The Gender Practitioners Community of Practice brings together the perspectives of evaluators from International Financial Institutions (IFIs) that are part of the ECG. This network aims to improve the methods and the quality of evaluations by promoting and participating in initiatives to exchange knowledge and stimulate a discussion on the approaches, challenges, and solutions to integrate gender in evaluation. This article summarizes the main messages of the ECG Reference Document which was inspired by the work of the Gender Practitioners Community of Practice of the Evaluation Cooperation Group (ECG) “Integrating Gender into project-level evaluation”, accessible at https://www.ecgnet.org/document/integrating-gender-project-level-evaluations-main-report.
While most development agencies and multilateral development banks, include gender equality as a development objective, and recognize the differential impacts of development interventions on women and men; the Gender Practitioners Community of Practice of the ECG recognized that most development evaluations do not adequately address issues relating to gender equality. Agencies vary considerably in terms of their level of experience in gender evaluation: some agencies are just starting to address these questions and do not yet have a clearly defined approach on how to address gender; others recognize the importance of gender but are still exploring cost-effective ways to incorporate these issues into the current evaluation program.

Many operations departments, even if aware of the importance of gender, struggle to find cost-effective ways to collect the additional information that would be required to conduct these types of evaluations. However, even agencies that have a strong commitment and more experience in addressing gender, often find that there is distinction between the small number of evaluations which are specifically defined as gender-responsive, and the majority of evaluations where gender is not the central focus of the evaluation. For all of these different reasons, it was acknowledged that, with some important exceptions, very few evaluations adequately address gender.

"The experience to date of the gender teams indicates that most, if not all, agencies recognize the need for a stronger and more systematic focus on gender in their evaluations".

While gender responsive evaluation (GRE) is still at an early stage in many agencies, it was recognized that significant and steady progress is being made. Several case studies, included in the report, illustrated some promising approaches. It was also
recognized that cooperation among the gender units of different agencies is a major resource that should be fully exploited, as well as the collaboration between independent evaluation and gender units. It was acknowledged that this report provides a useful reference source of tools and techniques on which to build.

Some of the key messages from the report are the following:

**How gender is addressed in development programs**

1. Achieving economic and social development goals requires that gender equality issues are fully addressed. The economic efficiency of many programs is significantly reduced when measures are not taken to ensure that women's entrepreneurial, organizational and socio-cultural resources and needs are fully addressed. Furthermore the economic and social rate of return on development programs can significantly increase when gender issues are adequately addressed.

2. Even when gender is addressed in program design and evaluation, the range of issues addressed is often very narrow. In many cases the gender indicators to be evaluated are derived from the project results framework, where gender indicators are often narrowly defined and often only include quantitative indicators relating to, for example, measures of participation in community organizations coordinating the project and access to quantitative project benefits. Many evaluation teams reported that (a) they are usually not consulted when the results framework is being defined, and (b) they are frequently discouraged from looking at the broader range of indicators (access to and control of productive resources, participation in decision-making at the family, community and broader levels, freedom from sexual-based violence) considered necessary for a rigorous gender analysis. There is a clear need to incorporate consultative and other mechanisms to broaden the boundaries of how gender issues are addressed in program evaluation.

3. Evaluation offices often have a marketing role to convince key stakeholders inside and outside the agency that gender issues are important, that they must be addressed in order to achieve development objectives, and that there is a significant value-added of including a gender focus.

**Methodological and strategic considerations**

4. It was agreed that the integration of gender in program evaluation requires a step-by-step approach, and that it is critical to raise awareness of the importance of gender and the value-added of investing scarce evaluation resources in the probably more expensive and complex gender evaluations. The following are often the steps in the process:

   a. Disaggregating available indicators (school enrolment, use of health facilities, access to microcredit) by sex. This is a simple and economical way to identify gender differences and to raise awareness that gender issues can be important.

   b. Identifying “quick wins” (“low-hanging fruit”) where there are economical ways, that do not place a burden on operational staff to identify gender issues that are operationally important. An example cited was the analysis of differences in post-harvest loss between male and female farmers due to women's more limited access to means of transport to get produce to market. This
information is usually easy to collect and has important implications for agricultural production.

c. Incorporating into the evaluation framework some of the widely-used gender analysis issues and indicators such as access to and control of productive resources, time-use etc.

d. Incorporating on a selective pilot basis, some of the broader concepts of feminist evaluation relating to power structures, mechanisms of social control, gender-based violence.

