Gender-responsive evaluation in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals in French-speaking sub-Saharan African countries: situational analysis, challenges, opportunities and innovative approaches

Although existing inequalities because of differences in gender, social class, age, ethnicity, disability etc. are still blatant in a significant number of countries, evaluation presents itself as an important tool for analyzing progress towards reducing these inequalities. This article stresses the importance of taking into account the needs of all (women and men) when setting up development policies, projects and programs. It establishes an inventory of gender-sensitive assessments in the region, examines the opportunities and challenges of gender equality and finally proposes sustainable solutions for the elimination of inequalities between men and women.
Introduction

Sustainable development requires that the needs of every member of society (women and men) be considered in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies, projects and development programs.

Although this principle is recognized in many countries, both north and south, the implementation of such a principle is often confronted with enormous socio-cultural burdens which create inequalities and all forms of discrimination between classes: rich and poor, men and women, youth and elderly, etc.

The evaluation of development interventions and public policies over the last three decades has highlighted these inequalities with evaluation becoming one of the most important means for reporting progress and significant changes in a population's well-being as relates to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Despite remarkable gains in MDGs implementation, progress made has not always translated into progress for all. Inequalities persist, with progress being uneven as relates to economic growth and the distribution of wealth. While poverty has dropped significantly in Asian countries, from 62% in 1990 to less than 3% in 2015 (a 216 million decline in South Asia), sub-Saharan Africa has seen an increase in the number of poor, going from 278 million in 1990 to 413 million in 2015 (World Bank Group, 2018). Overall, this African subregion includes 27 of the world's 28 poorest countries.

The African economic boom seems to have left out women and all populations at the bottom of the economic ladder (people at a disadvantage due to age, disability or ethnicity). For example, in Africa, many women continue to die during pregnancy or from childbirth complications. Indeed, for women, monetary and non-monetary inequalities are most important during periods of fertility (especially for women aged 20-34), this is then exacerbated by domestic work that conflicts with reproductive activities (WBG, 2018).

Such situation raises the following questions: What is the state of implementing gender responsive evaluation in sub-Saharan Africa? How should we conduct evaluation to ensure that no one is left behind in the context of the SDGs? What are the challenges and opportunities for gender-responsive evaluations? What methodological approaches are relevant for conducting gender-sensitive evaluations?

Answers to these questions are presented in the following sections.

Current knowledge on gender-responsive evaluations

To answer previous questions, a systematic review of scientific literature has been conducted to document the knowledge of gender mainstreaming in public policy evaluation. This approach is reliable, rigorous, transparent, structured and comprehensive to allow the documentation of knowledge on a given topic (Bearman et al., 2012, Landry, 2009). The current research is guided by the nine steps proposed by Gough (2007).
In step 1, we look at if and how previously researched questions are retained. In step 2, criteria are defined for scientific literature research to include the presence of keywords in article titles and interest in sub-Saharan Africa. Step 3 focuses on two elements: keywords and databases. The keywords are gender, evaluation, Africa or gender. The databases are the largest and most widely recognized for gender studies: Gender Inn, Women’s International Studies, and Ariane.

In steps 4 and 5, the application of inclusion and exclusion criteria for scientific literature searches yielded a sample of articles in both English and French. In October 2018, a total of 10 articles including one covering sub-Saharan Africa and three on South Africa are identified (Adom & Asare-Yeboa, 2016; Jan et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2009; Tirivanhu & Jansen Van Rensburg, 2018). An application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria for research revealed only one article, Adom and Asare-Yeboa (2016). Following the extraction of relevant data in step 6, the methodological aspect was examined in step 7, this includes: (i) consistency between the hypothesis (or research question) and methodology, (ii) analysis of links between variables, and (iii) analyzes appropriate to the type of search.

In steps 8 and 9, it should be noted that the only article dealing with gender and evaluation in sub-Saharan Africa focused on female entrepreneurship in Ghana, which is an English-speaking country (Adom & Asare-Yeboa, 2016). A sample of 25 women with different levels of education, showed that education plays a key role in women’s entrepreneurship to empower women. In particular, women with higher education levels are more likely to succeed in their activities than those who have not been educated. This is based on an increased access to opportunities through media and more developed skills to run their businesses.

Although research shows a link between women’s education and entrepreneurship, a question on training-entrepreneurship adequacy emerges as some women indicated that their studies were not aligned with their enterprises. In addition, more scientific research is needed in French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa to refine interventions to better target disadvantaged groups.

**Main challenges to gender mainstreaming in evaluation**

The challenges of gender mainstreaming in evaluations are multiple. First, it is important to underline a lack of knowledge of the cultural context. Since gender is a social construct, it is important to understand this context in order to be able to adopt an evaluation plan that is adequate not only for data collection but also for understanding the results and their use to improve the everyday life of women, children, the elderly and other vulnerable groups. Indeed, a misunderstanding of the context often leads to a poor analysis of the roles of different actors and the power relations that can impede the
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participation of vulnerable people in an evaluation. As a result, the needs or difficulties of these people will not be known, thereby not addressing the SDG principle of “leaving no one behind”.

Another challenge of gender mainstreaming in assessments is the availability of data to identify different population categories. Data collection in sub-Saharan Africa countries are mainly limited to censuses that are usually conducted every ten years, or demographic and health surveys which are every five years. These surveys, while providing knowledge about the population, often fail to provide data on regions from difficult to access areas (lack of roads, conflicts, security, etc.). These data are also often inaccessible and considered confidential. In addition, program evaluation using these data is often problematic as it is difficult to attribute an impact to the program. Indeed, specific questions about a program are not generally taken into account in the development of census collection tools.

Opportunity: A global partnership for the promotion and use of gender-sensitive evaluations or, EvalGender +.

