

***Learning community for gender equality and human rights-based approach to evaluation***

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***Background***

First, it is important to note that the gender equality and human rights-based approach to evaluation has recently become more visible in a formal way. It is a process in progress that timely highlights substantive aspects of the evaluation processes which the evaluation community in Latin America and the Caribbean have been thinking about for some time through our own practice.

We are a region where the indigenous and Afro descendant presence and the networks and civil society organizations – articulated around poverty, exclusion and discrimination – are some of our main characteristics. Therefore, what the historically excluded groups and communities can find in a gender equality and human rights-based approach to evaluation is a space where they can have their voices heard.<sup>1</sup> This poses both value and a challenge: the relevance of this approach as a space for visibility for the recognition of the difference and for the inclusion of the historically excluded groups.

Another antecedent of this case, which was its source and initial impulse, is the panel “*Advances in the evaluation with a gender equity approach: Views from UN Women, Civil Society and Universities*” held in the context of the International Congress on Evaluation and the III Conference of the ReLAC in July 2010, whose discussion generated widespread interest among a large number of participants in continuing to deepen the scope of the matter.<sup>2</sup> At the end of the panel, a group of 23 people from various origins enrolled in a list aimed to create a working group within the ReLAC.

Similarly, in 2011, on the occasion of the “*Seminar on Evaluation with a Gender Equality and Human Rights-Based Approach: Measuring or Changing Reality?*”, which was organized jointly by UN Women and the Equity and Inclusion Consultancy and included the participation of several experts from the ReLAC<sup>3</sup> and other institutions, experiences and reflections were shared on various issues related to this approach and the need for a reflective space on the conceptual and methodological scope of this new evaluation approach was emphasized.

In this context, the need to share experiences and learned lessons on evaluation is an opportunity for the region, especially from the momentum created by new approaches, the progressive implementation of transparency and accountability policies, the creation of new public agencies of evaluation and the growing importance of social networks, which have given a new impetus to the creation of spaces for systematic exchange in various fields of development.

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<sup>1</sup> We can attest, from our longstanding relationship with indigenous and afro descendant woman leaders in the region, that they manifest their need to be considered, consulted in assessments and to be able to express their own views and judgments on the outcomes and impacts of various projects of development in their communities.

<sup>2</sup> Belén Sanz, Head of the Evaluation Office of UN Women, Carmen Colazo, Network Coordinator of Gender and COLAM Development and Alejandra Faúndez, Director of Equity and Inclusion Consultancy, participated in this panel.

<sup>3</sup> The Seminar was held in Quito, Ecuador, on February 7-8, 2011, with the presence of 61 experts on evaluation, gender and human rights from the region, Spain, and the United States.

Thus, these identified elements and probably others we have omitted began to open coordination paths – with different nuances and emphases – to set up a progressive and constructive process on the issues of a gender equity and human rights-based approach to evaluation in Latin America and the Caribbean which requires rethinking capacity-building in these areas from peer exchanges. Everything indicates that we are in a creative process of reflection and construction of a conceptual and methodological heritage that is taking its first steps and needs to be shared and discussed collectively.

In this framework, we present the case of the Learning Community of the ReLAC called *Evaluation group on gender and human rights*, which aims to promote the creation of collective knowledge from reflection and shared learning.

### ***How does this learning community operate?***

In terms of its composition, the Group brings together participants from civil society, governments and international agencies which include monitoring and evaluation specialists, advocates in the field of gender equality and human rights, many of whom promote and/or support programmes in the region related to these areas of work.

To date, it consists of 111 registered people –the second largest group in ReLAC in terms of adherence – whose membership is voluntary and who work based on a collectively defined agenda with a central theme over successive periods.

The work methodology is an interactive articulation between theory and practice, whose basis is that those people who work in institutional or similar thematic contexts develop a common practice, thus creating the possibility of sharing their skills and knowledge and, in this process, we also learn as we form a community of practice or learning.

