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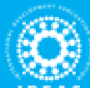

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Evaluation for equitable development results

The Evaluation Working Papers (EWP) are documents that present strategic evaluation findings, lessons learned and innovative approaches and methodologies. We would like to encourage proposals for relevant papers which could be published in the next EWP issues. Papers can be prepared by UN staff and by partners.

For additional information and details please contact Marco Segone, Systemic strengthening, UNICEF Evaluation Office, msegone@unicef.org

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This book complements the following material available at **www.mymande.org**

- **Manual on "How to design and manage Equity-focused evaluations"**, available free of charge at: http://www.mymande.org/?q=virtual
- **Resource center** available, free of charge, at: http://www.mymande.org/?q=equity_focused_evaluations_intro
- **Webinar series** with world-level experts available, free of charge, at: http://www.mymande.org/?q=equity_focused_evaluation&x=cl

Evaluation for equitable development results

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Contents

Preface
Colin Kirk, Director, UNICEF Evaluation Office,
Soma de Silva and Jim Rugh, President and Vice President, IOCE,
Ray Rist, President, IDEAS VIII

Editorial
by Marco Segone, UNICEF Evaluation Office; Co-chair, UNEG Taskforce on National Evaluation Capacities; and former IOCE Vice President XIII

Acknowledgement XIX

Part 1
Evaluation and equity

Evaluation to accelerate progress towards equity, social justice and human rights
by Marco Segone, UNICEF Evaluation Office; Co-chair, UNEG Taskforce on National Evaluation Capacities; and former IOCE Vice President 2

Human rights and gender equality in evaluation
by Janie Eriksen, UNICEF Evaluation Office, Shravanti Reddy, UNWomen Evaluation Office, and Janice Muir, OIOS; and members of UNEG Taskforce on Human Rights and Gender Equality 13

When human rights is the starting point for evaluation
by Donna Mertens, Department of Educational Foundations and Research, Gallaudet University 25

Strengthening Equity- focused evaluations through insights from feminist theory and approaches
by Katherine Hay, Senior Specialist, Evaluation, International Development Research Centre, Regional Office for South Asia and China 39

Decolonizing evaluation in a developing world. Implications and cautions for Equity-focused evaluations
by Rodney K. Hopson, Duquesne University, Karen E. Kirkhart, Syracuse University and Katrina L. Bledsoe, Education Development Center, Inc. 59

Part 2
Methodological implications for Equity-focused evaluations[1]

Methodological issues to design and implement equity-focused evaluations
by Michael Bamberger, Independent consultant 86

Developmental evaluation for Equity-focused evaluations
by Michael Quinn Patton, Founder and Director, Utilization-focused evaluation 102

Systems thinking and Equity-focused evaluations
by Martin Reynolds, independent consultant and Bob Williams, independent consultant 115

Methodological challenges in using programme theory to evaluate pro-poor and equity-focused programmes
by Patricia Rogers, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University and Richard Hummelbrunner, Independent consultant 142

Case Study and equity in Evaluation
by Saville Kushner, University of the West of England...................... 172

Values-Engaged Evaluations
by Jennifer Greene, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign 192

Part 3
Examples of Equity-focused evaluations

Evaluating the contribution of UNDP to equity-focused public policies in Brazil and China
by Juha Uitto, Deputy Director, UNDP Evaluation Office and Oscar Garcia, Senior Evaluation Adviser, UNDP Evaluation Office 210

Using a human rights approach to evaluate ILO's discrimination strategy
by Francisco Guzman, Senior Evaluation Specialist, ILO Evaluation Office................................222

CONEVAL experience in evaluating interventions for Indigenous populations in Mexico
by Gonzalo Hernández, Thania de la Garza, María Fernanda Paredes and Brenda Valdez Meneses, Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social................................244

UNICEF supported evaluations with elements of equity-focused evaluations 258

Annexes

Authors Vitae 264

Abbreviations 275

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1 For additional details on methodological implications, please see Bamberger and Segone, 2011, *How to design and manage Equity-focused evaluations* , UNICEF

Preface, Editorial & Acknowledgements

Preface
Colin Kirk, Director, UNICEF Evaluation Office,
Soma de Silva and Jim Rugh, President and Vice President, IOCE,
Ray Rist, President, IDEAS VIII

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by Marco Segone, UNICEF Evaluation Office; Co-chair, UNEG Taskforce on National Evaluation Capacities; and former IOCE Vice President XIII

Acknowledgement XIX

PREFACE

by the Director of Evaluation, UNICEF

Despite the economic downturn of 2008 and its lingering effects, spectacular headway has been made in reducing global poverty over the past two decades. Progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goal of halving the proportion of people living in poverty is on track, with the global poverty rate expected to drop below 15% by 2015, far below the target of 23%. Each year, more people escape extreme poverty, and more countries "graduate" to middle or high income status.

Yet despite the rapid progress in reducing poverty, inequalities are increasing both between countries and within countries. A recent UNICEF report on global inequality noted that the richest population quintile enjoys 83 percent of global income, with just a single percentage point going to those in the poorest quintile. As the UN's Secretary-General has written, introducing *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2011*, "Progress tends to bypass those who are lowest on the economic ladder or are otherwise disadvantaged because of their sex, age, disability or ethnicity". A growing body of research confirms that high levels of inequality in the distribution of income, power and resources can slow poverty reduction, exacerbate social exclusion and provoke political and economic instability. Even in rich countries, inequality is dysfunctional, as Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett so convincingly demonstrated with the mass of evidence presented in their influential book, *The Spirit Level*.

It is therefore high time to put equity at the center of efforts to promote development. Addressing a high level meeting on the Millennium Development Goals in Tokyo last year, UNICEF's Executive Director, Tony Lake, put the point eloquently. He declared: "There can be no true progress in human development unless its benefits are shared – and to some degree driven – by the most vulnerable among us ... the equity approach is not only right in principle. It is right in practice".

In the same vein, it is an appropriate moment to ask whether evaluation as a discipline and evaluators as a profession are addressing equity issues in ways which are indeed right in principle and right in practice. Some of the answers can be found in the present volume, which brings together a tremendous richness and diversity of evaluation thinking and experience. While a number of the papers included

in the collection touch on approaches and methods already familiar to evaluators, the challenge of addressing the question of equity has helped to demonstrate renewed relevance and establish fresh perspectives. Several essays showcase examples of evaluations addressing equity issues, providing a valuable source of inspiration.

I would therefore like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all the contributors to this volume, which I believe is a landmark publication on a topic of central importance. I would especially like to express my appreciation of the fruitful contribution made by my colleague, Marco Segone, in pulling together the present volume, and in organizing the companion series of webinars, which has already provided so much in the way of ideas and illumination for a worldwide community of participants.

In the end, the vital test is whether evaluation can truly help the international community to achieve equitable development results. At the meeting in Tokyo, Mr Lake called for "better monitoring and evaluation of results, to see what is working and where further resources should be focused". Evaluation can indeed help to guide investment towards equitable outcomes. But perhaps even more importantly, the equity approach renews the challenge to evaluators to ensure that the voices of the poorest and most marginal people in society are heard and that their views count in decisions affecting their future. This is perhaps the simplest challenge facing evaluation for equitable development results – but it is probably also the hardest to achieve. I hope the essays in this collection will help evaluators and others rise to meet this test.

Colin Kirk,
Director, UNICEF Evaluation Office

PREFACE

by the President and Vice-President of the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE)

Achieving greater social equity is increasingly becoming a common goal of governments, civil society organisations and development partners alike. Making development benefits reach the marginalized and the disadvantaged is becoming an integral strategy of national development plans as well as programmes of cooperation of the United Nations Agencies and multilateral and bilateral organizations. Groups of people have been marginalized and disadvantaged for reasons that are historical, cultural and political, among others. These reasons are deep rooted and intricately intertwined with power structures, knowledge levels, belief systems, attitudes and values of societies. They have been barriers to equitable social development. Development programmes and projects have typically tended to be designed with insufficient understanding of these issues. Consequently, development results have often benefited the most advantaged and the better able while only percolating in drops to those who are deprived, thereby perpetuating the inequities.

To penetrate the barriers to social equity, UNICEF is reorienting its programmes of cooperation with governments to achieve greater equity for the most deprived and marginalized children who are a highly vulnerable segment of the population. To achieve successful development results from such programmes, evaluation is as important as are appropriate designs and good implementation. Equity-focused evaluations face certain methodological challenges to address issues related to inequities and their deep rooted causes. In this context, the International Organisation for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE) is glad to see the publication of this volume which brings together reflections on the linkages between evaluation and equity as well as diverse methodological approaches to evaluating programmes that promote equity. It brings together a range of methodological approaches of evaluations covering design elements, process elements such as transformative approaches and overall approaches such as systems approaches. It also includes evaluations of a range of interventions such as governance and international development, national development programmes, community based programmes and public policies from widely differing contexts and communities.

It is the mission of IOCE to promote the development of theories and strengthening of evaluation practices that are socially relevant and respect the diversity of cultures, norms and needs. IOCE encourages advancement of theories to address emerging needs such as the approaches to evaluating social equity programmes. Such theoretical advances also enable evaluation associations to better facilitate professional development activities in evaluation that are relevant to the national development contexts.

Soma de Silva
President, IOCE

Jim Rugh
Vice President, IOCE

PREFACE

by the President of the International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS)

As President of IDEAS, I am especially pleased to be able to endorse this book and to recommend it to the development community. The issue of equitable development results is increasingly on the radar-screen of policymakers, program managers, and donors. And while the conventional understanding of equitable development is associated with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), there are broader implications that are addressed in this volume. Equitable development is not just working to achieve the eight goals of the Millennium Declaration in 2015, but conceptually and politically it carries us into the arenas of structural inequity, regional inequity, and the inequity that emerges from unfair trade practices, unfair currency manipulation, authoritarian regimes, and non-democratic governance. This book opens up the conversation to such issues and for this it is to be commended.

I wish to thank UNICEF for their initiative and perseverance in bringing this book to fruition. It is a contribution to the evaluation community and for this, we all own UNICEF a strong thank you.

Ray C. Rist
President, IDEAS

EDITORIAL

This publication aims to stimulate the international debate on how the evaluation function can contribute to achieving equitable development results by conceptualizing, designing, implementing and using evaluations focused on human rights and equity.

It does so by offering a number of strong contributions from senior officers in institutions dealing with international development and evaluation. These are: UNICEF, UNDP, UNWomen, ILO, IDRC, the International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS) and the International Organisation for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE); as well as senior Government representatives responsible for evaluation systems in their country, such as CONEVAL in Mexico.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I presents the relationship between evaluation and human rights and equity. Part II focuses on the methodological implications in design, implement and use of Equity-focused evaluations; and part III presents few examples of Equity-focused evaluations.

In Part I, **Segone** introduces Equity-focused evaluations by explaining what equity is and why equity matters. He continues by defining Equity-focused evaluations, what's the purpose and positioning equity-focused evaluations as a pro-equity intervention. He argues that, while Equity-focused evaluations pose new challenges, they also constitute an opportunity to make evaluation an action for change to achieve development results with an equity focus.

Reddy, Eriksen and **Muir** explain why it is important to integrated human rights and gender equality in evaluation, and the implications in doing so at each of stage of the evaluation process. They also present the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) – a professional network that brings together the units responsible for evaluation in the UN system – response to a gap in the integration of these important dimensions in evaluation of the UN's work: a handbook containing practical guidance for evaluators.

Mertens addresses the challenges of planning, implementing and using evaluations that emerge when human rights is the starting point for policymakers, funders, programme developers and evaluators. She explains that situating oneself as an evaluator in a human rights position requires re-thinking how evaluation is conceptualized, practiced, and used in international development. Finally, she makes the argument that re-framing of evaluation from this starting

point, based on human rights, provides fertile ground for obtaining meaningful answers to questions about the efficacy of international development interventions.

Hay examines how principles drawn from feminist and other research traditions and theories, can be used in practice to inform the understanding of programme theory; shape evaluation design and methods; negotiate judgment of success; guide practice; and, guide choices and opportunities for influence. She suggests that principles generated from feminist theory can help evaluation to play a stronger role in understanding how societies change and which policies and programmes show promise in shifting norms and achieving equity.

Hopson, Kirkhart and Bledsoe suggest that the good intentions of Equity-focused evaluations must be tempered by cautions. This concern flows from a legacy of research and evaluation that has exerted colonizing influences over Indigenous and minoritized populations. The opening section covers the context of development, evaluation, and culture. The second section argues that efforts to decolonize evaluation must begin with epistemology. A third section examines the implications of decolonization for evaluation method. Within the paper, a scenario is provided based on a development project in southern Africa. The authors close with implications and cautions for how evaluation generally, and more specifically, Equity-focused evaluations may perpetuate colonizing assumptions and aims.

In part II, **Bamberger** discusses strategies and methods for evaluating how well development interventions address and achieve equity objectives. He starts by highlighting the importance of distinguishing between *simple* equity-focused projects, and *complex* equity-focused policies and other national level interventions as these affect Equity-focused evaluation design options. He then presents different approaches and tools to evaluate equity-focused impact at policy level and at project level, highlighting the importance of mixed-methods.

Patton explains that Developmental evaluation supports innovative intervention *development* to guide adaptation to emergent and dynamic realities in complex environments. He suggests that evaluation for equity and the fostering of human rights, as part of achieving meaningful development results, often occurs in complex adaptive systems. In such situations, informed by systems thinking and sensitivity to complex nonlinear dynamics, Developmental evaluation supports increased effectiveness of interventions, social

innovation, adaptive management, and ongoing learning.

Reynolds and **Williams** argue that Equity-focused evaluations should be instrumental in redressing prevailing inequities of resource-access. In this context, they explain that it is often difficult to appreciate the wider picture of issues relating to resource access, including different perspectives on inequities from different stakeholders. A systems approach to Equity-focused evaluation prompts, firstly, a greater awareness of the interrelated issues of inequities; secondly, an appreciation of different perspectives on inequities, and; thirdly, a reflection on boundaries used to circumscribe our awareness and appreciation of inequities.

Rogers and **Hummelbrunner** discuss some of the key features of equity-focused programmes that programme theory needs to address – in particular, the need to support poor and marginalized people to be agents of their own development, and to address complicated and complex aspects of programmes. They then present the implications of these for developing, representing and using programme theory, arguing that programme theory needs to acknowledge the other factors needed to produce intended outcomes and impacts; support appropriate translation of effective interventions to other contexts, by distinguishing between theories of change and theories of action; highlight differential effects of interventions, and in particular the distribution of benefits; and, support adaptive management of emergent programmes.

Kushner contributes an approach to evaluation that makes it an equitable process. Its focus is methodological, and he suggests that the methodological solution of Equity-focused evaluation is case study. He argues that case study gives us a more systemic/ dynamic view of policy and public value, as describing, analysing and understanding the implications of policy-*shaping* is a key task for the case study evaluator who needs to understand the sources and consequences of unequal access to information and power asymmetries in setting the criteria against which interventions will be judged.

Greene presents the character of, and rationale for, in explicit naming and claiming of values in evaluation, including in Equity-focused evaluation. Greene argues that values are present in virtually all aspects of evaluation. The term "values-engagement" is intended to signal explicit attention to values as part of the evaluation process and to the central role that values play in our evaluation practice. From the framing of evaluation questions to the development of an evalua-

tion design and methods, and from the interactions of stakeholders in the evaluation process to the especially important task of making judgments of programme quality, values are a central feature in this approach. Engagement thereby suggests a kind of quiet insistence that questions of value be addressed throughout the evaluation, at every turn and every decision point – so values become interlaced with, knitted and knotted within evaluative thinking and judging.

In part III, **Uitto** and **Garcia** attempt to extract lessons from evaluative evidence gathered from the Assessment of Development Results conducted by the UNDP Evaluation Office in China and Brazil. They focus on the role played by international cooperation, particularly by UNDP and other international partners, in support of equity-focused public policies. After providing a brief overview of historical trends in inequity in Brazil and China, Uitto and Garcia outline the main findings of the evaluations regarding UNDP contributions towards policies that address inequities in the two countries. Finally, they end with a brief section on lessons learned and conclusions.

Guzman summarizes the challenges and lessons learned in including the transformative paradigm in the methodology used for high-level evaluation of the International Labour Organization's (ILO) discrimination strategy. In line with the Human rights and Gender equality approach to offer diverse perspectives to the evaluation, and to promote participation of different groups of stakeholders, the evaluation required setting-up an appropriate mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to gather and analyse data. The evaluation used a mixed-method approach including (but not limited to) desk reviews, interviews, focus groups, surveys, etc. In addition, the evaluation team took into account not only the policy and normative framework but also carefully discerned power relationships, and identified the structural causes of discrimination in employment and occupation.

Hernández Licona, de la Garza, Paredes and Valdez explain that Mexico is a country with prevailing challenges in various dimensions with regard to social inequities. One of the harshest manifestations of the social gaps that persist in Mexico is the lack of opportunities for the indigenous population, which leads to serious limitations for the exercise of their rights and provides evidence of the social inequities that prevail among the population. In their article, the authors present an assessment of the adequacy and results of social policies in order to analyze the situation of the indigenous people and the government response through public policies.

This book is part of a continuous effort led by UNICEF, in partnership with several key stakeholders, to stimulate the debate on how evaluation can contribute to equitable development results, as well as the sharpening of methodological approaches to ensure that interventions designed to enhance equity can be evaluated in a meaningful manner. This book complements the manual "How to design and manage Equity-focused evaluations" published by UNICEF in 2011; the electronic resource centre managed by UNICEF and UNWomen, available at www.mymande.org; and, the series of webinars with international keynote speakers.