To promote equity and gender-based evaluation and the use of evaluation results, a global network, called EvalGender+, was launched by EvalPartners at its Global Forum in Kathmandu, Nepal on 25 November 2015. EvalGender+ is made up of representatives of associations and institutions in evaluation. It works on capacity building, dissemination and the use of tools to mainstream gender in all stages of an evaluation. For example, a practical guide on assessing SDGs from a gender and equity perspective was developed in 2016 and is available on the EvalPartners website in English, French and Spanish.

A strategy to make gender-sensitive assessment an opportunity for different actors - as illustrated in the conceptual framework below - was developed in 2016 at the third
Global Parliamentary Forum for Evaluation in Kyrgyzstan. The pillars of this strategy are: (i) capacity building at the individual and institutional levels, (ii) creating an enabling environment for gender and equity sensitive assessment, (iv) sharing of resources, good practices and (v) promising cells. These actions concern emerging evaluators, parliamentarians, decision-makers, evaluation associations, and members of the EvalIndigenous group who advocate the consideration of cultural aspects in evaluation.

EvalGender+ has already supported 11 countries in the implementation of pilot projects on gender-sensitive assessments. One of the beneficiary countries is Burkina Faso where members of the Burkinabe Monitoring and Evaluation network, ministries and parliamentarians were trained on assessing SDGs from a gender and equity perspective.

Participating in all evaluation conferences, EvalGender+ members contribute to capacity building and to raising the level of debate via panel discussion.

**Innovative Approaches**

As gender is a social construct, sustainable solutions to the elimination of inequalities between men and women must be based on cultural and social values. How should project evaluation be conducted in order to ensure the implementation of policies which improve living conditions of the entire population? Three methodological approaches are suggested for this purpose: (i) conduct culturally

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**Figure 1: EvalGender + strategy for promoting gender and equity sensitive assessments**

[Diagram showing the strategy of EvalGender+ with various components like individual capacity of evaluators, institutional capacity for evaluation, advocacy, decision makers, EvalGender+, EvalYouth, EvalIndigenous, SDGs, VOPeS, and other elements related to training, resources, and enabling environment.]
sensitive assessments, (ii) undertake systematic and inclusive evaluations, and (iii) use mass data or big data.

Culturally sensitive evaluation

To maximize the usefulness of evaluation and research to vulnerable groups - in this case women, children and the elderly - stakeholders must be considered as full partners at all stages of evaluation and research and take into consideration the specific difficulties they face (Canada, Dussault, & Erasmus, 1996).

Several research studies have developed approaches to target these stakeholders to increase the utility and use of evaluation results (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational and Sanders, 1994). From this research, the following basic principles emerge:

- **Engage stakeholders** and focus on the use of evaluation: when designing the evaluation, know who the stakeholders are and how they should be involved. The "3R" method - Representation, Responsibility and Resources - can be useful for a better analysis taking gender into account. Also define how the evaluation should be conducted and what are the expected uses of evaluation results.

- **Collect data** by involving stakeholders at different social levels: how will the data be collected and who will be involved?

- **Analyze and interpret results** there is a need to answer evaluative questions most specifically at this stage to understand the results in their context. Here,
stakeholders can make an important contribution as they are more familiar with the cultural, social and economic context.

- Disseminate evaluation results depending on stakeholder roles and profiles. Different dissemination formats can be used such as paper documents, skits, local language videos to enable actors to own and use the results.

Systematic and inclusive evaluation

The systematic review of literature makes it possible to document knowledge on a problem in order to find innovative solutions. Specifically, in the context of gender-sensitive assessments, a new approach was developed by Stephen, Lewis, and Reddy (2018) and articulated in several phases:

In Phase I, issues of gender, social and cultural contexts need to be analyzed to identify obstacles in the participation of disadvantaged and marginalized groups. This analysis is done using transdisciplinary methods, which respect the ethics, rigor and validity of the tools. Phase II focuses on data collection from several sources that will need to be triangulated in order to extract the most relevant and useful information for Phase III; for the purposes of analysis, mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) are preferred. Phase IV is often the least used after evaluations; it is at this stage evaluations results should be translated into concrete actions of capacity building for positive social change. Quite simply, to improve the well-being of populations, it is not enough to show inequalities through assessments but to propose solutions and then put them into practice.

The use of «big data»

In recent years, a number of "new metrics" for information have been developed. These expand the range of indicators and measures available for monitoring and evaluating development results from a gender and equity perspective. Among these are:

- Data collected through mobile phones, tablets, internet, GPS location, Facebook, Twitter, etc.
- Mega data collected by satellites and drones, remote sensors, mobile phone records, electronic transfers - including the purchase of communication credit.

The current development of statistical analysis software makes it possible to extract specific data on social networks in order to better understand evaluation focus issues. For example, importing data to Facebook using the Stata software could be done by the facebook2stata command and on Twitter by the twitter2stata command. These applications can

Figure 2: Learning and action cycle for a systematic-inclusive evaluation

Source: Stephan, Lewis, and Reddy (2018), (p.58)
make it possible, in difficult access areas, to obtain information on certain vulnerable categories of the population.

In conclusion, the promotion and use of gender-sensitive assessment results needs to be strengthened in the French-speaking Sub-Saharan region; EvalGender + is an opportunity to meet these challenges. Big data offers enormous possibilities for analysis and can be used from a research perspective for the of evaluation reports from development institutions and partners such as the African Development Bank, UNICEF and UN Women.

Endnotes

1. EvalPartners: is an interactive web platform for sharing knowledge about Monitoring & Evaluation systems. In addition to being a source of learning, EvalPartners facilitates the strengthening of a global community, while identifying good practices in monitoring and evaluation in general, and monitoring and evaluation systems in countries in particular.
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References


