

Capturing Change in Women's Realities

A Critical Overview of Current Monitoring
& Evaluation Frameworks and Approaches

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Introduction:¹

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 we must devise ways of checking whether the policies, resources, and strategies applied towards building more equitable, sustainable, rights-affirming, inclusive and peaceful societies are working effectively or not – whether they are producing the changes we wish to see. This demands ways of measuring and tracking both the people and the processes involved in change.

While the attempt to assess changes in social realities certainly has been a positive development, measurement has become something of a power unto itself in modern times. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of modernization has been the creation of a range of instruments to measure virtually everything – 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.² 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**. We need to interrogate all of these assumptions – to determine when and what kinds of measurement are actually useful in comparison to 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 (M&E) systems of the social change projects they support. Social change organizations and activists are spending substantial amounts of time and energy filling in sophisticated LogFrames and compiling various kinds of data that are thought to effectively track change.

1 This section, and many parts of this paper, draws extensively on earlier work by Srilatha Batliwala, in particular, 2006. "Measuring Social Change: Myths, Assumptions and Realities", in Alliance Magazine 11(1): 12-14; "Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation: Clearing the Conceptual Cloud" for CREA (Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action), 2008, to be published in 2010; and "Can Civil Society Be Measured? A Review of Challenges and Approaches", Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations (Harvard University) Working Paper Series, March 2003.

2 Michael Edwards. 2008. "Just Another Emperor? The Myths and Realities of Philanthrocapitalism." New York: Demos: A Network for Ideas and Action, The Young Foundation.

In this document, we examine these assumptions in the context of women's rights, gender equality, and women's empowerment work, where M&E approaches create particular kinds of challenges. Part I provides a critique of current M&E frameworks and approaches as experienced by women's organizations and movements worldwide and attempts to articulate some principles and attributes to engender our M&E approaches. Part II offers an analysis of a large number of M&E frameworks and tools, along with some of their strengths and weaknesses in assessing women's rights and gender equality processes and impacts.

While we are aware that M&E frameworks and tools are often not freely chosen but required to meet donor or other needs, we nevertheless hope that this document could be used as a platform to help women's rights organizations and activists reflect on their M&E systems, to critically assess the systems they are currently using and make improvements, to negotiate with donors and others on how to best measure their performance and strategies, and most of all, to prioritize internal learning as central to organizational and movement strengthening.

Clarifying our Concepts

Throughout this document, we frequently use the terms monitoring, evaluation, frameworks, approaches, tools, and methods as concepts that are critical to our analysis. It is important, therefore, to clarify these terms and concepts to avoid confusion and conflation of meanings. As such, we begin by making a distinction between **monitoring** and **evaluation**.

In the context of social change work, **monitoring** is an ongoing program management activity, assessing the implementation of activities and progress made toward meeting outcomes (organizational, programmatic, or policy-related) for the purposes of measuring effectiveness and efficiency. Monitoring is done on a frequent and regular basis to determine whether work is proceeding according to plan, and if sudden or unexpected shifts or reversals have occurred that must be attended to in order to proceed towards intended goals and objectives. In practice, monitoring systems generate information that will feed into longer-term program or project evaluations.

Evaluation aims to assess the overall impact of a social change intervention³ against an explicit set of goals and objectives. Evaluation involves the systematic collection and analysis of data to help us discover if, how, and why a particular intervention or set of interventions worked or did not. Evaluations are conducted less frequently than monitoring, as they are more comprehensive and aim to capture the big picture of impact at particular moments in time. Evaluations can be conducted before (formative),⁴ during (developmental),⁵ and after (summative)⁶ an intervention is implemented for the purposes of program, project, or policy improvement, knowledge building, or learning.

Frameworks, (typically referred to as M&E frameworks in this document) are the broad conceptual structures that attempt to pull together a set of ideas about how a change intervention should be tracked and how its effects should be measured or assessed. So for instance, *Causal Frameworks*, which include the Logical Framework and the Theory of Change approaches or *Contribution Frameworks*, which include Outcome Mapping approaches, etc. described in the second part of this document, are conceptual structures that provide an overall framing or theory detailing the most appropriate ways of measuring change.

3 Interventions can be programmatic, policy-focused, or project-based.

4 Formative evaluations are conducted when programs are in development or in the mid-term when making strategic decisions about the inclusion or exclusion of a particular strategy or process. These evaluations focus on assessing the effectiveness of program processes and different delivery mechanisms or strategies.

5 Developmental evaluation focuses on assessment in rapidly changing environments. The focus is on creating evaluation teams with strong relationships and the ability to adapt evaluation questions and tasks as programs and contexts evolve. See Michael Quinn Patton, 2009.

6 Summative evaluations occur at the end of a given intervention or project cycle, focusing on analyzing the overall impact that a program has as well as detailing the strengths and weaknesses of the programs, policies, campaigns, organizations, etc.

Approaches are more specific and usually identify what elements are important to measure in a certain context as well as provide direction on how to measure it (explicitly or implicitly referencing appropriate methods). Underlying the approach are certain beliefs or hypotheses, at times explicit or not, about what constitutes effective performance, impact, and change. In this sense, both frameworks and specific approaches shape how our work is monitored or evaluated, and as a result shape what we can say about impact.

A **tool** is a specific assessment or measurement technique that is used within broader evaluation frameworks and approaches, to generate concrete data or evidence about the results of an intervention or change process. Specific examples of tools in this review include the Gender Empowerment Matrix and Interaction's Gender Audit, drawing from feminist and gender analysis frameworks. What is more, tools like these can be used in many different M&E frameworks and approaches to create baselines and then measure the extent of the change that has occurred.

In any M&E process, different data collection methods are used, and are applied to any approach and tool. Quantitative methods, such as surveys, help generate statistical evidence, while qualitative methods like interviews, focus groups, mapping, and so forth help gather richer, more nuanced information on individual and collective struggles, experiences and interpretations of the change process.

