

## Conducting an Impact Evaluation<sup>1</sup>

A great challenge in evaluating the impacts of development interventions is to measure any long-term changes occurring after a project or program has ended—for example, the changes that poor men and women may have experienced at the local level in the subsequent five years or so.

An impact evaluation can be defined as a means to determine more broadly whether a program has had its desired effects on individuals, households, and institutions and whether those effects can be attributed to the program. In assessing impact, IFAD recommends the use of “anchor indicators”—a short list of impact indicators based on objective, quantifiable, and comparable data. For example, such anchors as “level of malnutrition” and “household assets” can provide a base around which qualitative information can be added.

Impact evaluations can explore both intended and unintended consequences, positive or negative, on beneficiaries. Although impact evaluations can be quite costly, they can be particularly useful if some of the innovations tested during a program or project might be replicated or publicized. If a program is to be extended for an additional period, an impact evaluation provides very useful information for planning. Aside from these considerations, any program or project’s relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability should be evaluated through the lens of its contribution to gender equality.

To be useful and convincing, an impact evaluation must use suitable methods. If we are to be sure that an impact is a result of a particular program in a particular community, we need to assess what would have happened in the community without the project. This assessment can be done by comparing like with like (for example, comparing households or whole communities that have been project beneficiaries with either randomly selected or matched households/communities that have not benefited). Sufficient data must be collected to permit a sound analysis, and the data should be quantitative as well as qualitative (preferably obtained through participatory methodologies). A

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cost-benefit analysis is also useful, as it allows comparison of the unit costs for producing set outcomes—though of course social outcomes are far more difficult to quantify than agricultural ones. For instance, it is relatively easy to quantify the unit costs of increasing rice yields by using high-quality seed, but it is more complicated to measure the costs and benefits of providing marketing training to female farmers.

Some of the major steps and key questions in impact evaluation (especially in considering impacts on gender) are discussed in the sections that follow. The literature on impact evaluation offers detailed assessments of approaches, methods, and tools for various kinds of impact analysis, including the analysis of gender impacts. A good starting point is the World Bank handbook by Baker, 2000, or the Swiss guide by Späth, 2004.

## Steps in Impact Evaluation

### *Baseline Data Review and Hypothesis*

Discuss the project history with the implementation staff, donors, and government authorities. Revise the initial problem analysis and review baseline data. Form the hypothesis regarding impact.

### *Preparation*

Select impact indicators (or use those in logical framework, if suitable). Develop the methodology for evaluating impacts and identify key questions to explore in the analysis (see below for some ideas).

### *Initial meetings with stakeholders and sharing information*

Meet with the stakeholders and explain that the impact assessment will take place. Specify the assessment’s purpose and timing. Explain the methods to be used and how results will be shared.

### *Routine gathering of data and statistics*

The basic design of an impact evaluation usually involves collecting and comparing baseline and post-intervention data from both communities that participated and those that did not participate in the project or program. The specific indicators that are compared will depend on the type of program being evaluated, but in the rural sector such indicators might include information on agricultural or fisheries production yields, income source diversification, employment opportunities for men and women, participation of women in decision-

making committees, access to services and facilities, and poverty levels of female- and male-headed households. Data sources include household census data, agricultural production figures from the local agricultural departments, and household surveys and qualitative evaluation techniques undertaken specifically for the project, such as focus groups, interviews with key informants, and anecdotal information from community members. Mapping tools are useful—not only basic, hand-drawn maps but computer mapping tools that can overlay geographic, production, and other data to illustrate changes brought about in the communities by the intervention.

### **Analysis**

Trace the various activities implemented to determine the impact, if any, on the target groups in the community. Assess impact from the perspective of community members themselves, and identify any factors (environmental and otherwise) that contributed to the outcome. This final stage will also involve conducting a similar study in several communities that were not exposed to the program to determine if there are any differences between these communities and those that participated.

### **Key Questions**

Some of the questions addressed in impact evaluation include the following: What were the impacts on different gender or ethnic groups? Were any improvements a direct result of the project, or would they have occurred anyway? Could program design be modified to improve impact? Were the costs justified? In what way were the opinions of the stakeholders taken into consideration? What was learned from the changes? What are the relationships between the processes and the objectives of the intervention? What specific processes should be reinforced? Which stakeholder groups are participating, and who has been left out? (Questions based on Baker 2000 and Herweg and Steiner 2002.)

The FAO program on Socio-economic and Gender Analysis (SEAGA) has produced guidelines (FAO 2001) with a useful list of questions for impact evaluation.

- ✓ What are the program's key characteristics as perceived by various stakeholders? How similar or different are those perceptions? What is the basis of the difference?

