Gender and Economic Policy Discussion Forum

Engendering Policies and Programmes through Feminist Evaluation

FORUM XIII | 20 AUGUST 2014 BRIEFING NOTE 13

HIGHLIGHTS / KEY POINTS

- Feminist evaluation is important due to the persistence of inequities in India.
- The instrument of evaluation can be used to bring gender and equity concerns to the fore.
- Feminist evaluation recognizes evaluation as a 'political' process and acknowledges the significance of standpoint.
- There is no single method for feminist evaluation.
- It entails using a particular and intrinsically political lens – the feminist lens.
- Critical self-reflection is central to feminist evaluation.

The thirteenth in the series of Gender and Economic Policy Discussion Forums on 'Engendering Policies and Programmes through Feminist Evaluation' was held at the India Habitat Centre on the 20th of August, 2014. The discussion highlighted the need for gender and equity centered evaluation for effective policy making and impact.

Within the Indian policy arena, the importance of evaluation has been spelt out in the preface to the 12thFive Year Plan (FYP). It states that traditionally planning has focused on programmes and allocation of funds for their implementation but not on their outcomes. Often programme outcomes don't match the expectation because of flaws in design or implementation. Thus, the 12th FYP calls for "rigorous and independent evaluations of the effectiveness of… programmes in achieving the desired outcomes and an analysis of why they fall short"[1]. It suggests that both the Centre and the states should systematically undertake evaluations.

At the outset, it was suggested that the increased attention to evaluation in the last few years in India makes it important and timely to focus on Feminist Evaluation.

What is Feminist Evaluation?

Feminist Evaluation is an approach to evaluation that "exposes and looks critically at gender and other sources of inequity"[2]. While

evaluation offers the opportunity to examine policies and programmes, feminist evaluation offers the opportunity to use the examination process to bring gender to the fore of policy making by making gendered outcomes explicit. And thereby, it can help develop more effective policies and programmes.

Katherine Hay argues that gender bias is manifest and systematic in social institutions, and feminist evaluation is a way to understand how gender and other intersecting social cleavages define and shape the experience and exercise of power in different contexts.[3] Feminist evaluation, she adds, draws on feminist scholarship and is about using a particular lens – the feminist lens – in evaluation. Drawing on the work of Donna Podems, she states, a feminist lens to evaluation adds value to those who are marginalized. It starts with the central focus on inequities: it recognizes inequities as structural and not as based on individual capacities or abilities. It also recognizes evaluation as political and not neutral; it draws its strength from the recognition of potential biases rather than from assumed detached neutrality. It also values different ways of knowing and acknowledges that there are multiple truths depending on people's understanding of and position in the world.[4] *"Feminist evaluation is grounded in the understanding that discrimination or inequality based on gender is systemic and structural, that evaluation is a political activity, that knowledge is a powerful resource that serves an explicit or implicit purpose, that knowledge and values are culturally, socially and temporally contingent, and that there are multiple ways of knowing –some privileged over others".*[5]

Hay states that the principles of feminist evaluation can be applied at all stages of evaluation. For instance, its first stage is planning the process i.e. deciding what to evaluate and what questions to ask. Here, feminist evaluation can analyse and critique the dominant discourses that underline programmes and policies. Questions to be asked can range from who sets the questions to what is the definition of success of the programme and who defines success. Regarding the next stage i.e. the design stage of determining the methodologies to use, Hay states that there is no single tool kit to conduct feminist evaluation. Instead, it is a particular lens or standpoint used in the entire range of methods. The design or methods used must thus include the voices of the marginalized.

Similarly, in the stage of implementation where data is gathered and analysed, the feminist lens can bring to the surface the competing definitions of success. Regarding the phase of use, wherein the findings are shared, taken up and used, Hay states that feminist evaluation is an approach in which the process of evaluation itself becomes useful to the various stakeholders involved. It gets all the stakeholders to engage, think and reflect on the findings. In this process their own

understanding changes and they in turn change their way of working. Hay adds that reflexivity is inherent to feminist evaluation. Critical self reflection along with the analysis of the overlap of power and social cleavages, and the inclusion of programme implementers as well as community members is what makes feminist evaluation unique.[6]

Hay thus describes feminist evaluation as *'relentless implementalism'*. It involves constantly and consistently using the feminist lens and questioning at different stages of evaluation. Asking questions such as who is benefitting from a said programme, how are people experiencing the programmes differently, how much of the impact of the programme is structural and beyond the control of the programme implementers, and so on.