We hope this stream of work will enhance the capacity of the evaluation community to strengthen the relevance and quality of evaluations so as to better inform equitable interventions. I wish you an interesting and inspiring read.

Marco Segone
Editor

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The editor would like to thank the 27 authors for their excellent contributions to this publication, and their engagement in the series of live webinars available at www.mymande.org. In sharing their wisdom and experience, and good practices and lessons learned, they have shown how to conceptualize and manage Equity-focused evaluations.

The richness of partners in this publication, which includes CONEVAL, IDRC, ILO, UNDP and UN Women, testifies to the importance and commitment of international organizations to the theme of this book. The partnership with the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE) and the International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS), the two global evaluation professional associations, as well as the prefaces by the respective Presidents, are especially appreciated.

The editor would like to thank Colin Kirk, Director, UNICEF Evaluation Office, for his continuous support in making this publication, as well as the resource center available at www.mymande.org, possible.

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When human rights is the starting point for evaluation
by Donna Mertens, Department of Educational Foundations and Research, Gallaudet University........25

Strengthening Equity- focused evaluations through insights from feminist theory and approaches
by Katherine Hay, Senior Specialist, Evaluation, International Development Research Centre, Regional Office for South Asia and China........39

Decolonizing evaluation in a developing world. Implications and cautions for Equity-focused evaluations
by Rodney K. Hopson, Duquesne University, Karen E. Kirkhart, S yracuse University and Katrina L. Bledsoe, Education Development Center, Inc.........59

EVALUATION TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS TOWARDS EQUITY, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS[1]

Marco Segone, UNICEF Evaluation Office;
Co-chair, UNEG Taskforce on National Evaluation Capacities;
and former IOCE Vice President

What is equity and why does it matter?

The challenge of achieving equitable development results for children

When world leaders adopted the Millennium Declaration in 2000, they produced an unprecedented international compact, a historic pledge to create a more peaceful, tolerant and equitable world in which the special needs of children, women and those who are worst-off can be met. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are a practical manifestation of the Declaration's aspiration to reduce inequity in human development among nations and peoples by 2015. The past decade has witnessed considerable progress towards the goals of reducing poverty and hunger, combating disease and child mortality, promoting gender equality, expanding education, ensuring safe drinking water and basic sanitation, and building a global partnership for development. But with the MDG deadline only a few years away, it is becoming ever clearer that reaching the poorest and most marginalized communities within countries is pivotal to the realization of the goals (UNICEF, 2010c).

Since 1990, significant progress has been made on several MDGs. However, the gains made in realizing the MDGs are largely based on improvements in national averages. A growing concern is that progress based on national averages can conceal broad and even widening disparities in poverty and child development among regions and within countries. In child survival and most other measures of progress towards the MDGs, sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and the least developed countries have fallen far behind other developing regions and industrialized countries. Within many countries, falling national averages for child mortality conceal widening inequi-

1 Based upon Bamberger M. and Segone M. (2011). *How to design and manage Equity-focused Evaluation*, UNICEF.

ties. The same is true for several other indicators, including early childhood development, education, HIV/AIDS and child protection (UNICEF, 2010d). Disparities hamper development not only in low income countries, but also in middle income countries. A UNICEF study conducted in Brazil (UNICEF Brazil, 2003) showed that compared to rich children, poor children were 21 times more likely to be illiterate. But poverty is not the only cause of inequity. According to the same study, compared with white children, black children were twice as likely not to attend school, and children with disabilities were four times more likely to be illiterate compared to children without disabilities.

These marked disparities in child survival, development and protection point to a simple truth. The MDGs and other international commitments to children can only be fully realized, both to the letter and in the spirit of the Millennium Declaration, through greater emphasis on equity among and within regions and countries (UNICEF, 2010c).

What is equity?

For UNICEF "equity means that all children have an opportunity to survive, develop, and reach their full potential, without discrimination, bias or favoritism" (UNICEF, 2010a). This interpretation is consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which guarantees the fundamental rights of every child, regardless of gender, race, religious beliefs, income, physical attributes, geographical location, or other status.

This means that pro-equity interventions should prioritize worst-off groups[2] with the aim of achieving universal rights for all children. This could be done through interventions addressing the causes of inequity and aimed at improving the well-being of all children, focusing especially on accelerating the rate of progress in improving the well-being of the worst-off children.

Equity is distinguished from equality. The aim of equity-focused policies is not to eliminate all differences so that everyone has the same level of income, health, and education. Rather, the goal is to eliminate the unfair and avoidable circumstances that deprive children of their rights. Therefore, inequities generally arise when certain population groups are unfairly deprived of basic resources that are available to other groups. A disparity is 'unfair' or 'unjust' when

2 As different countries and different organizations use different terminology such as excluded, disadvantaged, marginalized or vulnerable populations, here the term "worst-off groups" is used to refer to those population groups suffering the most due to inequity.

its cause is due to the social context, rather than the biological factors.

While the concept of equity is universal, the causes and consequences of inequity vary across cultures, countries, and communities. Inequity is rooted in a complex range of political, social, and economic factors.

An equity-focused intervention must therefore begin with an analysis of the context in which inequity operates. This analysis informs the design of programme and interventions that are tailored to address the local causes and consequences of inequity. These initiatives must be developed in collaboration with national partners who can help identify culturally appropriate strategies for promoting equity.

Why does equity matter?

Achieving equitable development results...

As explained above, UNICEF states that the MDGs and other international commitments to children can only be fully realized through greater emphasis on equity among and within regions and countries, for the following reasons (UNICEF, 2010c). Firstly, several key international goals for children require universality. One of the most prominent is MDG 2, which seeks universal access to primary education. Logically, this objective can only be met if the children currently excluded, who are the poorest and the most marginalized, are brought into the school system. Similarly, it will be impossible for global campaigns seeking the eradication of polio, or virtual elimination of measles and maternal and neonatal tetanus, to succeed without addressing the poorest communities within countries. Secondly, having reduced the global under-five mortality rate by one third since 1990, countries now have few years to do so again to meet the conditions of MDG 4. Since most child deaths occur in the most deprived communities and households within developing countries, achieving this goal is only possible by extending to them the fight against childhood illness and under-nutrition. Thirdly, breaking the cycle of poverty, discrimination, educational disadvantage and violence experienced by many girls and young women is only possible through equity-focused approaches that eliminate gender-based barriers to essential services, protection and girls' knowledge of their rights. Fourthly, new technologies and interventions can contribute to faster gains for the poor if applied equitably and at scale.

...for socially fair, politically stable and economically strong societies

In *The Spirit Level*, Picket and Wilkinson (2009) show that in richer countries inequity is associated with a wide range of social problems including: levels of trust; mental illnesses; life expectancy; infant mortality; obesity; educational performance; drug use; teenage births; homicides; and, imprisonment rates. In most cases these indicators are not closely related to the per capita income or rate of growth of a country, and so higher rates of growth tend not to be associated with reducing social problems. Also, available evidence for both developed and developing countries does not suggest that inequity is reduced over time by high rates of economic growth. In addition, equity is important for the following reasons (Segone, 2003):

- **Inequity constitutes a violation of human rights**. Inequity remains among the most important human rights challenges facing the world community. A human rights-based approach means that, in the light of the principle of universality and non-discrimination, all children, from birth to childhood and adolescence, boys and girls, of whatever color, race, language or religion and wherever they may live, need to be considered (Santos Pais, 1999). It means that the situation of poor people is viewed not only in terms of welfare outcomes but also in terms of the obligation to prevent and respond to human rights violations. The High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that human rights are about ensuring dignity, equity and security for all human beings everywhere. (UN NGLS, 2002).
- **Inequity is one of the major obstacles in taking advantage of the richness of diversity**. If human beings do not all have the same opportunity, some groups are discriminated against and excluded from society. Inequity means that society is not giving these individuals and groups equal opportunity to contribute to the development of the country. It means that it is focusing mainly on one "cultural model" and is not taking advantage of diverse "cultural models", which can foster societal innovation and creativity.
- **Equity has a significant positive impact in reducing monetary poverty**. Monetary poverty is very sensitive to distribution changes, and small changes in income distribution can have a large effect on poverty. For a given level of average income, education, land ownership etc., an increase in monetary

inequity will almost always imply higher levels of both absolute and relative deprivation and vice versa (Maxwell and Hanmer, 1999).

- **Equity has a positive impact in the construction of a democratic society**. Equity facilitates citizen participation in political and civil life. A citizen's capacity to participate in political and civil life and to influence public policies is linked to his/her income and education. In a political system based on citizen's income, significant income inequity means significant inequity in the political system. This leads to higher inequity in the educational system, due to lower investment in quality education. This means poor children attend lower quality schools and therefore a wider gap is created between education and capacity (the "human capital") acquired by the poor children attending low quality public schools, and the rich children attending high quality private schools. This vicious cycle closes with the inequity in education impacting negatively on income inequity, as income is directly linked to the level of education.
- **Prolonged inequity may lead to the "naturalization" of inequity**. In several countries institutional and historical origins of inequity are multiple, but its persistence, or worsening, over the decades makes inequity something "natural". When inequity is perceived as a natural phenomenon (the so called "naturalization of inequity"), societies develop theoretical, political and ideological resistances to identifying and fighting inequity as a priority. Along the same lines, inequity may even create self-fulfilling expectation and acceptance of lower growth. If workers are paid according to social class, gender or race/ethnicity, rather than by what they achieve, this reduces the incentive to work/earn more.
- **Inequity may lead to political conflict and instability**. Last but not least, unequal opportunities for social groups in society – and perhaps more importantly, inequities as perceived by these groups – are often also a significant factor behind social unrest. This may lead to crime or even violent conflict, as well as lower investment and more waste of resources from bargaining over short-term distribution of rents. Highly polarised societies are unlikely to pursue policies that have long-term benefits for all, since each social group will be reluctant to make long-term commitment, dedicated as they are to secure their own wealth. Along the same line of argument, this instability also reduces

government's ability to react to shocks. The economic costs of external shocks are magnified by the distributional conflicts they trigger, and this diminishes the productivity with which a society's resources are utilised. This is largely because social polarisation makes it more difficult to build consensus about policy changes in response to crisis.

What are the implications for the evaluation function?

The renewed focus on equity poses important challenges – and opportunities – to the evaluation function: What are the methodological implications in designing, conducting, managing and using Equity-focused evaluations? What are the questions an Equity-focused evaluation should address? What are the potential challenges in managing Equity-focused evaluations? This document, together with the manual on "How to design and manage Equity-focused Evaluations", the webinars and electronic resources available at www.mymande.org, represents a first attempt to address these challenges.

Defining Equity-focused evaluations

What is an Equity-focused evaluation?

An Equity-focused evaluation is a judgment made of the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability – and, in humanitarian settings, coverage, connectedness and coherence – of policies, programmes and projects concerned with achieving equitable development results. It involves a rigorous, systematic and objective process in the design, analysis and interpretation of information in order to answer specific questions, including those of concern to worst-off groups. It provides assessments of what works and what does not work to reduce inequity, and it highlights intended and unintended results for worst-off groups as well as the gap between best-off and worst-off groups. It provides strategic lessons to guide decision-makers and to inform stakeholders. Equity-focused evaluations provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful, enabling the timely incorporation of findings, recommendations and lessons into the decision-making process.

Why are Equity-focused evaluations needed?

Equity-focused evaluations look explicitly at the equity dimensions of interventions, going beyond conventional quantitative data to the anal-

ysis of behavioral change, complex social processes and attitudes, and collecting information on difficult-to-reach socially marginalized groups. In addition, Equity-focused evaluations constitute a pro-equity intervention by empowering worst-off groups, as described below.

It is however important to highlight that while some new analytical tools are introduced (particularly the bottleneck supply and demand framework, and systems approaches to evaluate equity interventions in complex environments), most of the Equity-focused evaluation approaches, as well as data collection and analysis techniques, are built on methods which are already familiar to many practitioners in development evaluation. So the emphasis is on refining and refocusing existing approaches and techniques – and enhancing national capacities to use them – rather than starting with completely new ones.

Purposes of Equity-focused evaluations

Equity-focused evaluation contributes to good governance of equity-focused policies, programmes and projects for the purposes explained below. These will vary according to context, interventions content and partner interests, among other factors.

Accountability. Equity-focused evaluation ensures that reporting on relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of pro-equity interventions is evidence-based.

Organizational learning and improvement. Knowledge generated through Equity-focused evaluations provides critical input into major decisions to be taken to improve equity-focused interventions.

Evidence-based policy advocacy. Knowledge generated through an Equity-focused evaluation provides evidence to influence major policy decisions to ensure that existing and future policies will enhance equity and improve the well-being of worst-off groups. Equity-focused evaluation provides information that has the potential to leverage major partner resources – and political commitment – for pro-equity programmes/policies.

Contribute to Knowledge Management. Understanding what works and what does not work in pro-equity interventions and ensuring that lessons learned are disseminated to national and global knowledge networks helps accelerate learning, avoid error and improve efficiency and effectiveness. It is important to harvest the evidence-base, particularly resulting from innovative program-

ming to foster equity, to demonstrate what works in diverse country contexts.

Empowerment of worst-off groups. If Equity-focused evaluation is to be truly relevant to interventions whose objective is to improve the well-being of worst-off groups, the Equity-focused evaluation processes must be used to foster wider participation of worst-off groups, facilitate dialogue between policymakers and representatives of worst-off groups, build consensus, and create “buy-in” to recommendations. In addition, involving these groups in Equity-focused evaluation can be empowering. It imparts skills, information and self-confidence and so enhances the “evaluative thinking”. It can also strengthen the capacity of worst-off groups to be effective evidence-based advocates. Employing Equity-focused evaluation as a programming strategy to achieve empowerment can be very effective, and it can reinforce the other purposes of evaluation.

National Capacity development for equity-focused M&E systems. Countries (central and local authorities, governmental and civil society organizations) should own and lead their own national equity-focused M&E systems. International organizations should support national equity-focused monitoring and evaluation capacity development to ensure that it is sustainable and that the information and data produced are relevant to local contexts, while being in compliance with M&E standards (Segone, 2009 and 2010).

Equity-focused evaluations as pro-equity interventions

As already seen above, Equity-focused evaluation processes should be used to empower worst-off groups to the maximum extent possible, as well as to ensure that evaluation questions are relevant to the situation of these groups. This has two major implications.

First, equity-focused evaluation should be culturally sensitive and pay high attention to ethics. Evaluators should be sensitive to local beliefs, manners and customs and act with integrity and honesty in their relationships with all stakeholders, including worst-off groups, as stated in the standards for evaluation in the UN System (UNEG 2005). In line with the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other human rights conventions, evaluators undertaking Equity-focused evaluation should operate in accordance with international values. Evaluators should be aware of differences in culture; local customs; religious beliefs and practices; personal interaction

and gender roles; disability; age and ethnicity; and, be mindful of the potential implications of these differences when planning, carrying out and reporting on evaluations. In addition, the evaluators should ensure that their contacts with individuals are characterized by respect. Evaluators should avoid offending the dignity and self-respect of those persons with whom they come in contact in the course of the evaluation. Knowing that evaluation might often negatively affect the interests of some stakeholders, the evaluators should conduct the evaluation and communicate its purpose and results in a way that clearly respects the dignity and self-worth of the worst-off groups.

Secondly, equity-focused evaluation should use participatory and/or empowerment evaluation processes to ensure worst-off groups are involved and/or co-leading the Equity-focused evaluation process starting at the design phase. Participatory Equity-focused evaluation processes should pay particular attention to existing imbalances in power relationships between worst-off groups and other groups in society. This is to avoid worst-off groups participating in the Equity-focused evaluation being merely "providers" of information or even of being manipulated or excluded. Selection of stakeholders in Equity-focused evaluation processes should ensure that the processes and methods used serve to correct, not reinforce, patterns of inequity and exclusion. In addition, Equity-focused evaluations must also be aware of power relations within worst-off groups. In many ethnic minorities and disadvantaged groups, certain sectors are further marginalized on the basis of factors such as age, gender, land ownership, relative wealth or region of origin. Great cultural sensitivity is required to respect cultural norms while ensuring that marginalized groups are able to participate and have access to services.

Equity-focused evaluations should also involve young people and children as appropriate, since young people and children are often among the worst-off groups. The Convention on the Right of the Child provides clear initial guidance for the participation of children in evaluation, when it states that the views of children must be considered and taken into account in all matters that affect them. They should not be used merely as data providers or subjects of investigation (CRC, 1990). Article 13 of the CRC states that children have the right to freedom of expression, which includes seeking, receiving and giving information and ideas through speaking, writing or in print, through art or any other media of the child's choice. Their participation is not a mere formality; children must be fully informed and

must understand the consequences and impact of expressing their opinions. The corollary is that children are free not to participate, and should not be pressured. Participation is a right, not an obligation.

Conclusion

While Equity-focused evaluations pose new challenges, they also constitute an opportunity to make evaluation an action for change to achieve development results with an equity focus. The resources and material UNICEF and partners are making available constitute an important contribution to enhance national capacities in equity-focused evaluations.

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HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY IN EVALUATION[1]

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Human rights & gender equality

Human rights and gender equality (HR & GE) are the fundamental dimensions that guide the work of the United Nations (UN). However, in 2007, the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), a professional network that brings together the units responsible for evaluation in the UN system, recognized a gap in the integration of these important dimensions in evaluations of the UN's work. In response, it set up an HR & GE Taskforce to develop guidance on this issue. This year, the Taskforce has released a handbook containing practical guidance for evaluators that it hopes will serve as a step towards addressing this gap. The handbook is entitled: Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation – Towards UNEG Guidance.[2]

What are human rights and gender equality?

