This article was downloaded by:

On: 28 February 2008

Access Details: [subscription number 1]

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Gender & Development
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information: http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713422432

Participation, values, and implementation: three research challenges in developing gender-sensitive indicators

Tessa Hochfeld; Shahana Rasool Bassadien

Online Publication Date: 01 July 2007

To cite this Article: Hochfeld, Tessa and Bassadien, Shahana Rasool (2007) 'Participation, values, and implementation: three research challenges in developing gender-sensitive indicators', Gender & Development, 15:2, 217 - 230

To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/13552070701391516 URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13552070701391516

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf

This article maybe used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Participation, values, and implementation: three research challenges in developing gender-sensitive indicators

Tessa Hochfeld and Shahana Rasool Bassadien¹

This article critically reviews three key research challenges that emerged as a result of developing gender-sensitive indicators for an NGO in South Africa. The first challenge faced was finding an appropriate balance between an 'expert-led' and an inclusive participatory research process. The second challenge was identifying a set of criteria, based on explicit research values, to guide indicator development. Third, we were confronted with the task of ensuring that the indicators developed could be implemented in the context of a resource-poor, service-driven NGO setting. A discussion of the challenges faced exposes the complex and sometimes murky process of developing indicators that are relevant, appropriate, and usable.

Introduction

In recent years, it has been recognised that introducing policy and programmes that address gender equality without concomitant monitoring and evaluation is inadequate. Gender-sensitive indicators are tools commonly used in monitoring and evaluation to assess gender-related changes in society over time, and provide direct evidence of disparities between women and men in a particular society (CIDA 1997; Derbyshire 2002; SDC undated). They are a vital means of monitoring the impact of programmes on gender relations and roles, and in this way contribute to filling the frequent gap between abstract policy commitments to gender equality and a coherent and comprehensive process of gender mainstreaming (Moser and Moser 2005).

In South Africa, non-governmental and community-based organisations are facing increasing pressure from funding bodies to develop gender-sensitive indicators to demonstrate programme value, as well as to evaluate programme effectiveness. While the international literature on gender-sensitive indicators can help organisations understand the value of indicators and can guide them in a general way, the actual process of indicator development can be overwhelming. It is a challenge to develop gender-sensitive indicators that are specific, relevant to the particular services offered by an NGO, and responsive to unique local conditions.

The process of developing gender-sensitive indicators is a process of applied research, as data need to be collected and analysed. In this paper we discuss and critically reflect on three issues that presented themselves as challenges during monitoring and evaluation research that we were contracted to carry out, as part of the development of gender-sensitive indicators for a social service NGO, the Pietermartiz-burg branch of the Family and Marriage Society of South Africa (FAMSA)². The first challenge was resolving the tension between an 'expert-led' and a participatory research approach. The second challenge was deciding on the criteria used to develop the indicators. We argue that as the indicators are a direct result of the particular research decisions and choices that are made, and as this process is a complex one, these decisions should be influenced by a conscious and acknowledged set of criteria at each stage of the research process, rather than being allowed to arise in an arbitrary ad hoc manner. The third challenge we identify is that the successful use of gender-sensitive indicators to measure gender equality can be complicated by issues of funding and resource allocation at the implementation stage.

Background

Context

FAMSA provides social services via a small core group of professional social work staff and a large contingent of volunteers. The organisation's services range from individual and family therapeutic counselling to community development and community social education. FAMSA is situated in a small city, Pietermaritzburg, in the province of Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa. The city is an important urban centre for the surrounding rural and peri-urban areas, and thus FAMSA (and its rural satellite offices) serve a diverse set of communities across a wide geographical region, made up of individuals from a variety of racial and ethnic groups, and of different socio-economic status. Unemployment, poverty, violence against women, and HIV and AIDS deeply permeate the social conditions of both urban and rural communities in this province. While mechanisms promoting formal gender equality in South Africa are considerable, the good protective legislation supporting women's rights now in place is often inaccessible to those who are poor, uneducated, or lack the social or cultural capital to mobilise resources on their own behalf. Substantive gender equality is far from achieved, particularly in relation to conservative gender norms and roles, and excessive levels of violence against women.