Women's empowerment and gender equality initiatives have been under increasing pressure to measure their impact over the past two decades. 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,⁷ 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.”⁸

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*, such that challenging and transforming them is a doubly daunting task. 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. However, investors in women's empowerment that demand “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, M&E is motivated by at least five basic objectives:

⁷ See for example: Katherine N. Rankin. 2001. “Governing Development: Neoliberalism, Microcredit, and Rational Economic Woman.” *Economy and Society*, 1469-5766, 30(1): 18-37; Srilatha Batliwala. 2010. “Women's Empowerment in 21st Century India”, in K. Shiva Kumar et al (Eds), *Handbook of Population and Development*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press; Thomas W. Dichter 2003. “Despite Good Intentions: Why Development Assistance to the Third World has Failed.” Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press; and “Hype and Hope: The Worrisome State of the Microcredit Movement.”

⁸ Personal communication with Sheela Patel, Director SPARC, India, in 1987.

- **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;
- **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 and 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 practice, however, M&E is more likely to be done because:

- **Donors require it** to ensure their funds have been utilized correctly and to demonstrate impact 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 or 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 and approaches, 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 dominant in the development sector.⁹ In addition, we have had in-depth discussions on M&E with a wide range of women’s organizations and leaders, including a large number of MDG3 Fund grantees

⁹ See, for instance, Oliver Bakewell & Anne Garbutt. 2005. “The Use and Abuse of the Logical Framework Approach - A Review of International Development NGOs’ Experiences. A Report for SIDA.” INTRAC.

and partners and allies of our “Where is the Money” initiative. What follows is a summary of the key challenges in current M&E systems identified through our analysis as well as by women’s rights organizations and activists.

Specifically, we found that very few M&E frameworks or approaches actually enable us to understand **how change happens or how gender relations have been altered**. However, this is necessary if we want to identify 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 primarily focus on measuring performance against predetermined goals and activities, so that the only thing one can say at the end of a project cycle is whether those goals were achieved or not, but not how and in what fashion real change was achieved. Many frameworks and 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.

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. There seems to be a growing trend of questioning even long-standing indicators for their inability to tell us what is really happening on the ground in people’s daily lives. 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). 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 approaches are supposedly created to highlight lessons and the relevant interventions necessary to guide further action. In practice, however, M&E approaches 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 a widespread feeling among aid recipients – governmental and non-governmental – that measurement is used more as a tool of enforcement and accountability to the donor than as a means of understanding and learning what works and changing strategy if necessary.¹⁰

10 See Lisa Bornstein. 2006. “Systems of Accountability, Webs of Deceit? Monitoring and Evaluation in South African NGOs.” *Development* 49:52-61 and Gerry Helleiner. 2000. “Towards Balance in Aid Relationships: Donor Performance Monitoring in Low-Income Developing Countries.” *Cooperation South (UNDP)* No.2.

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 and 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.¹¹ 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.”¹² “It is time for our statistics system to put more emphasis on measuring the well-being of the population than on economic production.”¹³ 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.

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 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 and approaches that can capture the results of larger-scale women's empowerment processes that build collective power and deeper change, including accounts of success as well as challenges and backlash.

11 See Commission Report. <http://www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr/en/index.htm>

12 Joseph Stiglitz, “The Great GDP Swindle”, in The Guardian, Sunday 13 September 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/sep/13/economics-economic-growth-and-recession-global-economy>

13 Joseph Stiglitz. 2009. “Nicolas Sarkozy Wants ‘Well-being’ Measure to Replace GDP.” <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/economics/6189582/Nicolas-Sarkozy-wants-well-being-measure-to-replace-GDP.html>

Women’s and feminist organizations are increasingly critiquing the inherent narrowness and *inappropriateness of existing 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*. Our recent study of M&E challenges faced by recipients of the MDG3 Fund awards¹⁴ describes in detail the multiple assessment challenges faced in these complex organizational architectures, involving many actors (and organizations) working at different levels and locations. Often, the agency responsible for assessing and reporting progress and impact to their donor has to collate and synthesize information from all of 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 also 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.¹⁵

The linearity of many tools – especially widely used methods like the Logical Framework or “LogFrame” – *have been 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 one-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 and factors that may influence 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 [LFA] – 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.”¹⁶

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.” 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.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the tool is at best a supplement to other methods that better accommodate complexity and challenges from both within and throughout the change process.

14 Srilatha Batliwala and Alexandra Pittman. May 2010. “Learning from the MDG3 Fund Experiment: Results from AWID’s Survey of the MDG3 Fund M&E System.” AWID, Draft Report.

15 AWID/Mama Cash/HIVOS. 2009, “Resource Mobilization Strategies for Women’s Organizing and Women’s Rights: A Stakeholders Meeting”, held in Amsterdam, November 30 and December 1, 2009. p.8

16 Bakewell and Garbutt. 2005. op.cit. p.10.

17 Batliwala and Pittman. 2010. op.cit.

A hugely important factor, particularly for activists working in the developing world, is the **political assumption of stable and equitable socio-political contexts that underlies 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, Islamic and Hindu extremists in India and Pakistan, Iran), humanitarian and natural disasters (in 2009 in 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 approaches actually enable or allow these factors to be represented as integral elements affecting a project or intervention? If they do not, then these are very fundamental flaws, which deeply affect any change intervention aiming to transform their realities; this is particularly the case since women everywhere are more severely affected by these forces than men.