Human rights (HR) are the civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights inherent to all human beings, whatever their nationality; place of residence; sex; national or ethnic origin; colour; religion; language; or any other status. All human beings are entitled to these rights without discrimination. They are universal; inalienable; interdependent; indivisible; equal and non-discriminatory; and expressed in, and guaranteed by, normative frameworks and laws that lay down the obligations of States to act in order to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals or groups. The term 'duty-bearers' reflects the obligations of the State towards 'rights-holders' which represent all individuals in the concerned State.[3] In addition to the Universal Declaration of Human

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1 This article is based on: *Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation – Towards UNEG Guidance*, UNEG, 2011

2 The handbook can be found at the following site: http://www.unevaluation.org/HRGE_Guidance.

3 Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation – Towards UNEG Guidance, p 12

Rights (UDHR) – the overarching document that formally recognizes universally agreed human rights – there are nine core international human rights treaties that further delineate and codify the rights contained in the UDHR[4]. The strategy for implementing human rights in UN programming is called the Human Rights-Based Approach to programming.

UN common understanding of the Human Rights-Based Approach to Programming

1. All programmes of development cooperation, policies and technical assistance should further the realization of human rights as laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments.
2. Human rights standards contained in, and principles derived from, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments guide all development cooperation and programming in all sectors and in all phases of the programme process.
3. Development cooperation contributes to the development of the capacities of "duty-bearers" to meet their obligations and/or of "rights-holders" to claim their rights.

Source: http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FAQen.pdf

Gender equality (GE) refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men, girls and boys. It implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a 'women's issue', but concerns, and should fully engage, men as well as women. Equality between women and men, girls and boys is seen both as a human rights' issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development. It is also an essential component for the realization of all human rights. Progress toward gender equality requires changes within the family, culture, politics and the economy, in addition to changes in laws and their application. The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA) and the Millennium Declaration commit the UN to

4 See http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/index.htm#core

promoting GE in its work.[5] Gender mainstreaming is the strategy adopted by the UN for integrating gender equality in programming.

> ***1997 UN ECOSOC Resolution on Gender Mainstreaming***
>
> Gender mainstreaming is defined as "the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is gender equality."
>
> *Source: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/GMS.PDF, Chap IV A Para 4 I A.*

Why is it important to integrate human rights and gender equality in evaluation?

Evaluations play a crucial role in examining to what extent UN interventions benefit rights-holders (particularly those most likely to have their rights violated), and how they strengthen the capacity of duty-bearers or other actors to fulfil obligations and responsibilities, and strengthen accountability mechanisms and monitor and advocate for compliance with international standards on HR & GE. Evaluation can also shed light on how these processes occur and can call attention to the exclusion of certain groups.

An evaluation that neglects or omits consideration of HR & GE deprives the UN system of evidence about who does (and does not) benefit from its interventions, risks perpetuating discriminatory structures and practices where interventions do not follow UN policy in these areas. It may therefore miss opportunities for demonstrating how effective interventions are carried out.

What does it mean to integrate human rights and gender equality in evaluation?

An evaluation that is HR & GE responsive addresses the programming principles required by a human rights based approach and

5 See http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsandefinitions.htm) and UN (2008), Report on indicators for promoting and monitoring the implementation of human rights, pp. 4-10, paras 5 and 12, http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/icm-mc/docs/HRI.MC.2008.3EN.pdf

gender mainstreaming strategy. It contributes to the social and economic change process that is at the heart of most development programming by identifying and analysing the inequalities, discriminatory practices and unjust power relations that are central to development problems. HR & GE responsive evaluations can lead to more effective interventions and better, more sustainable results.

Given the mandate to support and incorporate HR & GE in all UN work, these dimensions need to be paid special attention when evaluating UN interventions. This requires attention to the interrelated principles of inclusion, participation and fair power relations.

- **Inclusion.** Evaluating HR & GE requires attention to be paid to the beneficiary groups in the intervention under review. Some groups may be negatively affected by an intervention. An evaluation must acknowledge who these stakeholders are, how they are affected, and how to minimize these negative effects.
- **Participation.** Evaluating HR & GE must be participatory. Stakeholders in the intervention have a right to be consulted and to participate in decisions about what will be evaluated and how the evaluation will be done. In addition, the evaluation will assess whether the stakeholders have been able to participate in the design, implementation and monitoring of the intervention. It is important to measure the participation of stakeholder groups in the process as well as how they benefit from the results.
- **Fair Power Relations.** Both HR & GE seek, inter alia, to balance power relations between or within advantaged and disadvantaged groups. In addition, evaluators should be aware of the power of their own position, which can influence responses to queries through their interactions with stakeholders. There is a need to be sensitive to these dynamics.

Additionally, evaluators should preferably make use of mixed evaluation methods. Information from mixed methods can assist in the triangulation of data and increase reliability and validity, as well as being useful for exploring whether/why different stakeholder groups were affected differently by the intervention.

How are human rights and gender equality taken into account when preparing for an evaluation?

Before embarking on an evaluation, it may be worthwhile considering the evaluability of the HR & GE dimensions of the intervention. The process of assessing evaluability may entail the review of key documents and consultations with key stakeholders to capture the extent to which the HR & GE dimensions were incorporated in the design and implementation of the intervention.

Evaluators will often find different levels of evaluability in terms of HR & GE dimensions in the interventions to be evaluated. The UNEG handbook provides guidance on how to integrate these elements, regardless of whether evaluability is found to be low, medium or high.

- When evaluability is high, the HR & GE issues have been considered and are visible in all features of the intervention design, including in the contextualized intervention theory and intervention logic (log frame, indicators, activities, M&E systems). The design has benefited from HR &GE analyses and active stakeholder participation. When evaluability is high the role of evaluators/evaluation managers may be to ensure that the HR & GE dimensions are fully reflected in the evaluation terms of reference. It may also entail determining, with stakeholders, whether all areas are adequately covered and whether new methods and tools need to be introduced to capture any changes in intervention context and circumstances.
- Medium evaluability signifies certain coverage of HR & GE issues. It may be mentioned in various aspects of the design and intervention logic, but may not be fully articulated, or inclusion may be limited to a few disaggregated indicators (such as number of men and women). Important stakeholder groups may not have been included and there may be limited data on HR & GE issues in implementation and activity records. In addressing medium evaluability the evaluators/managers may seek to understand the reasons for such limitations, and the consequences for the programme implementation and results, highlight them in the evaluation terms of reference and include tools and methods in the evaluation design that would generate new information on HR & GE issues, and strengthen stakeholder participation.

- Low evaluability is indicative of scenarios where the intervention theory failed to consider the HR & GE dimensions in its design, implementation, monitoring and reporting. It entails an absence of disaggregated data and the participation of relevant stakeholder groups. When evaluability is low, evaluators/managers may reconsider all essential design features for the inclusion of the HR & GE dimensions, including why they were not covered, how this can be addressed in the evaluation terms of reference, how a relevant stakeholder analysis can be included and what the key data sources would be. The evaluation may focus on how lack of HR & GE perspective can compromise results. Provision should also be made for assertive recommendations, addressing the HR & GE dimensions, to be included in the final evaluation report.

An evaluability assessment may be a distinct exercise that is conducted well ahead of the evaluation, in which case it may also contribute to improving the design of an intervention in terms of its integration of HR & GE dimensions. Alternatively, it may be conducted in closer proximity to the evaluation and thus be a lighter process. The actual type of assessment would depend on the context. The UNEG handbook will serve to help evaluators/managers to make this judgement.

How are human rights and gender equality integrated into the evaluation terms of reference?

Once the evaluability assessment has been completed, the evaluation terms of reference can be prepared. A number of processes are typically involved, and HR & GE dimensions should be applied in each of them:

- including the HR & GE dimension as an explicit purpose/objective of the evaluation;
- identifying and engaging the stakeholders who will participate, and determining how they will participate;
- including the HR & GE dimension in standard evaluation criteria;
- framing the evaluation questions;
- selecting the indicators that will be used; and
- selecting the evaluation team.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders who are duty-bearers or rights-holders have special interests or responsibilities in the intervention. Evaluations should strive for the participation of both groups to ensure inclusion of balanced and diverse perspectives.

Duty-bearers may include government entities; officials; leaders; funding agencies; and those responsible for planning, funding or implementing the intervention being evaluated. Rights-holders may include groups and individuals ultimately affected or excluded by the intervention, disaggregated by age, sex and other relevant parameters; and other organizations with interests in the intervention or its outcomes, including women's organizations and other civil society organizations.

It is important to consider the role that each group of stakeholders might play in the evaluation, the gains from their involvement, the stage of the evaluation at which they can most usefully be engaged, and the ways in which they might be able to participate and their needs assessed in order to inform the evaluation. The principle of inclusion should guide the analysis. The UNEG handbook provides a useful HR & GE Stakeholder Analysis Matrix to guide evaluators/managers in making such decisions. Examples of questions in relation to stakeholder participation are:

- Beneficiaries, implementers, rights-holders and duty-bearers can be involved in the process with varying degrees of intensity. What will be the implications in terms of effort, time-line and budget?
- Is there a clear communication strategy with all stakeholders regarding who will participate, who will be consulted and who will make decisions when there are differences of opinion?
- Have the gains in credibility of the evaluation results from a particular level of participation been considered?

Evaluation criteria

The evaluation criteria commonly used in the UN are those developed by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD-DAC) – relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. The UNEG handbook provides examples of the ways in which HR & GE dimensions can be integrated into each of these criteria. For example, under the relevance criterion the evaluator might consider the extent to which

the intervention complies with and contributes to the relevant international and regional conventions, declarations and international agreements, and the extent to which it was informed by analyses of human rights and gender issues and/or the needs and interests of diverse groups of stakeholders.

Evaluators might also consider whether criteria derived directly from HR & GE principles can be applied in the evaluation. These principles include equality, participation, social transformation, inclusiveness and empowerment.

Evaluation questions

The questions to be answered from the evaluation must be aligned with the evaluation criteria and must relate to each stage of the intervention, from design and planning, through implementation to results achieved. Different interventions and different evaluations will obviously require different questions, but a matrix in the UNEG handbook suggests some basic questions that may be a good starting point for the evaluator seeking to ensure that HR & GE dimensions are integrated meaningfully into his or her work. For example, under the effectiveness criterion, the evaluator might ask:

- Design and planning: Did the intervention's theory of change incorporate HR & GE dimensions?
- Implementation: During implementation, were there systematic and appropriate efforts to include various groups of stakeholders, including those who are most likely to have their rights violated?
- Results: What were the main results achieved by the intervention towards the realization of HR & GE?

Specifying these questions in some detail will also enable evaluators to identify the type of information that will be needed in order to answer them.

Indicators

Formulating indicators of HR & GE will assist the evaluator to assess the progress made on those dimensions as a result of the intervention and to identify the beneficiaries. The handbook offers advice for formulating both qualitative and quantitative indicators in the context of a particular intervention, and includes a number of examples drawn from specific types of interventions. A quantitative indicator of empowerment, for example, is the proportion of women and men in different stakeholder groups in decision-making

positions in local, national and sub-national government. A qualitative indicator is the change in access to information about claims and decisions related to human rights violations. More detailed examples are included in an Annex to the UNEG handbook.

Evaluation team

If the evaluation is to address HR & GE in an effective way, then the evaluation team must have the knowledge and commitment to apply these perspectives. While specialist expertise will be invaluable if it can be accessed, every member of the team should understand the UN mandates on HR & GE, and their application, and be committed to their inclusion in the evaluation. The *UNEG Ethical Guidelines* and *Code of Conduct for Evaluators in the UN System*[6] provide guidelines on ethics and behaviours for evaluators that are aligned with these approaches and are a further means of ensuring inclusiveness. They are reproduced in the UNEG handbook for the benefit of evaluators, along with desirable attributes for competence to integrate HR & GE within an evaluation team. Consider how diversity in the evaluation team can ensure a multiplicity of viewpoints and inclusivity.

How are human rights and gender equality integrated during the evaluation itself?

Integrating HR & GE dimensions is just as important throughout the conduct of the evaluation – the heart of the evaluation process – as it is in the planning phase. The UNEG handbook therefore suggests careful consideration when:

- selecting the evaluation methodology;
- collecting and analysing data;
- preparing the evaluation report; and
- disseminating the evaluation findings and developing a management response.

Selecting appropriate methodology

While all evaluation methodological designs are conducive to the integration of HR & GE dimensions, the use of a mixed methods approach is more likely to generate robust and accurate data on

6 See http://www.unevaluation.org/ethicalguidelines and http://www.unevaluation.org/unegcodeofconduct

the extent to which HR & GE were integrated in an intervention by allowing different perspectives to be heard, including those usually marginalized. For example, an HR & GE stakeholder analysis conducted in the preparation stage can help evaluators to select appropriate tools to maximize the participation of traditionally vulnerable and/or marginalized groups who may not normally be consulted during evaluation processes.

Other aspects to be considered in developing an HR & GE responsive methodology include ensuring an adequate sample that is inclusive of both women and men from diverse stakeholder groups; ensuring that data collection instruments allow for collection of disaggregated data; and, ensuring triangulation of data by collecting information from both rights-holders and duty-bearers.

Collecting and analysing data

HR & GE dimensions can be integrated in commonly used data collection and analysis methods by including HR & GE questions in the data collection tools and conducting an HR & GE analysis of the data collected. However, it also involves considering these dimensions in the process of collecting the data.

For example, evaluators organizing a focus group discussion (FGD) should consider in advance any barriers to participation when making decisions about the timing and location of the FGD and the composition of the group itself. Questions that evaluations might ask themselves include: What are the power dynamics within the group? Will women feel comfortable to speak freely if men are also present in the room? Evaluators can also ensure that other common tools, such as surveys, are in the format and language most appropriate for each stakeholder group. In some cases, surveys may need to be modified specifically for each group.

Preparing the evaluation report

Reports give evaluators the opportunity to highlight the importance of integrating HR & GE dimensions in an intervention, and the shortcomings derived from not doing so, and to illuminate the challenges and lessons learned and provide a clear explanation of the limitations or obstacles faced in integrating HR & GE in the design and implementation of the intervention, and in the evaluation process itself. This can help to stimulate future improvements and encourage actions to address limitations. Including specific recommendations on HR & GE dimensions will highlight specific areas for action by management.

Integrating HR & GE in evaluation reporting involves not only the inclusion of substantive elements in the report, but also thoughtful decisions on the most suitable forms of reporting. Reporting can move beyond the traditional written form and involve consideration of the different audiences for the findings and their specific information needs. Evaluators should ask themselves:

- How can evaluation findings be made accessible and understandable to both duty-bearers and rights-holders?
- Will different products need to be developed to ensure access to information?
- Has attention been paid to language and images to avoid stereotyping?

It may be necessary to make use of alternative forms of reporting, such as video, or to translate the report into relevant languages to ensure access to the relevant groups in order to avoid further marginalizing or disadvantaging them. Key findings may also be highlighted for evidence-based advocacy.

Dissemination and management response

Agency policies normally guide evaluation managers in the UN in developing dissemination strategies for evaluations. The integration of HR & GE in the process requires efforts to provide barrier-free access to the findings through translation, printing of hard copies and making use of relevant dissemination channels, among others, to reach both duty-bearers and rights-holders and direct and indirect users of the evaluation. These include human rights or gender organizations that may not have been involved in the intervention but for whom the findings would be of interest and use.

A management response which addresses the HR & GE recommendations, and provides action points in response, is crucial for enhancing the use of evaluation findings related to HR & GE issues, and to ensuring that the learning on HR & GE is incorporated into future practice. While normally developed by management, diverse stakeholder participation (including duty-bearers and rights-holders) in the process of developing the management response is one way of incorporating HR & GE dimensions into this last phase of the evaluation.

Conclusion

The development of guidance on the integration of HR & GE in evaluation fills a gap identified by UNEG. It enables evaluators to meet the expectations of the UN system to incorporate these dimensions into their work. This in turn will contribute to ensuring that HR & GE dimensions inform all aspects of the UN's activities from policy analysis to programme planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation. The UNEG handbook constitutes an authoritative reference for UN evaluative work and is of relevance for the wider evaluation community. The handbook will be further refined on the basis of user feedback.

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WHEN HUMAN RIGHTS IS THE STARTING POINT FOR EVALUATION

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"Citizens of former colonial powers are often baffled as to why indigenous or colonized peoples seem to suffer disproportionately from alcoholism, homelessness, mental illness, disease, lethargy, fatalism, or dependency. They cannot fathom… why many of their children cannot stay in school, or why many do not thrive in the contemporary, industrialized world of big cities and corporate capitalism. They are surprised that their development programmes don't produce the desired results and their attempts to alleviate the conditions under which so many indigenous or colonized peoples suffer may meet with passivity, indifference, resistance, or sometimes hostility."

Nobel Peace Prize winner
Wangari Maathai (2010, p. 172)

The United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) stands as testament that the pursuit of human rights and the furtherance of social justice are the life-blood of this international organization. This declaration established that all people have a right to life; liberty; security of the person; equal protection under the law; freedom of movement; marriage with the free and full consent of the intending spouses; ownership of property; freedom of thought and religion; freedom of opinion and expression; peaceful assembly; participation in governance; work in just and favorable working conditions and education. Two points of tension are immediately apparent when considering this universal declaration of rights. Firstly, all people do not live in conditions in which these rights are afforded to them, as witnessed by world-wide events of resistance to repression and discrimination. Secondly, throughout the years since 1948, the UN has recognized that a universal declaration did not result in universal access to rights. Their recognition of the continued need for attention to human rights reflects awareness that specific groups of people suffer the denial of their rights more than others.

