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## Chapter 12

# Integrating Feminist Approaches to Evaluation - Lessons Learned from an Indian Experience

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**Abstract.** *Feminist approaches to evaluation seek to unpack the nature of gender and social inequalities; treat evaluation as a political activity, not as a value-free assessment; and use it as part of the change process. In response to the increased attention being given to evaluation, and the possible role of feminist evaluation in influencing policy that could lead to gender equality along different dimensions, the Institute of Social Studies Trust, based in New Delhi, designed a four-year program. The aim of program was to enhance capacity and understanding of feminist evaluations of various stakeholders, with a conviction that it would influence gender-transformative policy making. This chapter discusses the objectives and activities of this program, and critically analyzes the lessons learned. It also highlights the important takeaways that can make evaluations transformative as far as gender-based inequalities and power dynamics are concerned.*

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The Indian economy and society have been struggling with persistent gender gaps and inequalities. Despite substantial progress over the years, gender gaps continue to persist in education, health, participation in the workforce, and decision making (Hay et al. 2012). Poverty, early marriage, malnutrition, and lack of health care during pregnancy are associated with high levels of maternal and infant mortality. Data show that in India almost 60 percent of girls are married before the age of 18 (UNICEF 2014), and nearly 60 percent of them bear children before they are 19 (Young Lives 2016). In addition, almost one-third of all babies are born with low birth weight. Although gender parity in school enrollment has largely been achieved, there are gender differences in the reasons for dropping out, for irregular school attendance, and for the pathways that open up through education. Against a male workforce participation rate of 53.0 percent in rural areas and 53.8 percent in urban areas, the female workforce participation rate was 30.0 percent and 15.4 percent in 2011 (GOI 2016). Women continue to be employed mainly as “marginal” workers, in home-based, informal economy work, and as unpaid family labor. They remain underrepresented in decision-making positions, even though quotas have enabled more than a million women to enter local governance institutions.

Because gender norms affect all aspects of work and life, and gender is seen as a cross-cutting issue, it often becomes invisible in policy and planning documents. For example, neither India’s midterm appraisal of the Eleventh Plan, nor the issues for approach to the Twelfth Plan, mention “gender equality and empowerment” as a separate tangible goal, and discussion with planners reveals that it is seen as a “cross-cutting” factor (Planning Commission 2011b, 2011c). The reluctance to make gender concerns more explicit, which is derived from ignorance of the facts about gender gaps, suggests that there is still significant doubt as to whether any alternative policy or program design would significantly alter gender-related outcomes or not. However, evidence from the work of feminist and gender-sensitive social scientists shows that identifying and addressing the factors leading to gender inequalities can indeed help develop strategies for both policy advocacy and implementation for better outcomes from a gender perspective.

The present chapter highlights the discussions and lessons learned from a four-year program of capacity building on feminist evaluation that was prompted by an apprehension that evaluations with a feminist lens are capable of offering evidence-based policy advocacy that is oriented to gender equity and social justice.

The authors consulted different program documents including the program proposal, narrative reports, workshop reports, and the evaluation reports drafted by the external evaluators in order to write this chapter.

## **ENGENDERING POLICY THROUGH EVALUATION: BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES**

### **Gender in Indian Policy and Planning**

The ways in which a gender and equity lens in evaluation can help improve policies and programs is an important message for policy makers to receive.

On the other hand, it is widely recognized that evaluation has been emerging as a critical space through which gender and equity questions can be brought back into policy discourse.<sup>1</sup> The Indian government's Eleventh Plan adopted a gendered lens to initiate a process of systemic improvement in the lives of women and children. But the plan's midterm appraisal shows that while certain sectors have shown remarkable improvement, others are lagging behind (Planning Commission 2011c). The approach to the Twelfth Plan shows that only 35.8 percent of the Eleventh Plan outlay has been allocated during the first three years of the plan (Planning Commission 2011b). Schemes for single and internally displaced women, domestic workers, and minority women, to name a few, have not found a voice in the first half of the Eleventh Plan (Planning Commission 2011a).

