of women’s organizations worldwide.

Several false binaries and dichotomies are embedded within or underlie many M&E approaches — e.g., “quantitative-qualitative”, “subjective-objective”, “macro-micro”, “success-failure”, and so forth. These create problematic hierarchies and reveal positivist and reductionist biases rather than immutable tensions. Subjective information, for instance, can be far more telling in measuring change in women’s lives than supposedly “objective” data; at the same time, dismissing the anecdotal as too “micro” often negates

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12 Discussion of considerations for monitoring and evaluation at the AWID / Mama Cash / HIVOS meeting on “Resource Mobilization Strategies for Women’s Organizing and Women’s Rights: A Stakeholders Meeting”, held in Amsterdam, November 30 & December 1, 2009.
14 Project details cannot be shared to protect the identity and confidentiality of the organization.
15 Personal communication of Nandita Shah, Akshara Centre, Mumbai.
potentially powerful lines of inquiry about change processes. But it is not only hardheaded evaluation specialists who carry these biases. Women activists are also guilty, though possibly at the other end of the spectrum: we have witnessed vehement assertions that “the kind of work we do cannot be measured or quantified – it is very nuanced. We can only tell stories about it, we can’t provide hard data.” These stances not only negate the fact that many dimensions of changes in women’s status and rights can be quantified, but also reinforce the sense that women’s empowerment processes are difficult to monitor or evaluate. But if one is motivated by the desire to demonstrate that even the most abstract interventions can have measurable impact, then women’s organizations may hold the key to producing incredible innovation.¹⁶

Women’s rights activists frequently encounter disjoint lines of inquiry about change processes, for the simple reason that the changes we are trying to track may not be visible within the time frame in which we are required to assess. This is particularly true for example, with the assessments being done of the MDG3 Fund grants, whose 3-year timeframe imposes limits on what can be realistically achieved in this short amount of time. Many MDG3 Fund grantees find there is lack of clarity about short- vs. medium- and long-term changes in the current M&E framework. This problem gets compounded in multi-layered architectures: women’s funds, for instance, must demonstrate what they are accomplishing in specific (and usually fairly short) time frames to their donors, and so are forced to pass the pressure on to their grantees.

This brings us to another critical issue – the problematic assumptions embedded in most M&E methods regarding the capacity of their end-users. In most cases, it is M&E specialists or other ‘experts’, rather than women’s rights activists, who have developed many of the current tools, which require similar kinds of training and competence levels for effective use. More importantly, they tend to assume that their logic and conceptual underpinnings are universal, rather than culture- and region-specific. In reality, the majority of women’s rights workers, especially in Southern cultures and grassroots contexts, think about change – and its assessment – quite differently (see Box 3). Activists from the Pacific, for instance, say that even the use of boxes, as opposed to circles, create problems in their region where people’s visual literacy cannot grasp shapes like squares and rectangles. They may narrate stories of profound and far-reaching change and use concentric circles to make connections between interventions and their results, but struggle to understand and fill in a LogFrame or use SMART indicators.¹⁷ There is also growing awareness that even activist-developed and supposedly “bottom-up” tools (several of which are included in Part II of this document) are too complicated for grassroots use. The need is for simple and user-friendly but culturally sensitive and nuanced tools that can be used by a broad spectrum of actors without requiring intensive capacity building.

There is a lack of clarity in the donor community around M&E, especially in the context of women’s empowerment work, which then permeates the relationships with grantees and partners and creates a lot of tension. Our research and conversations with women’s organizations reveal the perception that donors need to do more homework on this dimension, in order to become more aware of the complexities and of the potential and limitation of various tools, becoming active partners in the search for more relevant and sensitive frameworks. As one donor representative at a recent AWID gathering said,

“[in social change work] …. none of us know what we are doing… we are all flailing

¹⁶ Report of the Results Assessment workshop conducted by HIVOS with Indian partners in 2004.
¹⁷ Personal communication of activists from the Pacific Islands and Maori groups in New Zealand.
around. Donors get to impose [M&E models] but they don’t know what they’re doing either. What’s worked for us is … the conversation and face to face interaction … the site visits and dialogue is where we place the emphasis, instead of expecting all the answers in the report.”

Women’s organizations are also frustrated by the lack of a genuine and ongoing negotiation space for discussing what’s happening with their assessment systems – there is a sense that once a framework has been negotiated, it becomes a very rigid tool with little space for modification, even if the users discover that it is not working well or that new dimensions need to be added. But this is the nature of social change work, particularly women’s empowerment work. Even if you think at the beginning of a process that you know what should be tracked or measured, these are ultimately educated guesses and your indicators may actually prove inadequate and inappropriate in the second or third year of the project. But the bureaucracies within which even sympathetic and supportive donors work may not allow this kind of flexibility – so everyone is trapped.

This problem is also linked to the sense that M&E is used punitively – in other words, that if the indicators chosen at the outset turn out to be inappropriate, and the data generated through them reflects poorly on the project / implementing organization, it negatively influences funding decisions. This belies the rhetoric that many activists feel about evaluation being for learning and improving change strategies, since resources often disappear if the first venture is not revealed to be a “success”. Few donors, it is felt, stay the course and join grantees in learning how change works and in making mid-course corrections – including in the M&E design – so that some kind of lasting impact can actually be made. But donor agency representatives are under tremendous pressure: to show that they are supporting “winning” strategies and organizations or to discontinue support to seemingly amorphous women’s empowerment approaches that do not yield quick, visible, and quantifiable results.

At the same time, our research reveals that lack of a strong culture of assessment and the tendency of both donors and women’s organizations to treat M&E as an add-on is a serious challenge in the present environment. Many women’s rights activists are acknowledging the fact that there is a negative attitude towards M&E (probably because of all the challenges and limitations listed here) within their organizations, or at least, a tendency not to see it as a central and integral component of women’s rights / empowerment work. M&E is often viewed as donor-driven – too often because it is! – rather than an essential learning device. Locating and prioritizing M&E as a core activity, instead of the “add-on”, is rare within women’s rights organizations and even among many donors. As one activist put it, “there is no M&E culture in women’s groups” – so that most are, in fact, doing it to satisfy donor requirements rather than to interrogate their work and retool their strategies. M&E must be rescued from these dynamics and repositioned in women’s rights work as a critical element of our accountability to ourselves, our constituencies, and our politics. We need to create a culture of assessment and learning within our organizations and movements.