To remedy these disparities between people of privilege and those who are marginalized, the UN passed additional conventions and

declarations aimed at recognizing the most marginalized groups, including racial groups who are discriminated against (UN, 1969); people with disabilities (UN, 2006a); women (UN, 1979); children (UN, 1990a); migrant workers and their families (UN, 1990b); and, indigenous peoples (UN, 2006b). These declarations and conventions provide a partial list of the bases for discrimination and oppression that require focused attention if we are indeed to have universal human rights. The adoption of the Millennium Development Goals, and a review of progress toward meeting those goals, reinforces the need to attend to the poorest and most marginalized populations, including those who live in remote areas or urban slums, those who represent ethnic or racial minorities, and members of religious groups that experience discrimination (UNICEF, 2010).

The broader international development community has responded by calling for programmes that explicitly address the needs of the poorest and most marginalized communities, with conscious attention to the full spectrum of their diversity (Mertens, 2009; 2010; Mertens & Wilson, in press). This is evident in UNICEF's call for equity focused approaches in programme decisions (UN, 2010b), and a human rights approach to evaluation (Segone, 2009). On UNwomen (formerly UNIFEM) also supports the need to integrate human rights approaches with evaluation strategies, which focus on gender equity (Sanz, 2009). The UNDP Evaluation Policy was revised in 2011 to reflect a human rights focus:

"Evaluation is guided by the people-centred approach of UNDP to development, which enhances capabilities, choices and rights for all men and women. Evaluation abides by universally shared values of equity, justice, gender equality and respect for diversity" (p. 3).

This chapter addresses the challenges of planning, implementing and using evaluations that emerge when human rights is the starting point for policymakers, funders, programme developers and evaluators. It also takes on the difficult territory associated with gathering wisdom across small-scale evaluations to provide a human rights grounding for national level policymaking. Situating oneself as an evaluator in a human rights position requires re-thinking how evaluation is conceptualized, practiced, and used in international development. I make the argument that this re-framing of evaluation from this starting point based on human rights provides fertile ground for obtaining meaningful answers to questions about the efficacy of international development interventions.

Transformative paradigm

The transformative paradigm provides one philosophical framework that provides guidance for practical methods in evaluation, which align the human rights mission of international development organizations with a human rights approach to evaluation. The transformative paradigm provides a metaphysical umbrella to guide evaluators, which is applicable to people who experience discrimination and oppression on whatever basis, including (but not limited to): race/ethnicity; disability; immigrant status; political conflicts; sexual orientation; poverty; gender; age; or the multitude of other characteristics that are associated with less access to social justice. In addition the transformative paradigm is applicable to the study of the power structures that perpetuate social inequities. Finally, indigenous peoples and scholars from marginalized communities have much to teach us about respect for culture and the generation of knowledge for social change. Hence, there is not a single context of social inquiry in which the transformative paradigm would not have the potential to raise issues of social justice and human rights (Mertens, 2009, p. 4). Thus, the philosophical assumptions of the transformative paradigm serve to address the interests of not only the most deprived groups, but also to interrogate the power structures that can either support the attainment of human rights or can serve to sustain an oppressive status quo.

The transformative paradigm builds on the early work of Guba and Lincoln (2005), in defining the philosophical belief systems that constitute a paradigm in the evaluation context. They proposed that a paradigm was made up of four categories of philosophical beliefs:

1. *The axiological assumption* concerns the nature of ethics.
2. *The ontological assumption* concerns the nature of reality.
3. *The epistemological assumption* concerns the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the knower and that which would be known.
4. *The methodological assumption* concerns the nature of systematic inquiry.

The philosophical assumptions associated with the transformative paradigm provide a framework for exploring the use of a human rights lens in evaluation (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Transformative philosophical beliefs

Axiological Assumption:

- Identification and respect for cultural norms that support human rights and social justice;
- Identification and challenge of cultural norms that sustain an oppressive system;
- Reciprocity – what evaluators give back to the community;
- Resilience – recognition and validation of the knowledge, expertise, and strengths in the community;
- Sustainability – facilitating conditions such that actions to continue to enhance social justice and human rights are feasible once the evaluator leaves the community;
- Recognition of limitations: Not over-stepping the evaluator's boundaries or over- promising.

Ontological Assumption:

- Recognizes that different versions of reality exist;
- All versions of reality are not equal;
- Recognizes privilege given to what is perceived to be real, based on: social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, gender, religion, and disability perspectives;
- Interrogates versions of reality that sustain oppressive systems;
- Makes visible versions of reality that have the potential to further human rights.

Epistemological Assumption:

- Establishment of an interactive link between the evaluator and stakeholders;
- Acknowledges that knowledge is socially and historically located;
- Explicit acknowledgement of power inequities; and
- Development of a trusting relationship.

Methodological Assumption:

- Evaluators need qualitative assessment and dialogue time in the beginning of their planning in order to ascertain the cultural context in which they are working;
- Qualitative and quantitative data facilitate responsiveness to different stakeholders and issues;
- Methods used need to capture the contextual complexity and be appropriate to the cultural groups in the evaluation;
- A cyclical design can be used to make use of interim findings throughout the evaluation study; and
- Follow-up is needed to facilitate use to enhance the potential to achieve the strengthening of human rights.

Based on Mertens (2011)

Transformative axiological assumption

The transformative axiological assumption is discussed first because it provides the foundation for the subsequent assumptions. As evaluators reflect upon their beliefs about the nature of ethics, they first need to identify those ethical principles that guide their work. If they determine that the furtherance of human rights and the pursuit of social justice are the underlying ethical principles, then their beliefs are reflective of the transformative axiological assumption. Adopting such a position brings with it the need to consider differences of power and culture also as ethical issues. The questions then become: How can this evaluation contribute to social justice and human rights? The corollary being: What do I do differently in the evaluation in order to act upon these ethical principles?

A first methodological implication that emanates from this ethical stance is the need to identify the cultural norms and beliefs that are present in the targeted communities. In order to engage in culturally respectful ways, we need to include mechanisms for entering communities that permit identification of these norms and beliefs, and to understand the implications of those norms, either to support the pursuit of human rights or to sustain an oppressive system. For example, the African tradition related to “cleansing” a woman when her husband or child dies by bringing in a man from another village to have sexual relations with her is a practice that sustains an oppressive system and results in the continued spread of HIV/AIDS. This is a tradition that needs to be understood and challenged as sustaining an oppressive and dangerous practice. On the other hand, the African belief in Ubuntu (“I am because we are”) serves as a belief that can support this challenge and lead to the Africans resolving the conflict between their beliefs in favor of that which is more humane.

What is the role of the evaluator in such a context? The transformative evaluator will identify, through respectful interactions, those cultural norms, that are supportive of human rights and those that support an oppressive system. The evaluator can engage with communities by arranging for culturally appropriate opportunities to address those norms and beliefs that conflict with the pursuit of human rights. They can insure that all stakeholder groups, especially those who are poorest or most marginalized, have a platform for authentic engagement with the evaluator. They can clarify that part of the conducting of an ethical evaluation is inclusion of the goal

to leave the community better off than before the evaluation was undertaken. This means that the evaluator proactively addresses issues of reciprocity, sustainability and how the evaluation can contribute to the possibility of taking action to enhance social justice and human rights after the evaluator leaves the community.

As Maathai (2010, p. 130) noted:

"Poor people need to be engaged in their own development, and, by extension, in expanding the democratic space that many African societies desperately need. Just as communities should be mobilized to combat malaria, or HIV/AIDS, for instance, so they must work together to fight the scourges of failed leadership, corruption, and moral blindness. However, because the poor are more likely to be uneducated, illiterate, and ignored, and to feel powerless, this requires both political and economic commitment, as well as patience and persistence, since change does not occur overnight".

Although Maathi's comments are situated in the African context, they have relevance for the broader communities of poor and marginalized peoples. In such communities, the people may have lost sight of their strengths as a community. The evaluator can work with the people to explore their strengths and to validate their knowledge as having value because it is rooted in an experience that few evaluators and policymakers have had. This axiological assumption has specific implications for the transformative ontological assumptions.

Transformative ontological assumption

As alluded to in the previous paragraph, people with different experience-bases will often have different perceptions of reality. Thus, the transformative ontological assumption leads the evaluator to recognize that different versions of reality exist and that all versions of reality are not equal. The transformative evaluator has the responsibility of uncovering the different versions of reality that exist and to interrogate the basis for privileging one version of reality over another on the grounds of different social; political; cultural; socio-economic; gender; age; religion; geographic; and, disability perspectives. Just as different beliefs and norms are associated with either support for, or inhibiting human rights, the versions of reality need to be examined on the same basis. For example, if people in power perceive that it is too expensive to try to address the needs of the poorest and most marginalized people, then it is not

likely that the poor people will receive the support they need for a good quality of life. However, a version of reality that holds that on moral grounds alone (and perhaps on economic grounds as well, see UNICEF, 2010) we have an obligation to address the needs of the poor and marginalized, holds the potential to actually further the human rights agenda.

From the transformative ontological stance, the evaluator needs to ask questions about the quality of the evaluation that focus on the extent to which the evaluation reveals the different versions of reality, and the consequences of accepting one version of reality over another in terms of furthering human rights. The evaluator needs to document the fact that different versions of reality were explored, and that the consequences of those versions were considered in terms of the evaluation's contribution to the needed social changes.

Transformative epistemological assumption

In evaluation, the epistemological assumption can be thought of in terms of the nature of the relationship between the evaluator and the stakeholders (rather than the philosophical language about the relationship between the knower and that which would be known). In order to act in line with the transformative axiological and ontological beliefs, the evaluator needs to build a relationship with the stakeholders, which is based on cultural respect, acknowledges power differences, is inclusive of marginalized voices, and provides a safe environment for everyone to express themselves. The evaluator should provide evidence that they have considered issues of power and that they have included the voices of the less powerful in an accurate way, which leads to appropriate social action. In order to do this, the evaluator needs to address issues of power and language and to build trusting relationships with the stakeholders. The nature of those relationships will be contextually dependent, as the cultural norms that dictate what will engender trust in one setting will differ in another setting.

Evaluators have resources at their disposal to ensure that they are aware of the relevant dimensions of diversity within a particular geographic area, as well as to become informed about the cultural beliefs and norms that have implications for the development of the relationships with stakeholder groups. In addition to the mainstream evaluation literature, members of marginalized communities have increasingly published documents that give insights into appropriate entry into and means to establish relationships with

members of their communities. Harris, Holmes and Mertens (2009) provide terms of reference for conducting evaluations in the Deaf Sign Language community. Chilisa (2009) and Ntseane (2009) provide guidance for the ethical conduct of evaluations in Africa. Cram (2009) describes the protocol for entering and engaging with Maori communities in New Zealand.

The common thread in these culturally specific examples is that evaluators, especially those who are not working in their native language or in their native culture, need to consciously address the challenge of entering the targeted community. If feasible, the evaluator can establish lengthy relationships with community members who demonstrate their willingness to understand the culture. However, with shorter term evaluations, evaluators need to:

"present themselves and their backgrounds in ways that make clear their strengths and limitations in terms of their knowledge and life experience. This positioning allows the evaluator to acknowledge the need to work together with the people from the community, who have a stronger understanding of cultural and social issues (Mertens, 2011, p. 6)."

Engagement with communities is key to the conduct of transformative evaluations. Additional strategies include hiring evaluators from the home communities, and establishing teams of evaluators who have expertise in evaluation and awareness of the culture of the community. This might entail capacity building activities for those who lack evaluation skills or for those who lack cultural skills. Evaluators can also form relationships with important community gatekeepers who can vouch for the evaluators' credibility. However, this strategy comes with a cautionary note: the evaluator must be cognizant of the dangers associated with accepting one or a few people as representatives of the voices of the larger group. They should also avoid token representation of stakeholders; the invitation for participation must be authentic. In keeping with the international community's movement toward country-led evaluations (Segone, 2009), the transformative approach to evaluation supports those relationships between evaluators and community members that acknowledge the power differences and that value the expertise brought-in by each team member.

Transformative methodological assumption

No single method is dictated by situating oneself in the transformative paradigm. Rather, the methodological assumption flows from the axiological, ontological, and epistemological assumptions in that the focus is on developing methods that facilitate the support for human rights, uncover competing versions of reality and the consequences of accepting one over the other, and establishing trusting relationships with stakeholders. The model of transformative methods that encompasses these principles is a cyclical design somewhat akin to Patton's Developmental Evaluation (Patton, 2011). However, Patton does not situate his work within a transformative philosophical belief system. Hence, differences between his approach and a transformative approach emerge because the latter starts with the principle of furthering human rights.

The transformative methodological assumption calls for a re-thinking of the conceptualization of evaluation currently operating in the international development community. The definition of evaluation within the international development community tends to focus on measuring the outcomes of projects. The international community distinguishes between monitoring (the continuous function that provides managers and stakeholders with regular feedback), and evaluation. The United Nations Development Programme (2011, p.4) defines evaluation as follows:

> "Evaluation is a judgment made of the relevance, appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of development efforts, based on agreed criteria and benchmarks among key partners and stakeholders. It involves a rigorous, systematic and objective process in the design, analysis and interpretation of information to answer specific questions. It provides assessments of what works and why, highlights intended and unintended results, and provides strategic lessons to guide decision-makers and inform stakeholders."

This definition, and others found throughout the international community, focuses primarily on evaluation as an act that occurs after a programme is implemented. However, the broader evaluation community sees evaluation as a strategy that has the potential to inform the development of programmes, provide feedback about the processes that are implemented, and document the intended and unintended outcomes and impacts of a programme. In order to address the human rights mission of international development organiza-

tions through a human rights evaluation approach, evaluators need to be involved in international development projects throughout the life of the project, from the moment of inception.

Thus, the transformative methodological assumption supports the use of a cyclical model that provides opportunities for community participation throughout the project's lifetime (Mertens, 2009; 2010). If evaluators are called to do their work only after a programme is implemented, and to focus their efforts on outcomes and impacts, then they have missed the many opportunities afforded by a cyclical evaluation approach: to contribute to the quality of a project; to allow for on-going adjustments needed to correct or enhance the project; to gather wisdom from the community in order to support this effort; and to document outcomes and impacts with validity.

Before there is a programme, or when changes in an existing programme are warranted, members of the community can be consulted about the need for a programme or for changes in an existing programme, and on what that new or revised programme might look like in order to be culturally responsive. This stage of the process can involve the review of documents; meetings with various stakeholder groups; review or development of culturally appropriate protocols for interaction; focus groups; 'town hall' meetings or indigenous equivalents; and/or surveys. In evaluation, this period of the evaluation would be termed a needs assessment or context evaluation. The results of this first round of data gathering need to be analyzed in conjunction with community members in order to provide culturally appropriate interpretations of the data, and to determine the next steps in the process. This use of information, to inform decision-making, has been present in the broader evaluation community for decades. If this approach is to be applied in international development, it would expand the conceptualization of evaluation as it currently stands, in that context.

Based on information from the first stage of the evaluation activities, the evaluators would then work with programme developers and community-based stakeholders to determine the nature of the intervention, as well as to specify the contextual variables that require attention in its implementation. This might include the development of a pilot version of the intervention, which is implemented on a smaller scale in order to examine the appropriateness of the intervention, the process of implementation, and possible measures of outcomes. Data from this phase of the evaluation can

be used to inform decisions about the intervention and its implementation, as well as to make adjustments to the evaluation measures, as needed. These data should be brought to the programme developers and community stakeholders on a continuous basis so that adjustments can be made as needed.

Based on the information from the second stage, the evaluators can then work with the programme developers, implementers, and community stakeholders to explore the process of scaling-up the intervention, still maintaining a focus on process evaluation (how is the programme being implemented?) and on the outcomes and impacts, with an awareness that adjustments may need to be made on the basis of heterogeneity in marginalized communities. For example, if an HIV/AIDS prevention programme is implemented in the hearing community, what needs to change to have a quality programme in the deaf community? This transfer of the programme to a different marginalized group, who may live in the same geographic area as the hearing community, requires involvement of a different group of community stakeholders.

Follow-up of the use of the evaluation findings for programme changes and for policy decisions is a crucial part of the transformative methodological assumption. An evaluator's work is not finished by the provision of a final report to the funder. Rather, they need to work with appropriate constituencies to facilitate the use of the information by engaging in conversations, focus groups, 'town hall' meetings or indigenous equivalents, and/or interviews with appropriate stakeholders to determine how they can use the information. This should be viewed as part of the evaluator's responsibility and comes under the concept of meta-evaluation. If the goal of the evaluation is to address human rights, then the follow-up to facilitate and document use needs to be included in the definition of evaluation. Such follow-up is in keeping with the spirit of the international community's desire to make sense of the multiple evaluations that are conducted in order to gather wisdom from them for the purpose of policymaking decisions at a broader level. Quality local evaluations are needed so that the tension between the attention to diversity and the need for broader evidence-supported policies is addressed.

Evaluators who situate themselves in the transformative paradigm use methods that allow them to capture the "contextual complexity and provide pluralistic avenues for engaging appropriately with diverse cultural groups in the evaluation" (Mertens, 2011, p. 7). Hence, many

transformative evaluators choose to use mixed-method approaches that allow for the combination of both quantitative and qualitative data in a cyclical manner, to inform decision-making throughout the lifetime of the intervention. Transformative mixed-method designs reflect the cyclical approach described earlier, and support the use of mixed-methods as a mechanism for engaging with the full range of stakeholders and providing the needed evidence of programme effectiveness.

At the beginning of the evaluation, evaluators begin with qualitative assessment and dialogue time, in order to ascertain the cultural context in which they are working. They also benefit from the collecting of quantitative data that allows for a broader sense of community strengths and challenges, as well as for documentation of the effectiveness of earlier interventions. During the pilot stage, case study approaches can be combined with counterfactual comparisons. During the implementation and possible scaling-up stage, both qualitative and quantitative measures can be used, along with designs that provide counterfactual comparisons, as long as the ethical considerations of denial of treatment are addressed adequately.