Use of Feminist Evaluation Principles

Yamini Atmavilas reviews the State as the commissioning agency for evaluation work in terms of the assessment frameworks used and whether gender, feminist and other inclusive criteria have been included. This is to understand, she clarifies, whether State frameworks have any in-built system or potential entry points for engendering policy. Thus she reviews the Programme Evaluation Organization (PEO) of the Planning Commission[7] and the Performance Management and Evaluation System (PMES) of the Cabinet Secretariat. The PEO undertakes evaluation of programmes and schemes of the various Government of India departments. The PMES, on the other hand, is a system to assess the effectiveness of government departments through the preparation of a Results Framework Document (RFD).[8]

Bringing a gender lens to review the work of the State is informed by the awareness, states Atmavilas, of gender inequality and women's subordinate social, economic and political status. She argues, operationalising gender as a relational and a power-laden construct is important in the analytical frameworks for monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes – and to examine whether the differential needs of women and men from different social groups are identified, tracked, and measured; examine whether programmes benefit all different social groups equally; and whether there is a follow up and interrogation of the gaps.[9] Thus, she reviews various documents[10] in terms of the very basic – the frequency of reference to gender - to the more nuanced – the focus on coverage and collection of disaggregated data; concerns of access, use, participation, vulnerability, discrimination, exclusion; kinds of gender roles and identities, etc.

She concludes that there is absence of a sound gender framework in State evaluative efforts. The PEO, in spite of a stated purpose of supporting inclusive growth, does not make any reference to assessing the impact of the programmes in terms of ensuring equity, gender equality or human

development. Similarly, in the case of the PMES, neither the guidelines to draft the RFDs nor the RFDs themselves give any specific attention to gender or social inclusion. The RFDs of select social sector ministries, such as the Ministry of Rural Development, tend to view women only as beneficiaries and as a homogeneous category, focussing on the quantitative coverage of the programme rather than on structural concerns like inequality, access and power. There is, she adds, scant attention given to the productive, reproductive and community roles of women and to their access to power and resources. These factors underline women's ability to participate in and reap the benefits of development programmes.

Atmavilas's work can thus be viewed as using the gender lens to review the first or the planning stage of evaluation as given above. Therein, she analyzes the very questions and analytical frameworks used by the State in the evaluation process. The following section discussing the various methods of conducting evaluation with a gender lens can then be placed within the second stage of evaluation – the design stage.

Methods of Evaluating with a Gender Lens

Substantive Equality and Empowerment approach[11]

There are other approaches to evaluation that also question and address concerns of equality, equity and inclusion. Ranjani K. Murthy, for instance, uses a framework[12] comprising of the concepts of substantive equality and empowerment in the meta-evaluation[13] of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA), 2005. Substantive equality as compared to formal equality, she elaborates, takes into account the specific needs of women (like support for care) necessary for women's empowerment. Substantive equality also recognises that all women are not equally placed and marginalized group such as women or Dalits have specific interests and needs. Empowerment, additionally, is viewed in terms of individual power, collective power and power within or changes in attitude.

The MNREGA 2005 aims at providing livelihood security to households by way of providing 100 days of wage employment in a year to every household whose adult member volunteers for unskilled work. In terms of pro-gender aspects, the act stipulates minimum and equal wages to all beneficiaries, employment to be within 5 km of radius of the beneficiary's village, at least 1/3rd of the beneficiaries to be women and provision of conditional child care facility. In the fourth edition of the operational guidelines to the Act, released in 2013, empowerment of the socially disadvantaged, especially women, Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Schedules Tribes (STs), through the processes of a rights-based legislation is stated as one of the goals.