On the donor side, M&E also gets shortchanged in terms of resources and emphasis. While some give a lot of importance to M&E in grant negotiations, others tend to treat it as a postscript initially, but later put a lot of emphasis on it, creating both frustration and resentment on the grantee side. Donors are also unable or unwilling to bear the cost of good M&E – to invest resources in supporting grantees to create well-integrated and effective assessment systems – but do not hesitate to demand a “results orientation” as
though no staff time or organizational costs are involved in this. While good assessment is not always expensive, the levels or kinds of information some donors ask for requires a lot of staff time, capacity, and resources. The attitude that organizations should deliver this data without needing extra resources has to change – tracking and measuring women’s empowerment and advancements in gender equality can involve serious costs if it is to be done well.

Finally, many current assessment methods are neither gendered nor feminist in their principles or methodology, nor are they sensitive to or designed for the particularities of the power shifts and challenges generated by women’s rights interventions. While approaches like Theory of Change and Making the Case work rather well in our contexts, others are rather linear and limited. And as some M&E analysts have pointed out, even gender analysis frameworks – of which there are several (see Part II) – are not necessarily the same as feminist evaluation. But the concept and practice of feminist evaluation is not highly developed – we do not have a ready-made set of tools. We therefore need to unpack, explore, and construct the core principles and elements of a more feminist approach.

Given these myriad and serious challenges, it is crucial to construct new M&E approaches and tools that combine and adapt the strengths of some of our existing tools to overcome their more serious shortcomings in order to adequately capture the complexity of gender equality work and the social dynamic within which it occurs. We are at a threshold where building new frameworks cannot only provide the most convincing, quantitative “hard” data, but must also yield deeper insights into the kinds of strategies that usher in sustainable, long-term transformation of gender and social power relations.

Towards feminist M&E:

Let us now examine how we may begin to construct feminist approaches and tools for monitoring and evaluating gender equality, women’s empowerment, and rights interventions. It appears that at the center of our struggle to produce better evidence in women’s rights and gender equality work is the difficulty of pinning down the sometimes amorphous, shifting, and always multifaceted manifestations of gender oppression. It is often like the elephant in the room – everyone knows it is there, but pinning it down to measure its contours to create evidence of its presence is not quite so easy. But at another level, we have made remarkable and enormous progress: we have created excellent and extensive sets of indicators for measuring the status of women – life expectancy, infant and child mortality rates by gender, literacy and education levels, employment and work participation rates, political participation and representation, etc. We have ensured that gender-disaggregated data is available in most national and global statistical systems. Multiple gender assessment frameworks have also been developed over the past decades (see Part II).

Why then is there still a sense that no M&E system currently available is quite right—that there is always something we cannot quite measure or that we cannot generate evidence for in the given formats? Why has our research failed to find any existing M&E framework that women’s right activists, researchers, advocates, and donors declare as ideal and comprehensive?

The answer might lie in going back to the analogy of the elephant: that our existing instruments – whether quantitative or qualitative – tell only part of the story; they describe, like the six men and the elephant, only the part they can measure and believe that they are measuring the entire elephant. And some of these frameworks – such as the gender indices used in national and global statistical assessment like the GDI, are far too gross and too macro to be used for the kinds of work most women’s rights activists and advocates are engaged in or for the levels at which they operate. For instance, a grassroots intervention may not be able to identify any changes in female literacy or life expectancy in a three- or five-year project cycle!

Women’s rights work is engaged in a complex dynamic of change that often engages both the formal realm of law, policy, and resources, as well as patriarchal and other oppressive social structures, cultures, beliefs, and practices. The Rao / Kelleher model below describes four dimensions for unpacking the different domains in which gender power structures operate. The model is extremely useful in highlighting the complexity of the change work that women’s rights organizations undertake. As it stands, many of the current M&E instruments are actually designed to gauge change primarily in the formal domain, rather than the harder-to-measure realms of cultural norms and practices.

**Domains of Change in Gender Power**

Finally, women from our constituencies are a great, untapped resource for building more effective indicators for assessing change and impact. The box below gives some examples of why this is so. We need to work more closely with our constituencies in building our M&E systems to find more creative and often unseen ways of tracking the effects of our – and their! – interventions in the change process.

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A women’s empowerment project of three years was undergoing a mid-term evaluation. The evaluation team held meetings with the grassroots women’s groups that had been organized through feminist popular education techniques. When the women identified greater strength and confidence as one of the ways in which the process had empowered them, evaluators asked for examples. One woman, a landless agricultural laborer, said, “Three years ago, when the landlord in whose fields I work addressed me, I would answer him looking down at his feet. Now, I answer with my eyes on his chest. Next year, I will be strong enough to look him right in the eyes when I speak to him.”

Additionally, a study of gender relations and the status of women probed men’s and women’s relative autonomy and power with respect to control over private resources. The researchers struggled to come up with the right question to address women’s control over private assets – e.g., house, land, livestock, equipment, etc. During the pre-test, the question had been asked rather crudely and directly – “Who has control over the following…?” The researchers knew they had not gotten at the truth because both men and women respondents were confused by the question – they had identified the legal owner or patriarch of the family. The researchers then conducted focus group interviews with a set of women who had participated in the pre-test and discussed this question with them. One wise woman in the group asked with some amusement, “What are you trying to understand?” “Who really has control over this asset”, the researchers replied. “Oh!” she said, “In that case, all you have to ask is: if there is an emergency and you need money quickly, what can you sell or pawn without asking anyone’s permission?” The question was changed accordingly and the study yielded not only accurate, but astonishing results: the vast majority of women identified their personal jewelry as the only asset they truly controlled. And the men said the only asset they controlled was their wife’s jewelry!!

So if we accept that the ideal feminist M&E approach has yet to be created and that no one among the wide repertoire of tools currently at our disposal can serve the assessment needs of every organization, intervention, and change process, then the challenge is to determine how we can move forward more effectively with what we already have. We believe that one strategy is to articulate some principles that can guide our assessment and learning, especially in a feminist social change context.

**Some principles for feminist assessment:**

The following principles are based not only on our own research and the work of some feminist evaluators, but on the feedback we have received from practitioners engaged in gender equality and women’s rights work from the local to global level in diverse regions and contexts around the world. This is not a complete list, but an attempt to articulate some of the key insights that have emerged thus far:

- Feminist M&E means choosing and using **tools that are designed to unpack the nature of gender inequalities and the social inequalities through which these are mediated**. Not all tools are designed to do this since they may not disaggregate issues by gender at all. Our tools of choice will treat gender and social inequalities as systemic and embedded in social structures and will be able to examine the way the interventions being assessed are addressing the structures.
No single assessment tool can adequately capture all dimensions of gendered social change processes; consequently, we must seek to create M&E systems that combine different tools in the most appropriate manner for our specific needs. Similarly, no single tool can assess all the components of a feminist change process.