During the formulation process of the Twelfth Plan, the coalition of civil society organizations and the planning commission was strengthened. The planning commission invited civil society groups to contribute to the preparation of the approach paper for the Twelfth Five-Year Plan, which is aimed at achieving faster, more sustainable, and more inclusive growth. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) India supported a facilitation process that provided women and men from marginalized communities living in remote corners of the country with an opportunity to voice their opinions on key development issues, and in doing so, marked a significant step in making the planning participatory. Planners interacted with 16 population groups comprised of *dalits*,<sup>2</sup> migrants, the urban poor, ethnic minorities, Muslims, people living with HIV/AIDS, and transgender persons, among others (WNTA 2011).

Consequently, the Twelfth Plan approach paper acknowledged that the plan must break the vicious cycle of multiple deprivations faced by girls and women because of gender discrimination and undernutrition. The paper ensures that ending gender-based inequities, discrimination, and violence faced by girls and women must be accorded the highest priority, and that this needs to be done in several ways. The midterm appraisal report of the Eleventh Plan acknowledges a need to undertake impact evaluations of intended outcomes. To undertake such evaluation, it has been decided to establish an independent evaluation organization linked to, but distinct from, the Planning Commission (Planning Commission 2011c).

Within this environment, there is some evidence that greater attention is now being paid to government-commissioned independent evaluations, as well as to the methods used and the findings. Acknowledgment by the government has created a tacit space for discussing gender-responsive evaluations in India. A meeting of the evaluation agencies and implementing agencies of the Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP) for Women of the Indian government's Ministry of Women and Child Development was

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<sup>1</sup> *Transform: The Magazine for Gender-responsive Evaluation*, Issue 1, June 2015. UN Women, Independent Evaluation Office.

<sup>2</sup> *Dalit*, meaning "oppressed," is a term for the members of lower castes of India.

convened in May 2011 for the first time since the program had started in 1986, to reflect on the design and evaluation processes of the program. The participants provided their thoughts about a systemic development of the evaluation process for the program. The increasing demand for greater transparency and openness is further reflected in the recent citizen agitation demanding an anti-corruption bill,<sup>3</sup> and in the use of the Right to Information Act to ensure public accountability. The act is becoming more crucial for the vulnerable sections of our society as they battle for social and economic justice. This is particularly true for women's issues. Some recent reports show that groups of women have also been able to fight gender-based discriminations through the Right to Information Act (Bakshi and Bhattacharya 2010).

A meta-evaluation of the STEP was conducted in 2012 by the Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST), using a feminist lens. The study points out that care responsibilities and constraints on mobility can influence outcomes, and need to be factored into assessments of both design and outcomes. This study was an attempt at a formative meta-evaluation using a synthesis method, and with the purpose of using completed evaluation reports to inform and strengthen future evaluations ("Introduction," Sudarshan, Murthy, and Chigateri 2015).

The meta-evaluation of the STEP has provided critical insights, as follows:

...the importance of assessing whether the trainings were contextualized to the sector and catered specifically to the needs of the women was also emphasized. The argument made by the evaluating agency was that the trainings would not be effective otherwise, and that women would just remain recipients of STEP. In order to empower the women, the trainings had to be linked to the lives of the women. Furthermore, the trainings had to cater to the functional requirements of the women. For instance, it was recommended that the legal training not be limited to awareness of legal rights but should also address functional and transactional legal literacy in the particular context of the sector, for instance to know what happens in the case of non repayment of loans, or to any other specific issue from a particular sector like farming or weaving etc. Therefore, in order to assess the effectiveness of the training component, it is also important for the evaluating agency to assess whether the training was contextualized and catered specifically to the needs of women. (Chigateri et al. 2015, 65)

## Importance of Building Evaluation Capacity in India

There is a strong presence of international evaluators, both organizations and individuals, in India today. This has helped to generate a more visible discourse about evaluation. Questions are being raised regarding things such

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<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., news reports at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article1607789.ece>.

as the extent to which greater professionalization of the evaluation function is needed, and how important the role of contextual understanding and domain knowledge is.<sup>4</sup>

Whether there is a growing demand for the evaluation of programs and projects, or whether there is simply greater visibility of this area of work, there is a sense among many commissioners of evaluations that local evaluation capacity is weak: this means that even if more evaluations are being locally commissioned, there may be a sense of discomfort among the commissioners regarding their credibility. Shiva Kumar, for example, has commented that “Professionals carrying out evaluations in South Asia tend to be social science researchers, not trained evaluators. Many evaluators of development interventions and commissioners of evaluation have not fully realized that the competencies needed to become an evaluator are different from, though complementary to, those needed for conducting social science research” (Shiva Kumar 2010).