Conclusions

The international development community has been a strong supporter of human rights for decades, especially for the poorest and most marginalized populations. The international development evaluation community has taken the stand that their evaluations should align with this support for human rights. If evaluators take the promotion of human rights as their starting point, then they need a framework for thinking about the implications of this stance. The transformative paradigm offers such a framework through its examination of ethics and reality, and through the relationships between evaluators and stakeholders, together with evaluation methods that are rooted in the pursuit of social justice and the furtherance of human rights. The thinking of feminists; indigenous peoples; critical theorists and critical race theorists; disability rights advocates; and deafness rights advocates are commensurate with the transformative paradigm's philosophical assumptions. Practical implications for evaluators derived from these assumptions, provide guidance for evaluators who align their work with the international community's mission to address human rights issues. The international development evaluation community stands to benefit by accepting a transformative cyclical approach in order to reflect the complexities that

challenge programme effectiveness and, which provide a platform for informing policies that can enhance the possibility of achieving the desired end – a better quality of life for those who suffer discrimination and oppression.

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STRENGTHENING EQUITY-FOCUSED EVALUATIONS THROUGH INSIGHTS FROM FEMINIST THEORY AND APPROACHES[1]

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Introduction

Given the persistence of inequities globally, evaluation must play a stronger role in understanding how societies change and what policies and programmes show promise in shifting norms and inequities. This section examines how an equity lens and transformation-oriented practice can influence the framing, methods, and conduct of evaluation. The chapter draws on a set of evaluation efforts and experiences in India, and explores how a rights and equity lens can play out in evaluation practice. Most of the cases that are explored in this section focus on gender based inequities, a persistent site of exclusion that shapes the experience of all policies and programmes in India. However, ideas from these cases can be extended to other types of inequities. The section attempts to document and analyze experiences, perspectives, and ideas from practice and to connect them to emerging developments in Equity-focused evaluation.

The past decade has seen renewed enthusiasm and interest in evaluation in international development. Donors are putting out calls for demonstrating 'impact' and governments, including in India, have articulated interest in strengthening evaluation systems and capacity (Hay, 2010). Recently, India has announced plans to strengthen their evaluation system and to set up an independent evaluation office. With the expanding space in India for evidence, critique, and debate on development programming and policies, it is timely to explore the extent to which equity-focused approaches could inform evaluation questions, design, practice, and use.

1 Based upon and building on a paper in the Indian Journal of Gender Studies by the author (forthcoming).

This section argues that central ideas from feminist theory and research can strengthen and inform Equity-focused evaluation. The section starts from an understanding of inequities as manifest and systemic in social institutions. Equity-focused evaluation is presented as a way of understanding how intersecting social cleavages (such as gender, race, class, sexuality, caste, and religion) define and shape the experience and the exercise of power in different contexts. These ideas draw on work by Sudarshan, Ramachandran, Khanna, Jandhyala, and Murthy (forthcoming). Together with other social scientists and evaluators, between 2010 and 2011, they examined and reflected on their evaluation practice through a series of workshops and writing. Examining their evaluation experiences and reflections, this chapter explores how an equity-focused stance can influence the framing, methods, and practice of evaluation in India.

Conceptual framework

The definition of Equity-focused evaluations suggested by Segone in the introductory chapter of this book is consistent with recent definitions provided by Podems (2010) on feminist evaluation. Podems describes feminist evaluation as flexible and as being a 'way of thinking about evaluation.' Podems (2010) gives examples of practical aspects of feminist evaluations including their interest in multiple factors and structures influencing inequities, of which gender is only one. This can be compared to Segone's introduction: "inequity is rooted in a complex range of political, social, and economic factors that include, but are by no means limited to: gender discrimination" (Segone, 2011). Feminist theory offers deep and rich literature on the intersecting nature of exclusions (MacKinnon 2006, Mohanty 2003, Narayan 1997), which can inform evaluation practice.

Understandings of feminist evaluation, and of Equity-focused evaluation provided in this volume, are clear that documenting inequities is inadequate; quality evaluations using either approach should also seek to reduce those inequities. In doing so, both approaches implicitly recognize that evaluation can serve to reinforce or to challenge existing inequities. For example, Podems notes that while some evaluations might identify or record the differences between men and women, feminist evaluations would explore why these differences exist and challenge 'women's subordinate position' (p. 8). Though implicit, in both definitions it is recognition that for evaluations to change and challenge inequities they need to be used. This section makes that use explicit for Equity-focused evalua-

tion, as without use of evaluation, the purpose of equity cannot be achieved.

Drawing from the work of a range of evaluation theorists, Podems (2010) lays out 6 tenants of feminist evaluation (Box 1). It has as a central focus on gender inequities; it recognizes discrimination based on gender is systemic and structural; evaluation is political; knowledge has power; knowledge should be a resource of and for the people who create, hold, and share it; and there are multiple ways of knowing and some are privileged over others. If the focus on gender is expanded to include all sites of inequity, these tenants can arguably also be equally and usefully applied to all sites of inequity. In the case of UNICEF for example, the first tenant might include a central focus on inequities facing children marginalized by gender, disability, ethnicity or other sites of exclusion. Keeping the other tenants the same, and adding 'use' as a separate explicit tenant discussed above, what does this set of principles bring to equity-focused evaluation?

Box 1: Six Tenants of Feminist Evaluation defined by Sielbeck-Bowent et al (2002) and compiled in Podems (2010):

- Feminist evaluation has as a central focus the gender inequities that lead to social injustice.
- Discrimination or inequality based on gender is systemic and structural.
- Evaluation is a political activity; the contexts in which evaluation operates are politicized; and the personal experiences, perspectives, and characteristics evaluators bring to evaluations …lead to a particular political stance.
- Knowledge is a powerful resource that serves an explicit or implicit purpose.
- Knowledge should be a resource of and for the people who create, hold, and share it. Consequently, the evaluation or research process can lead to significant negative or positive effects on the people involved in the evaluation/research…
- There are multiple ways of knowing; some ways are privileged over others.

Let us first explore the nature of these principles. The feminist lens brings an emphasis on power relations, structural elements of inequities, justice, and politics into evaluation. This lens and these foci can provide important and different perspectives on Equity-focused evaluations. Through these foci, feminist research has made important contributions to development more generally, including on such diverse topics as: women's work and the double work burden; social cleavages and overlapping sites of discrimination; the 'black box' of

the household; and understandings of rights that are less abstract and more lived. Specifically, just looking at the field of economics, the contributions of a feminist lens are extensive and important. Researchers have both used mainstream economic tools to examine wage gaps between men and women and critiqued these tools for their limited ability to shed light on the underlying inequities behind such gaps (Figart, Mutari and Power, 2002). Studies of unpaid work within households, the 'black box', have brought attention to women's unpaid work (Waring, 1988) and highlighted inequities in distribution of resources within households (Sen 1990). Tools developed by McElroy and Horney (1981) have become commonly used for understanding decision making and agency within households. A feminist lens has also lead to innovations in the analysis of government budgets according to their effects on gender equity (Budlender et al., 2002) and understanding the effects of macroeconomic policies of structural adjustment and liberalization (Çagatay, Elson and Grown, 1995; Grown, Elson and Çagatay, 2000). For example, such research has demonstrated that actions such as cutbacks in health care programmes often have their most immediate impact on women. Feminist economists have also analyzed how factors such as race and caste (Brewer, Conrad and King, 2002) interact with gender and affect economic outcomes.

Just looking at this very brief list of how feminist insights and analysis have strengthened one field of development (economics), one can draw parallels to the way in which such analysis can bring new developments, approaches and insights to Equity-focused evaluation. Equity-focused evaluation can focus attention on different variables, and in doing so, challenge or critique the dominant discourse underpinning the programme. Examples of the ways in which central ideas on the structural nature of inequities can be explicitly brought into evaluation design include:

- Collecting data on women's time and women's drudgery in income generating projects (Sudarshan and Sharma, forthcoming, Murthy, forthcoming);
- Examining which children from which social groups have access to better schooling and their experience within those school systems (Ramachandran, forthcoming);

- Documenting how elite women capture benefits from political decentralization processes to the detriment of other less privileged women or men (Devika and Thampi. 2010).

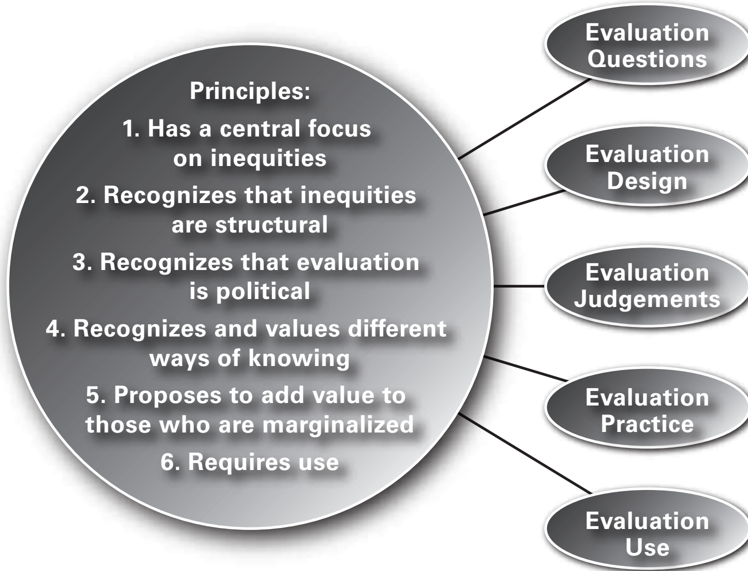
Feminist work on breaking into the ‘black box’ of the household, understanding and examining overlapping sites of inequities, and bringing focus to women’s work and women’s double burden, creates rich terrain that Equity-focused evaluation could and should more explicitly draw from.

With the modifications suggested, it is suggested that tenants from feminist evaluation (themselves drawn from a broader field of feminist research in multiple disciplines) can be usefully applied to all Equity-focused evaluations to bring useful and needed insights into Equity-focused evaluation. The rest of this section explores and suggests what this may entail in practice.

Evaluation is a process. Different evaluation theorists and practitioners categorize it into different stages, but in general: there is a start or a planning phase that includes deciding what to evaluate and what questions to ask; a design phase of determining what methodologies and methods will best generate the kind of knowledge and evidence needed; an implementation phase where data is gathered and analysed, and; a phase of use where the evaluation findings are shared and applied. These phases usually overlap in different ways depending on the nature of the evaluation.

This chapter applies a modified set of principles drawing from feminist analysis and utilization-focused approaches to evaluation stages (see figure 1) to explore through a number of case examples, how researchers and evaluators can integrate these principles into their Equity-focused evaluation work. The following sections look at how the ideas can influence the framing of evaluation questions, evaluation design, evaluation judgements, evaluation practice, and evaluation use.

Figure 1: Principles for Equity-focused evaluation drawn from feminist research and approaches and stages in the evaluation process.



Setting evaluation questions

Programme theory is informed by competing discourses on development and equity that are at times explicit, more often implicit, and at times competing. Integrating the analysis of power and the structural nature of inequities into Equity-focused evaluation offers opportunities to critique dominant discourses and hold them up for scrutiny. 'Discourse' here means the 'big ideas' that shape our understanding of how the world works. Discourse matters because it underpins and legitimizes interventions. For example, policy responses to HIV were based on dominant discourses on HIV that evolved over time. These discourses included 'gay plague' discourse, a 'contaminated other' discourse, an 'innocent victim' discourse, a 'heterosexual-risk' discourse and…a 'development' discourse on AIDS (Hill, 1995). Discourses can (sometimes) be unpacked fairly easily in hindsight but can often be obscure (often intentionally so) as they are lived. Ideas from deconstructive analysis (Dietz 2003, Nash 2002) from feminist research can provide useful starting points to ground this effort to unpack discourse, as can realist synthesis approaches from within the evaluation field (Pawson, 2006). Evaluation can raise questions about the discourse

itself, the way it is articulated in policies and programmes, and whether the implicit theories around the nature of the problem, and how change will happen, hold true on the ground.

Trends in discourse evaluators using equity-focused approaches should consider the dominance of questions on impact and increasingly, with some funders, on value for money. At times these are the most critical or important factors to examine. At times they become political rallying calls, which are inserted into evaluations rather thoughtlessly. In such cases, evaluators should demand a more thoughtful discussion on the use and users of the evaluation and negotiation to change the questions when it is not possible to measure impact or cost, or where it is not the most important issue. For example, evaluators describe shifting the questions of impact and attribution to new questions on assessing 'how effective are strategies in particular contexts' or whether outcomes are in line with needs of beneficiaries (Sudarshan and Sharma, forthcoming). Equity-focused evaluation may also include valuing, and thus generating knowledge on process results and unintended outcomes. Reflecting on several evaluations of gender programmes and organizations, Sudarshan and Sharma (forthcoming) note that, in their experience, a more 'iterative framework' and approach to evaluations is most useful for capturing unintended outcomes. Several evaluation theorists (Morell 2005, Mertens 2009) have made this a focus for their work. However, it is particularly important in evaluations relating to structural inequities, as interventions may further reinforce inequities in ways that were not anticipated, or in attempting to shift those inequities may create conflict or reinforce other divisions.

Ramachandran (forthcoming) illustrates how changing discourse around education in India in the last 50 years has influenced programmes; from education being conceptualized as a 'universal good' at the time of independence (1947), to an instrument for population control in the 1960s, to a 'right' by the 1980s, and to a cornerstone of women's 'empowerment' by the 1990s. Evaluation can be used to examine the ways in which dominant discourses become lodged in policies and programmes and test whether the implicit assumptions behind these discourses resonate with the actual experience of marginalized groups on the ground. In doing so, evaluation offers opportunities to reshape and critique the discourse informing those policies, and to bring a greater diversity of views and values into that discourse. Equity-focused evaluations can ask, 'who has constructed this discourse and whose experiences are not reflected?'

Jandhyala's (forthcoming) account of the Mahila Samakhya programme, a large programme on women's education and empowerment in India, reflects the understanding of evaluation as a political space where competing discourses that inform programme theory can be examined. She described how an external donor coming into the programme made funding contingent on defining results and targets in a way that reflected an understanding of the changes sought that was fundamentally different from that of the implementing organization. The funder wanted to show progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, with women's mobilization through the programme being a means to reach goals around elementary education. The target associated with Millennium Development Goal three is to eliminate gender disparity in education. So the implicit change theory is that more educated and informed women will be more likely to send their daughters to school. This vision however, is quite different from that of the programme implementers, who saw women's mobilization and empowerment as the goal itself. The monitoring and evaluation framework became the space where different views on the nature of structural inequities and the 'goals' of empowerment were articulated.

Evaluation can also identify gaps in programme theory that weaken opportunities to address inequities. For example, India has a set of programmes that has some parallels with depression era works programmes of the United States, including a huge programme designed to create jobs through building infrastructure in rural areas, called the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). Analysis of this programme, illustrates that the design of the programme was gender sensitive in a range of ways (equal wages for men and women, participation of women in committees, provision of a crèche on work sites etc.). Evaluations of the MGNREGS, illustrate how evaluations can test different dimensions of programme theory (Sudarshan and Sharma, forthcoming). However, evaluations showed not only that crèches are often not set up – an implementation failure – but also that women workers were more comfortable leaving infants in the care of older children – a programme theory failure. The second finding speaks to the design itself and the ideas informing that design. Specifically, it is based on an assumption that parents would choose to leave their children at crèches rather than with family members. By getting both the design and the implementation wrong the programme led to older female children missing school in order to provide childcare.

There is an opportunity for evaluators to identify and test the theories underpinning policies and programmes – including by looking across sets of programmes. For example, in the case above, how do assumptions about gender roles and child care feed into development programmes and schemes that cut across a range of development domains? How do assumptions of women and girl's labour preferences and time inform (if at all) discourse on development plans? To what extent do programmes assume women's time is unlimited and unintentionally move domestic burdens onto girl children by further engaging women in productive and development work?

Implicit (or even explicit) theoretical underpinnings of programmes can vary among actors and can change and shift over time. The space to explore and critique this may be very limited. As Khanna (forthcoming) notes, "Unequal power relations are so deeply internalised within hierarchical bureaucracies that discussion on gender power relations is next to impossible." Nonetheless, evaluation designs and frameworks can serve to embed, ignore, reflect or challenge those underpinnings and relationships. A recognition of evaluation as a political space can bring these tensions to the surface and promote more transparent review and dialogue on competing or alternative values or theories.

Evaluation design

Equity-focused evaluation can be situated within different approaches to evaluation and draw upon the differing traditions in design, methodology, and approaches to rigour and validity found in those approaches. As Segone notes, "most of the Equity-focused evaluation data collection and analysis techniques is built on approaches with which many practitioners in development evaluation already have some familiarity: the emphasis is on refining and refocusing existing technics – and enhancing national capacities to use those technics – rather than starting with a completely new approach" (Segone, 2011).

Equity-focused evaluation is not one design or one set of methods, but a lens or standpoint that influences the choices made in design and methods. A rigorous Equity-focused evaluation would be one that used the range of methods that best matched the questions around the type of change the policy or programme is addressing. In this view – equity is the lens in which questions are asked and evidence is challenged. Feminist analysis brings to Equity-focused evaluation, recognition that this process is constructed and political.

