



Evaluation of Norway's Support to Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Development Cooperation – *Ethiopia case study*

This report evaluates Norway's support to women and girls' rights and gender equality through its development cooperation in Ethiopia between 2007 and 2013. It is one of three country case studies (alongside Mozambique and Nepal) that form part of a broader evaluation assessing the results of Norway's support. It considers whether those results are in line with the four priorities set out in Norway's Action Plan for Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Development Cooperation (the Gender Action Plan) – political empowerment, economic empowerment, sexual and reproductive health rights, and violence against women. The evaluation addressed four broad questions:

1. Effectiveness: To what degree has Norwegian support to women's rights and gender equality produced the intended results?

2. Alignment: To what degree is Norwegian support to women's rights and gender equality aligned to the Gender Action Plan?

3. Relevance: To what extent is Norwegian support relevant in view of national priorities, needs and possibilities?

4. Sustainability: To what degree has Norwegian support influenced (positively or negatively) national processes to improve women's rights and gender equality, including influencing national ownership of the issues, or the capacity of national institutions and implementing partners?

THE EVALUATION TEAM'S APPROACH

The Ethiopian case study combined two elements: (1) a review of documentation on the Royal Norwegian Embassy's programme portfolio relevant to women and girls' rights and gender equality; and (2) an in-depth analysis of two programmes dealing with the thematic priorities of sexual and reproductive health rights and violence against women.

The first programme, managed by Norwegian Church Aid and Save the Children International, was designed to tackle female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and harmful traditional practices. It focused on the work of one of Norwegian Church Aid's local partners, KMG,

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in Kembata and Wolaita zones in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR). The second programme, jointly managed by UNFPA and UNICEF, supported tertiary-level students in Amhara and Oromia regions to access their sexual and reproductive health rights.

The evaluation team gleaned vital information from key informant interviews with government officials and staff from implementing agencies at the national, district (woreda) and village (kebele) levels. Their insights were complemented by in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with programme beneficiaries and other members of the community.

The team's analysis sought to identify results at three levels:

Systemic change: Has Norway's support contributed to changes in laws/regulations, funding levels, national discourse (what the public and policy-makers talk about and any national processes under way), or lent more legitimacy to women's rights and gender equality?

Project results: Has Norway's support contributed to the empowerment of women and girls, and to changes in people's attitudes and behaviours around gender equality (including the attitudes of influential people such as community or religious leaders)?

Organisational change: Has Norway's support strengthened the capacity of its partner organisations (including government agencies, non-governmental organisations and civil society groups, UN agencies and private enterprises) to do work on women's rights and gender equality?

Given the limited timeframe available for the evaluation, the team focused on identifying tangible outcomes. Longer-term impacts are more difficult to assess given the complexities of women's rights and gender equality change processes in different contexts.

COUNTRY CONTEXT

Despite strong economic growth over the past decade, Ethiopia is still one of the world's poorest countries, ranking at 173 out of 187 countries on the Human Development Index. Against a backdrop of legal and policy reforms to tackle gender inequalities and promote women and girls' empowerment, the past 20 years have seen significant advances for girls, with greater access to education and primary health care, including maternal and reproductive health services. Even so, the Gender-related Development Index (2013) indicates that Ethiopian women and girls still face substantial disadvantages, ranking the country 129 out of 187 countries. Discriminatory social norms serve to constrain women and girls' choices and capabilities as reflected in the OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index (2012), where Ethiopia is ranked 64 out of 86 countries.