Gender-transformative approaches to evaluation seek to unpack the nature of gender and social inequalities: further, they see evaluation as a political activity, not as a value-free assessment, and use it as part of the change process. Responding to the increased attention being given to evaluation, and the possible role of feminist evaluation in engendering policy and supporting changes that lead to gender equality along different dimensions, a consultation on gender and participatory evaluation was organized by ISST in August 2010 in New Delhi. There is, so far, little writing on gender-transformative evaluation tools and frameworks, and little on the difference made to evaluation findings by using a feminist lens. This workshop brought together a group of feminist and gender-sensitive equality advocates who, as social science researchers, have carried out evaluations and not had the opportunity to reflect on the role of these evaluations within their larger research agendas. Examples were given of the ways in which evaluation has been able to shift policy perspectives through the redesign of programs, and more importantly through systems change.

The participants of the above consultation might have lacked familiarity with mainstream evaluation theories and theorists, and the tools and frameworks associated with them, but the presentations by evaluators at the workshop showed that they have a good knowledge of the concerned sector. Evaluation findings can contribute to developing a future research agenda, leading to evidence-based policy recommendations, and drawing on the findings of a whole body of knowledge *including* evaluations. This positive contribution could be enhanced by strengthening the evaluation skills of social science researchers through exposure to evaluation theories and tools. At the same time, the immensely valuable set of knowledge and experience that has been gained by a number of feminist development practitioners will be unable to reach wider communities of evaluators if their evaluative

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Abhijit Sen, in his keynote address on “The Role of Evaluation in Policy and Programming” at the Evaluation Conclave, Delhi, October 2010, made a strong case for strengthening evaluation as a discipline (Evaluation Conclave 2010).

writings are not framed and structured in the language that is recognized by the conventional evaluators.

## Program Objectives

With this understanding, ISST in New Delhi designed a four-year program to address the increasing demand for transparency and accountability from program managers, including the government; the increasing interest in evaluation, but equally recognition of gaps in capacity; and the presence of a group of feminist social science researchers who have also engaged with evaluation.

ISST coordinated the program, which was entitled “Engendering Policy through Evaluation: Uncovering Exclusion, Challenging Inequities,” from 2011 to 2015, in response to persistent gender inequalities in Indian society and the economy in various spheres.<sup>5</sup> In principle, gender-equitable outcome is regarded as a cross-cutting objective across all sectors of development in India. However, it is often observed that, at the policy level, there is a reluctance to make gender concerns explicit in program design and implementation. It seems policy makers are not convinced whether a gender- and equity-focused lens in program design and evaluation would significantly improve outcomes or not. On the other hand, there is sufficient evidence from existing research that alternative strategies can indeed help in reducing the gender gap. The motivation for the program then was “to try to change and improve things on the ground” by demonstrating evaluation approaches derived from feminist theories of social inequities.

The overall objective of the program was to strengthen the understanding of gendered implications of policies and programs, and to enable the formulation of gender-sensitive approaches. In particular, focus was placed on evaluating selected key issues related to education, health, governance, and livelihood. Specific objectives included building evaluation capacity using a feminist lens, and expanding research and inquiry into the benefits of doing so. The work would contribute to building the field of feminist evaluation, and building an active network of professionals who are engaged in advancing its theory and practice.

## KEY ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Over a period of four years, this program has built a strong network of individuals and organizations in India that are interested in and working on feminist evaluation (table 12.1). For the purpose of capacity building, expanding a network of persons interested in evaluation with a gender and equity lens, and engaging policy makers, the following activities were undertaken.