5. Another key message was that while there are specialized gender-responsive tools, most gender-responsive evaluations largely draw on all of the conventional quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods evaluation tools. However, whichever data collection and analysis tools are used, there are a set of guiding principles that must be followed. These include:

a. Recognition that GRE does not just focus on women but examines the differential impacts of development interventions on women and men, and on the relations between women and men – as well as taking into consideration factors such as age, marital status, ethnicity, religion and physical and mental disabilities.

b. While much of the focus will be on the additional burdens faced by women in many cultures and sectors, it is important to adopt a broader focus and to understand the changing relationships between women and men as a result of economic and social change, and to recognize that certain groups of men may also be negatively affected by the processes of change.

c. Focus on removing barriers to equity, equality, human rights and social and economic empowerment.

d. The use of participatory and consultative approaches, and the use of mixed methods designs.

6. A key element (goal) is to be able to demonstrate the value-added of a focus on gender. Gender-responsive evaluation will always involve some economic and organizational costs, so it is important to demonstrate to management that the benefits, in terms of greater achievement of development objectives, will
significantly outweigh the costs. This is particularly important for agencies that use economic or social rates of return in assessing project viability.

7. From a strategic perspective, there are different ways that GRE can be incorporated. Several approaches can be used simultaneously in different evaluations, or the long-term strategy may be to move systematically towards the integration of gender into all or most evaluations.

a. A single evaluation that takes advantage of funding opportunities or an agency’s interest in responding to a particular matter or challenge and where there is no immediate plan to broaden the gender focus of the whole evaluation program.

b. An opportunistic approach that builds on the previous approach with the intention of testing the viability of different approaches with the goal of gradually institutionalizing a gender strategy for all or most evaluations.

c. Gradually incorporating, possibly over several years, a gender dimension into all evaluations.

d. Identifying a sub-set of evaluations that will focus on gender and that will gradually incorporate some of the more specialized gender evaluation tools.

Challenges and next steps

The experience to date of the gender teams indicates that most, if not all, agencies recognize the need for a stronger and more systematic focus on gender in their evaluations. However, there are a number of challenges to be addressed. These include:

a. The continued perception among some agency staff that while gender is important in sectors such as education and health, sectors such as transport, energy and enterprise development are “gender neutral”, so there is no need for GRE. How can staff in these sectors be convinced of the relevance of gender?

b. The fact that GRE normally increases the cost and complexity of the evaluation and may also create additional hurdles for the evaluation office if it has to request additional data or time from very busy operational staff. How can staff be convinced that the extra costs and effort is justified because there will be a significant value-added to the evaluation?

c. A key argument supporting GRE is that understanding and addressing differential impacts of development on women and men will improve the economic and social performance of development interventions. What kind of methodology should be used for calculating the economic and social rate of return on gender-responsive programs, compared to interventions that do not take gender into consideration?

d. Resistance from staff who in the past have only worked with conventional quantitative evaluation methods and may feel uncomfortable having to work with new methodologies. How can staff be helped to incorporate the new GRE methods?

e. The fact that GRE is often perceived as being linked to “feminist” political agendas, which some staff may not understand and/or find threatening. GRE is in fact based upon a set of values concerning social justice and gender equality. How can we encourage discussion around these values?
Michael Bamberger has been involved for over forty years in the evaluation of development programs in Africa, Asia and Latin America. His focus has been on poverty, social exclusion, gender equality and women's empowerment, urban development and evaluation methodology. He has taught and written extensively on how to conduct methodologically sound evaluations when working in real-world development contexts. Over the past few years he has worked on the opportunities and challenges for integrating new information technology into the evaluation of development programs.

He has been on the faculty of the International Program for Development Evaluation Training (IPDET) since 2001, and is on the editorial board of several leading evaluation journals. His recent publications include: “Dealing with complexity in the evaluation of development programs”, “Integrating big data into the evaluation of development programs”, “RealWorld Evaluation: working under budget, time, data and political constraints”, “Evaluating the Social Development Goals (SDGs) through equity-focused and gender-responsive evaluations.”, and “Big data analytics and evaluation: optimism and caution” (in press).