

Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation for Women's Rights:

*Thirteen Insights
for Women's
Organizations*

 By Srilatha Batliwala

The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) is an international feminist, membership organization committed to achieving gender equality, sustainable development and women's human rights. AWID's mission is to strengthen the voice, impact and influence of women's rights advocates, organizations and movements internationally to effectively advance the rights of women.


Author: Srilatha Batliwala, Associate Scholar, AWID

Contributors: Lydia Alpízar Durán, Cindy Clark, Alexandra Pittman,
Sarah Rosenhek, Angelika Arutyunova, and Alejandra Scampini

Proofreader: Kate Miller

Designer: Storm. Diseño + Comunicación

©2011 Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)

 This publication may be redistributed non-commercially in any media, unchanged and in whole, with credit given to AWID and the author. Published by the Association of Women's Rights in Development (AWID) in Toronto, Mexico City, Cape Town.

This publication is available online at www.awid.org

This publication is available in English, French, and Spanish

This publication is available in printed format.

To request a printed copy please contact

Toronto Office

215 Spadina Ave. Suite 150

Toronto, Ontario

M5T 2C7

Canada

contact@awid.org

*This publication was originally published in English AWID 2011,
Toronto, Canada*

AWID gratefully acknowledges the generous support of Cordaid, Hivos, Levi Strauss Foundation, MDG3 Fund (Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Oxfam Novib, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and an anonymous contributor.

A Challenging Context

The past decade has witnessed a major shift in the politics of aid, and a fairly radical change in the factors influencing support for gender equality and women's empowerment work. This has been one of the indirect results of the global economic trends, and particularly the worldwide recession that began at the end of 2008. Changes in the political environment, especially in western European countries and Scandinavia, have brought increasingly conservative regimes to power, who have rolled back the more liberal international aid policies of their predecessors. The aid modalities adopted a few years ago have also severely restricted the access of civil society organizations to bilateral aid. Worst of all, gender equality work has fallen off the international development agenda, or has been substituted by debatable alternatives like micro-credit and gender mainstreaming.

Thus in today's world, resources for women's rights work are no longer a matter of human rights or social justice but more pragmatic considerations of social returns on "investments"—the "investing in women" as "smart economics" advocated by the UN and World Bank, and "girl effect" model advocated by some foundations, are good examples of this approach.¹ This paradigm shift from a social justice to an economic argument is one of the many by-products of the dominance of the neoliberal growth model of development. Organizations working for women's rights and gender equality are therefore under growing pressure to demonstrate results. The resources for gender equality work—especially for approaches where impacts are harder to measure in quantifiable terms—have also been on the decline, as AWID's "Where is the Money for Women's Rights?"² research has shown. Many donor agencies—and particularly the gender equality programs within them - have been under pressure from governments (in the case of bilateral agencies), or their boards and "back donors" (in the case of private foundations and women's funds) to show what difference their resources have made. They have consequently strongly promoted the use of more linear, cause-effect and results-based monitoring and evaluation frameworks by their grantees.

At another level, there has been a global challenge to civil society around its accountability, legitimacy and credibility. In response, civil society organizations have attempted to increase transparency about their resources and strategies, improve internal learning systems and undertake more rigorous assessments of their effectiveness and impact, in order to more clearly establish the social value added by their work. Women's rights organizations are very much a part of this process, but given that their interventions are often movement-based and / or designed to deal with the structural roots of gender inequality, for which the current range of assessment tools are often inappropriate or inadequate, making a convincing case is often far more challenging.

AWID's Action Research on Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

It is in this context that through 2009 and 2010, AWID initiated multiple action research projects to study the challenges faced by both women's organizations and their donors in effectively monitoring and evaluating women's rights work, and to enhance our collective capacity to assess the

1. See for instance the UN Women's News Centre, Mckinsey & Company, and Nike Foundation Corporate Website.

2. For more information on AWID's action-research initiative on funding for women's rights see: <http://www.awid.org/AWID-s-Publications/Funding-for-Women-s-Rights>

influence and impact of such work. The following specific projects were undertaken during this time. More information on each project is available on the [AWID website](#).