- ✓ What are the characteristics of program participants, and how do those compare to the intended target population for the program?
- ✓ How do the actual resources, staff competencies and experiences, and time line compare to what was expected?
- ✓ What is working as expected? What is not? What challenges and barriers have emerged? How did staff respond to those challenges and barriers?
- ✓ What assumptions have proved true? What assumptions are problematic?
- ✓ What do participants actually do in the program? What are their primary activities, in detail? What do they experience?
- ✓ What do participants like and dislike? Are there gender differences?
- ✓ How well are staff functioning together? What are their perceptions about what is working and not working? Do they know what outcomes they are aiming for? Do they buy into the program's goals and intended outcomes?
- ✓ What has changed from the original design and why? On what basis are adaptations from the original design being made? Who needs to approve such changes?
- ✓ What monitoring system has been established to assess implementation on an ongoing basis, and how is it being used?

Impact evaluations have been used in many projects and programs, and some of the experiences are listed here. Gender may be only one of several issues investigated (as in the example in box 1). Alternatively, gender may be the principal focus of the evaluation (boxes 2 and 3).

### **References**

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### Box 1: Impact assessment in Vietnam

A number of considerations were important in assessing the impact of infrastructure built over four years under a rural development program in Vietnam:

- Information related to planning processes.
- The types of infrastructure built.
- Ownership.
- The potential (multidimensional) contribution to poverty reduction (if any) of each type of infrastructure work.
- Commune-level differences in terrain, modality of income earning (farm, nonfarm, mixed, and so forth), rural/urban characteristics, flood-prone areas, and prevalence of poverty.
- The particular causes, contributing factors, and dimensions of poverty in Vietnam.
- The development program's impact on poverty, in light of quantitative and qualitative information, gender, the planning processes used, and the type of infrastructure work undertaken.

Interviews were carried out by gender-balanced teams, and the results were analyzed by program teams. No great or significant differences in priorities with respect to infrastructure could be established between poor and nonpoor or male and female respondents—there was a fairly unanimous selection of priorities across these categories. This was an interesting and somewhat unexpected finding for program staff, who had expected that women would give higher priority to the building of social infrastructure, such as schools or kindergartens, than to transport infrastructure, such as roads and bridges. Additional information was gathered on a local planning process piloted in this phase of the program. Process improvements were proposed and used in developing the program's second phase. During the final year of the second phase, a follow-up impact assessment will take place.

*Source:* Thua Thien Hue Rural Development Programme, Vietnam, project documents (unpublished)

### Box 2: Considering gender in impact assessment in Nepal

In the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Support Programme funded by Finland in Nepal, a gender analysis was done in communities where project activities had been implemented. The objective was to assess whether gender issues had been considered adequately and to help prepare the gender plan for the program's next phase. The results of the analysis were discussed with the participating communities. The gender plan developed for the second phase incorporated changes to the approach, implementation, and monitoring that might promote a better gender balance and ensure that women and ethnic minorities could benefit.

*Source:* Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project, Lumbini Zone, Nepal, project documents (unpublished)

### Box 3: Gender impact assessment in Grenada

The purpose of a gender impact assessment is to draw out the differential impact, if any, of an event on men and women. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), in collaboration with Organization of Eastern Caribbean States Secretariat and the World Bank, conducted a macro-socioeconomic disaster assessment in Grenada following Hurricane Ivan.

A qualitative research design was used, involving a combination of in-depth interviews and focus groups. Purposive sampling was done to ensure that participants were representative of those most affected by the hurricane: those in the agricultural and tourist sectors; the young and old; and those in the lower income categories. The researchers used a social vulnerability framework that explicitly considered the balance between vulnerability and resilience among these groups. The analysis revealed that women were more acutely affected by the disaster than men and provided the basis for specific policy recommendations to bring more gender equity to the development outcomes of reconstruction efforts.

The impact assessment found that men had more social mobility and could move into other sectors of the workforce, while gendered skill differences and cultural viewpoints marginalized women in the labor market emerging after the hurricane. Women employed in the formal and informal sectors of agriculture and tourism were particularly disadvantaged. Women who processed and marketed nutmeg lost their raw materials, and those with home gardens lost their food supply as well a means to generate income. Women working in basic service jobs in the tourist industry were severely affected by damage to the infrastructure for tourism as well as the reduced number of tourists.

The study's qualitative information, especially on the living conditions of women and children, enabled policy makers to address women's strategic as well as practical needs in the reconstruction phase. Researchers were able to develop a number of gender-specific recommendations, such as:

- Devising a mechanism to support poor female-headed households in securing land entitlements and retrofitting and refurbishing owned shelters.
- Strengthening small and microlending facilities for women and men.
- Offering small, one-off grants to kick-start micro and small enterprises.
- Developing a Gender Policy to accompany reconstruction efforts.
- Training staff at the Ministry of Social Development in gender analysis.
- Designing a program to provide extension services targeted directly to women farmers.
- Offering support for improving literacy and reschooling for women displaced from the nutmeg industry.

*Source:* Kambon et al 2005