Changes in gender power do not go unchallenged—our tools will enable the tracking and appropriate interpretation of backlashes and resistance to change (i.e., not as failures of the strategy, but evidence of its impact and possibly, effectiveness).

Our tools will not seek to attribute change to particular actors, but to assess who and what contributed to the change.

Our approaches will challenge and transcend the traditional hierarchies within assessment techniques—e.g. between the evaluator and the “evaluated”, “subjective-objective”, “quantitative – qualitative” etc.—and will combine the best of all existing tools to create better evidence and knowledge for all.

Women’s voices and experiences will inform and transform our frameworks. Experience shows that women are often the best sources for sensitive indicators of hard-to-assess dimensions of changes in gender relations (see Box 3); so rather than reduce these to “anecdotal” evidence, our tools will find ways of privileging these perspectives in our assessments.

Recognizing that change must occur in both the formal realm of law, policy, and resources, as well as in culture, beliefs, and practices, our tools will track changes in both of these domains at the individual and systemic level.

Acknowledging that changing gender power structures is complex, but that our assessment tools must combine simplicity and accessibility, we will attempt to create systems that can bridge this paradox. We recognize the cultural biases of many existing tools and will attempt to modify them to the diverse settings in which we work.

We will undertake M&E primarily for our own learning and accountability and not because it is required by donors or other external actors. Accordingly, we will prioritize M&E in our work and proactively promote the tools of our choice with donor partners.

Consequently, we view M&E as a political activity, rather than value free, and will deploy this as part of the change process in which we are engaged.

Building our M&E system:

Having said that we need to create M&E systems that combine several tools to the best effect, it is also useful to identify some criteria for selection. Given that there are several distinct components in feminist social change work, we must choose the best tools available for each of these discrete, but central parts of our work:

a. Assessing plans and activities: tools to measure the effectiveness of our implementation (e.g., have we done what we planned in the time we set for ourselves, and if not, what happened?);

b. Assessing strategies / interventions: tools that track and examine the efficiency of our change interventions, to see if they are working or not (e.g., if we are deploying a particular awareness-building strategy, is it the most effective means for changing recipients’ understanding of the issues?);

c. Assessing our contribution to changes in formal systems and resources at both the individual and systemic level, quantitatively and qualitatively (see the “Domains of Change” model p. 13): tools that can gauge actual desired changes that have occurred in the domain of policies, laws, rights,
institutional arrangements, and resource allocations that benefit our designated constituency / issue / arena and trace our contribution in a convincing way;

d. **Assessing our contribution to changes in cultural norms, attitudes, and practices at both the individual and systemic level, quantitatively and qualitatively**: tools that can unearth and make visible the way that embedded patriarchal and other oppressive cultural norms – such as tolerance for violence against women – have changed with convincing evidence, including our role in this change;

e. **Assessing reversal / backlashes that have obstructed the change process**, and how we have managed / responded to those; and,

f. **Assessing the sustainability of changes achieved**: we cannot rest on the laurels of small victories or treat them as evidence of longer lasting change. We need ways of conducting longer-term assessments to gauge how sustainable changes are, especially in the face of backlash; these tools should help separate short-term effects from longer-term change.

* * * *

Despite current M&E tools and frameworks shortcomings and drawbacks, we are in a far more advantageous position than ever before in creating more effective and appropriate assessment systems for women’s rights and gender equality work. As Part II of this document demonstrates, today we have a wider range of tools – and far more choice – than was available to our predecessors just a couple of decades ago. The challenge is whether we have the creativity and flexibility to build our assessment systems in new ways – to create new M&E architectures that go beyond the scope of any one tool or method. Many of us are already doing this in practice. We hope that this document will further support these processes and generate new approaches that push us closer towards capturing change in the lived realities of women throughout the world.
Part II

A CRITICAL REVIEW OF M&E FRAMEWORKS

In order to gain insight into M&E frameworks that could be used and adapted to capture the complexity of change in women’s rights and gender equality work, we provide a brief overview and critical analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of some of the leading M&E frameworks used in development practice.

For analytic purposes and user accessibility, we categorize M&E frameworks and techniques according to their underlying assumptions in tracking and understanding the nature of change. In our review of over fifty M&E frameworks, four overarching trends emerged:

1. **Causal Frameworks** aim to demonstrate the causal and logical chains that lead to program impact;
2. **Contribution Frameworks** attempt to track the multiple and variable forces involved in producing change and highlight the contribution of change agents to the social change process and intended outcomes;
3. **Gender Analysis Frameworks** may draw from causal and contribution frameworks, but due to their importance to feminist work are included as a separate category; and,
4. **Advocacy Frameworks** may draw from causal and contribution frameworks and aim to assess the way that change happens through an advocacy lens.

More recently, women’s funds and many women’s rights organizations have been experimenting with and developing new hybrid M&E models, integrating multiple tools described in the frameworks above along with local innovations, to more effectively capture changes in women’s rights and empowerment work. An expanded and more in-depth analysis of each of the specific M&E tools and techniques that fall under these broader categories will be published as a separate compendium by AWID in summer 2010.

1. **Causal Frameworks**

Most bilateral and multilateral agencies rely on Logical Frame or Results Based Management approaches to conceptualizing social change. Both assume a logical and causal perspective in documenting impact, focusing on the logical hierarchal process that leads to goal attainment (or results) if activities, outputs, and project purpose are achieved. Another prominent framework that draws on a casual approach is the Theory of Change model. The Theory of Change approach highlights pathways to change by mapping the underlying assumptions and the implementation steps required to reach desired outcomes.

A. **Logical Framework Approach**

The Logical Framework Approach aims to systematize and identify a logical hierarchy, outlining how project objectives will be reached. The process includes multiple analyses and steps, including a cause and effect problem analysis, a stakeholder analysis, an objectives tree and hierarchy, and an implementation strategy. The LogFrame is the product of the analysis: a 4 x 4 matrix that details the goals, component purpose, outputs, and activities in

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one column crossed with a row detailing performance indicators, monitoring mechanisms, and main assumptions. The Logical Framework Approach has been adopted by most bilateral and multilateral aid agencies as standard practice and is often mandatory for reporting aid impact. An adaptation to a standard LogFrame includes the MDG3 SMART Planning.