- [Capturing Change in Women's Realities](#) (Batiwala and Pittman). A critical analysis of over fifty M&E frameworks, approaches, methods and tools currently in use by organizations and networks focusing on women's rights and empowerment.
- A [Monitoring and Evaluation Compendium](#), or wiki, containing reviews of over 50 commonly-used M&E frameworks, approaches, tools and methods, with a critical analysis of their strengths and limitations.
- An in-depth quantitative and qualitative study of the experiences and challenges faced by 37 out of the 45 organizations that received the Dutch Government's MDG3 Fund³ grants in 2008⁴. The results and insights from this study will be available in *Learning More from the MDG3 Fund Experience* (Batiwala and Pittman).
- A Dialogue convened in June 2010 in Amsterdam with representatives of the MDG3 Fund awardees, officials from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs that created the fund, the company that administers the Fund for the Ministry, and M&E experts, who discussed relevant M&E processes for capturing the dynamic changes that women's organizations seek to make.

While this work was partly in response to the larger contextual challenges outlined earlier, it was also inspired by our mission to support and strengthen women's rights organizations and movements. In fact, in the case of the MDG3 Fund research, what began as an attempt to analyze the possibilities and limits of the Fund grantees to demonstrate results evolved into an in-depth process of critical self-reflection and dialogue about M&E, internal learning and more effective communication about achievements to the external world. So while the goal of this work was primarily to locate ways in which advances—and reversals—in women's rights and gender equality can be more effectively tracked and captured, our concern was more with advancing our collective capacity to learn from our work: about how change happens, how we can apply this learning to strengthen our strategies and movements, and to increase the resources available for our work.

Shifting our Paradigm around M&E

In putting forward the principles contained in this document, therefore, our larger purpose is to re-position M&E as part of our politics—as a fundamental expression of our accountability to our cause and our constituencies, and as a critical means of advancing our individual and collective learning. We realized that even when we have extremely strong M&E systems, our learning from them tends to remain at the organizational level or, at best, is shared with our donors. This falls short of the most important goal of all: building and advancing a shared knowledge base on what works and what doesn't, so that together, we strengthen our *collective* capacity for advancing gender

3. A special fund created by the Netherlands Government's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to help advance the achievement of Millennium Development Goal 3 to promote gender equality and empower women.

4. Although this research was within the specific context of the MDG3 Fund, the underlying M&E systems required by the Fund (Logical frameworks) are standard practice across the development community. For this reason, the findings and recommendations from this study are valid for a broader range of organizations, contexts, and situations.

equality and women's rights. This is an urgent priority at a time when the challenges faced in building women's rights and collective power for social justice are becoming more serious and complex at every level, and the funds for this kind of work come with more rigid conditions or requirements.

Working with our Diversity

Before we share the insights from our research, we want to acknowledge that they represent an ideal—the best-case scenario of what we wish every women's rights organization had the resources and capacity to implement. In reality, we recognize the huge diversity of women's groups and processes, working at various levels in so many different contexts. We know that the vast majority of organizations fighting for women's rights are fragile, struggling for resources and survival, with limited staff and capacity. Others are working in situations of conflict and political instability, or under constant threat from criminal mafias, fundamentalists and other forces, and facing a growing number of attacks because of their work as women human rights defenders. Our suggestions may seem a distant dream to some groups, while larger, better resourced organizations, working in conditions of relative stability, may be able to apply several or all of them. While we believe all the principles are useful and important, it is not our intention to promote these as a package, or *in toto*—to be applied by everyone, under all circumstances. Rather, we offer them as a menu of ideas, possibilities and approaches from which organizations can choose, adapting those that seem most relevant, useful, and above all, feasible, given their particular contexts and constraints.

Keeping these provisos in mind, we present thirteen key insights into how women's rights organizations and movements can strengthen capacity to track and assess the contribution of our organizations and interventions. These lessons can contribute to uprooting and shifting the deeply-embedded gender-based inequalities and injustices that continue to plague our world.