For the meta-evaluation Murthy reviews 22 evaluation reports[14] on the basis of a framework comprising of 14 parameters across the different stages of evaluation[15]. The 14 parameters pertained to gender and social equality integration in evaluation preparation, evaluation methodology, evaluation report and use, and evaluation impact. Murthy finds very little reference to gender and other social categories in all the 22 evaluation reports, with the exception of studies produced by social science institutions. She also finds rampant use of terms such as beneficiaries and man-days over workers and person-days. Further, the focus of the evaluation reports was found to be more on implementation and less on the context, design and institutional arrangement. Also, the focus was more on the use of quantitative methods and if qualitative methods then it was restricted to focus group discussions (FGDs). While some reports examined impact on women's empowerment, a majority equated it with participation of women and access to equal employment and wages. The reports were also found lacking in reference to who controls income, appropriateness of works, violence against women, child labour, representation of workers in selection of workers'/ vigilance/monitoring committees, and etc.

Thus she recommends that we should move beyond formal equality to substantive equality. While carrying out an evaluation study, one must strengthen the design and methodology from a gender and social equity lens. Additionally, the findings of the study must be disseminated to and validated with women and men from marginalized communities. The impact of a study must be evaluated in terms of consideration of the differences in women's biological and social needs, consideration of transgender, provision of maternity benefits, toilets, elderly care support, and so on.

While Murthy presented a technique of carrying out evaluation from a gender lens, she also highlighted how evaluation studies without this particular focus can miss aspects of gendered outcomes.

J-PAL's Impact Evaluation approach using RCTs[16]

A good impact evaluation according to J-PAL, states Urmy Shukla, measures the difference between (a) an outcome generated after a particular programme has been introduced and (b) the outcome at the same point in time had the programme not been introduced (known as the counterfactual). In impact evaluations using randomized control trials (RCTs), the programme is randomly assigned. In practice, this means that a group (of individuals, villages, schools, districts, etc.) is randomly selected to receive the programme (the 'treatment' group), and another group (the 'control' or 'comparison') does not receive the programme. On average, these two groups are statistically identical. Therefore, any differences between the two groups can be attributed to the programme itself.

Shukla argues that RCTs are a scientifically sound way of looking at impact, as concerns of general trends and selection bias are avoided. More importantly, she adds, it serves as a tool to provide hard evidence to policy makers. Also, with its increased importance in the national and international development circuit, it can provide leverage for advocating various issues, including gender. Positive evidence generated by way of RCTs lends legitimacy to the programme and encourages funding, advocacy and programme expansion.

Similarly, interventions targeting women and girls with quantifiable outcomes, such as levels of education, employment, fertility rates and more, can be easily evaluated with RCTs. Shukla cites the example of a J-PAL study on the effect of merit-based scholarships on increasing girls' enrolment and reducing drop-out in middle schools in Kenya. The scholarship programme carried out in randomly selected schools, providing grants for school fees and school supplies as well as public recognition, was found to improve academic performance, attendance, and parental involvement. She cites another example which tested the impact of a gender-targeted intervention on the academic performance of adolescent girls. In a study in Nepal, in order to increase girls' enrolment and reduce drop-out in the 7th and 8th standards, randomly selected girls were provided feminine hygiene products. The study found no statistically significant impact on school attendance or on test scores, and a minimal positive impact in terms of time savings.

The challenge[17] in using RCTs however, adds Shukla, lies in evaluating gender-based or gender defined outcomes such as empowerment. Such studies call for more nuanced evaluation frameworks with perhaps complementary qualitative techniques. For instance, in a study on empowering adolescent girls in rural Bangladesh quantitative and qualitative researchers worked together to define appropriate outcomes.

Conclusion

In spite of the stated objectives of inclusive and sustainable growth, inequities persist in India. The persistence of inequities makes it important to evaluate the gender and equity dimensions of all programmes and policies. However feminist and gender criteria do not figure in most evaluation studies, whether carried out by the State or otherwise. A feminist evaluation approach not only addresses inequity but also provides the scope for critical self-reflection. As Hay states above, there is no one way or a right method for conducting feminist evaluation. The method that addresses the question in the best possible way is the right method. Contextuality and creativity in application of methods (use of multiple methods) underline feminist evaluation principles. In this sense, all the methods mentioned above fall in line with the principle of feminist evaluation, however, as long as there is scope for praxis, scope for critical self-reflection.[18]

Endnotes

[1] Planning Commission, Govt. of India, Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012–2017) Faster, More Inclusive and Sustainable Growth (New Delhi: SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd., 2013), Volume 1, Page XIV.