Norway has a long history in Ethiopia, through politics, bilateral aid and missionary work. Ethiopia has remained a priority country for Norwegian aid over recent decades, and while there was a dip in support following concerns over human rights abuses during the controversial presidential election in 2005, both countries have strengthened relations since. Norway is among the top four OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) countries, providing approximately US\$120.5 million as of 2013. From a total of 1,050 projects funded by the Norwegian government through Official Development Assistance (ODA) between 2007 and 2013, the largest number of projects fall under health and social services (346), followed by good governance (225), then economic development and trade (197). However, Norway's aid for women's rights and gender equality programmes in Ethiopia comprises just 32 per cent of its total overseas aid. (All aid activities reported to the DAC's Creditor Reporting System have to be 'marked' as either targeting gender equality as a principal or significant objective, or not targeting it, so is referred to as 'gender-marked aid'.) This percentage is low when compared with other OECD donors; in fact, Norway is ranked 12 out of 13 countries for its gender-marked aid.

In contrast to the other two country case studies (Mozambique and Nepal), the Norwegian Embassy in Ethiopia has made little use of the Women and Gender Equality Grant. This is a fund designed to jumpstart programming, analytical or capacity-strengthening work on aspects of women's rights and gender equality that might otherwise not be funded through budget lines for individual sectors). In Ethiopia, the Embassy's strategy has been to fund gender-related issues through sectoral budgets or general funding lines.

KEY FINDINGS

Overall, Norway has made a positive contribution to improving women's rights and gender equality in Ethiopia. But there is considerable scope to strengthen the impact of its activities and funding in terms of relevance, effectiveness and sustainability.

Relevance

- > Norway has played an important but modest role in supporting Ethiopian women to achieve their rights. The inclusion of gender mainstreaming in projects and programmes on good governance, and on energy, climate change and agriculture, has been a modest catalyst to getting women's rights on the national agenda. The programme portfolio on climate change has helped start a national discussion about gender inequalities and, to a limited extent, has strengthened the capacity of government partners in this area. Programming on sustainable agricultural initiatives – closely aligned to government priorities – has also included women, especially in terms of capacity building, although coverage has again been modest.
- > Norway's support for good governance has been pivotal in getting female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and other harmful traditional practices on the national policy agenda. Indeed, the Ethiopian government's commitment to virtually eliminate FGM/C by 2025 can, in part, be credited to Norway's support.
- > Norway's support for youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services through its partnership with the UNICEF/UNFPA joint programme (especially

at tertiary level) is closely aligned to the Ministry of Education's goal of providing more support to vulnerable young women.

- > Norway's support to the Center for Human Rights at Addis Ababa University is noteworthy, particularly given the constraints facing NGOs working on human rights and women's rights since the introduction of the 2009 CSO Law. This support is filling an important gap in an area previously championed by the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association and other civil society groups.

Effectiveness

- > In terms of **changes at the systemic level**, the Embassy's support for the prevention of female genital mutilation/cutting has been noteworthy. Recognising that social norm change is complex and non-linear, the long-term nature of Norway's support has been vital in getting this issue onto the national agenda. Not only has it been incorporated in National Development Plan targets, it has also been addressed in position papers produced by religious institutions. Norway has also played a useful but modest role in ensuring that the gender dimensions of climate change are included in policy dialogues.
- > In terms of **changes at the project level**, the evaluation team found that the two programmes are having a positive impact on the lives of girls and young women in Ethiopia. The strengths and weaknesses revealed by the evaluation are outlined below.

- **Strengths:** The programme to eliminate female genital mutilation/cutting works with the most marginalised groups (e.g. circumcisers, untouchable caste groups, girls) through local non-government organisations, raising awareness through 'community conversations'. In Kembata, it gets men and boys involved in changing social norms, and empowers girls by setting up school-based clubs for uncut girls.
- The programme supporting tertiary students' access to sexual and reproductive health rights has raised issues

around service gaps and student vulnerabilities on campuses. It has also provided financial support to poorer students, and supported income-generating activities for young vulnerable women. As with the school-based girls' clubs, university clubs have provided a valuable safe space for young women to discuss their feelings and develop their assertiveness skills.