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<sup>5</sup> The program was jointly sponsored by the International Development Research Centre, Canada; and Ford Foundation, New Delhi.

TABLE 12.1 **Structure of the program**

Participants	Activities	Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Feminist evaluators</li> <li>■ Gender researchers</li> <li>■ Members from implementing organizations</li> <li>■ M&amp;E personnel of different organizations</li> <li>■ Members from donor agencies/other development agencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Interactive training workshops</li> <li>■ Moderation of an online community of practice</li> <li>■ Participation in evaluation conferences</li> <li>■ Reflective writings on evaluation experiences with feminist lens</li> <li>■ Development of resources</li> <li>■ Dissemination seminars with NITI Aayog</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Resource materials on gender transformative evaluations (print and online)</li> <li>■ Edited collection of meta-evaluations</li> <li>■ Edited collection of feminist evaluations</li> <li>■ Short training videos</li> <li>■ Website and online community of practice</li> </ul>

- The network-building activity was sustained through a feminist evaluation Google group; an interactive online community of practice on gender and evaluation; a Facebook page; and a Twitter account.
- The work of capacity building and building a base of knowledge on feminist evaluation was sustained through workshops, small research grants, and support for participating in international workshops and seminars.
- The knowledge produced through this process was disseminated through publications, and both print and online training videos.
- The program has tried to engage policy makers at different stages.

The program conducted six training workshops, which functioned both as capacity-building spaces as well as opportunities to share research and knowledge on feminist evaluation. The program also offered scholarships to attend international conferences.

The program offered 11 small research grants for reflective research on evaluations. Some of the sponsored studies were “A Study of Gender and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Evaluations in India” and “The Culture of Evaluations: Women Empowerment Programs under the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Initiatives.” There were also two studies on meta-evaluations: one in the field of education, the other on health programs of the government of India.

Four books were published as outputs of this program: a toolkit on gender-sensitive participatory evaluation methods; an edited volume, *Engendering Meta-evaluations: Towards Women’s Empowerment*; an edited resource pack, *Resource Pack on Gender-Transformative Evaluations*; and an edited collection of feminist evaluations, *Voices and Values: The Politics of Feminist Evaluation*.

Since the inception of the program, knowledge sharing has been a key component. The base for this was provided by a feminist evaluation website,<sup>6</sup> various social media pages, and a Google group for those interested in feminist evaluation that was created in the first year of the program, as part of the knowledge sharing strategy. In addition, an online community of practice was set up in early 2013 to build a network of gender-responsive evaluation practitioners and researchers, including the core project participants, but also going beyond this group. The purpose was to provide an interactive, iterative platform that would build a knowledge base on gender and evaluation for the community of practitioners. This online community has more than 3,000 members from all over the world, and has generated new interest in gender and evaluation. It also provided an impetus for several organizations to seek collaborations with our feminist evaluation network. Since 2015, the online platform is also the online knowledge-sharing hub for EvalGender+.

There has been a widening of the networks beyond the initial base of project participants. While the project participants continue to form the core of our network, a broader network has been engendered by the online community, which has provided a much broader base for sustained conversations on gender and evaluation. Training videos on *What Are Gender-Transformative Evaluations?*, *Use of Evaluations in a Gender and Equity Context*, and *Principles, Values and Ethics of Gender-Transformative Evaluations* have been uploaded, which members have used, and through which they have also shared their inputs.

A key component of the program was also to engage policy makers, and to communicate the value of a feminist perspective in evaluations. Attempts to engage the policy makers have been underway since the beginning of the program. However, these efforts did not materialize until year 4, beginning with the International Year of Evaluation (EvalYear) events in India, for which ISST, the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog),<sup>7</sup> and the National Institute of Labour Economics Research and Development (NILERD) were co-organizers, along with other organizations.

Armed with some of the outputs of the program that directly address evaluation policies (for example meta-evaluations of government programs and state accountability mechanisms), the process of directly engaging policy makers proved to be more productive. Thus, in the fourth year, the program organized two policy workshops, in association with NITI Aayog and NILERD. And ISST's efforts to engage policymakers to use a feminist perspective in evaluations culminated in the launch of the Evaluation Community of India (ECOI), hosted by ISST.