Data collection/production

The data used to develop indicators was collected (or rather, as feminists Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002:154) suggest, 'produced') via a two-stage process. The first stage involved speaking to FAMSA service providers (paid staff and volunteers). We

identified four social workers, whom we interviewed, and 20 volunteers, with whom we ran two separate focus group discussions.

The questions we asked in this phase attempted to elicit participants' understanding of gender, their perception of how service needs and service delivery are gendered, and their perception of the different gendered experiences of beneficiaries. We tried to avoid the use of difficult concepts such as 'gender inequality' in our interviews by asking specifically if women and men had different access to resources and opportunities, and whether gender influenced decision-making power. We also asked about participants' perceptions of how services could better meet the gendered needs of clients.

The second stage involved talking to service users. Twenty-five clients and six community leaders (three school teachers, one ward councillor, one *Induna*³, and one pastor) were interviewed, using structured questionnaires. Community leaders were interviewed because they play a key role in maintaining cultural norms and practices with regard to gender roles and stereotypes within communities, and they all currently or in the past had some form of contact with the organisation's programmes. They were asked about the impact of FAMSA programmes on gender relations in their community.

Clients were requested to evaluate FAMSA's services particularly in relation to whether they were identifiably gendered. Other questions were designed to elicit information on gender-based violence and gendered roles in relation to childcare, domestic duties, decision making, and family and intimate relationships.

We will now turn to the challenges we met during this research.

Research challenges

Using a participatory approach

It is entirely possible that gender-sensitive indicators can be developed based on theoretical knowledge and a literature review. However, as gender-sensitive indicators are programme-level, implementation-related tools, a technocratic, 'one-size-fits-all' approach is inappropriate for their development. Further, developing indicators without engaging with those who will later on be asked to use them in their work, or whose access to services may be affected by them, would be ethically questionable for a social service organisation genuinely accountable to its constituency. There is a growing body of literature (Cornwall 2003; Malhotra *et al.* 2002; Levy 1998; Mayoux 1998; Guijt and Shah 1998) that shows that taking an 'expert' approach to gender work at the local level often means the practice is 'top-down, superimposing particular (culturally specific, some might suggest) frames of reference and barely allowing for broader participation in agenda setting or implementation. A simplifying worldview is thus projected onto diverse development situations' (Cornwall 2003, 1326). We thus chose a research process driven by stakeholder⁴ participation.

'Pure' or 'ideal' participatory research is understood as a process in which there is collective decision making by a team consisting of all stakeholders at every stage of the research process (Collins 1998; Chambers 1997). This conception of participation, while ideologically seductive to champions of participatory research, is not always realistic, particularly when external consultants are asked to manage the process, as we were in this case. For us, the tension was between ensuring participation, and not wanting to demand too much of an overstretched organisation's time and resources. However, Estrella and Gaventa (1998) argue that for monitoring and evaluation research to be considered participatory, the principles used are more important than the actual research practices chosen. They suggest that if research is based on principles that emphasise stakeholder participation, learning and reflection, negotiation and discussion, and design flexibility, then it can be considered a participatory process. Our research process was guided by the principles of participation, rather than being entirely participatory.

In our approach, we ensured maximum participation in the data collection/production phase of this process by choosing to use qualitative research methods with all stakeholder groups. While this clearly links to the principle of participation, it also resonates with the principles of negotiation, discussion, learning, and reflection. Individual semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions provided opportunities for stakeholders to reflect on the complexity of gender dynamics in the community, elicited the actual gendered experiences and perceptions of service providers and service users, and allowed an engagement in constructive discussion on necessary changes. This meant we did not, as 'experts', just assume what needed to be measured, but based the indicators on areas emphasised by stakeholders.