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— this is evidence that the process was working and was 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 and approaches. 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 that power structures are responding to the challenges posed by women’s rights interventions.¹⁸

18 Discussion of considerations for monitoring and evaluation at the AWID/Mama Cash/HIVOS meeting. Op cit.

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 is in raising women's income levels, the more likely male earners in the household shift responsibility for the household's economic security onto women, who earn less and work less regularly, while also taking control of women's income.¹⁹ 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 intervention²⁰ 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 men.²¹ Instead women had developed community-level strategies that were beginning to have some impact, but that could 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, etc., 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. 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”,

19 Nirantar Qualitative Study of SHGs and Empowerment, First Edition, February 2007.

20 Project details cannot be shared to protect the identity and confidentiality of the organization.

21 Personal communication of Nandita Shah, Akshara Centre, Mumbai.

“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 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 innovations.²²

Women’s rights activists frequently encounter a ***disjuncture between change measures and time frames***, 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 on the MDG3 Fund grants, whose 3-year time frame 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 reporting processes. 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 high levels of training and competence 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 do not easily 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.²³ 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.

22 Report of the Results Assessment workshop conducted by HIVOS with Indian partners in 2004.

23 Personal communication with activists from the Pacific Islands and Maori groups in New Zealand.

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 relationships between grantees and partners, creating tension. Our research and conversations with women's organizations reveal the perception that donors need to do more homework on M&E in order to become more aware of the complexities and of the possibilities and limitations of various tools, becoming active partners in the search for more relevant and sensitive approaches. 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 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 with some donors for discussing what is 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. This is the nature of social change work, particularly women's empowerment work. Even if we think at the beginning of a process that we know what should be tracked or measured, these are ultimately educated guesses and our 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 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.²⁴ 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

24 Batliwala and Pittman. 2010. op.cit.

organizations, or at least, a tendency not to see it as a central and integral component of women's rights and 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 many 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 our constituencies, our politics, and ourselves. We need to create a *culture of assessment and learning* within our organizations and movements.

On the donor side, ***M&E 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 quite well in many of our contexts, others are rather linear and limited. 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.²⁵ We therefore need to unpack, explore, and construct the core principles and elements of a feminist approach to evaluation.

Given these myriad and serious challenges, it is crucial to re-fashion our existing tools, approaches, and frameworks to overcome their more serious shortcomings, and strengthen their capacity to adequately capture the complexity of gender equality work and the social dynamic within which it occurs.

25 Donna Podems. 2007. “Gender and Feminist Issues in Global Evaluation,” Paper presented at the AEA/ CDC Summer Institute, Atlanta, Georgia.

Towards feminist M&E:

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 and 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).

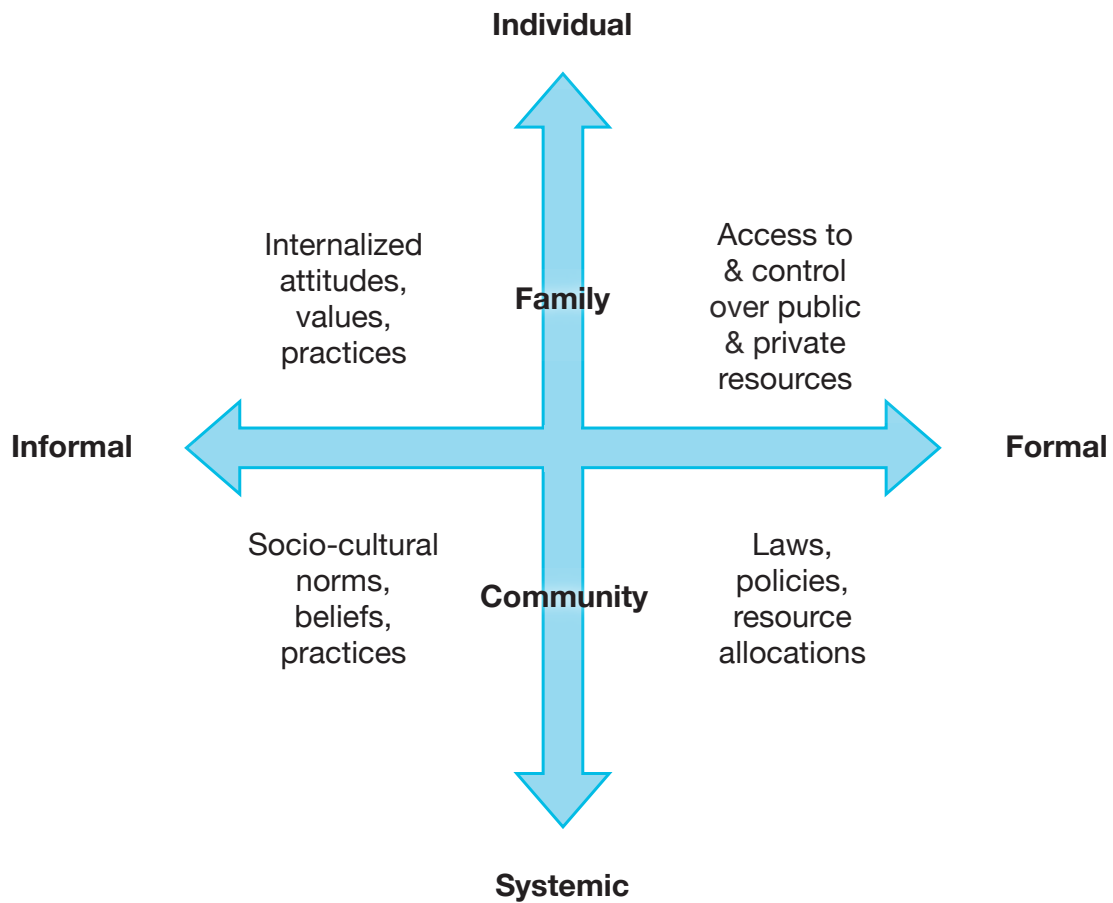
Why then is there still a sense that no M&E approach currently available is quite right – that there is always something we cannot quite measure or that we cannot generate evidence for in the given formats? Why has our research failed to find any existing M&E framework or approach that women's right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

The answer might lie in going back to the analogy of the elephant: our existing instruments – whether quantitative or qualitative – tell only part of the story; they describe only the part they can measure and believe that they are measuring the entire elephant. And some of these approaches – such as the gender indices used in national and global statistical assessment like the Gender Development Index (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 will likely not be able to identify changes in female literacy 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 and Kelleher model²⁶ 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 tools are actually designed to gauge change primarily in the formal domain, rather than the harder-to-measure realms of cultural norms and practices.

