

# PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY: LESSONS FROM A SYNTHESIS OF 2017 EVALUATIONS

The Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) in Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT) undertook a Review of 2017 Program Evaluations. Part of this review was a synthesis of the learnings from the 37 program evaluations completed by DFAT in 2017.

This paper considers the five main learnings from the synthesis on promoting gender equality. See the accompanying methods paper, for details on the methodology and a list of the evaluated programs reviewed.

DFAT's *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy* (DFAT 2016) adopts a twin-track approach that calls for initiatives that aim to specifically promote equality for women and girls as well as mainstreaming of gender equality promotion across all aid initiatives. Among the 37 evaluation reports reviewed, four specifically targeted gender equality—three were Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (Pacific Women) evaluations (one regional, one reviewing activities in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and one reviewing the country plan for Fiji) and the fourth an evaluation of Challenging Gender Based Violence in Pakistan.

The remaining evaluation reports in the review were of initiatives in health and education, economic development, infrastructure and transport, community engagement, agriculture, fisheries and water, humanitarian, and governance. Promoting gender equality featured strongly in the design documents for many of these initiatives, including in older designs (such as Governance for Growth 2007), which is reflective of the aid program's long commitment to promoting gender equality. Some designs included gender-specific outcomes, such as for three of the six community engagement initiatives.

Five main learnings for DFAT around promoting gender equality emerged from a systematic review of the 37 evaluation reports and 14 interviews with evaluators (half were women). All evaluation reports mentioned the word 'gender', but 34 of the 37 reports contained some form of explanatory text regarding 'gender equality'. The degree of sophistication by which gender equality was discussed in the reports was as much an indication of the gender skills of the evaluators as it was of the degree to which promoting gender equality had been mainstreamed into the programs being evaluated or incorporated into the Terms of Reference for the evaluations. While this posed a limitation, several of the evaluation reports were clearly informed by high levels of gender skills in the evaluators and provided valuable insights. At least three of the evaluators interviewed were gender experts.

## LEARNING ONE: ARTICULATING A CLEAR AND REALISTIC STRATEGY TO TRANSFORMING GENDER NORMS BASED ON SOUND GENDER ANALYSIS IS CRITICAL

DFAT's *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy* promotes gender transformative approaches. These approaches seek to address unequal gender norms, legal frameworks and policies. Helping to change gendered norms is a difficult undertaking, expressed well in the Pacific Women (regional) evaluation report:

*What is repeated in testimony throughout the studies is that generating widespread understanding and consensus at community level of the manifestations of and reasons for gender inequality continues to be a challenge—among women as well as among men—as it requires the gradual and systematic challenging of well-established and closely held social norms. Change in areas of deeply rooted relationships—such as gender relations and those between adults and children—is often slow and painstaking work that requires time, tenacity, commitment and skill.*

Nonetheless, there have been many efforts to support changes in gendered norms. A Pacific Women activity in PNG, for example, reported improved gender equality:

*Girls and boys are now helping with cooking, laundry, carrying water, and chopping firewood at home, and more girls are in leadership roles at school.*

However, explicit strategies were not found in the evaluation reports for how aid might help change gendered norms, even among the three Pacific Women evaluations. The Education Partnership in Indonesia missed opportunities to gain what the evaluation calls a ‘social inclusion dividend’ through the lack of strategy:

*The Education Partnership successfully targeted poorer beneficiaries, but the lack of an explicit strategy to address gender and disability-related issues compromised its social inclusion credentials.*

Pacific Women evaluations called for a more consistently strategic approach, particularly around women’s economic empowerment. Other reports<sup>1</sup> raised the need for more explicit strategies to be articulated for addressing gender equality, a finding supported in interviews.