While the balance of power in the data collection/production phase leaned towards stakeholders, the opposite was true for the next phase. Geographical distance, time, and resource constraints for both the researchers and the stakeholders meant there was minimal stakeholder participation in the indicator development phase. We tried to mitigate a privileging of 'expert' views both by relying on the information produced during participatory interviews and discussions, and through the continued use of participatory principles, particularly the reflective and discursive way in which we approached the analysis of data. For example, it was only after the generation of the list of 68 indicators that we coded the indicators thematically, and then grouped them into 12 thematic clusters. In essence, it was a bottom-up, reflective way of identifying core nodes around which changes in gender relations occur for FAMSA stakeholders in the community and in the organisation. This also prevented us from focusing only on women, which is a common but very limiting mistake in work around gender (Cornwall 2003). While some indicator clusters deal exclusively with women, such as 'empowerment of women', and some deal exclusively with men, such as 'men's power and control', the majority deal with community processes, which, when measured in a gender disaggregated way, will indicate changes in gender inequality. For example, the indicator cluster 'leadership and participation' includes indicators such as 'men increasingly allowing opportunities for women to speak in public/community contexts'.

Nonetheless, although we were very committed to reflecting the community's actual experiences and concerns, it is disingenuous to suggest that as researchers we had no authority over the list of indicators chosen. We are not claiming that the voices of clients and staff can be directly 'heard' through these indicators, as no research is unaffected by the choices of the researchers themselves (Jackson 2002; Cornwall 2003; Guijt and Shah 1998; Estrella and Gaventa 1998). What we are sure of, however, is that a discursive, reflective approach based on participatory principles helped enormously to ensure significant stakeholder influence on the final product.

Strategic criteria influencing indicator development

Gender sensitive indicators need to be able to measure shifts in gender relations within the specific peculiarities of the local context. One of the core challenges in developing indicators is identifying the actual criteria for monitoring and evaluation in a context of infinite possibilities (Moser & Moser 2005); in other words, deciding on the framework that will guide choices made in indicator development.

Three strategic and theoretical criteria influenced the development of indicators in this research process, namely: (1) a feminist and social justice approach; (2) the need to measure outcome, not just input; (3) balancing qualitative and quantitative indicators.

Feminist and social justice approach

In this research, a feminist ideology and social justice approach shaped our knowledge base, and was openly declared to FAMSA when the contract was negotiated.

Feminist epistemology is a branch of feminist theory which argues that 'truth' is strongly shaped by our social conditions, and that the idea of value-free knowledge is a false construct, biased towards the male experience of the world. While approaches to knowledge and its production continue to generate many internal disagreements within feminisms, in general, feminist epistemology attempts to raise the volume of excluded voices, specifically women's, and ensure that knowledge distortions that erase women's experiences as legitimate are unpicked and investigated (Longino 1993; Gouws 1996; Nielsen 1990). This lens influenced indicator development in this project in that we strove to promote gender equality and the emancipation of women by ensuring that women's needs and experiences were legitimised and clearly heard, and that each decision that was made was weighed carefully to ensure no assumptions about gender 'neutrality' were being made. At the same time, we concentrated on gender relations, rather than focusing solely on women, which could have had the effect of disregarding men's gendered identities.

We specifically chose to combine participatory and feminist research methods as these approaches share 'epistemological, ethical and political principles' (Cornwall 2003, 1326). Used in an informed and ethical way, these approaches can complement and support each other in ways that can lead to more inclusive and transformative practice (Cornwall 2003).

In addition, we were guided by a social justice approach which contends that class, gender, and race are forms of structural disadvantage, and 'any social or political [or research] programme which does not specifically question or challenge them is likely to reinforce these forms of oppression by accepting the dominant order which supports them' (Ife 1999, 55). This meant that we analysed comments within a framework that attempted to ensure that social injustices were not inadvertently reproduced by the indicators developed. We did this primarily by privileging community needs rather than donor requirements, as sometimes the latter are disconnected from important local issues, and can reinforce the existing *status quo* by ignoring the specificities of contemporary and indigenous gender relations.