26 Aruna Rao and David Kelleher. 2002. “Unraveling Institutionalized Gender Inequality.” *Gender at Work*, <http://www.genderatwork.org>

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.

BOX 3: *Why Women's Inputs are Crucial*

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?" The researchers replied, "who really has control over this asset." "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 framework 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 levels 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 so 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 framework can adequately capture all dimensions of gendered social change processes**; consequently, we must seek to **create M&E systems that combine different approaches and 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 as 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 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 and approaches**. 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 levels.
- **Acknowledging that while changing gender power structures is complex, our assessment tools must combine simplicity and accessibility. We will attempt to create approaches that can bridge this paradox.** We recognize the cultural biases of many existing frameworks and 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 frameworks, approaches, and 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:

Given that there are several distinct components in feminist social change work, we must choose the best frameworks and tools available for each of these discrete, but central parts of our work:

- ***Assessing how change happens***: systems that help us to understand the pathways through which change happens as well as make explicit the assumptions that underlie the change we seek.
- ***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?);
- ***Assessing strategies and 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?);
- ***Assessing our contribution to changes in formal systems and resources at both the individual and systemic level, quantitatively and qualitatively*** (see the Rao and Kelleher model p. 18): 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, and arena and trace our contribution in a convincing way;
- ***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;
- ***Assessing reversals and backlashes that have obstructed the change process***, and how we have managed and responded to those; and,
- ***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 shortcomings and drawbacks, as Part II of this document demonstrates, today we have a wider range of frameworks, approaches, and 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 assessment systems in new ways – to create 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 changes in the lived realities of women throughout the world.

In order to gain insight into M&E frameworks that can 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 these M&E frameworks according to their underlying assumptions in tracking and understanding the nature of change. In our review of over 50 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 and Network Assessment Frameworks** may draw from causal and contribution frameworks and aim to assess the way that change happens through an advocacy lens and accounting for complicated network structures.

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 and approaches described in the frameworks above along with local innovations, to more effectively capture changes in women's rights and empowerment work.²⁷

1 Causal Frameworks

Most bilateral and multilateral agencies rely on Logical Frame or Results Based Management approaches to conceptualizing social change pathways.²⁸ Both assume a logical and causal perspective in documenting impact, focusing on the logical cause-effect relationship that leads to goal attainment (or results) if activities, outputs, and project purpose are achieved. Another prominent framework that draws on a causal 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.

²⁷ See Batliwala and Pittman. 2010. op.cit.

²⁸ See Jim Rugh. 2005. "The Rosetta Stone of Logical Frames." CARE for a review of the different bilateral and multilateral donor terminology used in agencies' Logical Framework and Results Based Management Approaches.

A. Logical Framework Approach

The Logical Framework Approach – or “LogFrame” as it is popularly known – 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, purpose, outputs, and activities in 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. A tool for adapting the standard LogFrame is the MDG3 Fund’s SMART Planning.

Strengths of the Logical Framework Approach:

- Logical Framework Approaches offer a detailed description and identification of program activities, outputs, and goals, highlighting 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. This can be encouraging for groups working on issues where actual change and impact may be difficult to see in the short-term.
- 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 and risks that may pose barriers to the program, as well as 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 or project.

The Logical Framework Approach is not designed to accomplish the following:

- The Logical Framework Approach does not capture the complexity of the multiple factors that contribute to change actually happening because the assumption is that change occurs through hierarchal and logical cause and effect processes, which can be controlled by the intervening agency and which are directly attributable to an intervention.
- This approach relies 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.²⁹

29 Reflection from Community Development Resource Association (CDRA). 2001. “Reflections on Measurement.”

- There is an *embedded logical fallacy* in the framework: namely, that 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 over the entire project time frame; 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 also the 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 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 (RBM) places primary focus on the outputs and outcomes in an evaluation. The goal is to define the main results sought by 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, specifically providing 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. RBM approaches assume a causal relationship between the program's activities and its results, meaning that the implementation of the program should produce expected results.³⁰

Agencies that use RBM 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 RBM, though not entirely, in their *Making the Case* evaluation approach. 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.

30 Jody Zall Kusek and Ray C. Rist. 2004. "Ten Steps to a Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation." World Bank.

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.
- 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 play that can influence development outcomes and may even integrate participatory methodologies into the RBM structure.
- 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.³¹ However, this recommendation should not only be limited to gender analysis, but also be broadly applied to all M&E frameworks.

The Results Based Management Approach is not designed to enable the following:

- Typically, the RBM 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.
- There is an embedded bias toward *new changes* in behavior or policies and not on *maintaining past gains* since results are actually defined as a change.³²
- 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.

31 Giovanna Prennushi, Gloria Rubio, and Kalanidhi Subbarao. 2001. "Monitoring and Evaluation." In *Core Techniques and Cross-Cutting Issues, Chapter 3*:105–30. Vol. 1 of PRS Source Book. Washington, DC: World Bank.

32 Mark Schacter. 1999. "Results-Based Management and Multilateral Programming at CIDA: A Discussion Paper." Institute on Governance.

C. Theory of Change Approach

The Theory of Change³³ approach makes explicit the assumptions – or theories – about 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 (WLP) also use the Theory of Change approach for mapping pathways to gender equality and women’s leadership.³⁴

Strengths of the Theory of Change Approach:

- The fundamental assumptions underlying why a program should work are made explicit. By testing their relevance in a certain context, we can gain deeper understanding into why a program does or does not work.
- The approach fosters stakeholders’ and grassroots’ agency in defining what “success” looks like and validates their expertise in this respect, thus limiting the misinterpretations that might occur in the hands of external evaluators, who often lack understanding of local realities.
- Mapping preconditions for achieving change with constituents strengthens the collective or shared understanding of a program and its implementation.
- Multiple methods are used; both qualitative and quantitative indicators are drawn from and are designed to reflect local realities and lived experiences of the program’s impact.
- The approach provides context-specific monitoring or evaluation systems sensitive to power dynamics.