Individual methods *per se* are not 'equity-focused or feminist'; their suitability (and rigour) in any given evaluation is a function of their ability to generate valid and reliable data that speaks to the nature and change around the inequity that the programme is attempting to address. That said, there are a range of lines of evaluation and research theories that focus on issues of equity, rights and voice; for example, the transformative evaluation paradigm (Mertens 2010) and participatory paradigms (Chambers 1983, 1987). Equity-focused evaluation (and empowerment, feminist, participatory and transformative approaches) must start with the principle of including the voice of the stakeholder, as do these approaches to evaluation. However, what is considered 'valid and reliable' in Equity-focused evaluations often mirrors broader trends in evaluation and development.

On-going debates on qualitative versus quantitative approaches remain, but are now superimposed with other new debates on experimental (randomized) and quasi-experimental designs. Despite debates that are at times polarizing, there does appear to be a broader openness and interest in more mixed-method approaches and recognition that different designs suit different questions, contexts, and resources. Ramachandran (forthcoming) points to the importance of mixed methods using an example from education evaluation. Detailed observation-based studies revealed that parents were sending more boys to private schools and more girls to government schools. These qualitative micro studies, in turn, created demand for larger quantitative data sets, on both government and private school admissions (disaggregated by social group and gender) (Ramachandran, forthcoming). With the passage of the Right to Education bill in 2010, India moved towards capturing this data through larger quantitative data sets but it was the smaller more qualitative studies that raised the issue, and which continue to be the only source of evidence on this issue of exclusion and discrimination.

Evaluators conducting Equity-focused evaluations must recognize the perceptions of credibility by intended users of some evaluation designs (and of quantification more generally). As noted earlier, without use of evaluation, the purpose of equity cannot be achieved and use can at times be centred on perceived methodological credibility. This can also make choice of method a strategic choice. For example, Sudarshan and Sharma (forthcoming) note:

> "... the current dominant mode in evaluation design emphasizes quantification stemming from the need to provide evidence of

success to the donor, and the fact that numbers are far more effective in advocacy than narratives are..."

Different types of knowledge, expressed through different methodological traditions, have more, or less, power in decision-making structures. Noting that women's grass roots and implementing organizations in India, 'shy away from quantitative and macro data,' Khanna (forthcoming) integrates quantitative evaluation in her evaluations "... to increase their mastery over quantitative data." The feminist lens brings recognition of the power of quantitative data and the transformative potential of empowering organizations working with marginalized groups with the capacity to use both quantitative and qualitative data through the Equity-focused evaluation process itself.

Evaluation judgments

The purpose of evaluation includes improving the accountability and compliance of programmes and organizations, and knowledge development (Mark, Henry, and Julnes, 2000). Making a judgement about what works and what does not work is also a fundamental purpose of evaluation. As Segone notes in the introduction, "An Equity-focused evaluation is a judgment made of the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of policies, programmes and projects on equitable development results" (Segone, 2011).

Much development programming is not actually explicit about what the programme intends to do. What do feminist principles bring to discussions of "what working looks like?" and how do they inform the ways that Equity-focused evaluation's define and identify whether policies, programmes, projects, or organizations are successful or not?

Figuring out whether something works or not often entails first articulating what 'working' or success, means. For example, using Jandhalaya's (forthcoming) example on a women's education and empowerment programme in India, the donor defined success as 'consolidating and expanding' the programme to promote equality. Among a much longer set of goals, the 'engendered' goals developed by the programme included increasing 'life-long learning, leadership among poor and most marginalised women, and breaking discriminatory social barriers and practices (at individual, family, community and state levels).'

The two stakeholders set up success (and the measures of success) very differently[2]. Rather than counting increases in the number of groups and the numbers of women involved in groups, the engendered goal takes the programme down a path where success is defined by questions of 'which women' are involved, and how the groups make decisions, for example. The engendered framework sees the women's collectives as the place where success resides, where the programme is trying to bring change and thus where change should be measured. The debate over measures illustrates how evaluation can become a space where programmes are contested. They are contested in terms of how success is defined, where success is seen to reside, what is measured, and by extension often, what is done. The point here is not to suggest which definition of success is 'right' and which measures of success come closest to measuring changes that are relevant and meaningful. Rather it is demonstrating that in any programme, and certainly in large scale programmes, there are different or competing definitions and criteria of success. Equity-focused evaluation can bring those criteria to the surface for debate and critique.

Taking another example, in a women's health and empowerment project undertaken in the early days of the women's micro-credit movement, some of the changes that implementing organizations argued were the most impressive result of years of efforts in certain contexts, were that women from different castes were eating together, and that women were looking others (non-family members) in the eye (Bhirdikar et al, 2005). Other goals, perhaps much more impressive on paper, they were less proud of as they were much easier to achieve, for example, the thousands of groups that were formed. As Sudarshan and Sharma (forthcoming) point out, 'impact' is relative; measures should be embedded in the context of the intervention.

Evaluation practice

Inequities are deeply persistent for many reasons, many of which are deeply resistant and difficult to change. If reducing inequities is a goal of Equity-focused evaluation, it should come with a recognition of what can be at times a deep and inherent contradiction in using a time-bound, resource-bound, judgment-focused exercise – evaluation – with stakeholders who may be more or (often) less connected to equity and where the starting point is usually terms of

2 The full version of the original and engendered results framework is available in Jandyala (2010)

reference developed by others, to understand and shift inequities. Reflecting on this tension can lead to hand-wringing from evaluators deeply committed to Equity-focused evaluation (because it is never quite good enough, deep enough, transformative enough). Contributions on 'self-reflexivity' from feminist theory (Ackerly and True 2009, Cornwall 2003. Desai 2007) can offer important insights into Equity-focused evaluation on the role of reflection, and adjustment based on reflection.

Reflexivity is the critical introspection and analysis of the self as evaluator, and the way this influences the conduct of evaluation. Reflexivity can lead to insights and new hypotheses by pushing the evaluator to challenge their own theoretical positions. Reflexivity comes with a grounding or positioning of the evaluator within the process. The tension can become a healthy tension, because it comes with reflection, analysis, and adjustment, which lead to evaluation that moves closer to the Equity-focused evaluation principles. Sudarshan and Sharma (forthcoming), write: "It is our position that evaluation of NGO interventions in remote and difficult to work areas, has to maintain a balance between a level of objectivity and a level of sympathetic understanding." This positioning relates to questions of what is negotiable and non-negotiable in evaluation work sought, considered, or rejected, and to how evaluators see themselves in the evaluation process and, how this relates to the way they see themselves in the broader contexts in which they operate. It often finds a home in the way that evaluators identify themselves and position themselves in the work. Positioning is not new to social science. Feminist standpoint theory (Harding, 2004, Hartsock, 1997) has informed feminist research for over two decades and this understanding has filtered into the ways and approaches that some equity-focused evaluators use in their practice. 'Standpoint theory' offers alternative conceptualizations of rigour and validity rooted in principles of situated and constructed knowledge that acknowledges 'positionality', and begin from 'lived experiences.' Unlike 'positivist approaches', constructivist approaches' to evaluation start with the idea that knowledge is constructed and shaped, and the principle of evaluation should add value to those who are marginalized. As Harsh Mander (2010) has said of social science, Equity-focused evaluation: "is not an investigation into inert, static, external realities, but into the fluid, subjective worlds of people's lives, as experienced, interpreted, recalled and mediated by them." Similarly, Khanna (forthcoming) writes that providing "opportunities for the 'target community' to articulate their concerns and their analysis, and to share with them

my own analysis and suggestions, I believe promotes their empowerment."

Even if evaluators recognize that evaluation findings are socially constructed and evaluators clearly shape that construction, calls for 'objectivity' can be used to discredit evaluation findings. This may be particularly true in certain domains, and is likely to be particularly true where evaluations challenge deeply entrenched inequities. Equity-focused evaluations drawing on constructivist approaches may find theoretical work such as 'standpoint theory' useful in articulating the rigour and validity of such approaches.

In contexts that privilege certain methods and approaches, Equity-focused evaluators need language for demonstrating and speaking to the strengths, rigour, validity (and limitations) of the approaches they are using. In contexts where other evaluation approaches top the lists of what donors and national governments consider credible, such work is both essential and contested.

Use of evaluation

A challenge in Equity-focused evaluation is the evaluator's responsibility to promote use of or action on findings. While use is generally never fully in the hands of the evaluator, Equity-focused evaluation entails seeking pathways to use, while understanding these pathways as being political and negotiated. Certain pathways are risky (for the programme, the group experiencing inequities, etc.), others may be blocked, and some are strategic – but all are negotiated and constructed. While Utilization-focused evaluation offers deep insights and lessons for Equity-focused evaluation on designing for use, feminist analysis also offers insights on the types of use that are appropriate in Equity-focused evaluation. Put another way, with an equity lens, 'any use' is not a valid or responsible use. Improving or addressing inequities must be a central use, along with other uses particular to particular evaluations. Speaking to this idea of responsible use, Sudarshan and Sharma (forthcoming) write:

> "Responsible feminism requires recognition of the contextual constraints and the feasibility of recommended courses of action and choices. We have therefore tried to be responsible feminists – pointing out specific changes and actions that in our analysis would empower women; at the same time, we have learnt a great deal about what is possible or desirable, given any particular context and capacities, and this learning itself moderates our recommendations."

Equity-focused evaluation should build responsible use explicitly into their evaluation design and process. This is mentioned earlier in this volume with various emphases being placed on ethics. In some contexts, pathways for Equity-focused evaluation findings to gain traction and influence are severely curtailed. For example, reflecting on one experience in India, Khanna (forthcoming) writes on the limits to use in the face of deeply internalized power differentials:

> "I found senior nurses and Nursing College Principals who were Master Trainers – and expected to be change agents within the profession – playing subservient hand maidens to Deans of Medical Colleges and State Health Officers. The same women, when interacting with their own junior colleagues, replicated exploitative relationships that they alleged they were victims of vis-à-vis the medical profession. The lack of self-awareness in relation to the concept of gender power relations and the lack of internal collectivisation in the face of external threats to the profession was very apparent. These issues could not be addressed within the evaluation debriefing. They needed a different, more personally introspective process..."

The underlying structures and systems that create inequities cannot be programmed away within contexts that perpetrate and reinforce those systems. Multiple pathways will generally need to be sought in Equity-focused evaluations, and used at different points in time (both immediate and longer term), including through policy and programming windows that open after the evaluation has ended.

Understanding how evidence informs policymaking and decision-making in different contexts is essential to commissioning and leading the Equity-focused evaluation's that will be used. For example, the Rajinder Sachar Committee Report (2006), on the state of Muslims in India, documented extensive and persistent inequities that combined to make the Muslim community among the most marginalized in the country. The report recommended autonomous evaluation of the extent to which programmes address issues of inequities. Media reports have quoted a former member secretary of the Sachar Committee, as saying that the authority met only three times in four years, did not consider implementing the report and had no independent technical person[3]. Though government-led evaluation of the implementation of the report did not occur, a research organization called the Centre for Equity Studies (CES)

3 http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/Print/728651.aspx

led by a member of the National Advisory Council, Harsh Mander did evaluate the implementation of the committee findings. Those researchers found that conditions were not improving, nor being adequately addressed or resourced, and blamed the government for lacking 'political courage' to directly address Muslims for fear of being criticised. According to news accounts, Minority Affairs Minister disputed the study, purportedly also arguing that it was constitutionally not possible to directly target Muslims in programmes and schemes. This example illustrates how discussion around inequities and targeting of inequities is often highly politicized. Evaluation of policies and programmes is not detached from those politics, particularly when it comes to use. In this case, Muslims face discrimination exactly because of their socio-religious identities, however, visible programme interventions directly targeting particular religious groups is deemed to be politically untenable. One way of side-stepping this issue is to critique the rigour of the evaluation studies and discredit the findings.

In terms of use by policymakers, certainly evidence suggests that their on-going involvement can be an effective strategy when they are open to evaluation findings in the area of enquiry. However, evaluators should not underestimate the degree to which findings that contradict the dominant policy discourse may find difficulty in getting traction with policymakers.

The work of Mercedes Gonzalez De la Rocha , on poverty in Mexico is an interesting example of how the policy context affects what findings are used. In the 1980s economic crisis De la Rocha's looked at poor people's strategies for survival and the ways in which poor urban households responded to crisis. Her work created the 'myth of survival' or the idea that the poor have an unlimited capacity to withstand shocks. About 10 years later, her later research following the 1998 financial crisis brought this 'myth' into question. She argues that her work has since then been selectively used by key institutions such as the World Bank, with her early work highlighting the strategies of the poor being picked up, and her later work, showing the limitations of those strategies, being ignored (2007). Evidence can, and often is, interpreted and used to reinforce dominant policies, in this case economic liberalization. Her first set of research supported existing economic liberalization policies – her later research did not. Evidence is usually used selectively. Those involved in Equity-focused evaluations need to be more strategic in understanding the role of evidence in policymaking and be more intentional in trying to support more open and transparent dialogue on evidence.

Engagement with and connections between social activists, researchers, and evaluators can also create or seize policy windows where there is openness to change, demand for change, and evidence to inform change. For example, Ramachandran (forthcoming) reflects on experiences from the education sector:

> "When the national assessment of gender and equity in primary education was presented to the government in a Joint Review Mission in 2002, the first reaction was dismissive – some said "there is no segregation in Indian education" and some officials objected to the use of the phrase "hierarchies of access". However, as the months rolled by and as commentators started comparing the findings with other research studies, especially the PROBE [Public Report on Basic Education] study, there was a gradual thawing. At least on paper, the government and donors accepted the findings and said that they would address it. The issue of children from different social strata attending differently endowed schools, gender discrimination in the choice of school by parents (government for girls and private for boys) or the issue of poorly endowed village schools / single teacher schools being the preserve of the most deprived – have now been accepted within educational discourse. The 2009 Right to Education Act has formally recognised the need to provide equal education for all."

Given the amount of evaluation happening there is a lost opportunity for synthesizing and generating deeper understandings from evaluation, on how development affects change on the ground. There is tremendous but largely untapped potential for evaluation to deepen understanding around inequities. Knowledge being generated through evaluations is generally not broadly shared, made available, or tapped and used to explore questions beyond the particular evaluation. This limits the opportunities to use evaluation to triangulate, challenge, or reinforce other bodies of knowledge around issues of social change and equity. Resources to generate evidence on inequities are always limited; groups working to address inequities in different domains and / or focused on different marginalized groups, need to begin to see evaluations as a rich body of evidence to drawn into other modes of knowledge generation and translation. Groups involved in doing Equity-focused evaluations need to begin to question decisions on keeping evaluations out of the public domain.

Conclusion

This chapter examined how principles drawing from feminist and other research traditions and theories can inform the framing, methods, and conduct of Equity-focused evaluation. This chapter has demonstrated how these principles can be used in practice to inform the understanding of programme theory, shape evaluation design and methods, negotiate judgment of success, guide practice, and guide choices and opportunities for influence. The chapter suggests that principles generated from feminist theory can be helpfully and usefully applied to strengthen Equity-focused evaluations – whether they have a central focus on gender inequities or on other inequities. Applying these principles to Equity-focused evaluation can help evaluation play a stronger role in understanding how societies change and which policies and programmes show promise in shifting norms and inequities. Reaching this potential requires more intentional integration of evaluation knowledge into broader knowledge translation exercises around rights, exclusions, and discrimination.

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DECOLONIZING EVALUATION IN A DEVELOPING WORLD. IMPLICATIONS AND CAUTIONS FOR EQUITY-FOCUSED EVALUATION[1]

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Introduction

This chapter suggests that the good intentions of Equity-focused Evaluation must be tempered by cautions. This concern flows from a legacy of research and evaluation that has exerted colonizing influences over Indigenous and minoritized populations. The opening section covers the context of development, evaluation, and culture. The second section argues that efforts to decolonize evaluation must begin with epistemology. A third section examines the implications of decolonization for evaluation method. Within the paper, a scenario is provided based on a development project in southern Africa. The scenario illustrates the complexity of stakeholders, projects, and cultural dynamics in a development evaluation where equity is an important concern. The chapter closes with implications and cautions for how evaluation generally, and more specifically, Equity-focused evaluation may perpetuate colonizing assumptions and aims.

Locating development, evaluation, and culture

Basic understandings of culture and cultural difference in the evaluation and development fields are only now taking shape; however, these have not been typically perceived as mainstream models of evaluation or development. The recent moves to address culture and cultural differences represent both a challenge and an opportunity for practitioners in development – specifically international

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development – and for evaluation. There is a need to rethink dominant notions about how to work with and understand the particular concerns of traditionally marginalized and under-represented ethnic and racial groups, including indigenous groups, in varied country and nation-state contexts.[2] Now more than ever, both evaluators and developers are embracing specific paradigms that are more focused on social equity, empowerment, transformation, participation, and collaboration. Matters of culture and cultural differences are integral to these current approaches and deserve increasing attention.

For development practitioners and policymakers, the result is an increasing need to address questions and issues to do with culture and development. Thierry Verhelst's (1987/1990) book on this topic is just one example that critiques the collapse of current development models in favor of prioritizing a cultural dimension as an alternative path of development. Verhelst's premise rests on the failure of western development policies and models that have perceived nations in the global south as both backward and underdeveloped. This failure is despite the credible efforts by the United Nations in the 1980s to raise attention to these issues. Nevertheless, the prevailing development ideology, reinforced by notions of social Darwinism, colonialism, and unilinear views of history, has contributed to competing if not conflicting notions of development, modernization, civilization, and progress (Escobar, 1995; Rodney, 1981). These ideological conflicts persist between those from the West who practice development and those on the ground in "developing nations" who face "development" (Ferguson, 1994).