1. Make M&E a key ingredient in our learning and accountability
2. Develop M&E capacity
3. One size does not fit all
4. Track reversals or “holding the line”
5. Balance quantitative and qualitative assessment
6. Prioritize approaches that assess our contribution to change, not those that demand attribution
7. Less is more
8. Flexibility and adaptability
9. M&E systems must be appropriate to organizational architecture
10. Negotiate M&E systems with donors
11. Tailor indicators and results to time frames
12. Create baselines
13. M&E that works for us will work for others

Thirteen Promising Practices for Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation in Women's Rights Work

1

A fundamental paradigm shift is required regarding the true role of M&E in our work. Our research and conversations with both donors and women's organizations reveal that M&E is most useful and relevant when it is approached as a learning process, rather than a reporting or fundraising requirement. Solid, comprehensive and rigorous assessment of our effectiveness is a critical expression of our accountability to our constituency, and to our longer-term mission of building a gender just world. We often engage in this learning process subconsciously or informally. In our internal meetings and planning processes, or in conversations with each other, for instance, we are constantly assessing the progress of our work. We frequently share valuable insights about what we are learning, about what we have achieved, the setbacks we have suffered; we identify who and what is behind both the challenges to our work and the progress we have made; and we analyze why we think change has—or has not—happened. This is exactly what monitoring and evaluation means. The task is thus to transform this internalized habit of analysis and learning into more systematic and articulated forms that can be shared with others—not just the donors who may require the information, but others who could learn from our experiences and insights. Even more, we have to apply this learning more consciously in reviewing our practices and strategies, and shaping new interventions. The challenge, therefore, is to make M&E a central part of the way we learn and strengthen our work at every level, a vibrant expression of organizational and individual learning and growth, and a critical contribution to the collective learning of women's movements worldwide.

2

Women's organizations have overwhelmingly cited the necessity of building and increasing their capacity to effectively and convincingly document the results of their work. Many AWID member organizations report that it has become harder than ever to mobilize resources for their work, particularly when their strategies are seen as hard to monitor, or their results difficult to measure. So there is a need to generate more rigorous and convincing data about the effectiveness and impact of our strategies, and counter the impression that our work does not lend itself to "hard" analysis. But our research indicates that assessing our work effectively often demands the use of tools and methods that require skills and capacities that may not be available within our organizations, or which may feel alien to our cultures and traditions of learning. Others work in high-risk, conflict-ridden or violent contexts, the demands of day-to-day firefighting and survival may make such assessment impossible. So when setting up an M&E system, or trying to refine or re-design an existing one, it is important to assess the kinds of staff capacities, time, and other resources it requires, and to develop a mix of tools and methods that are feasible within these constraints. On the other hand, our constraints should not become an excuse to do less than we can—we need to question our current approach, to honestly assess if we are doing all that we can, if we can do more, and push our M&E boundaries as far as we can. This means integrating M&E skills into our overall organizational development and capacity building plans, and, if necessary and possible, accessing external expertise. And since any strong M&E system involves time and resources—no matter what our size

← Make M&E a key ingredient in our learning and accountability

← Develop M&E capacity

or context or level of operation—we must begin to budget for these and negotiate for specific M&E-related costs in our fundraising.

3 Our research has shown clearly that no single M&E framework can capture *all aspects* of the change, impact, or results of a women’s rights / empowerment project or strategy. No single tool or method can respond to all our learning needs, since each has been designed to track or capture specific dimensions of change or operational effectiveness, but not others. Any one M&E instrument—whether it is the logical framework, theory of change, outcome mapping, or gender impact analysis—only assesses a *particular* set of dimensions, but not all. Consequently, a comprehensive assessment process requires the application of multiple frameworks, methods, and tools, working together in a complementary fashion⁵. In fact, many women’s organizations are already doing this: over half (51%) of the women’s organizations in AWID’s recent study of MDG3 Fund grantees use *more than four* M&E approaches and tools, or elements from several, to document their progress and impact. This is quite logical given that the nature of gender and social power relations is complex and that organizations operate in different social, cultural, economic and political contexts. Our study also found that “organizations that used more than four M&E approaches, experienced a slightly higher level of satisfaction with their M&E system (and conversely, lower levels of dissatisfaction) than those that used one or two methods.” (Batiwala and Pittman, np) So while one M&E instrument cannot tell us the whole story, strategic combinations can bring us much closer to a more comprehensive understanding of the change process, including its strengths and limitations.

