LESSONS FROM EVALUATION

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Argentina. Refugee chefs cook for vulnerable people on World Refugee Day (13 June, 2020)

Gender Equality

Gender Equality During COVID-19

Progress on gender equality is stalling around the globe with women facing an increased risk of infection, less access to sexual and reproductive health and other essential services, loss of livelihoods, and increasing violence. At the same time, evaluations of previous disasters demonstrate that a crisis can be an opportunity to include more women at leadership tables and to challenge longstanding social norms that maintain inequalities. This note provides evidence and lessons from evaluations relevant to addressing gender equality during disease outbreaks and other emergencies that can inform responses during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

This note focuses on evaluation lessons on four key dimensions of gender equality affected by the pandemic: women's access to health services, addressing violence, promoting economic empowerment, women in leadership, and transforming harmful norms. It draws on a synthesized body of evaluation evidence on what works, for whom and in what contexts. It also draws on the What Works to Prevent Violence project, which compiles rigorous data on measures to reduce violence against women and girls. Drawing on evaluations provides a set of first principles to consider and build on before designing approaches to an unprecedented context.

Evaluation evidence is key to learning from the past and a way to leverage known successes.

The COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition is a network of the independent evaluation units of countries, United Nations organisations, international NGOs, and multilateral institutions. Participants work together to provide credible evidence to inform international co-operation responding to the COVID-19 pandemic – helping to ensure lessons are learnt and that the global development community delivers on its promises. **The Coalition is about learning with the world**.

Gender Equality

1. Lessons from Promoting Women's Access to Health Services and Achieving Better Health Outcomes

Pandemics make existing gender inequalities for women and girls worse, and can impact how they receive treatment and care.

■ **Health programming, including vaccination initiatives, need a gender strategy to ensure women and girls' have access.**

An evaluation in Jordan showed the importance of making vaccination services specifically accessible for women. In Zimbabwe, cultural and religious norms influenced women's willingness to access formal health services. Women's past experiences, and their treatment by health staff, shaped their willingness to access services.

■ **Health programming for women is more effective when it is led by women, and when it addresses the broader determinants of health and underlying power imbalances (holistic).**

Evaluations found that programmes that move beyond women's practical needs to address long-term structural changes related to women's status and equality, had more impact and greater sustainability. In Somalia, integrating awareness raising efforts on female-genital mutilation into health programmes contributed to broader changes to reduce vulnerability. When women were involved as leaders in the intervention, it improved effectiveness. In Nigeria, targeted support for recruiting and training women's healthcare workers was key. In the Northern region, a shortage of female health workers contributed to some of the poorest maternal and newborn health indicators in sub Saharan Africa.

■ **Achieving sustainable health outcomes for women requires health-systems strengthening and promoting government ownership and accountability. Successful examples required long-term development partners' commitment and multiple levels of government buy-in from the outset.**

Successful projects were often built on previous programming demonstrating phased interventions over time. Evaluations also warned about programming that created parallel systems and dependence on official development assistance demonstrating the need to embed programming in government systems to ensure sustainability.

■ **Disinformation and misinformation is combatted through awareness campaigns and establishing networks of local women health workers that live in – and are trusted by – the community.**

A health mediator model in Turkey and Syria built a bridge between health centres and communities. In Senegal, young girls' clubs were very successful in addressing sexual and gender based violence by developing young female community leaders. In Uganda, community health volunteers were effective in providing outreach services to the community.

■ **Funding sexual and reproductive services during a health crisis is important to ensure unplanned pregnancies and poor maternal health outcomes do not compound the negative impacts of the crisis.**

Previous conflicts, displacement and other emergencies around the world demonstrate how sexual and reproductive health can be threatened during a crisis. With Ebola in Liberia, women struggled to access maternal health services while facing a heightened risk of sexual violence and exploitation. An evaluation of a health centre for youth displaced by an earthquake in Malawi found that sexual and reproductive services were in greater demand following the earthquake.

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2. Lessons from Addressing Sexual and Gender Based Violence

Measures taken by governments to contain and mitigate the outbreak have created secondary impacts including increased violence against women and girls: "the shadow pandemic" (UN Women).

■ **Involving local people in participatory research makes programmes and awareness campaigns more relevant, effective and timely.**

In Iraq, a humanitarian response was informed by ongoing interactions with refugees, communities, civil society and government. This included Gender-Based Violence Safety Audits to understand risk and when to assemble teams for timely responses. In Lebanon, a study of the prevalence of early marriage and key determinants among Syrian refugee girls informed the development of training tools on early marriage targeting parents and youth, as well as a national campaign to increase the minimum legal age of marriage to 18 years old.

■ **Improving the capacity of legal systems to investigate and prosecute violence against women, while supporting survivors throughout the legal process, better protects women and brings perpetrators to justice.**

Evaluations highlighted key activities to improve legal systems. In Colombia, over 135 gender experts were deployed to investigate sexual and gender based violence. This supported women's participation in the investigation of war crimes. In the DRC, women were accompanied throughout the legal process. This contributed to an increase in the number of cases brought to the court and the number of convictions of violence against women.

In Kenya, women were supported to win their court cases, which conveyed a powerful message on women's equality, and increased support for organisations addressing gender based violence. Police deployed from Canada and Norway supported the Haitian National Police to develop community-policing skills. This resulted in a better response to sexual and gender-based violence including an increased ability to investigate and prosecute related cases. In Ukraine, judges and legal professionals were trained on gender-based violence, family law, discrimination, and sexual harassment in a labour relations context.