In an example of how this approach functioned in practice, when six of the nine male clients interviewed claimed that their partner beat or hit them, we did not literally and uncritically mirror the comments made by these research participants. On closer investigation we learned that a number of these same men were attending counselling because they had been ordered to do so by the court, after they had physically abused their partners. It is possible that these men felt persecuted themselves because their wives obtained court orders following serious abuse. Experience from across the world shows that advances in rights and services for women, particularly those relating to abuse, often attract a reactionary response. Claims may be made that men are suffering persecution and disadvantage, or criticisms may be voiced regarding the perceived lack of focus on men (Chant and Gutman 2000). This response can be partly explained by the lack of acknowledgement of the substantive disadvantages women continue to face in society, especially with respect to being the primary victims of violence in the home (Chinkin 1995). Hence using our ideological base to guide data interpretation led to indicators that measure the development of problem-solving skills in relationships, rather than simply measuring a decrease in the number of men reporting experiences of abuse. For example, one indicator states: 'men feel increased comfort and skill in using problem solving skills and verbal, honest and open communication instead of violence or control in their relationships'.

In our report to FAMSA we clearly articulated the reasons behind these decisions. In addition, we recommended some research into the incidence of abuse of men in the communities in which FAMSA works, as ignoring the possible existence of this group, with serious needs and who are commonly marginalised in service delivery, would be undesirable and unethical. Hence, in this case it was not just a matter of us 'suppressing' data that we 'didn't like', but rather finding ways to ensure that indicators developed do not serve to reproduce inequalities, while still serving community needs.

Measuring outcome not input

It is very common in monitoring and evaluation processes for assessment to focus on input indicators rather than focusing on outcomes (Moser & Moser 2005). But if indicator development is aimed at the substantive improvement of gender equality between women and men, then measuring programme outcome (rather than input or output) is both a political and ethical imperative. Instead of only measuring the resources or effort that have gone into programmes (an *input* indicator), or the number and proportion of women beneficiaries (an *output* indicator), one needs to measure the actual improvement in parity between women and men; that is, the actual impact on real people's lives.

There are, however, some inherent difficulties in measuring outcome in the context of gender analysis. The most significant is that changes in gender equality usually only occur via a long, complex, iterative process, influenced by innumerable social, political, cultural, and economic forces. As such, changes can seldom be attributed to the impact of one isolated programme or service (Kabeer 1994). For example, it is quite difficult to attribute 'increased safety of women in the context of their homes', or a 'decrease in men's discomfort and reprisal when women transgress gender norms' (which are both outcome indicators) solely to the work of one organisation, rather than to more generic social and cultural changes. However, the work of the organisation may contribute to these changes in a particular community through some targeted interventions. Thus, in this context, we needed to balance the outcome measurement imperative with the pragmatism of choosing indicators that are actually useful measurements of an organisation's performance.

This tension was minimised in the development of gender-sensitive indicators for FAMSA by ensuring that we included outcome indicators that are within the organisation's direct sphere of responsibility, as well as those that are only indirectly influenced by the organisation's activities (SDC, undated). For example, measuring 'women's improved ability to raise issues in couples counselling' is an outcome indicator that is within the organisation's direct sphere of influence.

On the other hand, indicators such as 'women's increased financial independence' and 'increased gender role fluidity between women and men in communities' measure outcome in a sphere only indirectly influenced by the organisation. While the organisation can develop programmes that help women obtain jobs and interventions that encourage changes in gender roles, these are more strongly influenced by a variety of economic, social, and cultural factors that would be difficult for one small organisation to influence.

Snyder *et al.* (1996, 1482) recommend that employing long-term planning as well as 'adopting an external perspective that emphasizes anticipating and shaping environmental change to achieve the organisation's strategic plans' may improve an organisation's ability to impact on gender outcomes. Hence, our implementation plan for FAMSA suggested a long-term strategic approach to indicator implementa-

tion. Moreover, FAMSA was encouraged to be aware of the current local socio-cultural context in the implementation of indicators.

