



Participatory Approaches to Programming, Monitoring, and Evaluation: A Means to Incorporate Gender Considerations into Development Projects

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In the sixth seminar of Chemonics International's series on Women in Development, Lyn Beth Neylon, legal and gender specialist for the Women's Legal Rights Initiative, and Leo Surla, president of MetaMetrics, Inc., spoke on incorporating gender into development projects through participatory approaches to programming, monitoring, and evaluation. Ms. Neylon discussed her efforts to include gender considerations in the WLR projects in Rwanda and Benin. Mr. Surla provided insights on using a participatory method for monitoring and evaluating projects based on his experiences in Ukraine, Armenia, and Nepal.

Linking Gender and Participation

"Gender is a way of looking at things," Ms. Neylon said. "It is a point of view; a perspective, not an add-on."

When working on a project, Ms. Neylon advised, we need to ask ourselves, "How does this activity affect men and women differently?" Finding out the gender roles and expectations in a given society, especially as they relate to project concerns and activities, and involving the stakeholders is the essence of the participatory approach, she said.

Ms. Neylon suggested ways to guarantee a broad representation among the local stakeholders by carefully examining who is being selected to participate. For a women's rights project, she said, a majority of the stakeholders should be women's groups. But because women are not one homogeneous group, to have broad representation she advised that the women selected should be involved and known in their communities, represent a variety of levels of education, and include members of ethnic or linguistic minorities.

Often women might be excluded because they lack access to meeting sites for issues of safety, comfort, proximity, or access to child care, Ms. Neylon cautioned. She described how the WLR team in Benin chose an office location near the central market. It was noisy, but easily accessible, and central to the community.

Identifying appropriate project coordinators and local partners is critical, according to Ms. Neylon. She suggested asking USAID and local groups for recommendations of trusted and respected people. A good local coordinator has contacts from government offices to the villages and can communicate with people at all levels.

Involving both men and women is a key element in effective change, Ms. Neylon said. Even when women are targeted specifically as beneficiaries, both sexes need to know about women's rights. The WLR initiatives in Benin and Rwanda incorporated men and women into all programs implemented by the local partners, she said. Often, WLR trainings were attended by more men than women, including NGO staff members, government representatives, religious leaders, community leaders, teachers, literacy coordinators, midwives, and municipal workers.

Local Partners

A participatory project demands local participation at all stages, from planning to closeout, according to Ms. Neylon. Often, she said, the more local partners a project has, the better—whether small grassroots organizations or government ministries—because the base of support and the range of perspectives increase. The local partners must work directly with the people affected by the project. In the WLR project in Benin, the part-

ners included two associations of women lawyers that have male membership; and two grassroots, nongovernmental organizations run jointly by women and men. In Benin, the number of WLR partners grew from the original four to twelve, and the groups often worked together to hold trainings.

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Selecting local partners may be fairly simple, compared to providing incentives for them to collaborate openly on the implementation of project activities. This may also be true when conducting a participatory project evaluation.

Ms. Neylon recommends making participation in the project conditional on collaboration with other partners. She also urges those in charge of projects to think strategically about how to encourage cooperation, by asking the groups to work together on a project. In Benin, for example, the WLR local partners collaboratively developed public awareness and trainings.

In Rwanda, local partners developed a media strategy together, using a local alliance made up of non-governmental organizations and media representatives. Under the WLR local alliance, they de-

vised a strategic media plan to broadcast a consistent message against gender-based violence. The collaborative effort had a stronger impact than any of the groups in the alliance could have achieved alone. When groups learn to successfully work together, relations improve within the group and in the community. Such collaboration also improves the chances of project sustainability, encourages local ownership, and discourages duplication.

On the Ground

Once a diverse group is committed to participating in the project, the step is to conduct research and collect data necessary for program evaluation. For Mr. Surla, this meant a monitoring and evaluation plan fully designed and conducted by the stakeholders themselves. Mr. Surla detailed his experience in Ukraine as an illustration of using a participatory approach in monitoring and evaluation.

His client, USAID, requested the involvement of stakeholders in the evaluation process, so Mr. Surla facilitated a forum of the stakeholders in which he explained the participatory process and project expectations. After several weeks of training, a core of these participants became the project evaluators.

The facilitator then trained the core participants in monitoring and evaluation methods. The evaluators used those methods to gather evaluation data, then reconvened to participate in a group analysis and compile reports. The facilitator only observed at this stage, and did not actively participate, so that the dialogue was fully group-led.

WLR used a modified participatory evaluation method similar to that of Mr. Surla's. After their first year of activities, WLR Benin partners came together for a general evaluation of their work and to discuss ideas for the next year's work plan, which was designed and written by WLR and later modified with input from the local partners.

Where Can This Work?

There are countless opportunities to incorporate a participatory approach in a project, according to Mr. Surla. For example, when monitoring or evaluating a project, opt for active staff feedback from those on the ground, rather than hiring a short-term consultant for the same pur-

pose. In terms of gender analysis and the participation of women, Ms. Neylon said that she always plans for women's full participation at all points in the project cycle, from design to planning to implementation to evaluation.

When starting the Women's Legal Rights Initiative in Benin, Ms Beth Neylon spoke to "government ministers, taxi drivers, judges, women in the market, lawyers, hairdressers...anyone who would talk" to her, in order to get an inclusive picture.

Most projects, she said, would greatly benefit from unofficial local participation before starting work on the ground. In the beginning of a project, when identifying potential partners and learning about the gender dimensions of the social, legal, economic, and political context, she encourages being open and talking to as many people as possible. When starting WLR in Benin, Ms. Neylon spoke to "government ministers, taxi drivers, judges, women in the market, lawyers, hairdressers—anyone who would talk" to her, to get an inclusive picture.

Results

In nearly all cases where participatory methods have been used, participant feedback has been very positive. Mr. Surla mentioned the comments of one stakeholder in a USAID project in Armenia that followed a participatory approach. The participant noted that being actively involved reduced the sense of project hierarchy and improved understanding and respect among partner organizations. She also reiterated the importance, especially in a post-Soviet setting, of considering all people to be equal and able to actually

contribute to the program and provide useful feedback.

Throughout WLR's work, its partners' collaboration on program design and monitoring and evaluation resulted in a work plan that was responsive to local needs and priorities, incorporated gender considerations, and produced an impressive number of collaborative activities (trainings, community meetings) and materials (short films, public awareness booklets and brochures in Benin, human rights manual in Rwanda). In Benin, WLR facilitated a legislation development workshop in which stakeholders successfully drafted, in only one week, legislation that prohibits sexual harassment. One year later, the legislation was passed, unchanged.

In Nepal, Mr. Surla assessed whether participatory methods could be applied to the Strengthened Rule of Law and Respect for Human Rights project. Ms. Sapana Malla from the Forum for Women's Legal Defense spoke about what she thought such participation could do for her organization.

"We really need intervention here, to monitor and follow up, so we make sure any activities or objectives which we have to meet [are] in process," Ms. Malla said. "The collaboration will help us, not only to recognize indicators, but to make us accountable."

Ms. Malla's statement illustrates that participatory methods have the potential to build the capacity of local organizations and engage project staff. These methods contribute to an increased feeling of ownership, responsibility, and accountability, with great potential beyond the immediate results.

MetaMetrics Inc. provides program planning, evaluation, and implementation services. Since 1973 MetaMetrics has delivered technical assistance in the United States and in over 30 foreign nations for state, federal, and non-profit agencies and private companies. MetaMetrics goes beyond measurement to develop, present, and implement innovative program options for managers and policy makers.

For Further Information

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