FEMINIST APPROACHES IN MONITORING AND IMPACT MEASUREMENT

JORDAN VALLEY LINKS
The purpose of this paper is to share MEDA’s use of feminist principles in monitoring and impact measurement practice. MEDA’s commitment to women’s rights, and to transforming unequal gender and power relations requires that we diligently measure, practice, and adapt (based on gender analysis) our contributions to these changes. This summary provides reflections on four strategies that prominently emerged on the Jordan Valley Links (JVL) Project.

Our aspiration is that this paper contributes to the growing knowledge base on how to positively practice monitoring and impact measurement while demonstrating MEDA’s commitment to gender justice and women’s rights.

MEDA’s Jordan Valley Links Project (JVL) is working with local partners to economically empower 25,000 women and youth and increase their contribution to Jordan’s economic growth. Women and youth are supported with training and mentorship to improve their business acumen and are linked to markets where they can sell their products and services. To increase access to finance, the project works to strengthen Savings and Loan Groups (SLGs) and build linkages to microfinance institutions. To reduce barriers for women and youth’s economic engagement, the project builds support for entrepreneurship in families and communities through communication campaigns, community theatre and role models who promote the value of self-employment for women and youth.

Key Attributes of Feminist Monitoring and Impact Measurement

Monitoring and Impact Measurement (MIM) at MEDA strives to draw on feminist principles. This means that MIM strategies explicitly challenge unequal power relations, and question assumptions about gender identities and roles. A feminist approach challenges the idea that measurement concepts are neutral and the assumptions underlying predefined groups, including categories that make people’s different gender identities, ages, ethnicities, religious, sexual orientations, or wealth—or the intersection of these categories—invisible. A feminist practice recognizes that MEDA’s MIM activities themselves can challenge or maintain existing power structures.1

---

These attributes are important to keep in mind when applying a feminist lens to monitoring and impact measurement:

**Ensure genuine participation**, using participatory techniques and co-ownership achieved by co-design and co-management. Taking the time to include clients and stakeholders in the development of measurement tools and processes yields high rewards in the form of quality data. Ensuring mixed methodologies, both complementary qualitative and quantitative, will allow both numbers and rich experiences to emerge on changes in gender relations.

**Examine the importance of trust, time, and resources** to develop MIM processes and capacities required to undertake them. Working with marginalized populations means going at a pace that works for everyone. Brokering trusted relationships and learning-oriented partnerships is critical. It takes time for behaviour change, especially shifting deep-seated social norms.

**Go beyond the basics** of sex-disaggregating. Data should be sex-disaggregated at a minimum so that women’s needs and interests can be taken into account throughout the program life cycle. Beyond that, it is important to consider intersectionality: how to disaggregate (MEDA MIM recommends within the sex category to really unpack any barriers that women or men may face) and indicator selection. Analysis around age group, geography, and sector may also uncover barriers or drivers to impact that particular groups may encounter.

**Walk the talk.** The implementing team and partners must share values and principles of feminist leadership to lead by example and have action follow words. Ensuring that women are in leadership; delivering training and mentorship around gender equality; and promoting the idea that everyone, staff, partners, clients and stakeholders are on a journey of liberation and transformation together. Practical steps that JVL took within the office to reduce barriers women face include, repurposing a conference room for daycare purposes in the office during the COVID pandemic and allowing parents the flexibility to drop off and pick up their children from alternative care during office hours while schools were closed. Promoting accountability and continuous learning go alongside of this idea.

**Build awareness** that capturing changes in gender and power can be challenging methodologically. Employing mixed methods help to counter this trend, but regardless, it is not meant to be easy when exposing power structures that are ingrained into identity. Keeping this top of mind and including in reflection meetings is important.
Alignment with Gender Equality in Market Systems Framework

The JVL project was designed around three gender equality outcomes: **access** and use, and **agency** and rights, and just and equitable **enabling environment**, represented in MEDA's gender equality and social inclusion framework below. By segmenting the project this way at design, MEDA ensured that women and youth would be able to grow their business while exercising their rights over income and accessing community support and leadership in a more supportive environment.