- **Shortcomings:** The female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) prevention programme paid only limited attention to understanding which factors had produced positive outcomes in Kembata zone before scaling up to the neighbouring zone (Wolaita). There was also limited exploration of the different attitudes and practices around FGM/C in Wolaita. The same model was applied in both zones. But because there was little attempt to contextualise or adapt it, the programme was able to achieve fewer gains in Wolaita. Similarly, while the programme has made impressive inroads into eliminating FGM/C in Kembata, limited recognition of the non-linear nature of social norm change processes has meant that in Wolaita, the programme has not evolved as flexibly as it could have done to take into account changing dimensions over time. For example, although uncut girls are increasingly in the majority in Wolaita, the clubs tend to involve only these girls in activities, rather than forging broader alliances among young boys and young girls.

- Weaknesses that hampered the second programme included limited provision of sexual and reproductive health services and supplies, and a lack of attention to ensuring confidentiality. Moreover, services and support groups such as clubs appear to exclude disabled students, who reported not having access to separate washrooms or other facilities they may need. Additionally, the income-generating activities scheme has been poorly targeted, and is mainly benefiting older women rather than vulnerable young people.

- **Unintended consequences:** The evaluation also found that both programmes had resulted in some unintended consequences (negative and positive). For example, community-based work to raise awareness of the

law prohibiting female genital mutilation/cutting is contributing to a worrying and unintended trend – some parents (particularly in Wolaita zone) are deciding to circumcise their daughters at a younger age than before in order to avoid detection. Stronger enforcement of the ban on FGM/C seems to be driving the practice underground; a backlash (at times violent) against whistle-blowers has emerged as a real programme risk. Also, given inadequate attention to the differential age dynamics across programming sites, the attempt to scale up clubs for uncut girls in Wolaita zone (where girls are being cut at even younger ages) is inadvertently stigmatising some young (uncircumcised) girls.

- In the case of the UNFPA/UNICEF joint programme (Adama University), some students' parents and other family members are no longer helping out financially precisely because those students are receiving support from the programme. But because the level of support provided by the programme is small, the loss of family support is having an adverse effect on those students. Additionally, due to inadequate measures to ensure confidentiality, students who need sexual and reproductive health services are often unwilling to attend those services, putting the students at potential risk.

- › In terms of **changes at the organisational level**, the Embassy's role and results have been more modest. It has supported the Ministry of Energy to develop a Gender Action Plan and provided technical assistance during its initial rollout, but for a short time only. The Embassy has also sought to provide ongoing support to the UN when other donors have been exploring other modalities. But due to insufficiently detailed monitoring, this support does not appear to be fulfilling the 'critical friend' role envisioned by the Embassy management – at least in terms of its work with UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women. Finally, although the Embassy is providing much-needed resources for national NGOs to continue work on gender-related issues, limited technical support to ensure rigorous monitoring, evaluation and learning means that this funding is not being utilised to maximum advantage.

- Challenges to achieving stronger results overall can be attributed to a number of factors. One concerns the relatively narrow conceptualisation of the role of the Programme Officer for Human Rights and Gender Equality as manager of a specific portfolio of projects on gender and social rights issues, rather than playing a broader, coordinating role. Another concerns the general view, among management and staff alike, that gender is just one of a number of competing priorities. There has also been limited investment in tailored capacity-strengthening for Embassy staff about how to integrate gender into their specific thematic areas. These weaknesses have been exacerbated by insufficient reporting mechanisms on gender. There has been a relatively weak 'legacy effect' of the gender pilot, and few efforts to take up the opportunities afforded by the Women and Gender Equality Grant.

Sustainability

- › In the case of the programme to prevent female genital mutilation/cutting, Norway's long-term funding commitment – somewhat unusual among top donors – has proven critical. Its ongoing commitment is commendable given the likelihood that change will be non-linear and there may even be periodic reversals of gains made in terms of changes in people's attitudes and behaviours.

- › Working through sub-national government agencies (in the case of the programme on sexual and reproductive health rights) is commendable in principle. But in practice, weak monitoring systems and comparatively limited funding mean that opportunities to strengthen capacity in the longer term are being missed.

