

Feminist Evaluation

A primer on integrating a feminist approach into monitoring, evaluation, and learning frameworks.

A Feminist Approach

For years civil society has been deepening our collective approach to understanding the gender dimensions to our work and how gender impacts experiences, perspectives, and outcomes.

A feminist approach acknowledges that gender bias is systemic across communities and institutions and recognizes the intersection of gender, race, class, and sexuality in the context of power-dynamics.

A feminist approach also views evaluation itself as political and that the research process is influenced by the context and background of the researcher. It is purposeful in holding space for different ways of knowing, reflecting, and sharing information and experiences. A feminist approach uses critical inquiry to challenge assumptions and tends to avoid creating or contributing to generalizations. Finally, a feminist approach sees knowledge as a resource to be shared, especially for those that create it, and is conscious that evaluation/research has potential to impact contributors both negatively and positively.

For organizations and evaluators, a feminist evaluation approach provides opportunities to go beyond recording of gender inequalities or differences in experience, to inform feminist approaches to doing our work, making recommendations for how our work can be strengthened to advance gender equality and address the needs and interests of women and girls.

Importantly, the Government of Canada actively promotes a feminist approach to community development work through its [Feminist International Assistance Policy](#).

How Did We Get Here?

Women and Development

An approach which asserted women's centrality to broader development efforts due to their critical work both inside and outside the home. WAD evaluation tended to take more of an economic lens to assessing impact and to assume that improvements in the macro context would benefit women.

1970s

Women in Development

An approach which called for greater harnessing of women's productive potential to advance development and sought to address women's issues in community development projects. WID projects generally approached women exclusively and treated women's issues as outside of mainstream development. WID evaluation tended to focus on impact of women-specific interventions on women alone rather than systemic inequality.

1960s

Feminist Evaluation

An evolving approach addressing shortcomings of WID, WAD and GAD. Feminist evaluation prioritizes women-oriented outcomes (as opposed to assuming their goals are the same as men). It goes beyond recording gender-based inequalities or differences in experiences/perspectives to explore why inequalities and differences exist. Feminist evaluation prioritizes information sharing and acknowledges the political nature of the research, seeking to use evaluation itself as a tool for improving women's lives. A feminist approach also employs a more fluid understanding of gender (e.g. incorporating transwomen) and recognizes that women are not a homogeneous group – that women's experiences/perspectives are shaped by context and by intersectional identities.

Today

Gender and Development

GAD began to focus on the intersection between gender, race, and class. GAD recognized the importance of power-dynamics and gender relations to understanding development challenges and addressing inequalities as central to achieving community development goals. GAD evaluation employed disaggregation to record inequalities and would explore patriarchal structures that contribute to unequal experiences, especially as related to economic status.

1980s

Putting Feminist Evaluation into Practice

CHECK BIAS

Consider and be upfront about who is conducting the evaluation and any identity-based bias or experience which may influence the research.

CONSIDER CONTEXT

Explore contextual factors that influence knowledge and experience. Seek to understand how context impacts women differently based on diverse intersectional identities.

CENTRE WOMEN

Ensure women's own goals and interests are prioritized, beginning with the research questions and informing research methodology and evaluation tools.

BE OPEN

Ensure that methodology and tools respect and are flexible to incorporate different ways of knowing and sharing knowledge.

SHARE BROADLY

Recognize that knowledge is a form of power and that participants are impacted by the research process. Seek positive impact through sharing knowledge, learning and recommendations.

TAKE ACTION

Identify and act on opportunities to create, advocate for, and support change which addresses structural inequalities. See the advancement of gender equality as a core objective of the evaluation process.

Recommended Further Reading:

- 1) [Feminist Evaluation \(betterevaluation.org\)](#)
- 2) [Making Feminist Evaluation Practical \(Article\)](#)
- 3) [Feminist Evaluation and Gender Approaches \(Article\)](#)

**Small Shop.
Big Impact.**

claire@ssbi.ca