Balancing quantitative and qualitative indicators

Significantly less attention has been paid to the development of qualitative as opposed to quantitative gender-sensitive indicators in the literature. This is partly because the large volume of literature on the development of gender-sensitive indicators is dominated by discussions of macro-level quantitative indicators, that measure changes at the national level such as maternal morbidity, political representation in parliament, or gender-sensitive policy development (see Alsop & Heinsohn 2005; Saith & Harriss-White 1998; Beck 1999; Knowles *et al* 1997; UNESCO 1997). Quantitative indicators also dominate because the 'gender impact' of a concrete service is relatively easy to quantify. It is relatively easy, for example, to establish the number of women as opposed to men granted housing, or the improved gender balance in the numbers of those who use a new rural transportation system, or the number of houses connected to mains electricity services in a particular area (which will impact positively on women's domestic responsibilities).

Quantitative indicators are generally unambiguous and, with the correct data, measurement is straightforward and easy. An example of this type of indicator as developed for FAMSA is 'increased numbers of women taking cases to community or religious authorities'. This quantitative indicator requires the institution of a simple system of counting that can be done quite easily if there is cooperation from community authorities and FAMSA volunteers.

However, quantitative indicators have inherent weaknesses. For example, 'increased numbers of women in leadership positions, particularly at the local level' is a quantitative indicator developed for FAMSA which measures levels of women's public participation. But this type of indicator is not able to measure the *quality* of participation or *level of influence* women have when participating, which is of crucial importance to substantive gender equality (Moser and Moser 2005; Cornwall 2003; Botchway 2001). Instead, measuring the *quality* of participation is better captured in a qualitative indicator such as 'women's improved self-confidence and capacity to talk in appropriate public and private settings'.

Social work services in particular do not easily lend themselves to useful quantitative measurements: measuring the success of services that aim to strengthen ailing marriages, that contribute to emotional healing after trauma, that comfort those grieving, and that promote women's empowerment, is a complex and sensitive process, and is not merely a matter of counting the number of women or men who receive the service. Although the usefulness of quantitative indicators is undeniable, Jackson (2002, 504) argues that,

a great many research questions posed by gender analysis do demand in-depth methods of study ... One obvious example is the area glossed as 'decision making'. Heroic efforts may be made to produce simple indicators on this ... but they produce little of value because of the complexity of the interactions called 'decision making' which can rarely be reduced to anything cut and dried.

Hence, to be useful in social service organisations, gender-sensitive indicators need to lean more towards qualitative indicators and need to measure micro- and meso-level processes. It is for this reason that we consciously developed qualitative indicators to assist in measuring micro changes in gender interactions, such as 'women's decision-making in the family is increasingly open and unaccompanied by fear of resistance and/or retaliation'.

Qualitative indicators are particularly suited to measuring women's empowerment, especially when focused on micro-level processes that impact on individuals, couples, and families. The intention is to measure improved gender equality in the everyday lives of women, such as 'increased gender balance in sharing of unpaid housework and child-care', rather than focus on important, but less immediate macro-level issues for FAMSA, such as improved work opportunities for women in non-traditional fields.

The principal disadvantage of qualitative indicators, however, is that they are notoriously difficult to measure. It is often only via self-reporting from an individual woman herself that an empowerment indicator such as the following can be measured: 'women report feeling more competent, capable and empowered'. However, relying so heavily on service-user's self-reports heralds profound complexities for implementation and demands time, patience, and a bottom-up, systematic, and methodical approach to measuring impact (CIDA 1997; Derbyshire 2002; SDC undated). While this seems overwhelming, the organisation can account for these subtle changes through careful and consistent monitoring and evaluation in the counselling, training, and development process, if it is clear about what to look for.

We thus tried to maintain the right balance between quantitative and qualitative indicators not only to ensure that a range of processes and issues are captured, but also to be realistic about what it is possible to measure in a small, resource-poor service NGO. However we also recognised that some indicators that we felt were vital to measuring gender equality would nevertheless be difficult to implement for a number of reasons, expanded on below.