Strengths of the Logistic Framework Approach:

- A detailed description and identification of program activities, outputs, and goals highlights what was invested, what was done, and what the program aimed to achieve.
- Clear planning and monitoring guidelines simplify implementation tracking, particularly in relation to inputs, outputs, and activities.
- Some adapted LogFrame structures place greater emphasis on exploring and identifying key assumptions and risks that could impact the program goals.
- The problem analysis aims to identify the strategic issues that may pose program barriers and to explore potential strategies or solutions, potentially including them in indicators.
- The process can be used to come to collective agreement on strategic objectives and assessment mechanisms for a program.

Limitations of the Logistic Framework Approach:

- The assumption that change occurs through hierarchal and logical cause and effect processes directly attributable to an intervention ignores the complexity of and multiple factors that contribute to change actually happening.
- Logical Framework Approaches rely extensively on program implementation in stable organizational settings with well-defined planning structures. However, many development settings are not stable and organizations work in complex and radically shifting environments that do not allow for implementation as planned.
- There is an embedded logical fallacy in the framework that states by implementing program goals and activities more successful program outcomes will be achieved. This assumption lacks traction, as the process of implementing the program is not made explicit for assessment purposes. Therefore, we only know if a goal was achieved or not, but have no mechanism for understanding how goal achievement was reached or if there was a point of breakdown in the path to goal achievement.
- Often once a LogFrame is produced it remains the same program planning and monitoring framework over time; adaptation and changes are not necessarily made given new contextual developments.
- The focus on activities and outcomes instead of actors limits understanding of the processes and people involved in change and does not account for power relations and individuals’ voices.
- Often, quantitative, macro-economic, or population-level indicators are used to show the program goal impact. Not only does this approach not reflect people’s lived experiences, but one program intervention cannot be attributed to population level or macroeconomic changes.
- The approach lacks adequate attention to contextual conditions that may constrain or augment program outcomes or track dynamic reversals based on political backlashes.

The focus on measuring primarily goals and outcomes, mostly quantitatively, precludes other forms of learning that can provide valuable lessons to the women’s movement, such as challenges, unexpected consequences, most effective means of implementation, and the pathways and catalysts of intended change.

B. Results Based Management Approaches

Results Based Management places primary focus on the outputs and outcomes in an evaluation. The goal is to define the main results of the program and then monitor progress against those results. It helps an organization determine how they are faring in implementing their program and achieving its intended aims. It provides information on whether an intervention is working in relation to the expected results. Results have three different categories: outputs, outcomes, and impact. Outputs are the result of the implementation of activities, outcomes are the result of mid-term outputs, and the impact is the result of the mid-term outputs. Results Based Management approaches assume a causal relationship between the programs and its results, meaning that the implementation of the program should produce expected results.

Agencies that use Results Based Management systems include bi-lateral agencies, such as CIDA, and multi-lateral agencies, such as the World Bank, particularly in relation to poverty reduction strategies. The Women’s Funding Network (WFN) draws on some aspects of Results Based Management, though not entirely, in their *Making the Case* evaluation framework. However, WFN adapts the model to be more conscious of the context and its influences on changes at five levels—shifts in behavior, definition, engagement, and policy as well as maintaining past gains.

Strengths of the Results Based Management Approach:

- The focus on tracking against intended goals strengthens the link between program goals and outputs, outcomes, and impact.
- The results focus strengthens program learning, particularly in terms of impact and implementation results.
- The collective outlining of program activities and associated outcomes provides the important role of consensus building for monitoring progress toward program aims.
- Some bilaterals place greater attention on the multiple forces at work that can influence development outcomes.
- Recommendations have been put forth, by agencies like the World Bank, emphasizing the importance of including qualitative and quantitative indicators for programs involving a gender dimension. However, this recommendation should not only be limited to gender analysis, but also be broadly applied to all M&E frameworks.

Limitations of the Results Based Management Approach:

- Typically, the Results Based Management Approach does not capture and assess how the program was actually implemented—so we cannot determine if the implementation was successful, if constraints to implementation occurred, or if reversals or shifts occurred based on contextual conditions.

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There is an embedded bias toward new changes in behavior or policies and not on maintaining past gains since results are defined as a change.25

The approach does not adequately assess and explore the role of context, such as exploring the systemic contributions to poverty or gender inequality or acknowledging the broader socio-political factors that may constrain, advance, or reverse change.

Using macro-economic indicators to measure program impact creates false attributions, e.g., in a poverty reduction program, using % of the population whose consumption falls below the poverty line. This is particularly important since these outcomes are not solely attributable to the poverty reduction program and strategy of interest; as such, the multiple other programs and policies beyond the agency that influence development outcomes are rendered invisible.

This approach preferences quantitative indicators that are not reflective of individual lived experiences.

The lack of an explicit gender analysis prevents understanding of the differential impacts of development interventions on men’s and women’s lives.

The understanding of and attention to power relations and dynamics is underdeveloped and is often left unanalyzed.

C. Theory of Change Framework

The Theory of Change approach makes explicit the assumptions behind why and how a program should create social change. The Theory of Change maps the relationships and steps between program activities, interim goals, and short-term and long-term outcomes, while also accounting for context, key allies, as well as unintended consequences. The organization develops their vision of what “success” looks like and highlights the social changes they desire. This mapping helps an organization to understand where they presently are and how they aim to achieve their vision, paying particular attention to identifying who will help them achieve their specific goals as well as outlining what is needed in order to maintain desired changes. They also consider what kinds of working relationships with specific constituents are needed in order to achieve their vision more effectively. The preconditions for achieving change are also mapped according to each constituent group in order to ensure solid assessment of the links between processes and outcomes. Finally, the method emphasizes the role of the organization’s constituency and their role in developing the Theory of Change.

A wide variety of civil society organizations have drawn from the Theory of Change approach. Keystone Accountability has largely popularized the approach in the NGO sphere, funders like HIVOS and Tides Foundation have adopted the approach, and international NGOs, such as AWID and Women’s Learning Partnership also use the Theory of Change approach for mapping pathways to gender equality and women’s leadership.

Strengths in the Theory of Change Approach:

- The fundamental assumptions underlying why a program should work are made explicit. By testing their relevancy in a certain context, we can gain deeper understanding into why a program does or does not work.


26 The Theory of Change framework has been adapted for the development sector, but the notion stems largely from decades of evaluation work by Dr. Carol Weiss, see Evaluation 1972 (1997).
• The approach fosters stakeholders’ and grassroots’ agency in defining what “success” looks like, which circumvents misspecifications based on external evaluators’ lack of understanding of local realities.
• Mapping preconditions for achieving change with constituents strengthens collective understanding of a program and its implementation.
• Multiple methods are used; both qualitative and quantitative indicators are drawn from and designed to reflect local realities and lived experiences of the program’s impact.
• The approach provides context-specific monitoring or evaluation systems that are sensitive to power dynamics.
• Highlighting and measuring alternative or unexpected outcomes of the program feeds into program learning.
• The collective mapping process required of the Theory of Change strengthens accountability and transparency across stakeholder groups, including with the staff and in reporting to donors.