For its operation, the intensive use of new information technologies through the virtual platform on which the Network runs (News ReLAC: <http://noticiasrelac.ning.com/>) has been considered in three axes closely related:

- As a tool to facilitate exchange and communication among its members;
- As an instrument to promote and facilitate collective and individual learning;
- As a tool for remote collaborative production (specific dialogue reports, notices, among other coordination).

### ***What activities has the Group achieved thus far?***

We can differentiate various stages in its activities:

#### **Phase 1: Defining the group's interests**

- In this early stage, a coordination team of the Community was established, consisting of 3 professionals whose role is to energize, call meetings for the forums and spread information.
- Between August and September 2011, a survey of interests was conducted taking advantage of the possibilities provided by on-line surveys, and that information was used to highlight some specific points of the agenda for the Group's operations in the months ahead.
- The primary concerns expressed in the survey were: the transfer and/or discussion of the fundamental elements of the gender equality and human rights approach to evaluation, with special emphasis on its practical or operational aspects (methodological issues, skills, design, diffusion), which is understandable since many participants come from the monitoring and evaluation field where this perspective of evaluation is in its early stages. Moreover, the demand for practical elements has turned out to be very pertinent considering the overall profile of the participants, oriented towards technical support and/or the implementation of programmes that consider these approaches. Lastly, the assessment of political elements of evaluation related to stakeholder participation, empowerment and social transformation is also important. Similarly,

the conversations that arose at the beginning of the forum focused on issues such as the situation of rural life as well as indigenous women in relation to the gender equality and human rights-based approach.

- In terms of modalities of participation, the prioritized proposals were: to participate in discussion forums, seminars and other online initiatives; to share evaluation experiences related to gender assessment and HR; to share methodological and conceptual scopes related to the gender equality and human rights-based approach to evaluation; to upload contents to the Group site; to upload links to the Group site; to upload information on requests for bids and jobs associated with the topic.

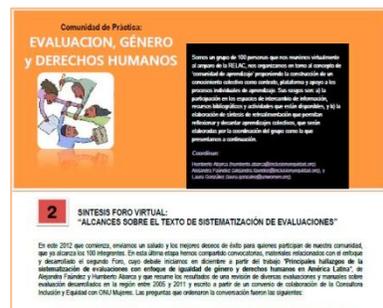
## Stage 2: First Discussion Forum on “A Gender equality and human rights approach to evaluation”

- This forum was organized during the month of September 2011, and had 270 views as well as 19 interventions that boosted the various topics related to the activity between September and October.
- The forum ended with a Synthesis Technical Note on Group discussions, prepared and delivered in the month of October 2011.
- The main topics of the forum were: the importance of the interaction between gender/race/ethnicity/age and area of residence in Latin America and the Caribbean; the use and dissemination of evaluation results among stakeholders; the emphasis of evaluation in the learning process; the scope of the concept of gender; the importance of participatory methodologies in evaluation; the role of the evaluator; the value of the strategic, multidimensional and involved nature of this new approach.



## Sharing documents around the approach and second Discussion forum

- In early 2012, documentation was exchanged and a set of documents about the gender equality and human rights-based approach was uploaded in the platform. These documents addressed conceptual and methodological issues requested by the participants in the previous months of exchanges.<sup>4</sup>
- On occasion of the reading of the materials, the second Discussion Forum “Scope of the document on the Systematization of Evaluations” was convened. This forum had 150 views and 16 responses that brought life to the debate. The publication discussed is available at: <http://www.inclusionyequidad.org/content/evaluacion-con-enfoque-de-igualdad-de-genero-y-derechos-humanos-sistematizacion-de-la-practica>