The capacity to conduct evaluation and recognize the value of evaluations has been strengthened with each workshop, reflection session, and conversation on ISST's online platform. This group has contributed to building

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<sup>6</sup>[www.feministevaluation.org](http://www.feministevaluation.org).

<sup>7</sup>NITI Aayog is a policy think tank established by the Indian government in 2015 to replace the erstwhile government institution called the Planning Commission.

the field in diverse ways, including the publication of papers and making presentations at national and international workshops and conferences, and at capacity-building workshops.

The group has been actively engaging with ongoing policy debates on reproductive and sexual health, particularly through the work on child and early marriages, and adolescent girls; on education (for instance, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan);<sup>8</sup> on the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), through a meta-evaluation study; and on livelihoods, through evaluating the governance of the irrigation sector through a gender lens.

Some of the participant organizations have incorporated their learning from the workshops into their own practice on monitoring and evaluation (M&E). For instance, Jabala, a community-based nongovernmental organization (NGO) that operates from Kolkata, conducted an internal evaluation on their economic rehabilitation program for survivors based on their learning from the workshops. The Child in Need Institute (CINI), an NGO based in eastern India, collaborated with ISST on using community-led participatory M&E tools in their project based in West Bengal. The Centre for Catalyzing Change (formerly known as CEDPA) is keen to develop a self-assessment tool for an end-line survey in one of their projects. And the Health Institute for Mother and Child (MAMTA) has started using participatory evaluation methods in their organization.

## ANALYSIS

Given the wide variety of stakeholders that were targeted by the program, the amount and type of involvement, and the takeaways, also varied.

**Practitioners** were drawn from organizations that were conducting development programs, and were mid-to-senior-level professionals from different disciplinary backgrounds, including social science, management, legal, and others. For this group, evaluation knowledge was rudimentary, and their experience was a “third-party activity” to which they were subjected by donors. Against this background, participation in the project was found to be valuable in enabling ownership of evaluation within the organization: in assisting them to think evaluatively of their work; in unpacking gender dynamics that had been opaque in their program design and implementation; and in showing the way for creating an “evaluative culture” within their organizations.

The program has contributed to many key building blocks toward improving capacity building for organizations, and professionals engaged in development work at the grassroots level. Such organizations typically rely on third-party evaluations, and do not engage in viewing their own work using a feminist lens. This was the case even for organizations that were working

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<sup>8</sup> Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is Government of India’s flagship program for achievement of Universalization of Elementary Education in a time-bound manner, as mandated by the 86th Amendment to the Constitution of India, making free and compulsory education to children in the 6–14 age group a fundamental right.

on equity and women's rights issues. Such an engagement was found to be valuable in identifying dimensions for engagement, or for ongoing analysis of their work. Thus, feminist evaluation concepts of power and structures were becoming integrated into ongoing and new projects, and these opened up new ways of looking at empowerment. This capacity is crucial in order for an organization to actively engage in ongoing self-evaluation that can feed into the design of more formal periodic evaluations. The capacity-building workshops enabled development practitioners to better understand and measure change processes, and reflect on their own experiences.

Capacity building for conducting formal self-evaluations by these organizations was found to be more limiting, especially as there tended to be rotation among the staff who attended, and the workshop sessions were not geared to be evaluation training per se. With the evaluative thinking on feminist issues that was provided by the program, individual organizations embarked on their own evaluations, with mentoring support from experienced evaluators, and also with the support of ISST.

More senior practitioners, such as those who were involved with joint review missions for the government's flagship programs, found the feminist evaluation concepts very helpful in assisting them to formulate questions that helped to push the analysis beyond the data that was available for these programs. Integrating these ideas with their government counterparts was also well received.

**Researchers and evaluators working on feminist evaluation** found the dynamic interaction on research issues very helpful in furthering their work. Such opportunities for reflection, interaction, and feedback are valuable for conducting good research.