4 M&E systems that allow space for us to track and document negative changes, resistance and backlash are essential in women’s rights / empowerment work. This is hardly surprising, since we know that in practice, most interventions that advance women’s strategic interests, and even many that address their practical needs, tend to create reactions from the status quo. The forces acting to push back change can range from mild (in the form of cooption or neutralization of our efforts) to aggressive (violence against women or the activists working with them). For example, in-depth assessment of micro-credit programs for women have found that measuring their results in terms of loan disbursements and repayment rates, or even of increases in women’s income, tells only one part of the story. Women in these programs often face further exploitation, increased domestic violence because of their growing economic power, or exhaustion because their workloads increase without any let up in their domestic or caretaking duties—or, really poor women cannot participate in microcredit schemes at all. But most assessment tools are not designed to track or capture these negative impacts. Designing instruments that pick up these negative effects and reactions is vital, since this can radically alter the assessment of a project’s “success” or “failure”, by placing our achievements in a more realistic context. Women’s groups working in high-risk, conflict-affected locations will particularly appreciate this point. In fact in many contexts, negative reactions or reversals are actually evidence of positive impact (Batiwala and Pittman, p. 6). Similarly, we need approaches that give due value to processes that successfully hold on to past gains that “hold the line”, such as preventing the repeal of a law entitling women access to abortion, or protection from

← One size does not fit all

← Track reversals or “holding the line”

5. See Batiwala and Pittman’s “Capturing Change,” as this compendium of M&E frameworks and approaches could serve as a helpful starting point for making these choices.

domestic violence. Holding the line, in such contexts, is a success story, not evidence of a failure to move forward. As several participants of AWID's MDG3 Dialogue said—including the participant from Iraq—signs of positive impact might actually simply be that “things haven't gotten worse”.

5 Just as we need to consider combining multiple approaches, we also need to combine both quantitative and qualitative M&E tools and evidence in an appropriate balance. The experience of most women's rights activists and organizations is that quantitative, or “hard”, evidence of results is taken more seriously than “soft” data like stories of change, which are treated as anecdotal and lacking in rigor. There is also a tendency, among many women's groups, to believe that our work can *only* be assessed qualitatively, and that our processes of change are too complex or subtle to be measured in numbers. While it is true that no one can as accurately assess change as the women and communities who are the subjects and agents of a change process, we should not see these as substitutes for, but complements to, harder assessment methods. In fact, an overemphasis on qualitative information often *limits* our ability to demonstrate that our work is making a difference, especially with audiences like government policy makers or the donor community. The fact is that the most complete picture of change—whether it is positive, or includes backlash, reversals or just successfully holding the line—emerges when both quantitative *and* qualitative tools of assessment are used. For example, we could combine surveys which generate quantitative data on changes in women's political participation, mobility, income, awareness of rights, literacy, health-seeking behavior, and changes in male attitudes, *with* qualitative methods like narratives of individual and collective struggles, stories of change, and focus group discussions that describe how change happened. In fact, quantitative data often validates and nuances qualitative evidence, and vice-versa. The quantitative-qualitative balance can be achieved by organizations regardless of their size, location, or context, especially when combined with the “less is more” approach (see point 7). Building our stories of change by combining quantitative data and qualitative evidence can help us make our case far more effectively.

6 We are often tempted to claim credit for all the changes that occur in a women's rights or empowerment process, or feel pressured to do so by the struggle to secure funding for our work. And sometimes we are reluctant or too modest to take credit for our contribution to change, fearing it will be seen as exaggerated or self-promoting. Some M&E frameworks—such as the logical framework or Results Based Management—are in fact *designed* to attribute results to our interventions in a simplistic way. But in reality, such approaches are more appropriate for tracking performance or implementation of project activities. They do not work as well when we are trying to understand how the change process produced results, both intended and unintended. What is more, such “attribution-seeking” approaches are not designed to capture the *interim* steps that must be achieved in order to reach the final intended outcomes. For example, a heightened awareness of domestic violence as a crime is a necessary first step to reducing such violence. This results in jumping straight to measuring the overall goal of a program or intervention—which we know can only be achieved in the longer-term (e.g., reduction or elimination of domestic violence)—and in making exaggerated claims of attribution that can rarely be supported. Worse, both having held the line, or

← Balance quantitative and qualitative assessment

← Prioritize approaches that assess our contribution to change, not those that demand attribution

reversals and backlashes will also be placed at our door in a negative way. No single organization or intervention can possibly work on all the factors that influence and mediate gender power and women's rights—as any women's human rights defender working in an area controlled by “narco-traffickers”, other mafias, or religious fundamentalists will tell us. This is why contribution-based approaches—such as Outcome Mapping, Most Significant Change, or Theory of Change, —should be important components of our M&E systems, since they allow us to make more realistic, but modest, claims about our role in the change process.