Limitations of the Theory of Change Approach:

• The time commitment required to map change processes and design indicators with stakeholders is considerable, requiring strong staff and leadership buy-in and follow through.
• The ability to track reversals in gains made is not always an explicit part of the Theory of Change.
• Some NGOs and activists believe that even with attention to context and stakeholders’ input, the Theory of Change is still overly focused on the causal and logical testing and validity of program assumptions and paths to outcomes. As such, the approach is not able to adequately account for the complexity and unexpected nature of social change.

2. Contribution Focused Frameworks

Another way of conceptualizing the pathway to impact is not through direct causal links, but rather by recognizing that change occurs through the interaction of a variety of congruent, yet diverse sources, which differentially contribute to a program’s long-term goals. Outcome Mapping introduces the notion of contribution rather than attribution and Participatory approaches underscore the importance grassroots’ and constituents’ voices in shaping evaluation and monitoring mechanisms.

A. Outcome Mapping

Outcome Mapping recognizes that the promotion of social justice is essentially about changing how people relate to each other and to their environment. Outcome Mapping is different from conventional approaches to evaluation, which assumes a causal relationship between an intervention and lasting changes in the well-being of intended beneficiaries. Outcome Mapping focuses on tracking outcomes that result from changes in behavior, relationships, or activities of stakeholders. Outcomes are not only outlined for direct recipients of an intervention, but also for all actors or groups targeted or potentially influenced, referred to as “boundary partners”. The hallmark of Outcome Mapping is a focus on contribution to change, rather than directly attributing a program’s activities to change. Outcome Mapping uses three core concepts: outcomes, boundary partners, and progress.
markers. Typically, progress markers are identified for each boundary partner on a three-point scale ranging from “expect to see, like to see, and love to see.”

Different Variations on the Outcome Mapping approach include: the Secondary Teacher Training Environmental Education Program in Zimbabwe (St2eep). Additionally, AWID and the Women’s Learning Partnership draw from Outcome Mapping to guide their annual planning and monitoring systems.

Strengths in Outcome Mapping:

- Traditional assumptions regarding logical attribution, which are nearly impossible to validate in evaluation work, yet nevertheless remain the “gold standard” of current M&E, are challenged by the contribution framework.
- The articulation that change is not linear and attributable to one specific intervention, but rather is the culmination of multiple interacting factors provides a fuller picture of what change really looks like and how it is catalyzed.
- The complexity of any social change context and the multiple influences, which variably affect individuals’ lives by contributing or constraining change is both recognized and integrated into the M&E framework.
- Using the boundary partner approach facilitates a relational assessment of different stakeholders’ contributions, needs, and influences, offering a straightforward path for tracking dynamic systems and contributions to change. Moreover, the importance of collaboration, including the work other actors make on outcomes is acknowledged.
- Participatory learning and reflection processes encourage greater respect for diversity as well as honor multiple voices and feedback in developing organizational planning and reflection cycles.
- Using a graduated system of progress markers helps organizations to think strategically about their bottom-line hopes for program outcomes as well as their best-case scenarios. This level of detail can help enhance program planning and strengthen implementation activities, particularly if in the course of outlining outcomes additional activities are found to be necessary to more effectively reach best case scenario goals.

Limitations of Outcome Mapping:

- A primary focus on progress markers for tracking advances in outcome achievement draws attention away from understanding failures or challenges.
- The lack of an assessment mechanism for capturing different pathways of change leave alternative explanations or unexpected consequences unaccounted.
- The focus of Outcome Mapping is primarily attuned toward planning and monitoring and not more in-depth evaluation work.
- The design process requires an experienced facilitator with detailed knowledge of the Outcome Mapping methodology and the ability to customize the model to different contexts.
- Significant time commitment and buy-in from leadership and staff is necessary to successfully implement all planning stages.

B. Participatory Approaches

Participatory approaches to M&E integrate stakeholders from various communities and involve them in every step of the evaluation process from design and measurement to data collection and analysis. The process of involving stakeholders in evaluation work is particularly important when striving for contextually relevant outcomes that respect local traditions, customs, and productions of knowledge. The shifting of traditional power relations between researcher and researched for the purposes of transformative social change underlies this approach. These approaches to M&E also highlight learning—both at the individual and collective level—as stakeholders aim to better understand the context, the strengths and weaknesses of their approach and strategies, and the visions for social change. This learning supports in-depth capacity building as well as organizational and programmatic strengthening. Finally, participatory approaches are flexible and adaptable to local, national, or transnational socio-political developments.

Participatory processes can be used in a variety of different research, monitoring, and evaluation settings, including more conventional evaluations. Different organizations have adapted participatory approaches to their specific structure, programs, and context. For example, Action Aid International’s, Accountability, Learning, and Planning System (ALPS) involves annual participatory learning and review processes by stakeholders; Oxfam’s “Most Significant Change” technique collects stakeholders’ local change stories; and Concern Worldwide’s “Listen First” develops a framework for increasing accountability and transparency to stakeholders.

Strengths of Participatory Approaches:

- The Participatory approach challenges notions of the unbiased and apolitical nature of M&E and asserts that the political nature of research is, in fact, a strength.
- The relevance of evaluation design, methods, and implementation to communities of interest, particularly in cross-cultural evaluation work, is enhanced using participatory methods.
- Participatory methods draw strength and insight from diverse and multiple voices, especially from marginalized groups, involved in defining program outcomes, setting targets, and developing relevant indicators.
- Participatory reflection processes provide space to explore and account for the complexities in the change process, including barriers to, reversals, and power struggles that shape the social change context.
- Assessment of and attention to power imbalances in the broader social context, in program and organizational processes, and in relations between staff and stakeholders is central to the participatory approach.
- The aim is to transform conventional power relations between evaluators and the grassroots.

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29 Evaluators in Nepal (Mathur, Mehta, & Malhotra 2004) compared more traditional experimental evaluation methodologies with participatory evaluation approaches. While both evaluation approaches garnered similar results, individuals involved in the participatory evaluation identified additional social and contextual factors that provided more extensive information in understanding why the program intervention was successful. Not surprisingly, these additional factors were closely related to the social context and individual lives.
Engaging participants in iterative and critical reflections and exploring successes and failures increases both individual and collective capacity for learning.