Implementation: measurement and resource concerns

It is not just the development of gender sensitive indicators that involves a process of research, but also the actual implementation of these monitoring and evaluation tools, as measurement of change requires data collection/production and analysis. In the 'messy world of project implementation' (Gow and Vansant in Botchway 2001, 139),

the way gender mainstreaming processes and tools are introduced, negotiated, and executed will have an enormous impact on their success or lack thereof in any given NGO. The existence of measurement tools, however good they are, will pay nothing more than lip service to gender equality unless genuine commitment to the goals of gender mainstreaming and indicator implementation is as universal as possible within that organisation. If the process of indicator development and implementation is perceived as beneficial only to donors, 'foreign', inappropriate, or unimportant, then resistance is inevitable (Wendoh and Wallace 2005). Even if commitment to gender equality is genuine and widespread in an organisation, two key issues can stymie successful implementation, namely measurement difficulties and resource limitations.

Measurement difficulties

Measurement challenges abound with the use of gender-sensitive indicators, but the most basic is the lack of baseline data. That is, you cannot identify a decrease or increase in a type of behaviour or phenomenon unless you can identify the level at which this type of behaviour or phenomenon currently occurs (Derbyshire 2002; Saith and Harriss-White 1998). This is true for both traditionally measured quantitative indicators and more complex qualitative indicators. Thus, in theory, for each indicator chosen, the organisation needs to first measure the starting or current level. In practice, however, baseline measurement can be lengthy and complicated (Estrella and Gaventa 1998), and thus baseline *estimation* which is done with the participation of the beneficiary group is a more realistic goal. Change attributed to the programmes or services offered can then be measured against this baseline estimate, using the indicator.

A more profound challenge lies with the difficulties in measuring changes in power and status, particularly important indicators in work around gender relations. Despite extensive debate in this area, no consensus exists on how to accomplish this. A sophisticated conceptualisation focusing on 'agency', multiple indicators, triangulation, and combining qualitative and quantitative indicators have all been suggested as ways to deal with this challenge (Moser and Moser 2005; Kabeer 1999; Jackson 2002; Malhotra *et al.* 2002). But the more complex and difficult measurement is, the less likely it is that a small NGO will go to the trouble of undertaking this task. Thus NGOs in consultation with experts need to reach consensus on a method of measuring elusive and imprecise, but exceptionally significant, social processes to provide baseline estimates, prior to indicator development and use.

Resource limitations

Financial support, time, and gender expertise are the three pivotal resources key to the success or failure of gender-sensitive indicator use. First, it is crucial that organisations

themselves realise that some of their own financial resources must be allocated to this process. Or, if funders create the imperative for organisations to develop gendersensitive indicators, they need to provide the financial resources for implementation.

Second, while organisations may be able to implement many of the indicators themselves, implementation cannot be *ad hoc* or done as an extra task in the daily process of the organisation. Indicator use takes time, and in a busy social service organisation this can often mean taking time and resources away from service delivery. This tension needs to be resolved if success is to be achieved.

Third, working with a gender expert could provide strategic direction, ensure efficiency, and contribute to greater success in implementation, since personnel may be overwhelmed by the task of implementing a wide range of indicators in the context of limited time and specialised knowledge. However, expertise on its own is not a guarantee of effective implementation without significant resource adjustments.

Crucially, an organisation must be realistic about what can be achieved with the available resources. While the 68 indicators developed for FAMSA are a comprehensive reflection of gender issues in the community, it is entirely unrealistic to expect the organisation to use all indicators at once. Instead, we recommended a system of prioritisation and staggered implementation.

Conclusions

Three distinct research challenges emerged as a result of developing gender sensitive indicators to monitor and evaluate FAMSA programmes. First, we decided to embark on a participatory process to ensure that the indicators were relevant, appropriate, context driven, and genuinely reflected the gender issues identified by the community and organisation. But the level of participation was challenged by time and resource constraints, encouraging a less than ideal 'expert'-led approach which we problematise. Resolving this tension was assisted by the use of participatory principles even when engaging in less participatory research practices.

