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Gender and Development – a review of evaluation reports 1997-2004

Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

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This report presents the outcome of a review of the gender perspectives in 63 evaluation reports produced during the years 1997-2004. 24 of these were pre-selected by Norad for in-depth review.

All the evaluation reports were reviewed by a set of questions designed to verify gender mainstreaming in evaluation design and implementation:

- How has the gender perspective been reflected with reference to designs of evaluations?
- To what extent has a gender perspective been integrated into the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the evaluations?
- Regarding the evaluation methodology chosen, has the gender perspective been reflected?
- To what extent has there been attention to gender when interviewees have been selected?
- To what extent has gender been an issue regarding the composition of the evaluation teams?

The selected sample of 24 reports was reviewed based on the following criteria:

- How and to what extent has a gender perspective been included within the selected areas?
- To what extent have programmes and projects taken women's needs and interests as their starting point?
- In connection with the formulation and planning of projects and programmes, to what extent have women been chosen as the target group?
- To what extent do the evaluation reports emphasise gender equality as a development objective?
- Have gender issues been included in the various steps of the implementation and evaluation of programmes and projects?
- To what extent are the chosen activities relevant to women?
- Have the programmes and projects included targets for participation by women and to what extent have the results benefited women?

Conclusions

Gender equality is closely linked to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The importance of gender equality in poverty reduction and the promotion of human rights and democracy is pivotal. There is hardly any other policy issue that has been so much profiled in policy frameworks guiding Norwegian development assistance over the years, and internationally Norway has a strong image as a country in which gender equality is highly valued.

Despite the emphasis on gender equality in policies guiding development assistance, gender has not been a key issue in evaluations conducted in the period 1997-2004.

This conclusion is based on the following findings:

- Of the total number of 63 evaluations conducted, 48 scored in the range of 1-3 (on a 1-5 scale) on the question of whether the gender perspective has been reflected with reference to the design of the evaluations. 36 of these evaluations received score 1, which means that there is no reflection of this point at all. In general, the average score was markedly higher for those evaluation reports where one would expect an explicit gender focus in accordance with the Strategy for Women and Gender Equality and Development Cooperation (1997-2005).
- 52 evaluations of the total of 63 scored in the range of 1-3 on the question of whether a gender perspective had been included in the ToR of these 52, as many as 38 of the ToR did not include the gender perspective at all. In those ToRs where the gender perspective is fully mainstreamed and at the same time explicitly addressed, the evaluators have followed the ToR. The average score for those evaluations where it was considered reasonable to expect a gender perspective to be made explicit was 2.27 and 1 in those where it was not reasonable to expect such a perspective.¹
- Several evaluation teams were well balanced from a gender composition point of view, but the review of 63 reports points out that this is quite uncorrelated to the degree of gender perspective incorporated in the evaluation topic and the ToR.
- Among the 24 evaluation reports which were considered from a thematic point of view, the connection between gender issues and the policy or intervention being evaluated was made explicit in only thirteen of

the cases. Women are specifically mentioned as one of the target groups in ten of the 24 evaluation reports. Only twelve reports contain some information about women's needs and interests. There is no example of an explicit reference to gender equality as an overarching objective of the programme.

- Eighteen of the 24 reports contained no information about specific efforts or approaches taken to investigate how the gender perspective had been included.
- In eleven of the evaluations no reference was made to gender-related achievements. In this connection it is important to note that even the briefest statement or description of what had been accomplished was taken as positive in this review.
- 21 of the 24 evaluation reports did not include any specific future action to be taken with regard to the gender perspective.
- Evaluations of initiatives related to social sectors were found to highlight gender issues to some extent; this performance was better than evaluations in other sectors but overall the review of the selected sample did not find a consistent pattern or trend regarding this point.
- The review did not find that female representation in the teams necessarily made a difference with regard to how the evaluation was conducted or how findings are presented in evaluations. It is not known how much weight has been put on incorporating gender specialists into evaluation teams.

In conclusion, results with reference to the inclusion of the gender perspective in both design and findings are not impressive, but the review team did not find an intentional pattern of deliberate exclusion of a gender perspective on the part of the individual evaluation teams.

Rather the results may be related to some "intangible" or "informal" aspects of an evaluation culture which tends to render women and gender equality invisible at many stages of the evaluation process ranging from design to reporting of findings.

More seriously, however, is the concern arising from the observation that gender mainstreaming was not a focal issue in the projects and programmes when these were originally designed. That being the case, one could hardly expect it to be a prominent feature in the evaluations of the very same projects.

This observation also points to the fundamental generic weakness of not designing projects, and their monitoring indicators with subsequent evaluations in mind.

Recommendations

In terms of recommendations, there is probably no single sweeping measure that can secure gendersensitive evaluations. This has to be addressed in a broad sense at several levels. It requires a pragmatic technical approach to the manner in which evaluations are conducted. Furthermore, it requires accountability of the development assistance system to ensure that emphasis is put on this issue. At the same time, it requires a careful understanding of the influencing mechanisms by which women can become marginalised in development assistance unless specific efforts are made to ensure the opposite effects.

The fundamental weakness that has led to the above findings and conclusions is to be found in the project- and programme cycle process as practiced. What is needed is a profound attitudinal change and associated awareness-raising regarding the incorporation (or mainstreaming) of the evaluation activity as an integral component of project- and programme designs. This must be established routinely in terms of explicit formulation of baselines (ideally; counterfactual development paths) with a set of carefully chosen project-specific monitoring indicators. This must be accompanied by agreed procedures and capacity for data collection throughout the project cycle. This will pave the way for the conducting of appropriate and timely evaluations. It is at this early stage in the project cycle that quality assured inclusion of the strategic gender dimensions in development cooperation must be secured.

What is possible, however, is to make recommendations about how evaluations are managed, designed and implemented:

- The ToR should clarify what Norad expects in terms of gender focus for each evaluation exercise. Connections between the project, policy or intervention in question and the women and men it directly affects should be made clear from the start whenever gender relevance is considered to be high.
- Gender equality experts should be involved in developing the ToR.
- In the cases where an explicit gender focus is to be given weight in the evaluation, and this is mutually agreed upon from the start, the Evaluation Department must ensure that this is properly reflected throughout the evaluation process cycle.

¹ It should be noted that when the expression "reasonable to expect" is used, this is on the basis that issues/themes under consideration are highlighted in the "Strategy for Women and Gender Equality in Development Cooperation (1997-2005)".