- › At Embassy level, Norway has very limited ability to take advantage of policy dialogue opportunities to promote women's rights and gender equality (apart from funding projects that tackle the issues directly). There have been limited efforts to build the capacity of Embassy staff to address gender issues in each sector; there are no incentives for integrating gender into projects, and there have been no dedicated discussions on the gender dimensions of individual projects. This is further



Poster used in a campaign supported by Save the Children and the Population Media Centre to abandon female genital mutilation/cutting.



exacerbated by limited support for civil society organisations and UN partners to undertake rigorous impact evaluation and learning. The result is 'bundled' programming, undertaken in a manner that is less systematic and cost-effective than it could be. This ultimately hinders the Embassy's ability to identify sustainable, maximum-impact programme models and interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation team's main recommendation is that Norway's development cooperation focuses first and foremost on adopting a more strategic approach to current activities. We understand that managers and advisors have large portfolios and multiple demands on their time. But the evidence suggests that a more strategic approach in a number of areas could help overcome bottlenecks and deliver stronger results. Extra resources are, of course, desirable, especially considering Norway's relatively low levels of funding to gender-marked aid compared with its peers. Even without extra resources, though, a more strategic approach could deliver considerable improvements. The following recommendations suggest how Norway could strengthen the impact of its development cooperation on women and girls' rights and gender equality in Ethiopia:

Support tailored capacity building so as to integrate gender into sectoral programmes: Tailored capacity building in various sectors, including energy, economic development, governance and climate change, would give more strategic and systematic attention to the gender dimensions of specific programmes. This is critical if the Embassy is to maximise its achievements through partnerships with civil society organisations, UN bodies, and sectoral ministries at regional level – all of which need considerable support to effectively address gender issues.

Avail the Embassy of rigorous, independent impact evaluation advice for specific projects or programmes that it funds: There has been unsatisfactory attention to quality design and use of baseline, mid-term and final evaluation findings in the projects

reviewed. This suggests that Embassy staff do not have the capacity or time to provide effective support, so important learning opportunities are being missed. External, independent support should be brought in to improve the capacity of staff to understand and roll out rigorous monitoring and impact evaluation approaches. This would enable programme activities on the ground to achieve more transformative change.

Support the development of more nuanced indicators to measure social change: The Embassy needs to develop more nuanced progress indicators to maximise the impact of its long-term support to change attitudes and behaviours around deeply entrenched social norms. This could be achieved by recognising the value of mixed methods approaches for demonstrating results on gender inequalities and empowerment, as well as the non-linear nature of social norm change and empowerment processes. With Norad and/or third-party support, the Embassy could usefully broaden its reporting and evaluation toolbox.

Enable the Programme Officer for Human Rights and Gender Equality to play a broader, coordinating role for gender issues across different sectors: To date, gender has been relegated to 'one of multiple considerations' for the Embassy and has not been sufficiently prioritised. To redress this situation, and promote synergies and knowledge sharing across portfolios, the Embassy should consider securing funding to enable the Programme Officer for Human Rights and Gender Equality to play a stronger coordinating role to ensure a more strategic focus on gender.

Make greater use of the Women and Gender Equality Grant: The Women and Gender Equality Grant could be used to help the Embassy deliver on the above recommendations. Or it could be used to support innovative pilots by local organisations engaged in pioneering work on rights-based issues, particularly as they are struggling to secure funding from other sources due to restrictive national legislation.

Please visit the Norad website to see the full Ethiopia case study report, the full evaluation report and the case study reports for Nepal and Mozambique (in English): <http://www.norad.no/en/toolspublications/publications/2015/evaluation-of-Norways-support-to-womens-rights-and-gender-equality-in-evelopment-cooperation/>

The Evaluation Department, located in Norad, initiates evaluations of activities financed over the Norwegian aid budget. The Department is governed under a specific mandate and reports directly to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The evaluations are carried out by independent evaluators, and all evaluation reports are made public.

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