33 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).

34 See WLP’s recent participatory evaluation manual, drawing from the Theory of Change approach: Rakhee Goyal and Alexandra Pittman 2010. *Measuring Change: Monitoring and Evaluating Leadership Programs. A Guide for Organizations*. WLP.

- Highlighting and measuring alternative or unexpected outcomes of the program is a major advantage and feeds into program learning.
- The collective mapping process required by the Theory of Change approach strengthens accountability and transparency across stakeholder groups, including with the staff and in reporting to donors.

The Theory of Change Approach is not designed to enable the following:

- The time commitment required to map change processes and design indicators with stakeholders is considerable, requiring strong staff and leadership buy-in, follow through, and a higher level of capacity.
- 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 causal and logical testing of program assumptions and paths to outcomes. As such, the approach is not always able to adequately account for the complexity and unexpected nature of social change.

2 Contribution Focused Frameworks

Another way of conceptualizing the pathway to change is not through direct causal links, but rather by recognizing that social change occurs in complex social contexts. Within these contexts, a multiplicity of forces and actors are at play; these congruent but diverse forces differentially contribute to – and detract from – the achievement of a program's long-term goals. M&E frameworks that focus on tracking and assessing change agents' contributions to these goals, rather than attributing the change to the intervention alone, hold a lot of promise for women's rights and empowerment organizations. Outcome Mapping and a range of participatory approaches operate on the notion of **contribution rather than attribution** and 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 the results to a program's activities. 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.”³⁵

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

Strengths of 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 Outcome Mapping.
- Using the boundary partner approach facilitates a relational assessment of different stakeholders’ contributions, needs, and influences, offering a more nuanced path for tracking dynamic systems and contributions to change. Moreover, the importance of collaboration, including the progress 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 the “best case scenario” goals.

Outcome Mapping is not designed to enable the following:

- 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 for.
- The focus of Outcome Mapping is primarily used for planning and monitoring and not more in-depth evaluation work.

35 Sarah Earl, Fred Carden, and Terry Smutylo. 2001. “Outcome Mapping. Building Learning and Reflection Into Development Programs.” IDRC.

- The design process requires an experienced facilitator with detailed knowledge of the Outcome Mapping methodology and the ability to customize the model to different organizational and cultural contexts and levels of intervention.
- Significant time commitment and capacity from leadership and staff is necessary to successfully operationalize this approach.

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 or evaluator and evaluated 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 analyze the strengths and weaknesses of their approach and strategies, and their 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.³⁶

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” is a tool for increasing accountability and transparency to stakeholders.

Strengths of Participatory Approaches:

- Participatory approaches challenge notions of the unbiased and apolitical nature of M&E and assert that the political nature of assessment 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.³⁷
- Participatory processes and 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.

36 Marisol Estrella and John Gaventa 1998. “Who Counts Reality? Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation: A Literature Review.” IDS. Working paper No. 70.

37 Evaluators in Nepal (Mathur, Mehta, and 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.

- Participatory reflection processes provide space to explore and account for the complexities in the change process, including power struggles and reversals that infuse the social change context.
- Participatory approaches allow for the assessment of and attention to power imbalances in the broader social context, and in relations between staff and stakeholders.
- Conventional power relations between evaluators and the grassroots are transformed.
- 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.

Participatory Approaches are not designed to enable the following:

- The ability to shed light on cross-group comparisons may be less likely because 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 applying participatory approaches.
- There is the possibility of local agendas being hijacked, or these approaches being ritualized but divested of their intended inclusivity, given the increasing donor demands for producing participatory evaluations. 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 in order to show positive results. 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).³⁸

38 Piers Blaikie. 2000. "Development, Post-, Anti-, and Populist: A Critical Review." *Environment and Planning* Volume 32: 1033 – 1050.

3 Gender Analysis Frameworks

Given the importance of gender analysis to feminist work, a full description and analysis of these frameworks and tools are provided. The following six gender analysis frameworks and tools are reviewed: 1) The Harvard Analytical Framework, also known as the Gender Roles Framework; 2) The Moser Gender Planning Framework; 3) The Gender Analysis Matrix; 4) The Women’s Empowerment Framework; 5) The Social Relations Approach; and 6) InterAction Gender Audit.

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) with USAID’s Office of Women in Development. The Harvard Analytical Framework offers one of the first efforts to disaggregate data by gender and capture differences in men’s and women’s positions and roles. Data is collected on the activities that men and women engage in at the individual and household level, according to their “reproductive” or “productive” nature. These activities are then assessed in terms of access and control over resources to better understand how household (or community) distribution will influence program outcomes. According to our definitions, it is a tool rather than a framework because it can be used to establish baselines and track changes in gender relations within various M&E approaches.

The tool has an interrelated matrix for data collection, which includes 4 elements: the activity profile, identifying the demographics of those involved in the project; the access and control file, highlighting the resources, access, and control in each activity by gender; the analysis of influencing factors, identifying factors contributing to gender differences; and the project cycle analysis, assessing the intervention based on gender aggregation.³⁹ The Harvard Analytical Framework is based on a Women in Development (WID) “efficiency” approach, meaning that the aim is to show that resource allocation to women and men makes good economic sense. While the tool is gender aware and makes more visible the differences between men’s and women’s labor, it does not analyze the roots of gender inequality and power imbalance.

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.⁴⁰

39 For examples of these tools and activities, see March, Candida, Inés A. Smyth, Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay. 1999. “A Guide to Gender-Analysis Frameworks.”

