

The rough road of pioneering change. AGDEN's engagement with Gender and Human Rights responsive evaluation

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Background

The Africa Gender and Development Evaluators Network (AGDEN) was created in 2002 as a special interest group of the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) by UNIFEM (now UN Women) and AfrEA. Its aim is to be a leader in providing expert evaluators with strong skills in the application of gender and human rights principles to evaluations in Africa, as well as to influence evaluation policy and practice in Africa from a gender and human rights perspective. This remains the mandate of AGDEN.

Research conducted by AGDEN in 2008¹ revealed that there is still a gap in evaluation capacity, as well as capacity development in Africa. The demand for evaluation is still largely donor driven, and much of the evaluation work is being undertaken by specialists and professionals who have credentials in areas other than monitoring and evaluation (M&E), including research think tanks, individual academics, and management consulting firms. In the public sector, investments were being made in national capacities and institutions for M&E, and there was therefore growing capacity, but this was still rather weak.

The commissioners of evaluations who were interviewed described the quality of evaluation capacity in their implementation countries as being poor or fair¹. As one respondent from Kenya stated "Most of the evaluators in Kenya are autodidacts. Very few have M&E training and the evaluation capacity that I see is not great". They expressed the hope that professional associations would improve the quality of evaluations, as well as evaluator skills and attitudes, although they recognized that investment would still have to be made in teaching.

This study also found that efforts at strengthening development evaluation capacity at the national level are still very dependent on individual effort and, on that account, are generally uncoordinated and ineffectual except for a few exceptions such as the South Africa M&E Association (SAMEA) and AGDEN. These efforts are still heavily dependent on donors or national governments, for example, the Public Service Commission supports SAMEA. At the same time, UNICE was supporting the Kenya Evaluators Association.

AGDEN has evolved from a core group of 14 members in 2002 to a network of 107 members from at least 18 countries in Africa, as well as the USA, United Kingdom and Canada. Membership is open to practitioners and leaders in gender and/or human rights and monitoring and development evaluation in Africa. In 2007, AGDEN was registered in Kenya as a company limited by guarantee, with no share capital and has since then run a secretariat in Nairobi, Kenya.

In its ten year history, AGDEN has operated a lean organizational structure with three substructures: the Steering Committee (SC), Secretariat, and the body of members. In this period there have been 2 Chairpersons. The current structure was created in October 2006. Before then, AGDEN was implemented by EvalNet as a project of UNIFEM (now UN Women) and AfrEA. EvalNet was thus instrumental in identifying and bringing the founding core group members together around a common cause. The Steering Committee (SC) is headed by a Chair person. Other non-executive SC members represent north, south, west, and east Africa, as well as francophone and Anglophone Africa. The nine-member Steering Committee sets policy and direction while activities are undertaken by members and other consultants. Florence Etta served as the first Chair of the Steering Committee between October 2006 and January 2012.

Strategy and implementation

AGDEN's strategy, to achieve its mandate of providing expert evaluators in Africa with strong skills in the application of gender and human rights principles to evaluations, is described below in four broad categories:

- Enhancing individual capacities to conduct credible and useful evaluations through the development of a training toolkit, provision of training workshops, convening panel discussions at conferences, facilitating online discussions, and web-based dissemination of information.
- Creating an enabling environment that is supportive of evaluation by contributing towards mandatory monitoring of how gender equality is addressed at the national level, promoting evaluation standards, and contributing towards policy evaluation and decision-making.
- Strengthening equity-focused and gender sensitive evaluation systems and evaluations. Strengthening the organizational capacity to deliver services through institutional development processes and training of staff and members.

Enhancing individual capacities to conduct credible and useful evaluations

As a network of evaluators, AGDEN has the primary responsibility to strengthen the capacity of its members, and as an Africa-wide network, to strengthen the capacity of all M&E practitioners on the continent and beyond to conduct credible and useful evaluations that are responsive to the principles of gender equality and human rights. AGDEN uses a multi-pronged approach to reach out to evaluation practitioners including:

a) Development of a toolkit - AGDEN has developed a toolkit on Gender and Human Rights Responsive M&E,² which is in its final stages of publication. This toolkit is targeted at development practitioners and provides information and practical guides on how to conduct M&E that is responsive to women and human rights. It was developed by experts in gender, human rights and participatory M&E from Africa, and has undergone several revisions to ensure that it is relevant to practitioners in all regions of Africa. AGDEN is in the advanced stages of publishing this toolkit.

b) Training workshops for evaluation practitioners - Over the last four years, AGDEN has conducted ten training workshops in Kenya; South Africa; Jordan; the Czech Republic; Ghana; and, Burkina Faso, for no fewer than 150 participants from civil society organizations and academic institutions, as well as for government agencies. The workshops are all aimed at building capacity of participants to conduct M&E that is responsive to gender equality and human rights.

c) Panels and presentations at evaluation conferences and forums - Since 2002, AGDEN has hosted panels and made presentations that were aimed at eliciting dialogue and discussion on gender and human rights in M&E. Since 2009 AGDEN has been a regular host of panels, workshops, exhibitions or papers at the most significant continental Evaluation conferences; African Evaluation Association and the South Africa M&E Association. AGDEN was the second place winner of the AfrEA 2012 Member development prize.