7 In the struggle to accurately capture and reflect the contribution of our work to changes in women's lives and realities, the answer is not to generate mountains of data and end up unable to meaningfully analyze it all, much less build a convincing picture of what was achieved. Indeed, smaller women's groups, or those working in challenging contexts, often have difficulty producing even basic evidence of their effectiveness given the constraints of resources, staff, and the risks under which they work. This is often why M&E processes feel overwhelming to many women's organizations. But in fact for effective M&E, sometimes *less is more*—in other words it is not the *quantity* but *quality* of information that matters, generated through fewer but more sensitive and intelligent indicators. Women's movements and organizations have to thus create a fine balance between generating more evidence than they can convincingly and competently analyze, and too little to make their case. The SMART framework, for all its limitations, was an attempt to do precisely this—to identify a small but effective set of indicators that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-appropriate. We need to focus on developing M&E systems that can make a more convincing case with evidence that is high in quality, but not necessarily in quantity.

8 Rigid approaches to reporting on targets / indicators / outputs / outcomes that were planned at the start of a change intervention are not useful in women's rights and empowerment work. As women's organizations have emphatically underlined in interviews, when we plan an intervention and design the M&E system to monitor and assess its results, we are engaged in intelligent guesswork rather than infallible certainties. The broader context can affect planned interventions, which requires the organization/activists to adapt to the new circumstances. For instance, the planned number of meetings for awareness-building of women's rights could not be held because the project encountered any number of serious setbacks (attacks on women activists, political surveillance and suppression which pushed activists underground, war/conflict breaking out, or men in the community mobilizing against the project). There is always an element of unpredictability in women's rights work, so that the best laid plans can go wrong, often for reasons beyond our control. On the other hand, things can also go right, or proceed much faster, than we had anticipated. This lack of predictability is not a peculiarity of social change work—even major corporations and businesses have been forced to revise their targets and indicators when macro-economic and market realities change! Under these circumstances, M&E indicators may quickly have to be revised, to reflect what the organization was able to do in response. As such, M&E systems must be agile and flexible, since evidence shows that even the most carefully-chosen approaches and measures may have to be changed midstream if the ground-realities shift radically in the course of project implementation

← Less is more

← Flexibility and adaptability

(Batiwala and Pittman, np). Of course this flexibility should not be misused—to hide, for instance, our own mistakes or strategic errors. It should be applied only when it is clear that the trajectory of our change intervention has been altered by external factors beyond our control or as a result of new information that suggests a change in course.

9

The world of women's rights is increasingly populated by organizations with complex architectures—networks, local-to-global structures, federations and confederations, membership-based organizations, coalitions, and many more. These entities have emerged in the past decades precisely *because* of the global nature not only of gender inequality, but the economic and political forces that complicate it at every level. Network-type structures can have greater reach, bandwidth, and impact at multiple levels of policy and activism. But most M&E frameworks and tools at our disposal were designed for far simpler, grassroots-based, direct-action or service-delivery organizations. These tools ask questions like “How many women have you reached? How many women have benefitted?” which are often quite inappropriate for complex, multi-layered, multi-locational structures. For example, the secretariat of a large, geographically dispersed network or coalition, with multiple organizations as members, located in dozens of countries, and working on both local and global policy advocacy, cannot answer this type of question without rolling it through all the layers of its structure. And even when they provide the answer to the question, it tells us nothing about what value has been added by operating through this type of structure, rather than a simpler one. But networks, coalitions, and transnational organizations have created complex structures that enable them to work in multiple countries, at multiple levels (local, national and global) and with multiple organizational members or partners. Their complex architecture also often enables them to deepen the impact of the work of their individual members by bringing in expertise from other locations or levels of the structure. This results in strengthening knowledge, capacity and strategies of all their members / units, and in stronger collective advocacy, multi-centric research studies, and other activities that a single organization may not have the ability, resources, or reach to undertake. These organizational structures therefore require more complex M&E systems. They may need to combine, for instance, the assessment of their effectiveness as *networks* (such as the Wilson-Grau/Nunez framework), their *advocacy impact* (through tools and recommendations offered by Patton and Klugman), as well as a judicious combination of the more conventional frameworks for assessing *unit- or member-level results*. This is yet another example of why multiple assessment tools are essential to build effective M&E systems.