■ **Survivors need access to a variety of services including medical, psychosocial and judicial services as well as socio-economic reintegration. One Stop Centres are an effective way to offer a single point of service.**

Evaluations demonstrated that poverty, violence and gender inequality are interlinked. In rural Rwanda, a key success factor was linking a range of activities: working with couples, providing safe spaces, referring violence survivors and perpetrators to services, educating opinion leaders, and supporting local activists. Other programmes that combined economic empowerment and gender-transformative interventions for women and families showed significant reductions in intimate partner violence and strengthening of the economic position of individuals and families.

■ **Activists and advocates were critical to elevate issues of sexual and gender-based violence.**

Positive impacts were reported as a result of using high-profile influencers and local people (including teenagers) to raise awareness about issues of violence and how to stop it.

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3. Lessons from Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment

COVID-19 increased women's unpaid work because of school and daycare closures, reductions in public services for people with disabilities and the elderly, and the need to look after family members with COVID-19. Jobs most affected were also held by more women (ILO).

- **Factors for achieving women's economic empowerment include pairing skills training with loans and a path to employment opportunities.**

  In the Philippines, Sari-Sari stores owned by women were provided business and financial skills training with small business loans. This allowed women to put their newly developed business plans into action. In Senegal, an evaluation noted the necessity for programming to also have a clear pathway for employment. In Egypt, a collaboration between industry associations and financial institutions improved women entrepreneurs' access to business development services. Other evaluations highlighted the need for demand-driven job services. In Honduras, value chain development was key (production, processing, product development, accessing markets).

- **Women's economic empowerment requires different approaches for already established business women vs. women looking to enter the economy for the first time.**

  Successful business women in Ramallah were looking to connect with markets and other business women as mentors. Women entering the economy for the first time were empowered with access to skills training within their community and access to micro-loans.

- **Supporting women's networks is key to advancing advocacy objectives.**

  The formation of women's networks provided new supportive relationships. Supporting civil society organisations and their advocacy capacity allowed women to influence legal reforms. In Ukraine, networks of women farmers successfully advocated for formal legal recognition of family farms under the law to provide women with equal shares. In Egypt, collaborating with the local federation of industries worked well to build the capacity of women entrepreneurs to serve on boards and promote the introduction of quotas for women on boards.

- **Women's participation in higher levels of education and in unconventional jobs can be increased with targeted approaches.**

  Campaigns to increase women in policing and in science and technology fields were successful as a result of targeted communication tools and specific language in job posters.

- **It is necessary to remove barriers to women's economic participation, including providing childcare, access to transportation, and finding creative approaches when freedom of movement is limited – such as online work. Women also need to know their rights.**

  Evaluations noted challenges for women to access jobs and remain employed due to a number of barriers. In Gaza, where movement is limited, women were able to find virtual employment through technical training and co-working services. In Pakistan, sensitisation of decent work and workers' rights at work was a crucial aspect of the enabling environment in promoting women's empowerment.

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4. Lessons from Supporting Women in Leadership and Challenging Harmful Social Norms

The pandemic is exacerbating existing gender inequalities and harmful social norms, presenting an immediate and long-term challenge to the realisation of women's and girls' rights. Across 30 countries, women make up only 24% of COVID-19 response committees.

■ **A crisis can create an opening for women to play unconventional roles.**

Evaluations of disasters noted women playing new roles in response and reconstruction efforts. Evaluations of programmes supporting women in political roles noted the importance of providing an understanding of, and access to, the system while supporting their confidence. However, male-dominated structures were challenging for elected women's meaningful participation. Supporting women once they were elected was a gap.

■ **Programming results are improved when combined with widespread community engagement campaigns.**

Evaluations found evidence that projects combining community awareness activities supported programming results by influencing the views and behaviours of targeted groups. However, evaluations also cautioned that awareness slowly changed attitudes. It was also necessary to support local civil society watchdogs and ensure multi-media campaigns were combined with individual and community dialogues.

■ **To achieve gender equality goals, engaging men and boys, as well as influencers like religious leaders, is important to make progress, as well as to prevent spoilers and possible back-lash against female participants.**

Evaluations demonstrated lower levels of intimate partner violence when intentional programming to target men and boys was integrated. In Honduras, Malawi, Senegal and Ethiopia programmes, working through religious and traditional leaders was key to success. In an Afghanistan program evaluation, it was noted that programming needed to also take into account the local terms and slogans to encourage buy-in. In Nigeria, working with young men saw participants became 'agents of change' and role models. Studies documented that male engagement was most successful when women were also empowered with more knowledge, confidence, and capacity to claim their rights.

■ **Evaluations note good efforts to mainstream the integration of gender considerations. However, it is still necessary to address women's meaningful participation and to better monitor gender data – which is not just about counting the number of women.**

Evaluations noted positive results in mainstreaming gender considerations into international declarations and national policies (e.g. G8 Declaration on the Prevention of Sexual Violence in Conflict, Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement). While women were being included more, and gender considered more, evaluations also spoke to challenges with women's meaningful participation. In an evaluation of producers organisations, the increase in women's membership of organisations did not go hand-in-hand with women being proportionally represented in formal structures, like boards and commissions, or having an equal share in technical positions.

Disclaimer

The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of the OECD, its member countries or the participants in the COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition. *Lessons from Evaluation* are rapid syntheses of evidence identified from evaluations published by participants of the Global COVID-19 Evaluation Coalition. Lessons presented in this brief are not prescriptive, and users are advised to carefully review these lessons along with lessons from comprehensive and systematic reviews in the context of country, sector, and thematic conditions. The contributors do not guarantee the accuracy of the data and accept no responsibility for any consequence of their use.

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UN WOMEN — United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

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