AGDEN has also made a showing at international conferences hosting panels, giving workshops and discussion fora at: the International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS) Global Assemblies in 2009 and 2011, the European Evaluation Society (EES) conferences in 2010, and the American Evaluation Association (AEA) conferences.

d) Online discussions - AGDEN has a lively email discussion list and in October 2010 formed a web-based Community of Practice for gender, human rights and evaluation practitioners and professionals. This group is currently in the process of reactivation and re-engineering.

e) *Web-based dissemination of information* – AGDENews. the AGDEN electronic newsletter, has been in publication since 2009. To date, twelve volumes have been distributed online to members and other evaluation practitioners. The newsletter contains updates on AGDEN's activities as well as information about worthwhile events and discussions in the fields of gender, development, and M&E.

Through its website (www.agden.org), AGDEN also shares information and links related to its core mandate of gender, human rights and evaluation. These are available to all visitors of the website.

Creating an enabling environment for evaluation

AGDEN is a continental organization and some of its work has been aimed at contributing towards the mandatory monitoring of how gender equality is addressed at a national level. In 2006, AGDEN, working as a member of the UNIFEM Africa expert group on gender and the New Aid Modalities, created a set of gender sensitive indicators together with an accountability and assessment framework for gender equality. This was done in the context of the Paris Declaration and other aid instruments. These indicators were reviewed and revised by AGDEN at a workshop held in Nairobi in 2007, and presented at a number of international fora namely: the Africa regional preparatory meeting for the third High Level Summit on Aid Effectiveness in Kigali, Rwanda; the CSO preparatory meetings of the 3rd High Level Summit on Aid Effectiveness in Accra, Ghana, in September 2007; the African Women's Regional Consultative Meeting on Aid Effectiveness and Gender Equality in Nairobi, in 2008; and the 6th GENDERNET meeting at the OECD headquarters in Paris in 2008.

The AGDEN indicators influenced the work of the EC and UNIFEM as well as the indicators proposed in 2010 in the optional protocol for the final Monitoring Survey of the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action. The results of this monitoring survey were presented at the Fourth High Level Forum, in Busan in 2011, where member states committed to:

- a) Accelerate and deepen efforts to collect, disseminate, harmonize and make full use of data disaggregated by sex to inform policy decisions and guide investments, ensuring in turn that public expenditures are targeted appropriately to benefit both women and men.
- b) Integrate targets for gender equality and women's empowerment in accountability mechanisms, grounded in international and regional commitments.
- c) Address gender equality and women's empowerment in all aspects of development efforts, including peace-building and state-building.

Over the last four years, AGDEN has been working towards the application of quality standards in evaluation primarily by popularizing the AGDEN approach to Gender and Human Rights Responsive Evaluation which it has been researching and developing as well as the African Evaluation Guidelines (AEG). The AGDEN approach and the AEG are included in the AGDEN toolkit on "Gender and Human Rights Responsive Monitoring and Evaluation", produced early in 2012 which is the basis for the AGDEN training given at workshops with the same title.

In the coming years, AGDEN plans to extend its reach to politicians, public administrators and other entities that influence policy-making and implementation, to develop their capacity to understand and use evidence on gender equality, produced by M&E systems. This will be done through training workshops and other fora for dialogue, both electronically and face-to-face. A proposal has already been developed for this, and AGDEN is currently seeking support to operationalize it Africa-wide.

Strengthening equity-focused and gender-sensitive evaluation systems and evaluations

Strengthening equity-focused and gender-sensitive evaluation systems and evaluations is the core mandate of AGDEN. Through its toolkit, training workshops, conference presentations, and online

discussions, AGDEN conducts research studies, discusses, advocates and training on integrating the key principles of gender and human rights (empowerment; equality; non-discrimination; transparency; accountability; and, participation) into the planning, implementation, and M&E of development interventions, programmes and/or policies. AGDEN has constructed a model for how these principles can be integrated with the five OECD-DAC evaluation criteria of: relevance; efficiency; effectiveness; sustainability; and impact.