The researchers who participated in the program were at both the junior and senior levels. The junior-level researchers valued the ability to conduct work and the opportunity to attend and present results at international conferences provided by the research grants, and the reviews and discussions that enabled them to complete their publications. The senior researchers, who had taken on higher-profile meta-evaluations of national flagship programs, were supported for conducting and publishing the work in an edited volume, which subsequently has been released at a policy seminar cohosted by NITI Aayog. Being able to influence policy makers was enhanced by the involvement of other experienced evaluators who were also involved in this program. The series of workshops provided a space for reflection and introduction to innovative ideas that spurred research productivity. And the e-network provided an ongoing space for discussion of issues, concepts, and methods, and for researchers to get feedback on their work.

There was relatively little engagement with decision makers and policy makers from institutional settings where programs were being designed and/or implemented; where evaluation training was being carried out; or with government officials. The concept underlying this work was that results emanating from the capacity building and research output would subsequently be able to influence decision makers.

The program outputs have the potential to influence many of these groups of decision makers. For example, the training modules and resource

pack could contribute to the integration of these methods in standard evaluation trainings; and research outputs such as the compiled meta-evaluations of national flagship programs could influence a closer look at their implementation and modifications. The dissemination and outreach workshops and seminars conducted in the final year of the program highlighted the fact that such influence was indeed being generated.

**Organizational leaders** wanted more hands-on training in order to be able to conduct their evaluations. The program has introduced fresh perspectives to work being done by the NGOs that participated, and evaluative thinking was being integrated into their programs. However, they lacked the capacity and expertise to conduct their own evaluations, and would have liked to have an ongoing mentoring relationship established to facilitate that.

**Evaluation practitioners**, especially those who were active in mainstream program evaluations, had a mixed response. Some responded that the reflection and research conducted with their participation had enabled them to better interject feminist issues into program designing and implementation, though they felt that the terminology of gender-transformative evaluation was more acceptable within their own constituencies. Others felt constrained with their ability to apply feminist evaluation concepts in their practice.

Some of the reasons they cited for this included:

- Commissioners of evaluation, and most donors, pay only lip service to gender empowerment/transformational development;
- The need to demonstrate links to economic productivity with equity/gender empowerment programming; and
- Logistical issues in conducting fieldwork by female evaluators for getting women's perspectives.

The volume of high-quality research output and publications with international visibility has contributed to energizing this field of inquiry: a significant majority of participants said that this was a valuable contribution, and that a desire for ongoing engagement with the community of practice has been established.

## PROGRAM OUTCOMES AS A WHOLE

### Short Term

The regular workshops conducted over the course of the four years of program implementation created a vibrant space for interaction, reflection, and the sharing of innovative methods and approaches that engaged participants in a productive manner. Those who attended several of these events gained insights that they introduced to their organizations and into their work. The shared learning space and commonality of equity and feminist program and research interests of the participants was conducive to creating an effective community of practice.

The external visibility produced both within the participants' own organizations as well as in international forums, is likely to enable feedback loops that will contribute to benefits in the medium and longer term.

### Medium Term

Publications of research on feminist evaluation include one edited collection of meta-evaluations of government programs (Sudarshan, Murthy, and Chigateri 2015), one toolkit on gender-sensitive participatory evaluation methods (Murthy 2015), one resource pack on gender-transformative evaluations (Chigateri and Saha 2016), and one edited volume on reflective writings on the practice of feminist evaluation in India (Sudarshan and Nandi 2018). These publications will provide an impetus for additional research and integration of a feminist lens in evaluations, program reviews, and their design.

The e-network, established and expanded internationally to more than a thousand members during the program period, is expected to be a major instrument for providing an open forum and long-term benefits for the continued development in the field of feminist evaluation that was spurred by this program.

### Long Term

The yardstick that can be used to assess the longer-term outcomes of this program is the extent to which there is institutionalization of the key short and medium-term outcomes. The main evidence of this is from interviews with NGO practitioners who are integrating evaluative thinking into their programs, and who have acquired the capacity to apply a feminist lens to their programs. Those working in more mainstream programs did not face such a positive institutional environment.