Reflective of several reports, the Bougainville Youth Initiative Evaluation linked the paucity of strategy with a lack of gender analysis:

*There is an absence of a strategy to develop women’s agency and voice and no gender analysis that would identify the socio-economic, political and logistical barriers to women’s effective leadership and participation at a community and regional level.*

Inequalities between men and women are overlaid with other inequalities depending on race, ethnicity, age, marital status, disability, sexual preferences, and a myriad of other factors. An intersectional approach is important in gender analysis to understand the complexities of the relationships between all the factors and be able to address them. In Fiji, work with local non-government organisations, FemLINK Pacific and DIVA (Diverse Voices and Action for Equality), has strengthened their links to rural areas, the LGBTI community (people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and/or intersex), younger women’s groups and disabled people’s organisations. However, inadequacies of gender analysis were highlighted in at least seven of the evaluation reports. The Pacific Women evaluation report for Fiji identified the need for a clear strategy around the specific groups of vulnerable women the program needs to reach. The Samoa Inclusive Education Demonstration Project evaluation noted the differences in girls’ and boys’ enrolment, including with children with disabilities, but urged for more analysis into the reasons behind these differences in order that they can be addressed.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Peace in Mindanao, Vanuatu Roads for Development, Governance for Growth in Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea Multilateral Health Partnerships and Pakistan Trade Investment Policy Program.

## LEARNING TWO: ADD WOMEN AND STIR IS NOT ENOUGH

A common mistake is to think of gender as meaning a focus on women, but ‘add women and stir’ is simply not sufficient as a means of addressing inequality and unequal power relations. Thinking of gender as a category – women, rather than a process – risks the dynamics of gender inequalities not being considered at the heart of the issue (Fletcher 2015). The evaluation of Australia’s Support for Peace in Mindanao underlined the risks of thinking of ‘gender’ interchangeably with ‘women’ and similar findings were reported in the Vanuatu Roads for Development and Bougainville Youth Initiative evaluations. It was clear in other reports covering efforts to mainstream gender equality that women and gender were being thought of as the same thing.

Gender blind interventions can exacerbate gender inequalities if they unconsciously reinforce existing gender norms. In Myanmar, for example, most teachers are underqualified women, and women are a minority in education leadership roles. Women also have less financial autonomy, are less mobile and have less access to computers and technology. In helping to reform the management of education offices, professionalise teaching and introduce distance learning through information technology in the Strengthening Pre-service Teacher Education Project in Myanmar, the review found it might make the situation worse for women and increase inequalities by making it harder for women to be promoted.

## LEARNING THREE: LOCAL OWNERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP ARE CRUCIAL TO SUCCESS

The support of local leadership was crucial to the success of the Pakistan Challenging Gender-based Violence Program, and to protect the safety of women and girls choosing to exercise their rights. A critical element was the support of local Jirgas, the informal, local decision-making bodies at the community level comprised of male elders which are often more powerful than the formal justice system. The Fiji Community Development Program evaluation report also found that supportive (male-dominated) local leadership was one factor underpinning progress towards gender equality. This shows the importance of deliberate processes and resourcing to engage with men, while at the same time addressing the male-dominated nature of traditional leadership structures.

Promoting women’s participation in decision-making bodies is a long-term endeavour that requires ongoing support, experimenting and learning. DFAT backing for an existing demand for women’s representation on decision-making bodies (as in the Women in Shared Decision Making coalition discussed in Learning Four), was found to be a meaningful and effective approach. The community driven development approach of the Timor-Leste National Program for Village Development (PNDS) was able to amplify local demand for women’s representation on village committees, with a flow-on effect at district level:

*The enhanced capacity and leadership developed at community level was frequently reported to have contributed unexpectedly to positive changes in local governance after only two implementation cycles. In the recent Suku elections, large numbers of PNDS-trained community members were elected as Xefe Suku [village chief] or to Suku Council positions, of whom a significant number were women.*

In contrast, initiatives which did not invest sufficiently in building this local demand for the participation of women in governance and management committees showed more mixed performance. For example, in the Cambodia Agricultural Value Chain Program (Phase I) about half of the women elected to water user committees dropped out.

## LEARNING FOUR: COMMUNITY MOBILISATION AND BUILDING NETWORKS AND COALITIONS ARE EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

Facilitating both male and female activists and leaders in communities to encourage communities to do their own self-assessment of power relations through a structured process can be an effective community mobilisation approach. Examples of successful community mobilising were found in the Pakistan Challenging Gender-based Violence Program, the Timor-Leste PNDS and the Pacific Leadership Program. On the other hand, more ad-hoc gender training and awareness activities, mentioned in many reports, did not show evidence of success.

