EFFECTIVE APPROACHES TO WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT

Key findings from the meta-analysis of Fund for Gender Equality programme evaluations

In 2015, UN Women’s Fund for Gender Equality (FGE) commissioned a meta-evaluation and meta-analysis of 25 grantee programme evaluations conducted between 2011 and 2015, generating insights about the Fund’s grant-making model and the most effective women’s empowerment strategies used by civil society.

The analysis also suggested areas for improvement, including the need to aim for larger, more structural change; build long-term capacities; and strengthen the sustainability of interventions. The Fund has already taken measures to address these with its new grantees. This brochure presents the main meta-analysis findings. To read the full report and the meta-evaluation, go to www.unwomen.org/fge.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

WHY OUR MODEL WORKS

DEMAND-DRIVEN
“The demand-driven and grantee-led approach of the FGE is a significant comparative advantage and ensured that projects were relevant, responsive to the needs of beneficiaries and sustainable.”

FLEXIBILITY
“The flexibility of the FGE enabled grantees to achieve important results and respond to changing needs and realities on the ground.” Projects are implemented organically, and grantees can direct strategies to respond to the emerging needs of beneficiaries and/or changing dynamics within countries.

PARTNERSHIPS
“Establishing the formation of networks and partnerships is a comparative advantage of FGE as an effective means of ensuring sustainability.” Grantees work in partnership with other civil society organizations and stakeholders at local and national levels for greater sustainability of results.

CAPACITY-BUILDING
“Increased FGE investment in building grantees’ monitoring, reporting and evaluation capacities resulted in greater visibility of FGE effectiveness and impact.” Continuous support and coaching of grantees throughout programme implementation resulted in positive assessments of grantees’ capacities.

STRONG PROGRAMME DESIGN
“Ensuring a strong project design contributed to better management and evaluation of project results.” High-quality programme design in most cases led to delivering intended results. The FGE has technically supported sound programme frameworks and provided guidance on results-based management.

WHY OUR PROGRAMMES ARE EFFECTIVE

CASCADE APPROACH TO TRAINING OF CSOs
“The cascading approach of training and capacitating a large number of CSOs [..] to effectively integrate gender equality and women’s empowerment into the work of their organization will serve to further amplify and sustain results of FGE interventions to contribute to the SDG agenda.” An expanded number of actors, including community-based organizations, are now better equipped.

USE OF COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT MODELS
“The use of community empowering models has the potential for transformative impact.” Strategies that focused on empowering women and their communities enabled women to claim their rights and strengthened their agency.

UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF VULNERABILITY
“Understanding different levels of vulnerability and marginalization of beneficiaries and adapting project strategies to address these specificities has proven essential to advancing women’s political and economic empowerment.” Programmes effectively engaged excluded and marginalized communities.

COMPREHENSIVE PARTNERSHIPS AND NETWORKS
“Investing the time to develop comprehensive partnerships and networks with a variety of stakeholders increased the impact of FGE projects, more effectively addressed the needs of beneficiaries and fostered sustainability.” Partnerships positioned grantees as bridges between civil society and government.

UTILIZING LOCAL CapacITIES
“Utilizing local capacities and building on partners’ expertise and ongoing programmes enabled FGE to achieve impressive results in a short timeframe.” Using local capacities and resources has proved cost-effective, and ensured greater national ownership and sustainability of results.
WHAT WORKS FOR WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT?

Increasing incomes leads to higher control and decision-making power. The improvements in income and livelihoods has a positive effect on decision-making (UN Women). Projects that target marginalized groups require thorough socioeconomic analysis and might benefit more from involving social workers. In Cambodia, the income generated by women helped them support daily expenses and achieving better food security and nutrition.

Increasing women’s understanding of and ability to exercise their rights. Women who better understand their legal rights, such as property or inheritance, were more likely to assert their rights. In India, putting women’s “self” at the center of the intervention translated into changes in the power relations within families as women became more empowered.

Developing comprehensive project strategies. Successful programs were linked to strategic campaign building with the establishment of networks while tackling structural barriers – all based on a detailed context analysis. In Yemen, where cultural norms were an identified major constraint to women’s public participation, men’s engagement at community level complemented women’s capacity development efforts. Leveraging economic empowerment to promote political participation raised women’s self-confidence, especially those in marginalized positions, motivating them to become more outspoken and politically active. In Palestine, the work with women’s economic costs led to increased women’s mobilization in public life addressing 20 community issues.

Increasing women’s understanding of and ability to exercise their rights. Women with a better understanding of their legal rights, such as property or inheritance, were more effectively able to claim them, within their families and through formal bodies. The combination of such knowledge with access to paralegals and coverage of legal costs in Rwanda was particularly impactful.

Strengthening women’s trade unions to advocate for political reforms. Collectives gave women the space, support, and strength to negotiate as a group. For example, in Palestine, job shadowing was found to be a unique strategy to support the mobilization of young activists to have an impact in formal settings.

Raising awareness about the situation of vulnerable populations such as migrant and domestic workers and promoting legislative changes to recognize their rights. Conducting studies to further understand the situation of most vulnerable sectors such as domestic workers and revising centres and political debate in Brazil. Creating networks for economically marginalized groups. Connecting and linking groups of economically marginalized women is successful particularly when matched with training – including peer learning – and an ongoing process of ‘handholding’ in Kyrgyzstan. Network of women’s collectives became a direct advocacy mechanism to push local government for improved economic and political legislation.

Utilizing existing employment schemes. Government employment schemes can be implemented in order to give access to the most marginalized women even in rural areas, particularly in small communities.

WHAT WORKS FOR WOMEN’S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION?

Building women’s self-confidence and awareness of their rights can serve as a critical success factor for empowerment. In India, putting women’s “self” at the center of the intervention translated into changes in the power relations within families as women became more empowered.

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Expanding and strengthening women’s leadership

Maximizing coalitions to advocate for policy reforms. Collectives and networks give women space and strength to negotiate and advance advocacy efforts. Strategic litigation also helped advance gains in women’s human rights. In India, the formation of coalitions strengthened their shared causes and enabled the crafting of a national action plan and enhanced national and international advocacy. Engendering government structures. Setting up structural bodies is an important strategy to institutionalize and sustain gender responsive budgeting and policymaking. In Zimbabwe, the Gender Budget Action Committees established by the programme have now become a permanent structure led by women and representing community interests in both national and local budget processes.

Promoting legislative and policy change

Connecting elected women representatives with their constituencies. Shared and safe spaces enable grassroots women to voice their ideas and concerns, and connect directly with decision-makers. In India, a women’s information network connected to local elected representatives through mobile technology enabled 10,000 women to access basic entitlements and bring taboo issues to the public arena.

Capitalizing on political opportunities. Identifying and capitalizing on propitious political momentum – such as elections or legal reforms – is favourable for advocacy campaigns. In China, the training of women and local communities prior to the 2012 local elections resulted in an increased number of locally elected women.

Fostering inclusive legislative and policy-making. Engaging marginalized women politically and socially and culturally allows organizations to push for more inclusive legislation and rights. In India, traditional coalitions were transformed into ‘coalitions’ by obtaining information directly from the beneficiaries of public services, including excluded groups.

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