10

Many women's organizations find that the M&E frameworks and approaches required by some donors demand resources that are beyond their capacity, such as the abilities of their staff, the time required for their implementation, or the need for external expertise to which they may not have access. They may also be difficult to use for groups working in politically unstable or risky contexts of violence and conflict. Sometimes, the complexity and amount of data required is excessive, and does not necessarily give a better picture of implementation or impact. This usually happens because M&E requirements are not prioritized in the grant-negotiation process, but treated as an afterthought or add-on by both donor and grantee, resulting in a nasty shock when the reality of what is involved becomes clear. But this can be pre-empted if we seize the initiative

← M&E systems must be appropriate to organizational architecture

← Negotiate M&E systems with donors

in designing a sound M&E framework and indicators for our proposed work—based on quantitative-qualitative balance, “less is more”, and other principles offered here—but which are tailored to our contextual realities and organizational capacity, and which demonstrate a serious approach to tracking and evaluating our work. This also ensures that the basis for negotiating the assessment of our work is created by us, rather than others less experienced or expert in the strategies and contexts of our work. Understanding and negotiating M&E expectations at the outset of a project or funding cycle is a useful strategy to avoid tensions and misunderstandings at a later stage.

11 AWID’s M&E research indicates that we are sometimes seeking results from our interventions that are disproportionate to their time frame—and this is often a product of the pressure to attribute results to our work. For example, a violence against women intervention may attempt to measure a reduction in violence within a three-year project cycle. But a more realistic measure of success in this short period would be increased awareness or recognition of such violence as a crime, or having broken some of the silence around it, evidenced by increased reporting of violence by victims or their families. Macro-level changes, such as lower violence rates, can only be reliably assessed in the long term, and only after accounting for the role of multiple actors involved in the change process, as well as the influence of a variety of cultural, political, and economic forces. A single project or organization cannot work on all these factors, much less in a three- or five-year timeframe. What we can measure, instead, are the interim changes within specific stakeholder groups and our *contribution* to enabling that change. So when we are setting up assessment systems and tracking tools, we will have to synchronize our indicators with our time frames, and make a convincing case for this approach to those who support or challenge the value of our work. This prevents us from making exaggerated claims about our impact, *and* from feeling disappointed with our results.

12 Generating periodic baseline data is a powerful but underutilized tool in accurately assessing our role and achievements in the change process—and in locating the most strategic directions for the next phase of our work. In fact we are often launching projects and change strategies without a clear vision of the change we seek, the values and politics that inform that vision, and without a strong diagnosis of the problems we are attempting to address. Baselines can greatly advance this clarity by providing the basis for a clear situational analysis at the outset. This in turn enables us to more accurately place the changes that have occurred in the course of our work—both positive and negative—against this baseline, identify what worked and what did not, and refine our strategies accordingly. There are many examples of baseline studies conducted by NGOs and women’s organizations assessing the state of human rights, gender relations, violence against women, etc., in many parts of world.⁶ The evidence generated through these has helped to monitor and assess the impacts of their interventions in more convincing and accurate ways by generating concrete evidence of where things were at the outset of the

6. See for example Ranga Zinyemba and Ronah Mugadza, “Report of the Baseline Survey on Human Rights, Gender and Democracy” European Union / Konrad Adenauer Stiftung / SHDF: 2008, and Batiwala, Srilatha *et al.* “Status of Rural Women in Karnataka,” National Institute of Advanced Studies: Bangalore, India, 1998.

← Tailor indicators and results to time frames

← Create baselines

project. This has enabled them to better learn about the impact of their change interventions over time, but also to make a much stronger case to external audiences about what worked—and what didn't. It is not that only large, well-funded organizations can conduct baseline studies—they can be done even with limited resources through interesting combinations of participatory methods, secondary data (gleaned, for example, through official statistics or census data, or surveys and studies done by other organizations), as well as conventional “objective” methods like surveys. Our ability to create baselines, and place our progress along selected indicators within these, also enhances the ability of our supporters (including our donors) to make a stronger case to the larger world for why such work needs support.