The Pakistan Challenging Gender-based Violence Program worked through local non-government organisations which engaged with community activists to mobilise and build capacity to advocate for women's rights and reduced tolerance for gender-based violence in a traditionally restrictive society for women. The evaluation found significant evidence of both attitudinal and behavioural change among men, women and girls in the communities visited.

The Pacific Leadership Program supported a partnership between the tribes of Simbo Island (in the Western Province of the Solomon Islands) and a Samoan non-government organisation to provide a range of support and training to communities, through activities driven by the local women. Among the many results: some families reported that they can more easily pay school fees and save small amounts for emergency medical treatment for the first time; food security is enhanced; Simbo women have joined a superannuation fund for the first time; and both male and female members of the community reported improved relationships within families and less family violence.

Supporting coalitions among women's organisations is another deliberate and successful strategy of some programs, to provide a platform for advocacy efforts and increase women's voices. Pacific Women showed considerable benefits from its efforts to increase the capacity and reach of the We Rise Coalition in Fiji. For example, this support led to the development of a Pacific Feminist Charter for Change in 2016, which provided a framework for feminist organising, movements and policy advocacy on gender equality in the Pacific.

Pacific Women also supported a faith-based network across the Anglican Church in Fiji, including the House of Sarah, South Pacific Association of Theological Schools and Pacific Conference of Churches. The House of Sarah has helped facilitate this network since 2013 to gradually integrate gender equality into the Anglican Church, contributing to:

*... a significant legislation change ensuring that the two representatives elected to the Synod (from parishes) included one male and one female. The inclusion of women at the Synod decision-making level then created further opportunities for sensitisation of male pastors and support for community-level activism.*

Notably, the coalition approach by Pacific Women only worked in contexts where there were existing women's groups that were strong enough in terms of governance and financial management to meet DFAT requirements. In Kiribati, PNG and Samoa this was not possible.

The Pacific Leadership Program also focused heavily on supporting coalitions. Support to a local Women in Shared Decision Making (WISDM) coalition in Vanuatu succeeded in securing 'temporary special measures' to help women get elected to parliament. The WISDM coalition also helped 10 women be elected to municipal councils in Luganville and Port Vila, including the first woman Deputy Mayor of Luganville. The Pacific Leadership Program saw results in Samoa with a forum bringing together women candidates and the election of three women Members of Parliament in the 2016 elections. Tailored training and mentoring support through the Women in

Leadership coalition in Tonga led to a record number of women contesting seats in local government elections. Two women were elected, including the first Woman District Officer in 2016.

It is promising to see coalition-building approaches embedded in private sector initiatives such as the Mekong Business Initiative, where a network of women's business associations were established to represent the interests of female entrepreneurs to the public sector in Vietnam.

## LEARNING FIVE: AN INFLUENTIAL CRITICAL MASS IS NEEDED TO INGRAIN NORMS AND BEHAVIOURS THAT SUPPORT GENDER EQUALITY

In addition to local ownership and deliberate strategies, the long and difficult path of changing gender norms through community mobilisation and supporting networks also relies on achieving critical mass—in communities, institutions, provinces or countries—to influence change.

*Harnessing the power within people to change and leveraging that power to sway an influential critical mass and arrive at norms and behaviours that support gender equality is at the heart of effective gender-based violence prevention programs ...*  
(Ellsberg and Betron 2010)

The evaluation of the Pakistan Challenging Gender-based Violence Program recognised that the program did not have the necessary critical mass (on its own or with others) to be successful in national advocacy and sensibly endorsed the program's decision to scale back its advocacy ambitions to a provincial level. Concerns were raised in the Pacific Women (regional) evaluation about budget constraints limiting geographic coverage and affecting the program's ability to achieve necessary critical mass. Interviews confirmed the importance of selecting and resourcing appropriate partners (for example, the government in Timor-Leste, churches in Melanesia, and chiefs in Vanuatu) to achieve such a critical mass.

## REFERENCES

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