Stakeholders are involved in the planning process, which increases the relevance of program outcomes to communities of interest, thereby strengthening the link between potential program influence and the possibility of reaching intended outcomes.

Limitations of Participatory Approaches:

- The ability to shed light on cross-group comparisons is reduced since different M&E designs are produced based on each stakeholder’s analysis. Yet making these comparisons across organizations and groups may be crucial, particularly for those working in a transnational network or in coalitions.
- Gathering reliable information for comparing outcomes over time may not occur, particularly if M&E systems constantly evolve and change based on contextual developments.
- The data and outcomes may vary across settings based on the levels of knowledge, facilitation, training, and skill of the stakeholders and staff doing M&E.
- There is the possibility of hijacked local agendas, given the increasing attention on producing participatory evaluations under donor demands. While participatory M&E is being popularized by many development agencies, such as the World Bank and other bilaterals and multilaterals, care must be taken to ensure that marginalized voices are not being further silenced with the participatory processes themselves. Indeed, critiques against participatory development processes mention that often “consensus is reached by omission (the poor, sick, old, untouchable, unclean, absent, etc remain unheard in spite of exhortations to include them in what becomes a public ceremony of interchange between local people and the freshly arrived development agents)” (Blaikie 2000:1046).

3. Gender Analysis

Gender analysis is used for socio-economic analysis in development. Given the importance of gender analysis to feminist work, a full description and analysis of framework is provided. The goal is to outline connections between gender and development. The descriptions of the various frameworks (A-E) are drawn and reproduced from a document prepared by Development Technical Systems. The analysis of strengths and shortcomings is the work of the authors of this paper.

The following six gender analysis frameworks are reviewed:

- The Harvard Analytical Framework, also known as the Gender Roles Framework
- The Moser Gender Planning Framework
- The Gender Analysis Matrix (GAM)
- The Women’s Empowerment Framework (WEP)
- The Social Relations Approach
- InterAction Gender Audit

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A. The Harvard Analytical Framework or Gender Roles Framework

The Harvard Analytical Framework (sometimes referred to as the “Gender Roles Framework” or the “Gender Analysis Framework”) was developed by researchers at the Harvard Institute of International Development (HIID) in collaboration with USAID’s Office of Women in Development. It represents one of the earliest efforts to systematize attention to both women and men and their different positions in society. It is based upon the position that allocating resources to women as well as men in development efforts makes economic sense and will make development itself more efficient – a position labeled as the “efficiency approach.”

Key to the Harvard Analytical Framework is adequate data collection at the individual and household level, it adapts well to agricultural and other rural production systems. Data is collected on men’s and women’s activities which are identified as either “reproductive” or “productive” types, and is then considered according to how those activities reflect access to and control over income and resources, thereby “highlighting the incentives and constraints under which men and women work in order to anticipate how programs will impact their productive and reproductive activities as well as the responsibilities of other household members.”

Data is collected in three components: an activity profile, an access and control profile that looks at resources and benefits, and a list of influencing factors. The approach helps those with little understanding of gender analysis useful ways of documenting information in the field: according to one donor, “It makes men’s and women’s work visible.”

Because the approach emphasizes gender-awareness and does not seek to identify the causes of gender inequalities, it “offers little guidance on how to change existing gender inequalities.” There is the expectation that having good data on gender will, on its own, allow practitioners to address gender concerns in their activities; it assumes that both the problem and the solutions are technical ones. Compared to more recent and more participatory approaches, the Harvard method does not involve informants in describing their own views of the development problems they face.

Strengths of the Harvard Analytical Framework:

- The Gender Roles framework is useful for mapping and identifying the gendered division of work as well as access and control over community resources and benefits.
- The visual mapping process is useful for getting diverse groups of stakeholders on the same page.
- Gender is a central part of the program analysis, which is often rare in other development programs and assessments.
- The analysis highlights the need for gender disaggregation in measuring program impact, which can help reveal if there are differential outcomes for men and women.

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Sources:


34 International Labour Organization, “Online Gender Learning and Information Module.”

35 International Labour Organization, “Online Gender Learning and Information Module.”

receiving the same program intervention. Combined with an in-depth analysis of access and resources, it may be possible to infer, to some extent, why these gender differences may exist.

Limitations of the Harvard Analytical Framework:

- While gender analysis is central, identifying the source of power or social inequities is not the primary focus. This limits the ability to create strategic or targeted initiatives designed to decrease inequalities or increase access to power.
- Stakeholder participation in defining the analysis is not fully developed or encouraged, limiting grassroots’ input.
- Often analysis can tend toward the economic rather than focusing on equality.
- There is no mechanism for assessing pathways of change, which limits the extent to which we can understand why a program intervention may work.

B. The Moser Gender Planning Framework

This framework, developed by Caroline Moser,\(^\text{37}\) links the examination of women’s roles to the larger development planning process. The approach introduces the idea of women’s “three roles” in production, reproduction, and community management (see below), and the implication that these roles have for women’s participation in the development process. In making these links, both between women and the community, and between gender planning and development planning more broadly, Moser’s framework encompasses both the technical and political aspects of gender integration into development.

The framework is composed of several components (or tools). In the first, the triple roles of women are identified by mapping the activities of household members (including children) over the course of twenty-four hours.

**Reproductive Roles:** Childbearing and rearing, domestic tasks that guarantee the maintenance and reproduction of the current and future work force (e.g., cooking, cleaning, etc.)

**Productive Roles:** Work done for remuneration, in cash or kind. (e.g., wage labor, farming, crafts, etc.)

**Community Management Roles:** Work that supports collective consumption and maintenance of community resources (e.g., local government, irrigation systems management, education, etc.)

The second component identifies and assesses gender needs, distinguishing between practical needs (to address inadequate living conditions) and strategic needs (for power and control to achieve gender equality).

The third component, or tool, disaggregates information about access to and control over resources within the household by sex: who makes decisions about the use of different assets.

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The fourth component identifies how women manage their various roles, and seeks to clarify how planned interventions will affect each one.

Finally, the WID/GAD policy matrix evaluates how different planning approaches (welfare, equity, anti-poverty, efficiency, and empowerment) have addressed the triple roles and women’s practical and strategic needs.