<sup>4</sup> The manual “Let’s take the floor” (Basagoiti, 2001) which provides the guidelines for promoting participatory research; Text “80 Tools for participatory development” by Frans Geilfus (ICA, 2009) which provides a broad overview on the world of participatory technics; Evaluation Text, Process Guide from the Local Observatory of Participatory Democracy (2006) which provides a number of particularities for evaluating participatory processes; Text by Iñigo Estolaza on the Theory of Change (PNUD, 2006) whereby the author provides guidance on this way of approaching the project cycle; Participatory Evaluation Manual from the Programme (Judi Aabel, 2000) provides conceptual and practical tools for organizing participatory evaluation processes; Manual on the Technique of Mapping Outcomes (2002) which provides a detailed introduction to the comprehension and use of this technique; Texts by Algreto Ghiso: “Empowering diversity” and “Systematization of experiences”, whereby he develops the notion of systematization as a dialogue of knowledge and explores the implications of a reflective and participatory proposal of research; The summary of the study’s presentation “Evaluation with a gender equality and human rights-based approach”. Systematization of practice in Latin America and the Caribbean (Abarca and Faundez, 2011), a document that offers a look into a set of assessments and revised guidelines.

- The main topics of the forum were related to the following questions: a) Are the factors related to the context of the emerging approach sufficiently entrenched in the region?, b) What innovative changes in the use of methodologies can be observed in the assessments? And in its own practice? c) What is your opinion on the role of the actors in the programme during the evaluation process?; and d) How has our own experience been in relation to the how, why and for whom of the evaluation?
- This forum ended with a summary note highlighting interesting issues ranging, for instance, from the concept of gender and the inclusion of masculinities to reflections on the role of evaluations in the context of unequal power relations and the need to articulate new analytical categories, among other things.

#### **Stage 4: The overlook on public policies and incidence**

- The debate agenda for this coming period is currently under preparation. These are some of the emerging issues: the implementation of evaluative agencies in the governments of the region and how these processes establish a dialogue with the gender equality and human rights-based approach, the incidence towards them and towards cooperation, further understanding of some methodological precisions on approach, among other things. The main topics of debate for this period still need to be defined.
- At the same time, participants have requested and shared documentation of various kinds having to do with approach, gender and migration, and evaluation and cooperation for development.

#### **Challenges**

- As noted, the Group offers a contribution for its potentialities in proposing and encouraging an emerging agenda whereby various institutional interests exist. Therefore, a political and institutional effort is needed to coordinate agendas and times that will allow for the increased potential of the meetings. At this point, it is important to improve our ties with the ReLAC, with other sites like PREVAL, the REDLACME, the site created by UNDP Regional on evaluation, and other sites of the UN agencies. This is key for promoting agreements on distribution issues and initiatives, and creating synergies that increase participation in various spaces. The current overlapping of sites disempowers the whole.
- To define a substantial, basic bibliography that can allow for a number of reduced topics of discussion to be shared at each event. The dispatch of targeted documentation and promotion of high-level discussions to harmonize themes and titles may be conducive in this direction.
- To conduct an institutional effort so that in-person meetings of various networks (e.g., the next Regional ReLAC Conference) can generate spaces of face-to-face interaction between members of the Group and thus enhance synergy.
- To incorporate a line of Technical Notes concerning various topics of the approach, along with other working groups of the ReLAC. Its periodicity may be bimonthly or biannual and aim at political-theoretical and methodological points.
- To create new spaces for the exchange of experiences, much like a bank of good practices in the region about gender equality and human rights in the evaluation.
- To try to increase the platform's level of interactivity in order to encourage interactivity and seek its members' participation. This point has to do with two major issues: a) the limitations of the ReLAC News Site in the sense that its interface does not allow for the development of webinars, chats or other 'live' events that enable a higher level of interactivity between participants. This condition can serve as a barrier towards generating a more proactive engagement in those who tend to use more synchronous methods of communication, and b) the role of coordination requires ongoing support and it is very important in terms of energizing the Group, but at the same time requires support – whether it is financial or sharing responsibilities – due to the intense amount of time that animation demands for some of the people who coordinate the groups.

## Assessing the experience

The strategic objectives for creating a Learning Community have given way to the promotion of an interesting partnership between different actors. From the coordination aspect, which consists of an Evaluation Office of the United Nation's System (UN Women) associated with an organization of professionals (Inclusion and Equity Consultancy) and all of them articulated around the ReLAC itself, to the participation, at the same time, of a large number of professionals and activists from the field of development belonging to the State, the Civil Society and international cooperation organizations from 18 countries of the region. Thus, the articulation itself is a valuable exchange opportunity and a space of resonance for technical discussions and policies in vogue in the region, in synergy with the efforts of other entities such as UNEG and UNDP, among others.