40 Donna Podems. 2007. “Gender (and Feminist) Issues in Global Evaluation.” AEA/CDC Summer Institute Atlanta, Georgia.

- The visual mapping process is useful for getting diverse groups of stakeholders on the same page.
- Gender is a central part of the analysis, which is often rare in other development planning or program assessment tools and approaches.
- The analysis highlights the need for gender disaggregation in measuring program impact to help reveal if there are differential outcomes for men and women 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.

The Harvard Analytical Framework is not designed to enable the following:

- 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 broader equality and gains in women's rights.
- There is no mechanism for assessing pathways of change, which limits the extent of understanding around why a program intervention works.

B. The Moser Gender Planning Framework

The Moser Gender Planning Framework, developed by Caroline Moser,⁴¹ is a tool for planning and assessing assumptions related to gender in development interventions at all levels, including policy, program, project, or community work. The Moser Framework introduces the notion of women's triple roles, i.e., productive, reproductive, and community involvement and maps them over a 24-hour period. *Productive roles* are those tasks that are monetarily reimbursed. *Reproductive roles* are those associated with child rearing/raising and caretaking of the home (e.g., cooking/cleaning). *Community Involvement* highlights those tasks related to collective support and community gain.

Given women's inequality in comparison to men and their triple roles in families, communities, etc., the Moser Gender Planning Framework also assesses practical and strategic needs. Practical needs are immediate needs necessary to ensure safety, health, and basic needs, such as water, sanitation, health care, etc. These do not fundamentally transform gender discriminatory power structures. Strategic needs, on the other hand, forward women's equality and empowerment by challenging those power structures, such as having equitable laws, living free from domestic violence, etc.

41 Caroline Moser. 1993. *Gender Planning and Development: Theory, Practice, and Training*. London: Routledge.

After assessing needs, women's and men's access to and control over resources are examined. Finally, planning is done to assess the extent to which women's triple roles can be balanced. The tool also provides a lens for assessing how different development paradigms address women's strategic and practical needs (e.g., welfare approaches, WID/GAD, empowerment).

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 tool 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.

The Moser Gender Planning Framework is not designed to enable the following:

- 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 or how a change was achieved, if any.
- The tool 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 tool is primarily useful for program planning rather than evaluation work.

C. Gender Analysis Matrix

The Gender Analysis Matrix, developed by Rani Parker,⁴² is a useful participatory assessment tool to quickly determine how a development intervention will affect men

42 Rani Parker. 1993. "Another Point of View: A Manual on Gender Analysis Training for Grassroots Workers." New York: UNIFEM.

and women from the community perspective. The principles of the Gender Analysis Matrix are:

- 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.⁴³

As such, this tool leverages community expertise as the foundation for the analysis and for use in planning change interventions. The tool aims to analyze program objectives across four levels with women, men, households, and groups in the community, in light of impacts on time, resources, labor practices and socio-cultural factors, such as gender 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, and 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 adaptable to a variety of settings.

The Gender Analysis Matrix is not designed to enable the following:

- Since the focus is not on tracking program processes, it limits the ability to create learning channels to monitor program strategies and outcomes.
- While the focus is primarily on gender analysis and its differential impacts on the community, the analysis is more suitable as a *precursor* to program planning and development of evaluation and monitoring systems, rather than a standalone assessment system.

⁴³ Quoted from the Global Development Research Center.

D. Women's Empowerment Framework

The Women's Empowerment Framework⁴⁴ was developed by Sara Hlupekile Longwe as a way to conceptualize the process of empowerment through a sequence of measurable actions. The tool highlights the ascending levels of gender equality, although the levels are not linear in nature, but rather are conceptualized as reinforcing in nature. 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 five "levels of equality" in the Women's Empowerment Framework include:⁴⁵

1. *Welfare*, meaning improvement in socioeconomic status, such as income, better nutrition, etc. This level produces nothing to empower women.
2. *Access*, meaning increased access to resources. This is the first step in empowerment as women increase their access relative to men.
3. *Conscientisation*, involving the recognition of structural forces that disadvantage and discriminate against women coupled with the collective aim to address these discriminations.
4. *Mobilization*, implementing actions related to the *conscientisation* of women.
5. *Control*, involving the level of access reached and control of resources that have shifted as a result of collective claim making and action.

The model is explicitly political, linking women's inequality and poverty to structural oppression. As such, in order to secure women's equality and empowerment, both materially and financially, women must be empowered. The tool examines a program, such as a health or education intervention, to assess how it influences the five levels of empowerment, i.e., negatively, positively, or neutrally. It postulates an ascending level of equality impacts that can be tracked and assessed over time, to see if progression or regression is taking place.

Strengths of the Women's Empowerment Framework:

- The Women's Empowerment Framework may assist organizations in developing more explicit programmatic strategies that aim to fundamentally shift the bases of gender inequality.
- Gendered assumptions of equality are made explicit. This provides an excellent opportunity for a feminist context analysis, highlighting the political dimensions 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.
- It is unique in explicitly allowing negative impacts to be located and analyzed.

44 Sara Longwe. 1995. "Gender Awareness: The Missing Element in the Third World Development Program" in Candida March and Tina Wallace (Eds) *Changing Perception: New Writings on Gender and Development*. Oxfam: Oxford.

45 From Sara Longwe. 2002. "Spectacles for Seeing Gender in Project Evaluation."

The Women's Empowerment Framework is not designed to enable the following:

- The Women's Empowerment Framework is not designed to explain how or why a program works, exploring the contributing or causal factors that led to the progression from one level of impact to the next.
- Focus is only placed on three levels of equality, (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 suggests a somewhat more linear change trajectory than is often found in practice.