For AGDEN, research is a primary starting point for all the training. Each AGDEN workshop includes a participatory action research session with participant evaluation practitioners. The research focuses on the practices, utility, and relevance of integrating gender equality and human rights into development evaluation. The research also expects (aims) to identify the capacity needs of practitioners so as to ensure that the training offered is relevant to the context. In 2009 AGDEN was commissioned by IOD PARC to conduct a rapid assessment of M&E Capacity Strengthening Mechanisms for Development Evaluation In Sub-Saharan Africa; Kenya; Rwanda; Tanzania; Malawi; Mozambique; Nigeria; and, Sierra Leone.

Strengthening AGDEN's institutional capacity to deliver services

AGDEN aims to ensure that all its members have the capacity to practice, train and advise on gender and human rights in M&E at the national and international level. AGDEN therefore targets its members when selecting participants for the training workshops, and has conducted the following training for members:

- Training in outcome mapping.
- Training on new aid modalities and the Paris Declaration.
- Gender and rights-based M&E in development practice.
- Evaluation proposal writing.

The AGDEN secretariat and membership structure needs to be set up as a viable and sustainable organization. To date, two institutional assessments have been conducted, one on the organizational systems and procedures, and the other on the organizational readiness for learning and evaluation. Through these assessments, AGDEN identified key areas for organizational strengthening and is currently working to strengthen the weaknesses identified and to further strengthen the good practices.

Progress and results:

After 10 years of work, AGDEN has made progress towards increasing the understanding and practice of integrating gender equality and human rights concepts and principles into M&E practice of in Africa.

As a direct result of research activities, pictures of how development managers deal with and integrate gender and human rights issues into evaluation are being constructed for the continent. Research conducted in Nairobi and Johannesburg, with a total sample of 171 respondents, sought to understand from programme managers and officers, their

- knowledge of (familiarity with) key concepts in human rights, gender and development, and M&E;
- experience with M&E, gender and development, and human rights;
- use or application of key human rights and gender and development (GAD) concepts in their programming or M&E; and
- thoughts about integration of gender equality and human rights in M&E of development projects and or programmes.

Although 97.4 per cent³ of the respondents believe that it is a good idea to integrate human rights and gender equality into their programmes, only 58 per cent reported that the monitoring systems in their organizations incorporate elements of human rights and gender equality.

As hoped, the discourse on human rights and gender equality has now been amplified both on the continent of Africa and globally. IDEAS, the global association of development evaluators, invited AGDEN to two consecutive biennial conferences, in Johannesburg and in Jordan, to give workshops on the subject of gender and evaluation.

There is also an indication of a change in behavior of development practitioner towards the AGDEN goal of integration of gender and human rights in evaluation. Follow-up reports from AGDEN trainees reveal that they have engaged in further learning on gender and evaluation; participated in web-based and face-to-face discussions on these topics; conducted training for their colleagues and other practitioners; and are now planning for, or submitting proposals, to conduct evaluations that are gender and human rights responsive.

AGDEN, as an institution, has also experienced significant growth in its capacity to deliver services. In the past year alone, membership of the network grew by 50 per cent, with almost all of the new members trained to conduct gender and human rights responsive evaluations. The network also has a secretariat that is progressively formalizing its structures and procedures. In the words of the director of AGDEN's host institution:

“The Network is now well positioned to become a force that will shape the global agenda in rights-based approaches in evaluation and, therefore, become a one-stop shop for such matters. AGDEN has done a commendable job in the few years that it has been in existence and the various tools that it has championed and developed are a case in point. Other than that, the networking opportunity it has provided for gender and M&E practitioners is priceless”

Key Enabling Factors

The commitment of the AGDEN leadership has been the most important factor in the growth of the network. For many years, AGDEN has had a President and Steering Committee that are committed to its vision and mission. They have made great sacrifices and have shown incredible zeal to push AGDEN to new heights. Without this level of commitment, the network would not have experienced the growth that it has.

Since its formation, AGDEN has maintained important strategic partnerships with organizations like UN Women (previously UNIFEM) and the Ford Foundation. These organizations have believed in the worth of AGDEN's work and continued to provide support, ranging from sponsorship of members to participate in international evaluators' meetings, to more recently funding for 1-2 year development interventions.

The highly skilled membership of AGDEN, with experts in gender, human rights and M&E, located in many countries of Africa, has enabled the network to develop and deliver products that are relevant to the target countries and of high professional standard. An example is the development of the toolkit which involved members from six different countries, who not only contributed their technical skills, but also contextual knowledge. This process helped to ensure that the toolkit is usable and appropriate for a wide range of professionals across the continent.