As such, even contemporary development practices, often referred to as participatory, "tend to emphasize the *who* and the *what* of development, with little attention to the *why* and the *how* [emphasis added]" (Eversole, 2005, p. 298). That is, development practitioners and policymakers ask questions such as who is involved in the development initiative and who benefits from its implementation. Other questions focus on illustrating distinctions between grassroots and top-down development and the different agendas that they imply. The 'what' development questions include, what initiatives are implemented; what do the development initiatives actually promote; or what type of development is to be carried out,

2 Of course issues of culture and cultural differences are much broader, such as around differences surrounding geography, gender, social class, etc… than around traditionally marginalized, stigmatized groups who are considered ethnic or/and racial minorities or indigenous, but the concerns of these groups are especially acute and the focus of this chapter.

"with the assumption that the right kind of initiative will solve those lurking questions about achieving authentic participation for target groups" (Eversole, 2005, p. 299).

'Why' and 'how' questions not only help to pay attention to cultural differences and the cultural 'groundedness' of efforts in development initiatives, but also dig deeper to draw on unstated assumptions about development, its processes, goals, and expected outcomes. These questions help to understand the competing and conflicting visions of development between the concerns and perspectives of different target groups, and outside development policymaking and practitioners. Asking questions about the 'why' and the 'how' of development presupposes a different set of interactions with a wide range of people, including acknowledging that involvement or participation by target groups without processes that fit the culture of the target group is hardly truly participatory.

Considerations of culture in evaluation have seen considerable growth domestically and internationally in recent years, since the first sets of literature on the topic in the mid-1980s and early 1990s (Hopson, 2003; Madison, 1992; Patton, 1985). What is clear from the early attention to culture is the bifurcated ways in which the evaluations and evaluators addressed the topic of culture. For those in the field working in international cross-cultural settings, the Patton (1985) edited volume asked, "what happens when we export the ideas, concepts, models, methods, and values of evaluators to other countries and cultures?" Evaluators from generally western perspectives were encouraged to consider the problems and potentials of doing international, cross-cultural evaluations. The Madison (1992) edited volume brought attention to how evaluations should be sensitive to multicultural issues and traditionally underrepresented and minoritized peoples and their perspectives in North American settings. Together, these volumes laid the groundwork for the increased number of professional workshops, conferences, symposia and published matter, on topics related to culture and evaluation in the United States (Chouinard & Cousins, 2009; Frierson, Hood, Hughes, & Thomas, 2010; Hood, 1998, 2001; Hood, Hopson, & Frierson, 2005; Mertens & Hopson, 2006; Samuels & Ryan, 2011).[3]

3 Much of this work has promoted an emerging evaluation approach or model, Culturally Responsive Evaluation (CRE), as a system or culmination of practical frameworks that attend to culture during various stages of the evaluation process.

Epistemological issues in decolonizing evaluation

Evaluation directed toward equity must comprehend and respect the cultural contexts in which the work is sited. This understanding goes beyond superficial appreciation of local culture as art, music, dance, and literature (Verhelst, 1987/1990) to deeper roots of history, spirituality, and core values. Central to the cultural location of any inquiry – research or evaluation – are cultural assumptions and beliefs about the nature of knowledge itself. Thus, any evaluation that hopes to address equity must begin by considering epistemology.

Epistemology is foundational to all evaluation, but it plays a particularly key role in those methodologies that seek to promote equity and social justice. Epistemology is both personal and political. Evaluators must reflect on what knowledge they privilege as well as acknowledging the politics of knowledge construction. Examining the political nature of knowledge construction reveals the influence white privilege in marginalizing alternative ways of knowing, which leaves Indigenous inquiry "off the 'buffet table' of methodological options" (Kovach, 2010, p. 79). Decolonizing epistemology broadens and expands what knowledge can entail, and creates room at the table for a richer menu of options.

The colonizing effect of research is now well recognized (Estrada, 2005; Grande, 2008; Smith, 1999; Weber-Pillwax, 1999). Indigenous frameworks that are explicitly decolonizing have been proposed in both research (Cajete, 2000; Estrada, 2005; Kovach, 2010; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008) and evaluation (Kawakami, Aton, Cram, Lai, & Porima, 2008; LaFrance & Nichols, 2010). In evaluation, colonization manifests itself in determinations of merit or worth that are defined from a non-Indigenous – often geographically and culturally distant – perspective, and applied to Indigenous persons and programmes without regard to local culture and values. Evaluation is colonizing when it defines the programme, poses evaluation questions, gathers and analyzes data, and formulates results in ways that silence the voices of Indigenous persons in the local context. Evaluation is colonizing when, by omission or commission, it bolsters majority power structures without critique or challenge. Decolonizing evaluation means locating it within Indigenous cultural specificities, preferences and practices. It means recognizing and critically interrogating Eurocentric knowledge systems and standards of inquiry that have historically been imposed upon Indigenous cultures in Africa, Asia and the Americas.

The key to shifting perspectives lies in understanding how knowledge is created and understood within a given cultural context and in using that understanding to define standards of good practice in research or evaluation, including standards of legitimation such as validity. Standards of practice and legitimation in turn guide method choice. These three elements – standards, validity and methods – stand in reciprocal relation to one another, grounded in epistemology. Together, they offer a three-strand approach to decolonizing evaluation, informed by Indigenous scholars on five continents.

Strand 1: Epistemology informs what is understood as good evaluation practice. To decolonize ways of thinking about good evaluation practice, one must appreciate how Indigenous epistemology places the entire evaluation process outside of Western[4] understandings. Indigenous epistemologies stand in contrast to Western epistemologies in both scope and content. The boundaries of what constitutes knowledge are much broader; knowledge from dreams, visions and prayers is respected (Ermine, 1999). Historically, Indigenous knowledge systems, which do not separate spirit and reason (Deloria, 1999), were dismissed as superstitions by Eurocentric researchers. "Indigenous knowledges could not be understood from a reductionist analysis because they could not be fragmented, externalized, and objectified" (Kovach, 2010, p. 77). Little Bear (2000) reviews fundamental differences in Aboriginal and Eurocentric worldviews. He characterizes Aboriginal worldviews as holistic and cyclical, generalist, process-oriented and grounded in place; European worldviews as linear, singular, static and objective. It is important to note that when he speaks of "jagged worldviews colliding," Little Bear is speaking not only of collisions between/among cultural groups but also within a given person.

To decolonize means that standards of good evaluation practice are defined by local values and protocols. Inquiry must be vetted through appropriate local authority that determines what knowledge can be shared under what circumstances. Evaluation must be done in the right way, following the path recognized as good, honorable, and respectful – all of which is defined by local culture, linked to understandings of the right way to live upon the earth.

Indigenous belief in the interconnectedness of all living things disrupts linear understandings, both in defining the parameters of what

4 We use Western here and throughout to designate those perspectives that generally derive from a limited North American (United States, primarily) and western European geographic reality that privilege theirs above others.

is being evaluated and in setting forth the framework for the evaluation. Telling a programme's story replaces linear Western logic models (LaFrance & Nichols, 2009). Cram (2011) cites Conner's 'Draw-a-Path' process of creating a visual timeline with drawings and symbols so that people can tell the story of the programme as they understand it. Portrayals of Indigenous evaluation frameworks may also be visual and non-linear, often employing story or metaphor. They are in sharp contrast to Eurocentric portrayals of approaches to evaluation practice. Where Western frameworks or models are often presented via steps or categories, Indigenous frameworks use visual images and extended metaphors. For example, Estrada (2005) uses the metaphor of the *Ceiba* (Tree of Life), to connect research to a circular and multidimensional cosmology directed by the Maya sacred book of Creation, the *Popul Vuh*. LaFrance and Nichols (2009) use Dr. Eric Jolly's story of Cherokee basket making, told by his grandmother, as a metaphor for Indigenous evaluation.

Good evaluation under Indigenous epistemology addresses power imbalance. It positions evaluation to resist exploitation and oppression by centering control of the initiation, information-gathering procedures, interpretation, and sharing of information in the local community (Bishop, 1998, L. T. Smith, 1999; G. H. Smith, 2004). Evaluators must respect local authority and protocols for entering a community and making introductions. These protocols are culturally-specific. For example, Bishop (1998), a Maori scholar, describes a formal ritualized introduction, *mihimihi*, as "a statement of where you are from and of how you can be related to these other people and the land, in both the past and the present" (p. 203). LaFrance and Nichols (2009) introduce themselves through tribal and clan affiliation, family genealogy, and geographic locations in which they are grounded.

When interacting with persons of authority, such as elders, to gather information, evaluators must consciously relinquish control of the conversation and let the story unfold from the perspective of the teller. The conversation should not be shaped to fit a predetermined outline or interview schedule without ensuring the questions or items are sufficiently rooted in Indigenous realities. Power dynamics relate also to the underlying vision of evaluation bringing benefit to communities. Who gets to define benefit and what segments of a community or society will experience it? These questions relate directly to concerns for equity.

Location is extremely important to the practice of Indigenous evaluation. Both the evaluation and the evaluator must be situated in

context. Place is a living presence that defines nationhood and the core values of Indigenous peoples (LaFrance & Nichols, 2009). So too, knowledge and the ability to access it may be linked to a particular place or location (Hermes, 1998; Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008). Location also refers to the cultural location of the evaluators and their use of theory as well as to the programmes, structures or persons being evaluated (Kirkhart, 2010). For example, in her *Ceiba* metaphor, Estrada (2005) sees the tree trunk as Indigenous knowledges and woman-centered epistemologies, noting that "this stance better reflects my cultural location, since the Maya culture is traditionally matrilineal" (p. 50).

Time plays an enormous role in setting the parameters of good evaluation. Indigenous epistemology calls evaluation to look forward and backward, beyond the present moment. Long-term outcomes must be carefully considered. Evaluators must resist becoming narrowly focused on immediate effects on direct programme participants; impacts (intended or unintended) on persons in the community are of equal or greater importance. Indigenous evaluation is patient. It may not conform well to fixed deadlines or the timelines of Western funding cycles. Standards of practice also address time in a way that is unfamiliar to non-Indigenous evaluators. "Good practice" includes rules governing *when* certain stories may be told or information gathered, often tied to the four seasons or cycles of Nature (Tafoya, 1995).

To achieve a decolonizing outcome, Indigenous evaluation supports sovereignty and self-determination. Local epistemology gives Indigenous persons control over how evaluation is conducted, in ways that contribute to greater control over their lives. The conduct of Indigenous evaluation honors core values (LaFrance & Nichols, 2009) and reflects cultural, political, economic and social preferences (Smith, 2004). It is action oriented. Indigenous evaluation practice moves beyond determinations of merit or worth to support cultural reclamation and transformation.

Indigenous epistemology expands voice and vision in evaluation. It offers more diverse worldviews (and a correspondingly clearer sense of the limitations of narrow cultural location) that challenge our prior understandings, moving evaluation beyond a data-gathering and interpretation exercise, even within participatory or collaborative models. A similar expansion recasts validity concerns.

Strand 2: Epistemology informs validity. Validity holds authority in systems of inquiry – both research and evaluation. It signi-

fies power and control over the legitimization and representation of knowledge (Bishop, 1998), which is contested space in decolonization. Who determines what is valid and invalid, legitimate and illegitimate? What is given heavy consideration and what is discounted? Under decolonization, validity must be expanded beyond a reductive, monolithic construct to allow different ways of being valid and multiple pathways of validation and legitimization. Validity must be recast to fit local understandings about the nature of knowledge and how legitimacy and trustworthiness is determined.

Validity resides within language; this is especially critical for Indigenous knowledge and languages. Translation compromises and disrupts valid understanding. If one is limited by the English language for instance, genuine meaning may not be conveyed. Nuances of meaning are not captured in generic nouns. A simplistic search for direct translation leads to frustration and misunderstanding (see Tafoya, 1995, for an illustrative story).

Decolonization involves unfolding validity arguments to make the logic and bases of justification more transparent and to expand the range of arguments considered legitimate. Indigenous understandings of validity emphasize justifications that are relational, experiential, and attentive to consequences (Kirkhart, 1995, 2005). Relational accountability lies at the heart of Indigenous research and evaluation (Wilson, 2008). Relational criteria replace criteria of "neutrality, objectivity and distance," which have historically excluded Indigenous peoples from participating in the construction, validation, and legitimization of knowledge (Bishop, 1998, p. 201). Experience resides in both outward and inward space, physical and metaphysical, objective and subjective (Ermine, 1999). Consequences are viewed in terms of the good of the whole – the sovereignty and well-being of the tribe or community (LaFrance & Nichols, 2010).

Decolonization avoids the construction of sweeping rules and procedures for validation that lie outside a given research or evaluation project, because such rules remove authority from participants. When validity is located external to context, it ends up defining other people's realities, disregarding local epistemology (Bishop, 1998). Validity must be understood within, not outside of, Indigenous worldviews.

Indigenous perspectives on validity must be foremost, so that conclusions are validated by appropriate criteria and procedures compatible with the context. But this does not mean that all Indigenous

perspectives are identical or that *only* indigenous perspectives may apply. The links between global and local must be well understood and made visible in evaluation research (Stanfield, 2011). Such linkage is an issue of particular importance to matters of equity that cross national boundaries. Evaluators working in international development contexts import paradigms that do not fit the realities of the local cultural context, including but not limited to frameworks of validation. These imported beliefs must be recognized, understood, and replaced or balanced with culturally-specific ones. The importance of balancing rather than replacing is not an unwillingness to commit to local epistemology. Rather, it is recognition that the primary value in evaluation is utility – in this case, the utility of a given approach in achieving equity. One must be multilingual with respect to epistemologies, because conversations about access to resources cross cultural boundaries (Williams, 2006). Wholesale rejection of majority epistemologies may be as unproductive as wholesale acceptance. In a development context, the ability to move clearly and transparently among epistemologies in working with multiple stakeholders, avoids "collisions" of incompatible worldviews in favor of well-informed dialogue.

Strand 3: Epistemology informs method. Consistent with broader understandings of good evaluation practice and validation, epistemology also expands the range of available methods. It alters time frames and modifies procedures for gathering, processing and using information to reflect local ways of knowing. This is not simply a question of "sensitivity to context" in translating and using non-Indigenous tools, but of the nature of the tools themselves. Tools used in Western approaches may need to be deconstructed and rethought. Some methods are culturally-specific and must be created from scratch. Others may be repurposed, modified or adapted to context. Tools that are traditional to Indigenous communities may appear "new" when viewed from Western perspectives. Conversely, methods that may at first glance appear familiar (e.g., interview or observation as data-gathering strategies) are in fact quite different when applied with a different epistemological foundation.

The processes of data gathering must allow participants to share their experiences in their own terms. The non-linearity of Indigenous knowledge discussed above (Little Bear, 2000) often defines a data-gathering process that does not resemble a Western exchange of questions and answers. In framing evaluations, questions are sometimes not appropriate at all; statements about what knowl-

edge is desired or needed are more suitable (LaFrance & Nichols, 2009). Answers often reveal themselves in stories that are indirect and non-linear. This requires a different attitude and skills set on the part of the listener, as well as those interpreting the stories to form evaluative conclusions.

> "It helps if you listen in circles, because there are stories inside and between stories, and finding your way through them is as easy and as hard as finding your way home. Part of finding is getting lost, and when you're lost you start to open up and listen" (Tafoya, 1995, pp. 11-12).

Along with tools and methods, Western notions of research design may also be reinvented. Preordinate designs, perhaps mapped out even prior to entering a community, are antithetical to Indigenous evaluation frameworks. Indigenous epistemology informs designs that are emergent. Hermes (1998) is explicit in stating that her methods were not clearly delineated before she started her work. They were continually changing, acting as a "situated response" to both theory and context. Such a fluid view often accompanies a focus on inductive (vs. deductive) methods.

Indigenous epistemology privileges context over method (LaFrance, Nichols, & Kirkhart, forthcoming). "Context-stripping methods" long associated with positivist epistemology (see, for example, Mishler, 1979) must be avoided in favor of methods that honor the context dependence of ideas ("variables") and the relationships among them. However, it is important to be clear that no single method or category of methods (e.g., qualitative vs. quantitative) necessarily obviates the problem of colonization (Bishop, 1998).

The scenario that follows illustrates how understanding context sets the stage for development evaluation. It describes the project history, key stakeholders, and other key aspects of an educational evaluation of the San[5] in the context of southern Africa.

San education evaluation project scenario: Part 1

In the southern African region of the world lives one of our oldest known human groups, the San. In one such community, an international aid agency based in Europe has requested its first evaluation of the last decade. Project activities included teacher training, teacher support, and other efforts to support education at a primary level and to influence the educational situation in the local

5 Other terms used to refer to San are Bushmen, or (in Botswana), Basarwa.

San community. At stake are a set of decisions and recommendations needed to contribute to administrative transitions underway by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the European aid agency (EAA) regarding the future directions of the educational projects. At the time of the evaluation, there is a little angst about the future direction of the educational project from the ministry and the community. It is believed that the evaluation will help to answer questions and propose a future direction for the government and dispel the fears the community has about the potential termination of the project. In addition to the angst about the future of the project, there is as much anxiety about the evaluation. Some key stakeholders recall how a prior evaluation by another international aid agency over a decade ago left more questions than answers.

Since the development of language and educational projects after Independence, the San community has had less participation in formal schooling systems than any other indigenous group, both in the country and in the region. For the 20 years after Independence, efforts were made by other international and local aid agencies in collaboration with the MoE to increase the number of San attending school and to take advantage of the fruits of development. Although the San gained increased access to formal schooling during this time, there were incredible challenges for them in completing that schooling. For instance, while increases had been seen in the attendance of San children in formal schools, too many dropped out due to complex economic, social, and cultural issues that prevented many from achieving educational success. Specifically, reports of bullying from other ethnic indigenous groups, lack of supportive adults (teachers and staff), irrelevant curricula, and acute homesickness were the common reasons reported by non-governmental and governmental agencies for why San children dropped out of schools at the upper primary and junior secondary levels. Typically, no San children remain enrolled at the senior secondary level of schooling.