E. Social Relations Framework

The Social Relations Framework⁴⁶ was created by Naila Kabeer (Institute of Development Studies in Sussex). The Social Relations Framework assesses how gender discriminations and inequalities are created, maintained, and reproduced in institutions (i.e., the household, community, market, and states) as well as aims to involve women in their own development solutions. In this way, it is a political rather than a technical or informational solution.⁴⁷ Social relations shape the roles, resources, rights, and responsibilities that people access and claim. As such, the aim is to assess how inequalities are reproduced in institutions through social relations and to understand the cross-cutting nature of inequalities within and across institutions for project development and planning purposes. The Social Relations Approach uses five concepts to analyze gender inequality.⁴⁸

Concept 1: Development as increasing human well-being

Concept 2: Social relations

Concept 3: Institutional analysis

Concept 4: Institutional gender policies

Concept 5: Immediate, underlying and, structural causes

The approach assesses the immediate, underlying, and structural factors that maintain and reproduce inequality according the institution type, household, market, community, state. There are five aspects that are shared by all institutions, which shape social relations— rules, resources, people, activities, and power. Institutions operate in different ways and reflect the undergirding gender policies (gender blind, neutral, aware, specific, or redistributive).

46 Sarah Earl, Fred Carden, and Terry Smutylo. 2001. “Outcome Mapping. Building Learning and Reflection Into Development Programs.” IDRC.

47 Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay and Franz Wong. 2007. “Revisiting Gender Training. The Making and Remaking of Gender Knowledge.” *Gender, Society & Development*. KIT and Oxfam.

48 For a summary and examples of each of these concepts, see March et al. 1999. op. cit.

Strengths of the Social Relations Approach:

- The Social Relations Approach reframes the analysis from individual experiences of inequality and power differentials to understanding the systemic causes and structures of gender inequalities. This deeper analysis can then inform policy or program planning and guide social change interventions and larger advocacy efforts.
- The focus on identifying spaces where inequalities are constructed and reproduced allows for a dynamic analysis of gender relations.
- The assessment of a range of institutional gender policies that span from gender blind to gender redistributive provides valuable information for the development of strategic interventions and alternative policy prescriptions.
- By mapping the actors involved in gender power dynamics, the fundamental importance of social relations to systemic inequalities is highlighted.
- The separation of development for efficiency and productivity from development for improving human well-being and empowerment offers important distinctions for purposes of structural transformation.
- The potential of exploring places where structural catalysts to inequality can be disrupted offers new possibilities for development interventions.

The Social Relations Approach is not designed to enable the following:

- The Social Relations Approach does not include multiple voices and experiences in the analysis because of its structural bias – e.g., this approach uses an institutional lens to assess and improve policies, which may not fully account for grassroots' experiences or the contextual specificities of particular minority groups within an institution.
- Participation of grassroots actors and voices is limited compared to organizational staff or others with the formal skills required to use this approach.

F. InterAction's Gender Audit

InterAction's Gender Audit⁴⁹ is a tool for assessing the integration of gender into the organization and its policies, programs, and projects. 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 topics critical to gender integration within an organization, such as 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 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.

49 InterAction. 2009. "Gender Audit. A Tool for Organizational Transformation."

Strengths of InterAction's Gender Audit:

- The audit highlights areas for organizational and programmatic strengthening using participatory processes and methods.
- 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.

InterAction's Gender Audit is not designed to enable the following:

- The reliance on the commitment from senior staff and gender focal teams could be constraining if political will is not strong.
- The audit is not designed for monitoring or tracking change.
- Follow-up and accountability mechanisms for action planning are lacking.

4 Advocacy and Network-Assessment Frameworks

Measuring and assessing advocacy efforts and changes brought about by networks can be difficult given the ongoing and cumulative nature of campaigns and lobbying efforts, which rely heavily on the political context, allies, the strength of opposition, and other levers and constraints to change. In networks, the task becomes even more complicated as networks usually comprise autonomous organizations that can each affect differing kinds and levels of political, socioeconomic, or social changes. For these reasons, trying to capture the trajectory and outcomes of change can be difficult, particularly as much of the work is condition dependent. However, assessing signposts and indicators on the road to longer-term social change, such as law, policy, or economic reforms, has been an increasingly important focus in the development community. Specifically, Michael Patton and Barbara Klugman have detailed techniques and strategies for assessing advocacy work. Ricardo Wilson-Grau and Martha Nuñez have done extensive work on ways of assessing the impact of networks.

A. Measuring Advocacy Strategies

Michael Quinn Patton (2008)⁵⁰ 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:

50 Michael Quinn Patton. 2008. "Evaluating the Complex-Getting to Maybe." Oslo, Norway. May 29, 2008. PPT Presentation.

“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.”