Challenges and bottlenecks

The main challenge face by AGDEN is its unreliable funding and resource base. AGDEN depends largely on donor support to conduct its activities. Even though a membership fee is charged, this constitutes less than 5 per cent of the annual budget. The network therefore experiences periods of very low activity when no funded project is being implemented. To date, the organization has received most of its funding from UN Women and the Ford Foundation. The organization is however pursuing

relationships with other funding partners, in addition to strengthening and improving its consulting service as a way of improving sustainability.

Another challenge experienced by the network is its bilingualism. To date, conducting activities in French has remained a major challenge despite having a sizeable number of French speaking members. The network secretariat is located in an Anglophone country and key AGDEN documents are currently only in English. Some mitigating strategies instituted so far include: election of a francophone secretary, and a francophone representative on the board; translation of the AGDEN toolkit into French; and, sending out communications in both English and French to members on the mailing list.

Additionally, AGDEN is a virtual membership network which depends immensely on information and communication technology (ICT) tools and infrastructure for its work and administration. AGDEN has four ICT- related challenges namely:

- Members need to be ICT savvy to be adequately and appropriately engaged. This cannot always be guaranteed. For instance, seeking member information and updates of member documents such as CVs is often a major difficulty.
- Managing and coordinating member contributions to tasks present ICT related challenges and delays.
- On account of its continental spread, timing for meetings is often quite delicate.
- AGDEN needs special ICT applications which need to be developed for Africa by ICT developers, and that has not yet happened.

The last challenge experienced by AGDEN is in the method by which network activities are managed. The oversight, governance and management functions such as those currently undertaken by the Steering Committee are all conducted on a completely voluntary basis. This frequently involves members incurring expenses as well as spending a lot of their time to ensure that network activities continue. This frequently results in activities taking a longer time to complete than if a dedicated team was implementing them.

Innovations and Lessons Learned

AGDEN has recognized the value of using toolkits as cost-effective method of sharing knowledge. It has developed the AGDEN approach to Gender and Human Rights Responsive Evaluation, which is detailed in a toolkit and that it plans to share widely with evaluation practitioners in Africa. AGDEN is also in the process of developing guidelines that will make it easier for its members to prepare bids for evaluation projects.

Over the years, AGDEN has also realized the importance of documenting network experiences for posterity. Because AGDEN is a growing network with membership from various countries, there are few opportunities for its members to have face-to-face meetings. Similarly, the members of the steering committees are all in different countries. As such, unless a member is involved in a particular activity, they are not aware of what was involved in implementing the activity. AGDEN has therefore implemented strategies such as documentation of activities in project reports, and using the bi-monthly e-newsletter to share network activities with members.

It is also common practice at AGDEN to formalize solutions to any challenges experienced. At the time that AGDEN was set-up, there was no list or template of the tools that would be required to maintain a network and its secretariat. Over the years, AGDEN has devised methods to overcome challenges as they presented themselves, thereby strengthening its secretariat. AGDEN has also

developed an operations and procedures manual that formalizes AGDEN's management processes, and as the network grows further, these are being developed into stand-alone policy and procedures manuals for issues such as human resource management, finance management and other tasks, for instance, the management of training events.

Next Steps

The future plans for AGDEN focus on strengthening a number of key aspects as outlined below.

1. Strengthening the enabling environment.

AGDEN is planning to extend its reach to policy-makers and other decision-makers with the aim of increasing their capacity to understand and interrogate the responsiveness of policies, as well as policy processes relating to women and, more generally, to human rights through training and facilitation of dialogue on Gender and Human Rights Responsive Evaluation. This work is awaiting funding and is planned to start in Benin and Kenya before being rolled out to other countries.

AGDEN plans to conduct research on the policy environment in select countries to determine the factors which influence and/or hinder the use of evidence on women's rights. This information will be used to design future activities.

2. Strengthening individual capacities.

AGDEN plans to continue conducting training on Gender and Human Rights Responsive Evaluation for development practitioners throughout Africa and, on invitation, the rest of the world. Indications from AGDEN research show that the need for this training is still high.

AGDEN is currently revitalising its web-based activities, and will rejuvenate the Community of Practice (CoP) for moderated discussions on gender equality in M&E.

3. Advocating for equity focused and gender sensitive evaluation systems.

AGDEN is developing plans to work with grassroots organizations to set up evaluation and learning systems that are gender and human rights responsive.

4. Strengthen AGDEN's institutional capacity.

AGDEN plans to continue with its institutional strengthening of efforts and procedures to support the structure and work of the organization.

AGDEN also plans to continue to train its members, and is planning web-based training opportunities.

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