Even before arriving at primary school, the San children have foundations in language(s), culture(s), values, and skills learned from their home and local communities. The village communities from which most rural San children come are tight-knit systems of parents and community leaders. Historically, the San lived as hunter-gatherers in areas of their traditional territory. At Independence, traditional ways of living continued to influence a series of important decisions and policies on maintaining and classifying traditional lands. While these decisions seemed to benefit this San commu-

nity, there were significant racial and class divisions and many San families at and following Independence still struggle with a basic subsistence livelihood as farm laborers, either on the outskirts of town or in rural areas.

As required by the terms of reference (ToR), the evaluation methodology was expected to be a review of project documentation through a desk study and interviews with key stakeholders involved in the project. More specifically, the ToR proposed: i) a general update on the situation for the San; ii) an overview of goals achieved compared to goals initially set forth; iii) analysis of effects of the project on grade 1-3 students, compared to those not participating in the project; iv) analysis of educational levels achieved by San children; v) an investigation of how partners perceive the success of the project operation, implementation, and influence; vi) input toward local ownership and local participation; vii) discussion of how funds were prioritized; and viii) recommendations for future steps. According to the ToR, the report of the evaluation would span a period of four months and a summary would be provided in the local language.

As a starting point, a team of foreign-born evaluators wrestled with the specific ToR, wondering to what extent the desk study and interviews would reveal answers to the questions posed; how an evaluation study could be designed to answer the questions related to achieved and intended goals; the effects of the project on students in primary school; and the expected influence of the project and the evaluation for future decision-making purposes. The EAA's managing director, in response to questions about the ToR, was both vague and brief. He responded to the evaluators' request for clarification by reiterating his hope that the evaluation would assist communities in focusing on the intended directions of the project. Of particular concern was the impending transfer of responsibilities for the project administration from the primarily European-led project coordinators, who had led the efforts for the first eight years, to the regional office of the MoE. The motives for the transfer from the international aid agency to the country-led regional line ministry office were not clear. The EAA had presumed that the time taken to develop the educational projects was sufficient to allow for the transfer, although at the time of the evaluation, considerable unease remained within the San community over the timing and specifics of the transfer.

Methodological considerations in decolonizing evaluation

The dilemma of the evaluators within the San scenario is one that all evaluators must face: evolving situations subject to whatever changes occur. Ensuring evaluation that promotes equity and social justice means understanding that methods and methodological designs must be representative of the culture, the location in which the culture is situated, and the political context.

Arguably, the tension between the consideration of Indigenous epistemology versus the practical constraints of resources, politics, and decision-making timelines is palpable (Kovach, 2010). To simply insinuate that conducting evaluation in developing countries is a challenge is to understate the issue of undertaking evaluation in unforeseen and, in many ways, unstable circumstances including culture, socioeconomic status, physical environment, and internal and regional politics. When one adds the agendas of westernized often Eurocentric countries such as the United States, that often fund developing countries' humanitarian programmes, the multitude of stakeholders who impose perspectives on what is considered good evaluation, grows exponentially.

Although only the most altruistic rationales underlie development programming and by extension, programme evaluation, development remains largely an externally focused activity, with funders and donors as the givers, and target groups as the receivers (Eversole, 2005). By its very nature, evaluation that is equity-focused or socially just should challenge the view of obtaining answers in a context-free location, and in a value-free climate. Instead, evaluation models that privilege equity, for instance, would strive to represent and explore the views of "the other," and dare say, work to decolonize by reflecting on the common core values that underlie the cultural context, the culture, and the political milieu.

Yet, there is pressure to answer the questions of developing countries (and funders) using a westernized, and arguably Eurocentric view of what is considered rigorous, systematic and objective evaluation. It is problematic to interpret data using a one-size-fits-all approach to answer questions from multiple stakeholder perspectives. Methods and methodological designs must be contemplative, exemplifying the context and various mores imbued throughout the country. In this way, the focus is on the values of the country and target group rather than a colonized view. Additionally, tailored

designs and methods are, in the end, intended to insure the precision, validity, and credibility of the information gathered.

The above mentioned issues have been considered as tensions in epistemology and practice in developing countries. For instance, in understanding evaluation in Africa, evaluators such as Gariba (2007) call for understanding African Knowledge Systems as a basis for evaluation, rather than using traditional perspectives. Such a perspective means considering: a) the historical and political perspectives of the country; b) the purpose of evaluation in the context and within the setting; c) what standards should be used to provide the background for design and execution in methodology and data collection; and d) what is meant by 'credibility of information'.

Understanding historical perspectives and contexts of countries and their relationship to evaluation methodology. To understand the context of the country and modern day programming, one must understand international relations in general. Pronk (2009) notes that international conflicts in the 20th century were, at a larger level, both political and ideological between west and east, but also reflective of the aspirations of people to free themselves from political, economic and cultural oppression. The 21st century has brought similar perspectives, with nations across the world witnessing a wave of resistance to colonization that has been imposed either within the country or with influence from powerful nations from east and west (Pronk, 2009). With the aforementioned as a backdrop, the focus on equity across nations, within classes and cultures, becomes significant.

Acknowledging imperialism in programming and evaluation. Conlin and Stirrat (2006) acknowledge that programmes in developing countries were and have continued to be primarily donor focused, designed and shaped in the manner that donors find most palatable, and most congruent with their values. By extension, evaluations face similar issues. Evaluations have in the past, and in many ways continue, to abide by the scientific clinical trial model of testing that includes Randomized Control Trials (RCT) and experimental designs. Despite calls for considerations of the contrary (e.g., Mertens & Wilson, 2012; Hood, Hopson, & Frierson, 2005), these designs are still considered a "gold standard" for impact evaluation, and the standard by which all evaluation, no matter what the culture, political perspective, or context, should aspire. Yet to Conlin and Stirrat (2006), this so-called gold standard is feasible only in a modicum of international circumstances and contexts. In under-

standing this reality, it becomes clear that evaluation that privileges equity must consider the context in which the evaluation would be conducted, and acknowledge the colonialist perspective that such a standard projects.

In attempting to address equity in evaluation, the design must address variables such as the historical understanding of imperialism. Such designs would account for issues such as class and status warfare, and why these might influence any type of international development that might be accomplished. For instance Gariba (2007) pondered the question of how African evaluators cope with challenges posed by the need to use evaluation as a tool for transformation, and not just ex-post assessment. Thus, evaluations committed to equity and social justice must keep in mind that the evaluative process is a collaborative process, a synergy between all parties dedicated to obtaining evidence that is representative of context, while addressing the needs of stakeholders.

Standards for design and execution in methodology and data collection. Many approaches – even those focused on social justice, inclusivity, and equity – are steeped in traditional deductive methods versus those methods that are more inductive. These deductive strategies may be useful and in some cases necessitated by the design; however, they can be disarming and distancing, discouraging the very aim of social justice values. Therefore, the focus must be on those designs that encourage inductive reasoning and by extension, designs. Conlin and Stirrat (2006) note that, "perhaps the time has come to recognize that interpretative approaches which owe more to history than to experimental sciences might be better suited to the world of development" (p. 200). Designs that are inclusive of non-traditional, inductive-based methods might be better suited to chronicling a community's response to programmes. Additionally, such methods can insure validity of information, as well as informing multicultural validity (Kirkhart, 2005).

In addressing what else might enhance an equity-focused agenda, the Culturally Responsive Evaluation (CRE) framework is informative in providing insights and strategies for promoting equity (Frierson, et al., 2010; Mertens, 2008) and is adept at acknowledging and encouraging the full participation of underserved and disadvantaged communities. CRE strives to bring the cultural context to the fore in evaluation design, thereby insuring that the methods used, whether traditional or non-traditional will be true to the context in which the culture operates.

Even under the best circumstances within a CRE approach, donors and recipients can, and regularly do, clash on factors related to programme design and by extension, the best way to illustrate results. As Gariba (2007) notes, the question is, whose standards for research are used? And, by association, whose ethics?

Cultural competence and responsiveness in method design and methodology. A mainstay for Equity-focused evaluation must be the consideration of cultural competence in method design and methodology. Cultural competence can be defined as a "state of being" (American Evaluation Association, 2011). But Lee and Farrell (2006) wonder if is cultural competence an excuse to continue to perpetuate racism, nationalist attitudes and stereotypes (for instance) in programming, and evaluation? They warn that the tendency to use race, culture, and ethnicity interchangeably further categorizes communities and groups. To avoid these issues, one must consider that there must be some sort of collaboration between those who are evaluated, the evaluation agenda, and the evaluator. As Gariba (2007) notes, those with power and instruments of communication and those who do not have access to these instruments (the target population) must work in tandem with one another, deciding the most congruous channels for communication of results.

Participants and participation. Much like development programming, evaluation donors of developed countries, while asking for a more collaborative and close relationship with developing countries, continue to subtly and sometimes overtly shape the goals, landscape and processes of initiatives. This colonial perspective suggests that there is a specific way to design programmes, usually one that is closer and more representative of a westernized perspective. In an Equity-focused evaluation, it makes sense that the values of those who are most affected by the programme and evaluation (the consumers) would come to the fore, while acknowledging the context in which these values are executed, and reconciling those of the funders and donors who may subscribe to a different perspective.

Credibility of information. Perhaps the cornerstone of methodology endeavors is the credibility of information gathered (and interpreted). Credibility, as Donaldson (2009) notes is the reliability and *validity* of the information gathered, the analysis of it in a manner that is reflective of the data, and finally, dissemination at all levels. Earlier within this chapter, we postulated that validity must fit local, contextual understandings about the nature of knowledge. Specifically, to insure true validity, multiple ways of knowing and concep-

tualizing must be encouraged and accepted. Thus, the evaluator is emboldened to look beyond traditional identifications and definitions of validity. These might include, as Gariba (2007) encourages, considerations of "voices and collective energies of the marginalized" (p. 8).

Although we do not assume that there are exact similarities between evaluation performed in developing counties versus developed countries, the ongoing conversation is appropriate for both contexts. Such context-specific situations illustrate the need for uniquely developed location-situated understandings and evaluations. For instance, the American Evaluation Association's Public Statement on Cultural Competence (2011) provides several tenets for culturally responsive and culturally competent evaluation, especially as they relate to validity. Validity requires a level of shared understanding, and to achieve such an understanding, all voices and perspectives must be honestly, equitably, and equally represented. Such a combination ensures that credibility of information is enhanced. When translating the tenets of validity for Equity-focused evaluation, into international development efforts, validity and by extension, credibility is supported and enhanced (AEA, 2011, pg. 5) when evaluators:

- accurately and respectfully reflect the life experiences and perspectives of programme participants in their evaluations;
- establish relationships that support trustworthy communication among all participants in the evaluation process;
- draw upon culturally relevant, and in some cases culturally specific, theory in the design of the evaluation and the interpretation of findings;
- select and implement design options and measurement strategies in ways that are compatible with the cultural context of the study;
- consider intended and unintended social consequences in the overall assessment of their work.

The final section of the educational evaluation scenario in the San community in southern Africa specifically addresses methodological considerations and challenges in carrying out equity and socially just evaluations. Specifically, the evaluators were placed in a conundrum in which they needed to choose a design that was responsive to the development agendas of the ToR, but also responsive to the needs of the San. In keeping with Eversole's (2005) participatory typology, the evaluators discovered that a collabora-

tive approach was best suited for the context, as well as the political landscape. However, as the scenario progresses, we notice that the collaborative approach does not solve all questions, and issues linger at the conclusion at the end of the scenario, as discussed below:

San education evaluation project scenario: Part 2

The evaluators chose a design that would be collaboratively formative and culturally grounded, ensuring there was opportunity to meet a host of stakeholders at multiple levels in the country, region, and community, including building an opportunity to share the draft report to all groups prior to submission to the EAA. They had had recent experience where researchers or evaluators had either collected information without full ownership of the document by the San community or, as was more typical, the findings were non-representative, not available, or not in a language that could be understood by most in the local community.

To illustrate the challenge that the evaluators faced at the time of their fieldwork, the total number of learners in grades 4-8 at the regional primary and junior secondary schools numbered only 40 out of the nearly 150 primary school students. These figures are for the village schools in a good year, based upon enrollment statistics recorded by the principal of the village schools. Many San children came from their village schools at grades 1-3. Out of the large numbers of students who had completed grade 3 over the last decade or so, many did not make the transition to school in the regional center. By the time of the evaluator's visit, there was only one student still enrolled in 8th grade and fewer than a handful in junior secondary school. As the MoE statistics continued to illustrate, the higher the grade, the more likely San learners were to drop out. The situation facing the one village school student left in 8th grade reflects a larger, more complicated challenge related to changes and transitions that took place at multiple school levels. These challenges were both pupil-related and staff-related. They included logistical challenges around transportation, materials, food, support, the increased need for teacher uptake and training, and community consultation and involvement.

In two in-country fieldwork periods and one set of interviews at the aid agency offices in Europe, a variety of stakeholders were interviewed at the locations where stakeholders worked. At the time of the interviews, these stakeholders were involved with educational efforts in the San community in the capital city, the regional

city, or the local or village constituency, as well as in the European country that funded the project. At the outset of the fieldwork, it was important for the evaluators to visit each village and ensure a community meeting was held to gather insights at the village level. Local research assistants were employed during the fieldwork at the regional and local levels. The nearly 130 respondents included educational planners, land and environment consultants, members of the MoE in regional positions, San community, principals, teachers, village committees, students, and matrons.

During a second fieldwork visit a few months after the initial team fieldwork, preliminary results were reported to groups of stakeholders in three regions of the country – in the capital city, in the regional headquarters, and in the San regional area. In the San regional area, two presentations were given over a weekend to facilitate attendance by groups of teachers and community members to listen and provide feedback. In addition to presenting the draft report, the purpose of the meetings was to gather additional input regarding the intended recommendations of the report. At these meetings, evaluators ensured that multiple languages – local, regional, and official – were spoken in the feedback presentations and that the final report recommendations would be in the San language.

In the final report to the EAA, evaluation recommendations were arranged in several sections related to the key sections of the report: the context and background of the aid agency's project, the goals of the project, its impact, and challenges for transition, logistics, roles and responsibilities, teacher training, and community consultation and involvement. Five priority recommendations preceded the remaining 49 recommendations. These priority recommendations focused on the key presence of the agency and the need for a consultative conference, a clearly established mission statement, role clarification between the aid agency and the ministry, and the development of alternative approaches to education.

The response to the report from the aid agency was generally positive and priority recommendations were, by and large, likely to be acted upon beginning with the suggested consultative conference later in the year. This was to involve a diverse group of stakeholders who would revisit the recommendations of the evaluation report. What was less clear from the perspective of the evaluators, despite the expected consultative conference where all matters pertaining to San education would be discussed, were the continued expressions of alienation these groups faced. This alienation was evident

even in government schools that were attempting to close achievement gaps and to ensure that all groups had access to schools and educational materials that had heretofore not been available for most and especially the San. The nature and transparency of the relationship and roles between the MoE and the aid agency also remained unclear, as was how community involvement and input would actually be guaranteed or promoted in moving forward.

Concluding thoughts and critiques

Much of this chapter has been focused on understanding the implications and cautions about Equity-focused evaluation within the context of westernized colonialistic programming, while acknowledging, embracing, and privileging local culture. As with all evaluation approaches, but especially those that are transformative and focus on social justice and Indigenous populations, the challenge is to provide voice and true representation of those who the evaluative process affects the most. We do not question outright the motives of developed countries such as the United States who would work collaboratively with developing nations. Many of those collaborations are altruistic in nature. However, we consider Equity-focused evaluation to be a strategy by which to *equalize* the often benevolent and charitable nature of international funding and programmatic assistance. Given that Equity-focused evaluation is new to, as Mertens and Wilson (2012) would assert, values-driven evaluation approaches, it bears a large responsibility.

Before closing this critique, transparency requires acknowledging the complexities and pitfalls of what has been proposed, just as the scenario above insinuates. Decolonization is neither easily nor quickly accomplished; it is an enormous project over generations of evaluators. It requires a long view of time, and an appreciation of the slow process of building trustworthy relationships. It requires deep commitment and motivation, as well as resilience to steel oneself against the realities and limitations of what can be accomplished at any one site and time – what Maori scholar and educator Graham Hingangaroa Smith calls "the politics of truth" in the context of his work in the Academy. It requires an appreciation of irony, acknowledging that one is undertaking decolonization within a development context that has held, and often continues to hold, an explicitly colonial agenda. It requires an insider perspective that must be engaged authentically. When evaluators are not Indigenous to a given community, it requires genuine partnerships and

an acute awareness of one's cultural location. It requires unlearning some traditional definitions of "good evaluation" to create space for broader understandings of validity and rigor, of utility and relevance. It requires tolerance for ambiguity, moving away from a search for singular truths.

This chapter suggests that decolonizing evaluation is not easy work. There are many challenges in committing to and carrying out Equity-focused evaluation. There are deep commitments to the epistemologies and methods in which we have been schooled. Furthermore, there is arrogance in assuming that anyone can fully know and understand the worldviews of others, particularly when one is coming from outside the community in which the evaluation is located. In grappling with new realities, one risks reifying cultural dimensions as singular and static or creating fixed categories to aid description. One must struggle to retain a vision of culture as fluid, dynamic, and multifaceted. In seeking to build evaluation on Indigenous knowledge, one risks advancing an assimilation agenda that changes the worldview one is attempting to incorporate. Seeking partnerships brings stressors of multiple accountabilities, creating tensions between two or more loyalties, and potentially dividing communities. One must balance circumspection about the possibilities of missteps with the imperative to move ahead toward equity and justice, not to be paralyzed by one's acknowledged ignorance but to advance with humility.

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