The program was able to develop some integration of feminist or gender-transformative lenses in the evaluation training being offered at NILERD, which partnered in some of the workshops and outreach events. With the dissemination of publications that resulted from the program, there is potential for expanding such capacity building.

The impressive volume of high-quality research, and the publications that have been produced, will also contribute to longer-term outcomes.

## SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROGRAM

Human resource capacities built at the individual level by the program will be sustainable, given the depth and diversity of the discourse that has been provided. It is anticipated that these individuals will carry this capacity into their ongoing work, since they have been enabled to establish this type of discourse into any of the programs, evaluations, or research contexts in which they may find themselves.

Since the program was designed to influence capacity at the individual level only, at the organizational level influence is most likely to occur as the indirect result of participants who are able to integrate their learning on the

value and processes of introducing a feminist lens into the work of their organizations. As discussed earlier, this type of institutionalization was more apparent in the women's and human rights-based organizations, where the shift was related to introducing access to evaluative thinking, and a feminist lens enabled them to identify dimensions of their work that were not evident earlier.

However, the senior participants from mainstream development organizations felt confident that they would be able to make some inroads into the thinking at the institutions they worked with. At the same time, they also identified the constraints they faced. One of these is the challenge of using the terminology. Often the application of the term "feminist lens" has a tendency to address gender issues in a superficial manner, with little or no demand for systematic, gender-transformative programming and policy formulations, or their evaluation. And a number of the junior-level professionals did not feel competent enough to influence the work in their respective organizations.

The program has managed to have a small amount of direct engagement with national and state government officials concerning the value of using a feminist or gender lens in program evaluation, and in addressing program design for equity outcomes. This engagement only happened in the final year of the program, and was primarily the result of a few workshops and seminars that were cohosted with NITI Aayog. The previous chief executive officer of NITI Aayog and a number of senior-level officials participated, and engaged actively in those events. The program results presented were received very positively, and a favorable policy environment was evident. However, for this to be sustained and integrated into mainstream program evaluations and design will require concerted, ongoing work.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Participants from rights-based organizations found value in learning from the program and the workshops. Many of them who are new to evaluation began to integrate evaluative thinking in their work.

The program provided a new way of looking at how to make evaluation gender responsive. But it was challenging at the organizational level, since new learning applications had to go through an internal process of explaining and convincing the leadership. Introducing a gender-transformative perspective in designing and implementing a program even at the organizational level would be slow and challenging.

Researchers opined that the program enabled them to connect with practitioners. As for using the learning in their work, a couple of them noted that the term "feminist lens" was not always acceptable to their colleagues, so they used the concepts but not the terminology. The online community was very helpful, and much was learned from the information sharing.<sup>9</sup> Overall, there has been a positive contribution to building the field for feminist/

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<sup>9</sup>The online community of practice can be accessed at <http://genderevalning.com>.

gender-transformative evaluation and opinions on transforming policies and programs using gendered evaluation.

However, there are serious challenges in conceptualizing feminist evaluation. One major challenge has been confusion around the question of whether equity-focused and gender-responsive evaluation is different than feminist evaluation. The question was raised time and again, both inside the group and outside of it, whether feminist evaluation is a separate methodology or simply a frame of mind to use in looking at issues of inequality and gender-based power dynamics. There is also confusion as to whether feminist evaluation is an approach that could be used in any evaluation practice. This was discussed in some of the group workshops: whether the feminist approach should be integrated into the project design, or not. The question of whether to use a feminist lens in project monitoring was another area of concern.

During the midterm evaluation workshop, some of the participants raised the issue of wider acceptance of evaluation reports conducted with a feminist lens. One participant raised her concern that policy makers do not want complexity: they like to see a few clear results, stated in terms of numbers. This may go against the grain of feminist evaluation. The opinion was expressed in this workshop that the feminist evaluation approach cannot produce figures and numbers: rather, it captures social changes or program/project outcomes qualitatively. Perhaps this is the reason that policy makers and governments rely mostly on a set of institutes who practice and adopt more quantitative methods.