**Strengths of the Moser Gender Planning Framework:**

- The analysis distinguishes between two critical types of empowerment, *meeting basic practical needs*, which enhances living standards, but does not challenge division of labor or power inequities, and *strategic needs*, which increases power with the aim of gender equality.
- The distinction between these two levels of needs also highlights different approaches to development, such as programs that aim to provide services versus those that aim to transform power relations. These different approaches are often conflated under the broad term empowerment.
- The Moser Framework highlights the multiple and complex roles that women manage on a daily basis, particularly those that influence access to and control over household and social resources.
- The Moser Framework could be especially beneficial and advantageous in contexts where strategic action plans and ideas for program implementation are in the process of being designed.
- There is attention to the complexity of how women’s lives and roles may interact with program interventions. This may provide opportunities for more nuanced analysis and mapping of sources of power and potential constraints or opportunities.

**Limitations of the Moser Gender Planning Framework:**

- There is not a focus on the process through which a program intervention should produce change, which limits assessment capabilities regarding why or how a program works.
- The framework excludes other forms of analysis that may be useful, such as the intersection of race and class with gender.
- Less attention is placed on the interrelationships that exist between men and women and how they interact to influence a context.
- The framework is primarily useful for program planning, not for evaluation work.

**C. Gender Analysis Matrix**

The gender analysis matrix was developed by A. Rani Parker\(^\text{38}\) as a quickly employed tool to identify how a particular development intervention will affect women and men. It uses a community-based technique to elicit and analyze gender differences and to challenge a community’s assumptions about gender.

Unlike some of the other tools described, this one is explicitly intended for use by the community for self-identification of problems and solutions. The principles of the Gender Analysis Matrix are:

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All requisite knowledge for gender analysis exists among the people whose lives are the subject of the analysis. Gender analysis does not require the technical expertise of those outside the community being analyzed, except as facilitator. Gender analysis cannot be transformative unless the analysis is done by the people being analyzed.  

Each program objective is analyzed at four levels of society: women, men, household and community by various groups of stakeholders. They carry out the analysis by discussing each program objective in terms of how it impacts on men’s and women’s labor practices, time, resources, and other socio-cultural factors, such as changes in social roles and status.

**Strengths of the Gender Analysis Matrix:**

- This is a truly participatory process in which stakeholders define program objectives and different categories for analysis.
- The gender analysis matrix is helpful for contextually mapping power relations and identifying sources of inequality, which strengthens background understanding of gender roles, status, and resources in a particular community.
- Focusing on analysis of different stakeholder groups, i.e., men and women or political groups versus community groups, yields community-specific and relevant analysis.
- Taken together, the group specific analysis provides a multifaceted picture of a program. This type of analysis demonstrates how addressing diverse needs and hearing multiple perspectives can result in broadened understanding of a program and its intended and unintended outcomes.
- There is no reliance on external experts or complicated evaluation logic, making it a relatively simple tool for implementation in a variety of settings.

**Limitations of the Gender Analysis Matrix:**

- The lack of attention to program processes limits the ability to create learning channels through which monitoring of program strategies and outcomes can occur.
- While the focus is primarily on gender analysis and its differential impacts on the community, the analysis may be best suited as a precursor to program planning and the development of evaluation and monitoring systems, rather than a standalone assessment system.

**D. Women’s Empowerment Framework**

The Women’s Empowerment Framework was developed by Sara Hlupekile Longwe, a gender expert from Lusaka, Zambia. Her model is explicitly political, arguing that women’s poverty is the consequence of oppression and exploitation (rather than lack of productivity), and that to reduce poverty, women must be empowered.

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The framework postulates five progressively greater levels of equality that can be achieved (listed from highest to lowest).

1. Control – equal control over in decision-making over factors of production.
2. Participation – equal participation in decision-making processes related to policymaking, planning and administration.
3. Conscientisation – attaining equal understanding of gender roles and a gender division of labor that is fair and agreeable.
4. Access – equal access to the factors of production by removing discriminatory provisions in the laws.
5. Welfare – having equal access to material welfare (food, income, medical care).

The framework is intended to assist planners to identify what women’s equality and empowerment would mean in practice, and to determine to what extent a development intervention supports greater empowerment.

The tool examines elements of a program’s design or a sectoral program to determine to see if it affects the five different levels of equality either negatively, neutrally, or positively.

**Strengths of the Women’s Empowerment Framework:**

- Gendered assumptions of equality are made explicit. This provides an excellent framework for a feminist context analysis, highlighting the political dimensions of gender inequality.
- The Women’s Empowerment Framework highlights ascending levels of gender equality, which can be simply measured. The path can be used as a frame of reference for progressive steps towards increasing equality, starting from meeting basic welfare needs to equality in the control over the means of production.
- The framework’s political nature and framing may assist organizations in developing more explicit programmatic strategies that aim to fundamentally shift the bases of gender inequality.
- The three levels of a program effect, e.g., positive, neutral, or negative impact, can be easily compared across programs. This also helps clarify areas of program strength and weakness, which can be used for program learning purposes.

**Limitations of the Women’s Empowerment Framework:**

- This framework best suits program monitoring and planning goals, not more in-depth evaluation work.
- There is no mechanism for tracking how or why a program works or how it changes over time.
- Focus is only placed on three levels of equality, e.g., positive, neutral, or negative impact, which limits important qualitative assessments of “success” that provide valuable information critical for program improvement.
- The assumption that there is a hierarchy of gender equality levels may suggest more of a linear change trajectory than is necessary.
E. Social Relations Framework

The Social Relations Framework was created by Naila Kabeer at the Institute of Development Studies in Sussex, UK, and draws on explicitly structural feminist roots. It is more broadly oriented than earlier approaches, locating the family and household within the network of social relations connecting them to the community, market, and state. Kabeer writes that the triple roles model formulated by Moser is insufficiently attentive to “the fact that most resources can be produced in a variety of institutional locations (households, markets, states, and communities) so that the same resources may be produced through very different social relations.” In contrast, the Social Relations Approach allows the resulting analysis to show how gender and other inequalities are created and reproduced within structural and institutional factors, and then to design policies that can enable women to work to change those factors that constrain them.

The Social Relations Approach asserts that:

- Development is a process for increasing human well-being (survival, security and autonomy), and not just about economic growth or increased productivity.
- Social relations determine people’s roles, rights, responsibilities and claims over others.
- Institutions are key to producing and maintaining social inequalities, including gender inequalities. Four key institutions are the state, the market, the community and the family. These have rules (how things get done), resources (what is used and/or produced), people (who is in/out, who does what), activities (what is done), and power (who decides, and whose interests are served), all of which engender social relations.
- The operation of institutions reflect different gender policies. Gender policies are differ according to the extent they recognize and address gender issues: gender-blind policies, gender-aware policies, gender-neutral policies, gender-specific policies, and gender-redistributive policies.
- Analysis for planning needs to examine whether immediate, underlying, and/or structural factors are responsible for the problems, and what their effects on those involved.