Second, developing indicators is a complex process that is best guided by a set of criteria based on the political orientation of the researchers. Feminist research theory has argued that, rather than decreasing so-called scientific rigour, the 'explicit, self-conscious application of values within scientific practice' (Gergen 1988, 92) can substantially decrease inadvertent male bias. In this case, a political orientation informed by a feminist and social justice approach was also one of the criteria used in developing indicators. The other two criteria, namely a focus on outcome, and balancing quantitative and qualitative indicators, were chosen for their capacity to assist in measuring substantive changes in gender equality. Hence, these three criteria for selecting gender-sensitive indicators were value-driven and designed to ensure a gender sensitive monitoring and evaluation process that has the potential to be transformative.

The third challenge discussed in this paper is the extent to which indicators can be implemented in resource-poor, service-focused organisations. Indicator implementation is a cornerstone of monitoring and evaluation, since an inability to implement indicators would mean that organisations are unable to measure shifts in gender relations in the communities where they are working. Gender-sensitive indicators that cannot be implemented are therefore worthless. Not only do organisations and funders need to collect/produce baseline data against which to measure indicators, but if they are serious about promoting gender equity, they must move away from piecemeal, inconsistent, and patchy approaches to resourcing gender mainstreaming, by accounting for implementation complexities in their planning and funding allocations.

The seemingly technical task of developing gender-sensitive indicators is in reality fraught with challenges and contradictions. We contend that developing indicators that will contribute to transformative practice and an increase in gender equality is only possible using an approach that is honest, flexible, strategic, and driven by feminist social justice values.

Tessa Hochfeld has been an activist, researcher, academic, and social work practitioner in the gender field for many years, with a particular focus on gender-based violence. She is currently a researcher at the Centre for Social Development in Africa, University of Johannesburg, where her work is focused on gender, poverty, social development, and social policy. Email: tessah@uj.ac.za

Shahana Rasool Bassadien is a social worker by profession. She has been an activist in the gender field through her work as a consultant, trainer, and researcher. Shahana has a Masters in Comparative Social Research (specialising in social policy) from the University of Oxford. She is currently coordinating the Honours Social Work Programme at the University of Johannesburg. Email: sbassadien@uj.ac.za

Notes

- 1 Thank you to the director, staff, volunteers, and clients of FAMSA Pietermaritzburg for permission to use the data for this article and for working with us so co-operatively and openly. Thanks also to Terry Sacco for very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.
- 2 When using the acronym FAMSA we refer specifically to this branch, and not any other of the numerous FAMSA offices across South Africa.
- 3 *Indunas* are important tribal leaders amongst Zulu people. They wield significant local power and report directly to, and can strongly influence, their local area *Nkosi* (chief).
- 4 By 'stakeholders' we are referring to the staff and volunteers of the organisation, recipients of services, and representatives from the wider community, all of whom have a stake in the effective delivery of FAMSA services.