[2] Katherine Hay, Ratna M. Sudarshan and Ethel Mendez, "Why a Special Issue on Evaluating Gender and Equity?" Indian Journal of Gender Studies Volume 19, Issue No. 2 (June 2012): Page 180.

[3] Katherine Hay, "Engendering Policies and Programmes through Feminist Evaluation: Opportunities and Insights". Indian Journal of Gender Studies Volume 19, Issue No. 2 (June 2012): Page 322.

[4] Katherine Hay at GEP XIII

[5] Hay et al.: Page 180

[6] Hay: Page 334

[7] On 1st January 2015 the Planning Commission was replaced by the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog. For more read http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/niti-aayog-replaces-planning-commission-prime-minister-to-be-chairperson/

[8] Yamini Atmavilas at GEP XIII

[9] Yamini Atmavilas, "State Evaluation and Accountability Mechanisms: Where do Gender and Equity Criteria Figure?" A report submitted to Institute of Social Studies Trust.

[10] The guidelines on the framing of Result Framework Documents (RFDs), RFDs of randomly selected ministries and Terms of References (TOR) for Evaluation Studies and M&E Guidelines.

[11] Ranjani Murthy at GEP XIII

[12] This framework has been devised by Jo Rowlands (1998), Ratna Kapur (1993) and Naila Kabeer (2001).

[13] Reviewing evaluation studies is known as meta- evaluation. For more on meta-evaluation go to the following link- http://betterevaluation.org/plan/manage/review_evaluation

[14] Most of the studies covered in the report were completed in 2009-10. Studies later than this were yet to be posted as of 2014.

[15] Murthy uses the UN System Wide Approach Evaluation Performance (SWAP) Indicator methodology to score the reports in terms of the parameters not available, missing, partially met or fully met. For more on the UN SWAP indicator visit the following link - http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/1452

[16] Urmy Shukla at GEP XIII

[17] There are other challenges in using RCTs. For more go to the following link - http://betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/rct

[18] Katherine Hay at GEP XIII

References

1. Planning Commission, Government of India. Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012–2017): Faster, More Inclusive and Sustainable Growth. New Delhi: SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd., 2013. Volume 1, Page XIV.

   Available at http://planningcommission.gov.in/plans/planrel/12thplan/pdf/12fyp_vol1.pdf

2. Hay, Katherine, Ratna M. Sudarshan and Ethel Mendez. ""Why a Special Issue on Evaluating Gender and Equity?" Indian Journal of Gender Studies Volume 19, Issue No. 2 (June 2012).

3. Hay, Katherine. "Engendering policies and programmes through feminist evaluation: Opportunities and insights". Indian Journal of Gender Studies Volume 19, Issue No. 2 (June 2012).

4. Atmavilas, Yamini. "State Evaluation and Accountability Mechanisms: Where do Gender and Equity Criteria Figure?" A report submitted to Institute of Social Studies Trust.

5. Rowlands, Jo. "A word of times: What does it mean? Empowerment in the discourse and practice of development". In Women and Empowerment: Illustrations from the Third World, edited by Afshar H., (11–34). London: Palgrave Macmillian, 1998.

6. Kabeer, Naila. "Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment", Discussing Women's Empowerment - Theory and Practice, SIDA Studies No. 3. 2001: 17-58. Last accessed 24th February, 2015. http://www.sida.se/ contentassets/51142018c739462db123fc0ad6383c4d/discussing-womens-empowerment---theory-and-practice_1626.pdf

7. Kapur, Ratna and Brenda Cossman. "On Women, Equality and the Constitution: Through the Looking Glass of Feminism". National Law School Journal. 1993: 1–61.

Speakers at the Forum

Katherine Hay, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Ranjani Murthy, Independent Researcher and Social Activist

Ratna M. Sudarshan, National University of Educational Planning and Administration

Urmy Shukla, Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) South Asia

Yamini Atmavilas, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Gender and Economic Policy Discussion Forum

presented by

INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL STUDIES TRUST

Core 6 A, UG Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi - 110003
Phone: +91-11-4768 2222 Website: www.isst-india.org

in association with

HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG INDIA

C-20, Qutab Institutional Area, New Delhi - 110 016
Phone: +91 11 26854405, 26516695 Website: http://in.boell.org

Kaagaz International, 98112 30592