Strengths of the Social Relations Approach:

- Reframing the analysis from individual experiences of inequality and power differentials to structures of gender inequalities allows for analyses that address root causes of and spaces of inequality. These analyses can then feed into policy or program planning or become the basis for measures of social change.
- The focus on the identification of spaces where inequalities exist and are reproduced allows for a dynamic analysis of gender relations.
- The assessment of a range of gender policies in institutions that span from gender blind to gender redistributive is beneficial as it provides valuable information for the development of strategic interventions and the development of appropriate policy prescriptions.
- The multifaceted mapping of actors underscores the fundamental importance of social relations to systemic inequalities.

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43 Drawn from the Netherlands Development Organization’s, “Gender Reference Guide.”
The separation of development for efficiency and productivity from development for improving human well-being and empowerment offer important distinctions for purposes of structural transformation.

The potential of exploring places where structural contributors to inequality can be disrupted offer new possibilities for strategizing in development.

Limitations of the Social Relations Approach:

- The structural bias of the analysis inhibits multiple voices and experiences in analysis.
- This approach uses a macro-approach to assessing and improving policies, which may not fully account for grassroots’ experiences or the contextual specifics of particular minority groups.
- Participation of grassroots is limited.

F. InterAction’s Gender Audit

InterAction’s Gender Audit is a tool for assessing the integration of gender into the organization and its policies, programs, and programs. The participatory audit process involves three steps for identifying organizational strengths and challenges including a survey, focus group discussions, and action planning. The Gender Audit survey consists of 92 questions (long version) or 20 questions (short version), covering the following topics critical to gender integration within an organization: political will, technical capacity, organizational culture, and accountability. Following the survey, a more in-depth focus group session is held with staff to discuss the results from the survey and to identify areas of opportunities and strategies for strengthening gender integration. Out of these discussions, a basic action plan with specific items and targets that build on institutional strengths are outlined in the Gender Plan of Action. This plan includes staff recommendations for improvements identified in each stage of the audit.

Strengths of InterAction’s Gender Audit:

- The audit highlights areas for organizational and programmatic strengthening using participatory means.
- It provides a simple and accessible way to quickly gauge gender integration followed by more in-depth reflection and analysis by focus groups.
- Multiple stakeholders’ voices are involved in the assessment process.
- The audit provides opportunities to explore political barriers and constraints to gender equitable policies and programs within the organization.

Limitations of InterAction’s Gender Audit:

- The reliance on the commitment from senior staff and gender focal teams in terms of making the audit happen could be constraining if political will is not strong.
- The audit offers little benefit for monitoring or evaluating programs or for tracking change.
- The process lacks specific follow-up and accountability mechanisms for action planning.

4. ADVOCACY FRAMEWORKS

Measuring and assessing advocacy efforts can be difficult given the ongoing and cumulative nature of campaigns and lobbying efforts, which rely heavily on the political context, allies, opponents, and levers and constraints to change. For these reasons, and many others, trying to capture the trajectory and outcomes of change can be difficult as much of the work is condition dependent. However, assessing signposts and indicators on the road to longer-term campaign changes, such as law, policy, or economic reforms, has been an increasingly important focus in the development community. In particular, techniques and strategies for assessing advocacy work have been detailed by Michael Patton and Barbara Klugman.

1. Measuring Advocacy Strategies

Michael Quinn Patton (2008) introduces a method for measuring key areas in social justice advocacy. Patton suggests drawing from retrospective evaluation techniques and assessing the strategies that have led to successful reforms, policy or otherwise, in the past. Using this methodology, Patton proposes six interconnected strategies to measure in M&E that strengthen advocacy work. Patton (2008) notes:

In essence, strong national/state/grassroots coordination depends on having a high capacity coalition. A solid knowledge and research base contributes to a focused message and effective communications. Message discipline depends on a strong coalition and national-state coordination, as does timely and opportunistic lobbying and judicial engagement. To build and sustain a high capacity coalition, funders must use their resources and knowledge to collaborate around shared strategies. These factors in combination and mutual reinforcement strengthen advocacy efforts. In classic systems framing, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and the optimal functioning of each part is dependent on the optimal integration and integrated functioning of the whole.”

From a donor perspective, Barbara Klugman (2009)\textsuperscript{46} notes that in order to understand the complexity of change, M&E models must stop using linear rationalist LogFrame-like models, which do not account for the changing context and actors involved in change processes, and start identifying one’s contributions to change, not attributions, much like an Outcome Mapping approach. Specifically, Klugman suggests integrating Theory of Change models with other tools to most effectively track specific social justice and advocacy outcomes. This is particularly important:

“Given that policy wins and their implementation are always unpredictable and depend on a wide range of contextual factors and diversity of stakeholders, evaluation of policy advocacy needs to look for strengthened capacity in those factors that are most likely to ensure organizational/social movement readiness and creativity to initiate and engage policy processes in the most effective ways possible” (Klugman 2009:4).

Seven different advocacy outcomes were identified from a meta-analysis of successful advocacy efforts, including:
- Strengthened organizational capacity;
- Strengthened base of support;
- Strengthened alliances;
- Increased data and analysis from a social justice perspective; and
- Improved policies.

Longer-term impacts, which cannot be attributed to a particular grant or set of grants include:
- shifts in social norms and
- changes in population-level impact (such as decreased violence against women, suicides of LGBT youth, or homelessness).

**Strengths of Advocacy Frameworks:**

- The acknowledgement that population-level changes cannot be tied to one organization’s impact underscores the importance of reframing impact in terms of contributions, not attributions, to change.
- The different types of advocacy outcomes highlighted, including strengthened alliance building, capacity building, research, communication and messaging, and use of strategic opportunities, are useful benchmarks of hard to capture mid-term advocacy successes.
- The advocacy models explored allow for and encourage the use of multiple assessment tools and frameworks given the unique needs of an organization.
- There is a strong focus on learning from historical progress and gains, assessing strategies and situations that have worked in one country or across countries and organizations.
- Tracking failures as well as successes is conceptualized as an integral part of the learning process.
- The freedom of each organization or stakeholder outlining their own assessment and learning mechanisms both strengthens capacity and allows for the development of more locally meaningful assessment tools.

Limitations of Advocacy Frameworks:

- Retrospective evaluations, as described by Patton, may not work across all settings, particularly unstable or conflict or post-conflict areas. Gathering information that led to past reforms may no longer be relevant given the current situation.
- Depending on the tools and techniques chosen to measure change, M&E frameworks may not meaningfully capture trajectories or pathways that assess how and why advocacy strategies should lead to change.

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