This brings up the second level of concerns for the group of feminist evaluators. The question was asked, how to bring feminist values into the evaluation findings, and how these values can be flagged so that policy makers will start noticing them. Other questions discussed were how to create an enabling environment for equity-focused and gender-responsive evaluation, and how to share lessons learned effectively in lessening gender inequalities. On this last question the group agreed that practicing feminist evaluation is part of a larger structure of feminist politics that ultimately tries to bring equality. This concern enabled the group to name feminist evaluation practice as gender-transformative evaluation in an Indian context.

During these interactive sessions, it was understood that there is a need for further dialogue and discussion among the members of the group and among both young and senior practitioners and evaluators. A number of participants in the program were open to sharing and exchanging. The recognition of the importance of converging various approaches and methods even increased greatly with the progress of the program. The group agreed on a crucial issue that feminist evaluation knowledge needs to go beyond feminist constituency and reach a wider audience. The group also discussed how to deepen the alignment between feminist researchers, mainstream evaluators, and formal and informal networks of evaluators, donors, university and research institutes, governments, and NGOs in order to build the field of feminist evaluation.

During the midterm external review workshop in 2014, the group agreed to strengthen the capacities of a larger group of development

practitioners and M&E personnel through developing an easy-to-read toolkit and the mentoring of young practitioners by senior feminist evaluators. They also suggested that the community of practice can facilitate a space where people will be able to interact, debate, discuss, and share knowledge.

A feminist evaluation curriculum for India and South Asia that is mainstreamed through the university system would help in developing capacity in feminist evaluation. To ensure that feminist evaluation is adopted at the organizational level, there is a need to orient staff, particularly the leadership. The group also felt a need to engage more with government officials, and with a focused and targeted approach.

A series of suggestions was rendered by the evaluators at the end of the four-year program. These suggestions came out through conversations with members of the group. One important suggestion was to continue organizing policy workshops, publishing policy briefs, and publishing in reputable journals and edited volumes in order to document the process of change that feminist evaluation has created. The second important suggestion was to find ways to increase visibility of the group of feminist evaluators in India. The third suggestion was to make efforts to integrate equity-focused, gender-responsive evaluation with mainstream evaluation methods such as utilization-focused evaluation, or impact evaluation.

In the longer run, organizational capacity building for integrating a feminist lens would be aimed at the foundation that has been built by this program. Attention is needed to support continued research on documenting the approaches and the value gained with feminist evaluation, and its integration into mainstream development research agendas.

Continuing the feminist evaluation e-network and community of practice is a priority. The recent development of EvalGender+ stepping in to support this is a big plus, and will help to maintain the momentum that has been generated. This platform has been valuable for encouraging exchange on theory and practice, creating a space in which to question and have a dialogue on issues, challenges, different methods, and their applications.

Outreach and dissemination of key messages and lessons learned from the knowledge products that have been produced for different audiences will help to expand the audience and understanding gained beyond those who are active participants in this work.

As a follow-up of the program, the core group of feminist evaluators might consider introducing courses in feminist/gender-transformative evaluation at evaluation training centers in India. Gender is becoming a standard cross-cutting objective in development programs, but not enough attention is being given to how the objectives can be attained in reality. At the same time, building of capacity at the organizational level for integrating a feminist lens in the design and monitoring of programs for producing gender-equitable results will be another key step. This can be linked to working with donors to promote building a culture of evaluation with a feminist lens.

The core group of gender evaluation network participants, along with ISST, are well positioned to expand collaboration with NITI Aayog and the state governments to review their evaluation guidelines and methodologies, and their M&E review processes. In some states, leaders of this feminist

evaluation network are already assisting with reform of the M&E processes, and are documenting their work so that it can be used to assist in cross-learning mobilizing support.

This would also be an interesting way to get the insights and involvement of the leaders in feminist evaluation, who otherwise do not have time to contribute to the online platforms or join the discussion groups.

Research funding for feminist evaluation is an ongoing constraint, and the online community of practice can take up this issue and find ways to establish a research fund for supporting ongoing research.

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