The assessment of an institutional affiliation is interesting. Most of the participants of the Group belong to institutions (80%), and over 50% are tied to agencies of the United Nations System at regional level. It is important to note that this also implies a more passive way of participation, that is, that most of the participants limit themselves to visiting the platform but do not necessarily express their opinion in the forums. It is mainly those linked to Civil Society Organizations who encourage the important debate that has developed in this period.

The ReLAC News site has been fundamental in the Group's articulation. It is designed around three basic, yet necessary operations for its proper functioning: activate a membership, participate in opinion forums and exchange documents and news.

Regarding the contents that have been elaborated in the forums and in the ReLAC's Conference Panel as well as in the experts' Seminar, all of which was present when the group began, some very important elements are worth noting:

- The need to bring the practice of evaluation back to its fundamental aspects, that is, the construction of learning and optimal decision-making for greater impact on public policies and developmental programmes. Concerning this point, the representatives of female organizations warned about the fact that evaluative terminology can sometimes be imposed upon the actors without serious reflection on its reach, reducing the evaluative work process to its procedural dimension, in terms of the fulfilment of a commitment made with the donors and that, from this approach, its main transforming capital is not very easy to avoid, and thus there is a potential.
- The need to synchronize the implementation and/or operation of systems and evaluative practices with the times of the programmatic intervention and political action has been highlighted, seeking to incorporate them from the beginning – if possible, at the design stage of the programmes –and with full knowledge and participation of all interested stakeholders, in order that the participatory component of the evaluations is not only rhetorical.
- The importance of recovering the evaluation as a social good in terms of its importance towards achieving the impacts or changes that are expected to be reached. From this point of view, the evaluative exercise is demanded to satisfy conditions of inclusion, participation, responsiveness or relevance and ownership by local actors, many of which are in a situation of vulnerability and/or exclusion. This involves attaching a provision of time, cultural relevance and institutional relevance appropriate throughout the entire evaluation process.
- To recognize the importance of incorporating an overview and a logic of evaluation that emphasizes the dimension of processes with regard both to the construction of learning about the intervention and the achievement of expected impacts, an issue that introduces a long-term dimension and complexity in terms of the exercise of the attribution of impacts to the specific intervention when it is in fact operated within a multifactorial context whereby it is difficult to talk of monocausality.
- Derived from the above, as an approach to the evaluative judgment, the need to incorporate new appreciative models that value the qualitative dimensions and integrate them with the quantitative ones has been raised, thus seeking to enrich the contextual information (local, cultural, political, social) and thus reflect the issue of results and impacts in a complex or multicausal way.

- It has also been considered that the introduction of a gender equality and human rights-approach to evaluation demands the incorporation of a systematic capacity-building programme. Materials or guidance on specific issues of the approach ranging from its design and management to the conceptual and methodological aspects have been permanently demanded in ReLAC's own Group; thus, there is an enabling scenario for amplifying the number of professionals who know it and integrate it to their evaluative practice.
- Important issues have been discussed from the perspective of gender equity, such as the distinction of equity/equality at the approach level, and the challenges and questions posed by the incorporation of men and other diversities, both at a gender analysis level prior to the project as well as the reflection on the differential impact of interventions. An underlying theme that evaluative reflection cannot escape is the equality/difference dialectic, especially when trying to work from an inclusive and mobilizing perspective.
- Finally, another point raised was the need to move forward from the evaluation of programmes towards the evaluation of public policies with a rights-based approach, implying a leap in terms of complexity and advocacy. From the point of view of the approach, this raises the need to impact on national evaluation systems and, at the same time, strengthen the capacities of the stakeholders at a governmental and civil society level in order to bring about evaluative processes at any level that may be required. This requires creating distinctions between evaluations whose axis is based on the development of those evaluations whose axis is based on human rights.