References

- **Alsop, R. and N. Heinsohn** (2005) 'Measuring Empowerment in Practice: Structuring Analysis and Framing Indicators', World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3510, Washington: World Bank
- Beck, T. (1999) 'Using Gender-Sensitive Indicators: A Reference Manual for Governments and Other Stakeholders', London: Commonwealth Secretariat
- **Botchway, K.** (2001) 'Paradox of empowerment: reflections on a case study from Northern Ghana', *World Development* 29(1): 135–53
- **Chambers, R.** (1997) Whose Reality Counts? Putting the First Last, London: Intermediate Technology Publications
- **Chant, S. and M. Gutman** (2000) *Mainstreaming Men into Gender and Development: Debates, Reflections and Experiences*, Oxford: Oxfam GB
- **Chinkin, C.** (1995) 'Violence against women: the international legal response', *Gender and Development* 3(2): 23–8
- CIDA (1997) Guide to Gender-Sensitive Indicators, Hull, Canada: Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)
- Collins, K. (1998) Participatory Research: A Primer, Cape Town: Prentice Hall
- **Cornwall, A.** (2003) 'Whose voices? Whose choices? Reflections on gender and participatory development', *World Development* 31(8): 1325–42
- **Derbyshire, H.** (2002) *Gender Manual: A Practical Guide for Development Policy Makers and Practitioners*, London: Department for International Development (DFID)
- **Estrella, M. and J. Gaventa** (1998) 'Who Counts Reality? Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation: A Literature Review', IDS Working Paper 70, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies
- **Gergen, M.M.** (1988) 'Toward a feminist metatheory and methodology in the social sciences', in M. M. Gergen (ed.) *Feminist Thought and the Structure of Knowledge*, New York: New York University Press
- **Gouws, A.** (1996) 'Feminist epistemology and representation: the impact of post-modernism and post-colonialism', *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa* 30: 65–82
- Guijt, I. and M.K. Shah (1998) 'Waking up to power, conflict and process', in I. Guijt and M. K. Shah (eds.) *The Myth of Community: Gender Issues in Participatory Development*, London: Intermediate Technology Publications
- **Ife, J.** (1999) *Community Development: Creating Community Alternatives Vision, Analysis and Practice*, Sydney: Addison Wesley Longman
- Jackson, C. (2002) 'Disciplining gender?", World Development 30(3): 497-509
- Kabeer, N. (1994) Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought, London: Verso
- **Kabeer, N.** (1999) 'The Conditions and Consequences of Choice: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment', UNRISD Discussion Paper No. 108, Geneva: UNRISD
- **Knowles, J.C., C. Leighton and W. Stinson** (1997) 'Measuring Results of Health Sector Reform for System Performance: A Handbook of Indicators', Bethesda, USA: Partnerships for Health Reform

- **Levy, C.** (1998) 'Institutionalisation of gender through participatory practice', in I. Guijt and M. K. Shah (eds.) *The Myth of Community: Gender Issues in Participatory Development*, London: Intermediate Technology Publications
- **Longino**, **H.** (1993) 'Subjects, power and knowledge: description and prescription in feminist philosophies of science', in L. Alcoff and E. Potter (eds.) *Feminist Epistemologies*, New York: Routledge
- Malhotra, A., S.R. Schuler and C. Boender (2002) 'Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development', Paper of the World Bank Gender and Development Group, Washington: World Bank
- Mayoux, L. (1998) 'Gender accountability and NGOs: avoiding the black hole', in C. Miller and S. Razavi (eds.) *Missionaries and Mandarins: Feminist Engagement with Development Institutions*, London: Intermediate Technology Publications
- Moghadam, V.M. and L. Senftova (2005) 'Measuring women's empowerment: participation and rights in civil, political, social economic and cultural domains', *International Social Service Journal* 57(2): 389–412
- **Moser, C. and A. Moser** (2005) 'Gender mainstreaming since Beijing: a review of success and limitations in international institutions', *Gender and Development* 13(2): 11–22
- **Nielsen, J.M.** (ed.) (1990) Feminist Research Methods: Exemplary Readings in the Social Sciences, Boulder: Westview Press
- Ramazanoğlu, C. and J. Holland (2002) Feminist Methodology: Challenges and Choices, London: Sage
- Saith, R. and B. Harriss-White, (1998) 'Gender Sensitivity of Well-Being Indicators', UNRISD Discussion Paper No. 95, Geneva: UNRISD
- **SDC** (undated) 'Gender Toolkit: Instruments for Gender Mainstreaming', Bern: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)
- **Snyder, M., F. Berry and P. Mavima** (1996) 'Gender policy in development assistance: improving implementation results', *World Development* 24(9): 1481–96
- **UNESCO** (1997) 'Gender-Sensitive Education Statistics and Indicators: A Practical Guide', Paris: United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).
- Wendoh, S. and T. Wallace (2005) 'Re-thinking gender mainstreaming in African NGOs and communities', Gender and Development 13(2): 70–9