MEDA works with market actors to ensure their employment opportunities, products, and services are **inclusive, accessible, and useful** for diverse clients, while supporting clients to overcome the capacity constraints that may limit their access and use.

MEDA's work supports diverse clients to strengthen their **agency and control** over resources and profits, while building the capacity of market actors to advance clients’ **rights, dignity, and leadership**.

MEDA engages with strategic local partners, market actors, and key influencers to foster **just and equitable relations** between clients and their socio-economic environment.
The JVL project included indicators and activities into its project design to promote a gender transformative approach. The table below links MEDA's GESI outcomes with selected examples of JVL indicators and activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GESI Outcome</th>
<th>JVL Outcome Indicator</th>
<th>JVL Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Access and Use                | Percentage of women and youth reporting a change in sector income (disaggregated by sex, age range, sector, and location) | • Market linkages and business development services  
• Training on business management, including costing and financial management  
• Establishing of savings and loans groups |
| Agency and Rights             | Percentage of women reporting a change in control over decision making in household spending and business income (disaggregated by age range, sector, and location) | • Community and household dialogues on gender equality  
• Promotion and support to male gender champions promoting women's economic engagement |
| Just and Equitable            | Perception of stakeholders regarding the entrepreneurial and business acumen of women and youth (disaggregated by sex, age group, sector, and location) | • Technical support to government stakeholders on regulations and licensing for home-based businesses  
• Training for private sector and linkages to women and youth for their supply chains |
| Enabling Environment          |                                                                                       |                                                                                  |

Applying Feminist Monitoring and Impact Measurement in the JVL Project

The JVL Project applied feminist approaches in four ways as part of its MIM strategy: stories of change; gender progress markers, intersectional analysis; and women enumerators.

**Stories of Change**

MEDA's story of change methodology was employed as a complementary qualitative approach for collecting evidence of behavioral and attitudinal changes regarding income and gender relations. Founded in the Most Significant Change methodology, Stories of Change were used by JVL to
surface women and youth voices. Stories of Change can allow clients and participants to share what is important to them using different narratives from project indicators. In the telling of stories, clients, staff, and partners exchange ideas and perspectives, thus learning from each other. Staff and partners were trained on the process, and tools to gather stories were translated and tailored to suit project needs. Through the Stories of Change, the JVL project observed positive unanticipated results:

• **Stories promoted women’s recognition.** In Jordan, women face socio-cultural constraints—a “culture of shame”—that limits their potential to work or start a business as this is considered beneath them. This stigma also extends to gender and family/community dynamics, which limit women and youth’s ability to become entrepreneurs. As the project addressed this, the JVL MIM team found that stories of change also promoted women’s recognition of their identity as community members and business owners. The simple process of telling their story empowered them and women felt more recognized. The JVL project translated stories of change into Arabic, shared stories and photos on social media, and invited clients to the project closing ceremony; these measures reinforced this recognition which proved to be important for JVL clients.

• **Stories fostered market linkages.** The JVL Project featured story of change clients in an event, Treasures of the Valley. These clients set up a booth with their wares and were able to
share ideas and sell their products with buyers, stakeholders, and even royalty! Telling one’s story is often the first step to a marketing campaign, and many JVL entrepreneurs introduced their business to the community in this way. Further, women and youth clients featured in stories felt free to contact JVL project staff and engage in dialogue with them first about their story details, and jumping off from there on programming, production, and marketing questions and concerns. This channel of community proved useful not only for story details, but also for programming and marketing.

- **Feminist informed consent.** Early in the project, JVL used paper and e-forms to document informed consent for photography. When COVID hit, and client visits became impossible, the MIM team pivoted and sought informed consent via an audio message sent over WhatsApp. This was sent to project staff directly from the client. This digital method worked well for JVL women clients and even beyond the Stories of Change. Audio informed consent allows remote and/or low literate clients to use their voice quite literally.

### Gender Progress Markers

**Gender progress markers (GPM)** are a set of progressive behavioural and attitudinal statements that measure change related to gender. The purpose of GPMs is to move beyond numbers and quantitative data; GPMs look at how attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours related to gender in society progress and change over the life of a project. GPMs begin with what local partners and project staff ‘Expect to See’ in the community, describing the current state. