

# UTILIZATION-FOCUSED, GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE (UFE+) EVALUATION

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## Main points about UFE

- Utilization-focused evaluation (UFE) begins with the premise that no evaluation should start unless primary USERS have been identified, and they have determined the expected USES.
- Key questions or KEQ are developed cooperatively with USERS that will provide evidence for decision making and enable the USE of the evaluation.
- UFE does not prescribe any specific content, method, or theory. It is a guiding framework, as opposed to a methodology.
- UFE follows a set of well-defined steps that ensure rigor and relevance.
- Users take ownership over the evaluation purposes, the selection of methods, the analysis and the utilization of findings.
- In UFE, the evaluation professional plays the role of a facilitator, not of external judge.

## Main points about Gender

- Gender<sup>1</sup> refers to the socially constructed roles and relationships between men and women. Gender intersects with various social cleavages such as race, class, sexuality, caste and religion and shapes the exercise of power in different contexts (Hay, 2012). The central concept of a gender transformative lens is that power relations often embedded in social

structures and institutions must be changed (in favor of the marginalized) to attain social justice.

- Gender equality, though contextual, is critical to ensure an inclusive society that benefits all peoples. It refers to the equal enjoyment by women and men of socially valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards.

## Background

“Utilization-Focused Evaluation (UFE) begins with the premise that evaluations should be judged by their utility and actual use” (Patton, 2008, p. 37). In UFE, evaluators facilitate a learning process with attention to how people might apply evaluation findings and experiences. In designing a utilization-focused evaluation attention is constantly placed on the intended use by intended users. UFE can include a wide variety of evaluation methods within an overall participatory paradigm.

Decision making, in consultation with those who can benefit from the evaluation, is an important part of the process. As important is the fact that intended users will likely utilize an evaluation in which they have ownership. UFE belongs to a push in the evaluation field for evaluations that get utilized. As simple as this notion may sound, its application is mired in organizational and management challenges.

<sup>1</sup> Gender may be defined beyond binaries, to include LGBTQI. In this summary note, the binary examples of men and women are illustrative.

Many evaluations (and program designs) are gender neutral (or even gender

discriminatory) and only assess the interventions. They assume that the interventions impact men and women equally, in spite of structural gender and social inequities. Many such evaluations do not question the *inherent* structural inequities that exist, missing an opportunity to question gender roles and relationships - which is critical if we wish to promote gender equality. Some evaluations do disaggregate data by gender but this is *not enough*, as it should also be disaggregated by the intersectionalities that create complex power dynamics. Further, projects may not be 'gender neutral' and specifically target women and may be "gender instrumental" such as educating women about their children's health or "gender responsive" e.g. self-help groups for women to raise their economic status. However, evaluating such projects in terms of their effectiveness, is *not enough*. To be gender transformative, we would need to ask, what is the gendered role of men and women, did additional income lead to further exploitation of women's earnings, was patriarchy and male entitlement or influence addressed, and so on.

Only if we use a *gender transformative* (*also called a feminist*) lens – which addresses the differential and complex power relationships between men and women, can we truly evaluate gender equality.

An evaluator using UFE has an added responsibility to enable users to question the presence of implicit and explicit gender differences and apply this understanding while defining the USES of the evaluation, developing KEQ and engaging with USERS.

### **Gender transformative principles that guide an evaluation design**

- Have a central focus on inequities
- Recognize that inequities are structural
- Recognizes that evaluation is political
- Recognizes and values different ways of knowing
- Proposes to add value to those who are marginalized and to those implementing programs (Hay, 2012; Podems, 2010)

### **Challenges in UFE**

In UFE, the definition of primary users is open to different stakeholders: they may be the funders of a project, or its implementers or even its beneficiaries. A gender lens will remind the evaluator to engage men, women and excluded groups to ensure their unique perspectives and situations as included in the evaluation design. The definition of USERS can be delicate as it is affected by power relationships. It calls for a review of **readiness** at the very start of the process – not just to apply the UFE, but to do so with attention to possible gender inequalities (UFE+).

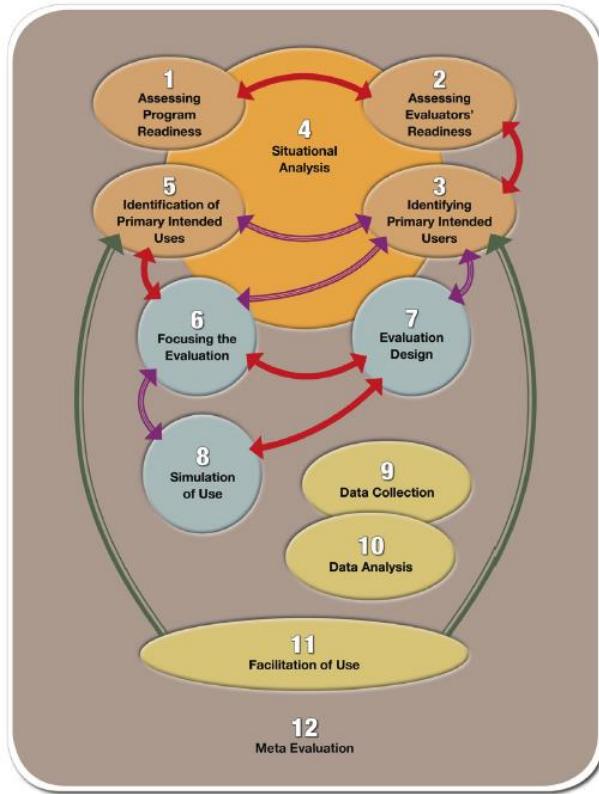
Challenges to use a UFE+ approach would include:

For Key questions: Do the KEQ address gender and structural inequities?

For User: Is the User open to challenging power asymmetries for gender transformation? Understands the intersectionality of gender with other inequities (class, age, religion and so on)?

For Uses: Is use available to and benefits the marginalized?

While UFE is summarized into a series of steps, the process itself is not linear (Ramírez & Brodhead, 2013). The first five steps are interrelated: assessing program readiness; assessing evaluators' readiness; identifying primary intended users' identification of primary intended uses; and situational analysis. This process may require several iterations of one or more steps and it needs to be anticipated and planned for, given that changes in one step will impact others.



Focusing the evaluation takes place through the definition of **key evaluation questions**; that in turn guide the design of the evaluation. 'Simulation' is about test-driving plausible data sets to double check that they respond to the questions. This step ensures course correction is possible, especially when it appears that some

questions may not still be as strategic as they first appeared.

A unique aspect of UFE is Step 11: facilitation of use, that ensures the findings and evaluation processes are fed back to the users. The closing step 12 captures the experience through a meta- evaluation.<sup>2</sup>

### So, how does one use a gender lens in the various UFE steps?

Ideally, a gender analysis should be included in the situational analysis, in the formulation of key questions (and by doing so, automatically review the ToC and its gendered assumptions), in choosing data collection methods and in doing a gendered analysis. Often, gender is an add-on in evaluations (and therefore quite superficial) but in UFE it can be a process / learning oriented evaluation approach that will provide an opportunity for weaving gender through all the UFE steps.

### An example of a gender transformative evaluation

The project: "Using a Mobile Application and Mapping Platform to Increase Accountability in the Delivery of Maternal Health Services for Tea Garden Workers in Assam". The evaluator went beyond the non-judgmental role of a UFE mentor to help the implementing organization discover the gaps and assumptions. During the situational analysis, a gender lens indicated the social and cultural exclusion of the tea garden workers. They were mostly women, who belonged to marginalized tribes imported by the British from neighboring states in pre-Independence India to work on the labor-

<sup>2</sup> In the 2012 book on UFE by Michael Quinn Patton, five additional steps have been added; see the Recommended readings and websites.

intensive tea gardens. Isolated and disempowered, the women could not claim their maternal rights. The context analysis enabled a review of the theory of change. The SMS mobile platform to report violations was considered to be gender neutral and training the women to report on maternal health violations was gender specific (related to their reproductive roles). However, despite the best efforts to train the women in the technology, the reporting of maternal health violations was low. The feminist lens used in the UFE approach unearthed the disempowerment of women, led to a revision of the key evaluation questions, data collection methodology and analysis. The findings were used to revamp the training program to include gender empowerment sessions rather than just learning the use of technology. Later, the reporting role of women morphed to include para-legal training to litigate for their rights (Zaveri 2018).

### **Mentoring in UFE+**

UFE has been test-driven through several evaluation capacity development research projects funded by the International Development Research Centre (Canada) (see reference list).

Capacity development is effective because partners receive the mentoring *at their own pace and according to their schedule*. It contrasts with the more conventional training workshop where a great deal of material is condensed into a few days with little opportunity to contextualize it, let alone absorb it and use in the real world. As shown in the example, using a gender transformative lens in UFE brought added value to achieve gender equality, anchored in values of equity and human rights.

### **Conclusions**

UFE is learned through practice. Not only do evaluators quickly appreciate its potential; the primary intended users emerge with **evaluative thinking**. Some elements for success worth repeating include:

1. Mentors with a strong background in evaluation need to be selected, they need to be familiar with UFE. What is key is that they have outstanding facilitation and communication skills. They can be partnered with project evaluators (on staff or contractors) who are invited to do the same: to test-drive UFE. A capacity development objective creates a safe environment for experimentation.
2. The evaluation mentors bring a gender lens into the UFE process. This requires a gender-inclusive teamwork, an ongoing awareness of how different evaluation USERS are situated in each context, and how their own evaluation USES and questions need to address gender inequalities.
3. It is recommended to work with a project funder interested in experimenting with this approach to capacity development in evaluation. The IDRC team allowed the mentors and the project partners the freedom to choose users and define uses.
4. When first learning the process, evaluators and mentors can follow the UFE checklist systematically as a guide. While one quickly realizes that it is not linear and calls for more iterations, it is useful to tackle each task in the order that makes the most sense in that context. An analogy would be how one

learns to drive a standard shift car: you begin with the first gear and move on to the second and so forth. Only later, with experience, you realize that when starting on a downhill road you can begin in second just as well; you also begin to learn to use gears to slow down, but this action comes from experience.

## Recommendations

Recommendations for other projects and funders of projects interested in introducing UFE+ to a project:

- Confirm a commitment by funders and major stakeholders to explore the approach (in our case Utilization-focused Evaluation+) through an action-research process.
- Apply gender principles when helping users define evaluation uses and evaluation questions, as well as data analysis and recommendations.
- Clarify expectations early on with regards to the role of UFE relative to other possible evaluation and accountability needs. Is UFE a replacement or a complement to other evaluation needs? How committed are the funders and implementers to apply a gender lens?
- Work as a team, with mentors who are able to support and trouble-shoot, and committed staff and management for the *process* of UFE+.
- Create an environment of trust where learning from mistakes is embraced.
- Acknowledge that the process takes time, and that the 'aha moments' will come once the approach is being implemented.
- Make use of the training modules and feel free to adapt them to each circumstance and contextually adding gender related information and analysis.
- Ensure that there are funds and dedicated time to complete all the steps of UFE, especially the last one that calls for a reflection on the overall implementation of the approach; this is the point at which much learning happens. At every step include a gender lens.
- Encourage evaluation mentors and users to regularly check that a gender lens has been applied – in programs, policy and organizational structures and guidelines.
- Carry out a mid-term self-reflection to course-correct and to celebrate progress.

## Recommended readings

Hay, K. (2012). 'Engendering Policies and Programmes through Feminist Evaluation: Opportunities and Insights', Indian Journal of Gender Studies, 19:2, 321-340

Patton, M.Q. (2012). *Essentials of utilization-focused evaluation*. Sage.

Patton, M.Q. (2008). *Utilization-focused evaluation, 4<sup>th</sup> edition*. Sage.

Podems, D. (2010). 'Feminist evaluation and gender approaches. There is a difference?' *Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Evaluation*, 6(14), 1-12

Ramírez, R. & Brodhead, D. (2013). *Utilization-focused evaluation: A primer for evaluators*. Southbound: Penang.

Zaveri, S. (2018) "Using a Feminist Lens for Utilization Focused Evaluations: Lessons Learned" in Ratna M. Sudarshan and Rajib Nandi eds. "Voices and Values: The Politics of Feminist Evaluation", Zubaan: New Delhi  
ISBN 978 81 85932 39 7

## Recommended websites

Designing evaluation and communication for impact

<http://evaluationandcommunicationinpractice.net>

The Better Evaluation website includes a section on UFE and a blog:

[http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/utilization.Focused\\_evaluation](http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/utilization.Focused_evaluation)

<https://www.betterevaluation.org/blog/how-evaluation-embraces-enriches-adaptation-ufe-approach>

Better evaluation website includes a page on Feminist Evaluation with links to UFE

<https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/themes/feminist-evaluation>

## The authors

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