Six Interconnected Factors, Dynamically Interacting, That Strengthen Advocacy

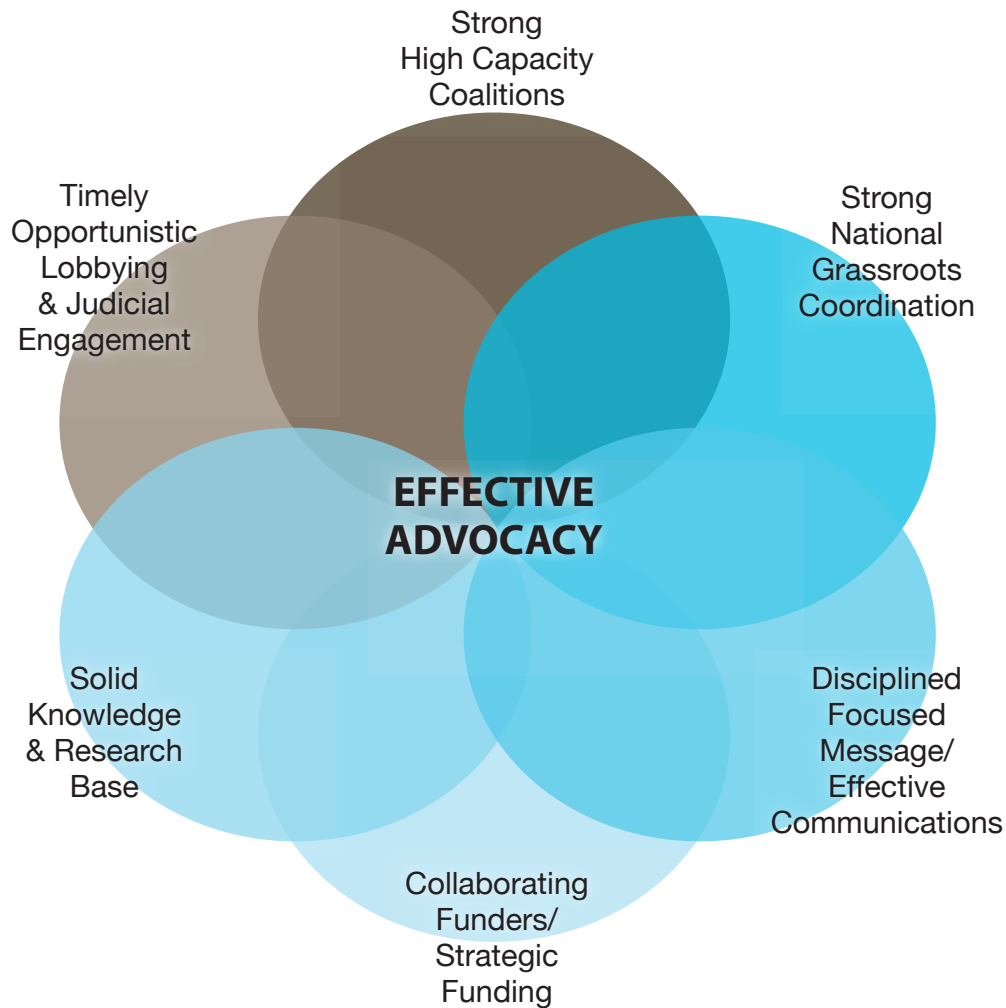


Chart reproduced from Patton (2008).

From a donor perspective, Barbara Klugman (2009)⁵¹ notes that in order to understand the complexity of change, M&E models must stop using linear, rationalist, LogFrame-like models that do not account for the changing context and actors involved in change processes. Instead, donors must start identifying one's contributions to change, not attributions, much like an Outcome Mapping approach. Specifically, Klugman suggests integrating Theory of Change approaches 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 for measuring donor contributions 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 that 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 the Advocacy Assessments:

- The acknowledgement that population-level changes cannot be tied to one organization's impact underscores the importance of reframing impact in terms of contributions to change rather than attribution.
- 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 approaches given the unique needs of an organization.

51 Barbara Klugman. 2009. “Less is More-Thoughts on Evaluating Social Justice Advocacy.” Ford Foundation.

- Retrospective assessments, described by Patton, strongly 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.

The Advocacy Assessments are not designed to enable the following:

- Retrospective evaluations 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 approaches may not meaningfully capture trajectories or pathways that assess how and why specific advocacy strategies led to change.
- Since each stakeholder can use their own unique set of assessment methods, comparability of results across stakeholders may be limited. This is a challenge in the case of advocacy networks where multiple partners are engaged in different locations on similar change goals.

B. Assessing Networks

Ricardo Wilson-Grau and Martha Nuñez⁵² have developed a framework for measuring the complexity of the changes that networks seek to create. Evaluating networks differs from standard M&E approaches aimed at learning about one program, project, or organization. Networks operate in multiple, dynamic, changing environments, in which often the group and all of its members must adapt and change course on very short notice, requiring more flexible M&E planning and implementation. The structure of networks is generally non-hierarchical with autonomous member organizations playing diverse roles in forwarding political and social change, sometimes collectively and sometimes individually or in clusters. Given this complexity and the multiple actors involved, the contribution-attribution issue becomes prominent. In order to address these different concerns, Wilson-Grau and Nuñez developed a conceptual framework and approach for assessing the functioning, purpose, and aims of a network. Specifically, they highlight four qualities crossed with three operational dimensions, which construct the backbone for any network assessment. The four qualities are **democracy, diversity, dynamism, and performance**. The three operational dimensions are: **political purpose and strategies, organization and management, and leadership and participation**. Assessments should address all of these different levels to track the manner in which and the ways that the network achieves its goals.

52 See Wilson-Grau, Ricardo and Martha Nuñez. 2007. "Evaluating International Social Change Networks: A Conceptual Framework for a Participatory Approach." *Development in Practice*, 17(2): 258-271.

Strengths of the Network Assessment:

- The Wilson-Grau and Nuñez framework and approach is heavily based on participatory methodology as the primary means to gather and assess information about the social change and political outcomes generated by networks. This strengthens the relevancy of the findings as well as the assessment capacities of autonomous network members.
- There is a strong focus on the organization and management of networks, which are integral to internal functioning and purpose. This approach examines the network's structure, operational management, institutional capacity, and communication in-depth.
- This approach underscores the importance of organic outcomes, in addition to general impact and other outcomes, which refer to the internal changes experienced by staff and network members. This is an important dimension of change often overlooked, and thus is an incredibly important contribution of this framework, helping us to understand if the existence of the network is an added value for its members. This is particularly important since it supports the reasons for the network's unique existence and identifies areas or gaps underlying its effective operation and purpose.
- There is a significant focus on measuring political outcomes, which aim to examine how social actors and network members influence longer-term changes in social relations and in shifting power structures in a given setting.

The Network Assessment is not designed to enable the following:

- The Wilson-Grau and Nuñez framework and approach does not require exploration of how the network actually contributed to the changes seen in political and other outcomes. The fact that this assessment is optional weakens our ability to understand the role and contributions the network is making. What we can say about a network's impact is primarily descriptive in nature, underscoring what the network does and who it targets and seeks to influence, but not if and how the outcomes have been achieved.
- Relatedly, by focusing more heavily on assessing internal network structure, purpose, and functioning, this approach limits our understanding of the pathways and extent of external change.

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