13

The final and possibly most important principle emerging from our research is that if we make the time, effort, and resources available to design and implement the best M&E system possible for tracking and assessing our work, chances are that it will also serve the needs of other stakeholders to whom we may be accountable—be they our governments, donors or the women that we seek to serve. Donors, for instance, may need specific kinds of information on whether we have implemented the scheduled activities in a timely way, which may not be our priority; or women may be more interested in which strategies were more effective in dealing with backlash. But even if there isn't a perfect fit, chances are that a well-thought out M&E plan, developed in consultation with our constituents, with thoughtful experts/supporters, with allies in the donor community, and deploying our own ingenuity, insight, and experience, will cover most if not all the information needs of our stakeholders. The point is to seize the initiative in our own hands, rather than wait for something to be demanded or imposed by others. Our capacity to successfully negotiate for our own M&E approach is greatly enhanced when it has been developed through a sustained and committed organizational process, and is consequently both robust and convincing.

← M&E that works for us will work for others as well

We would like to place this discussion of insights and lessons for improving the assessment of our work, for becoming more effective learning organizations and movements, in a larger historical and political context - as a reminder of why all this matters. Those of us committed to societies that are just to women know that social power structures and the injustices they create are both resilient and powerful, and it is very difficult indeed to achieve lasting changes in gender relations. Any kind of social change that we seek to catalyze and contribute to is unpredictable and the pathways to it are constantly shifting. If we accept these realities, we know that most of our interventions on behalf of women's rights and empowerment are based on the wisdom of experience, and huge amounts of courage, rather than failsafe formulas. It is our most profound duty, therefore, to continuously assess, weigh and learn from our efforts as best we can, to share this learning with others, to document and analyze it, and by doing so, strengthen the hands of those who will come after us in the long road to gender justice.

Why does this matter?

1. Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID). "Monitoring and Evaluation Compendium" Wiki. Web. <http://www.awid.org/Library/AWID-s-Wiki-on-Monitoring-and-Evaluation>
2. Association for Women's Rights in Development. "Where is the Money for Women's Rights" action research. Web. <http://www.awid.org/AWID-s-Publications/Funding-for-Women-s-Rights>
3. Batliwala, Srilatha & Pittman, Alexandra. "Capturing Change in Women's Realities: A Critical Overview of Current Monitoring & Evaluation Frameworks and Approaches", The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID). December 2010. Web. <http://www.awid.org/About-AWID/AWID-News/Capturing-Change-in-Women-s-Realities>
4. Batliwala, Srilatha and Pittman, Alexandra. "Learning More from the MDG3 Fund Experience: Lessons from AWID's Survey of the MDG3 Fund M&E System." The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) to be published.
5. Batliwala, Srilatha *et al.* *The Status of Rural Women in Karnataka*. National Institute of Advanced Studies: Bangalore, India, 1998.
6. McKinsey & Company. "The Business of Empowering Women," January 2010. Web. http://www.mckinsey.com/App_Media/Reports/SSO/EmpWomen_USA4_Letter.pdf
7. Nike Foundation. "Girls: An Unexpected Answer," 2011. Web. <http://www.nikefoundation.org/>
8. UN News Centre, "Investing in Women and Girls Smart Choice in Troubled Economic Times – UN officials" July 2009. Web. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=31444&Cr=maternal%20mortality&Cr1>
9. Zinyemba, Ranga and Ronah Mugadza. European Union / Konrad Adenauer Stiftung / SHDF, "Report of the Baseline Survey on Human Rights, Gender and Democracy" 2008. Web. http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_15739-1522-1-30.pdf?090326123612

References

This resource was produced by AWID's Building Feminist Movements and Organizations Strategic Initiative (BFEMO)

The following BFEMO related publications can be found on the AWID website, www.awid.org:

[*Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation for Women's Rights: Twelve insights for Donors*](#)

by Srilatha Batliwala, Associate Scholar

[*Capturing Change in Women's Realities: A Critical Overview of Current Monitoring & Evaluation Frameworks and Approaches*](#)

by Srilatha Batliwala, Associate Scholar
and Alexandra Pittman, Research Associate

[*Changing Their World: Concepts and Practices of Women's Movements*](#)

by Srilatha Batliwala

[*Building Feminist Movements and Organizations: Global Perspectives*](#)

Edited by Lydia Alpízar Durán, Noël D. Payne, and Anahi Russo.

awid women's
rights
Association For Women's Rights in Development