

## Discourse

### ENGENDERING POLICY THROUGH EVALUATION<sup>1</sup>

Evaluation has a strong role in telling how society has to evolve. Evaluation must play a stronger role in understanding how societies change and what policies and programs show promise in shifting inequities. Within this premise, ideas from feminist theory and research can strengthen the theory and practice of evaluation and any evaluation informed by such insights can make for more equitable policy and programs.

The feminist lens can contribute to a range of evaluation approaches; bring out the distinction between the lens, analysis, and approach without a difference. Through these foci–feminist research has made important contributions to development, for instance in the field of economics in which, feminist lens has made extensive and important contributions; in the analysis of government budgets according to their effects on gender equity and understanding the effects of macroeconomic policies of structural adjustment and liberalization. Looking at even this very curated list of how feminist insights and analysis have strengthened the economic analysis of development, suggests the ways and possible extent that feminist insights from across disciplines can bring new developments, approaches and insights to evaluation.

In the period of economic liberalization, the influence of international donor agencies had become particularly important. The origins of this push for more and better quality evaluation during this period was largely a push for upward and external accountability to donors. New calls for impact and/or value for money are being overlaid on a landscape that has been historically shaped by a dominant focus on external accountability. Increasingly in international development, even for small scale projects, funders demand demonstration of impact or ‘value for money,’ at times with little recognition of what they mean and what they are asking for. Again, though not particular to evaluation with a feminist lens, evaluators should push back and demand a more thoughtful discussion on aspects like who is the evaluation intended to serve, on appropriate measures when measuring impact or ‘value’ is not possible or central.

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<sup>1</sup> (Abstract of the Workshop on “Engendering Policy through Evaluation: Uncovering Exclusion, Challenging Inequities” held on 15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> December 2011 at the India Habitat Centre, New Delhi. The workshop was organized by Institute of Social Science Trust (ISST) and was sponsored by IDRC and Ford Foundation, New Delhi. Reported by Mary Bachaspatimayum. Acknowledging the ISST, New Delhi team for inviting and allowing to document the workshop abstract.)

Evaluators working with a feminist lens must draw on a range of approaches including those focused on measuring attribution and others emphasizing process, context, engagement, transformation, and stakeholder's perspectives. Accountability provides the rationale, social inquiry the systematic and justifiable set of methods for research; placing value on objects is the central task of evaluation; and who will use the evaluation and by whom.

Feminist evaluation is not one design or one set of methods, but a lens or standpoint that influences choices made in design and methods. Insights from research and evaluation can inform development discourse. Feminist evaluators recognize that the underlying structures and systems that create inequities cannot be programmed away within contexts that perpetrate and reinforce those systems. Embedding this political lens on utilization focused approaches to evaluation appears to be a promising space theoretically and for engendering policies and programs on the ground.

Causality runs both ways when we talk about gender equality and development. This two way relationship between gender gaps and development makes it hard to disentangle correlations from causation. A failure to clarify the mechanisms for answering questions like why gender gaps emerge may be to limit the impact of policy or to lead to a backlash. Findings from the application of the feminist lens in research and evaluation have been able to bring in various changes in the planning of policies. Gender lens is important in evaluation of a policy not of a project because every action the Government takes, it affects both men and women and women in a different way, e.g. law and order. Every policy which the Government introduces is interlinked with gender however gender evaluations are seldom done, so is the intersectionality, which is usually missed.

Feminist lens contributes to quality criteria for evaluations by mapping the utility and transformation among the communities or groups involved in the evaluation and facilitate feasibility to ensure that an evaluation will be realistic, prudent, diplomatic and frugal. It ensures that an evaluation will reveal adequate information about the features that determine worth and merit of the evaluation to bring accuracy in the project. Another aspect is the propriety to ensure that an evaluation will be conducted legally, ethically, and with due regard for the welfare of those involved in the evaluation as well as those affected with its results. Assessment of quality can be done by adapting internationally recognized evaluation standards of utility, feasibility, accuracy, and propriety to reflect a feminist lens.

While designing an evaluation the question of what it is about, does it have a feminist/gender approach besides thinking about the intersectionality, sustainability, requirements, etc. should be constantly considered.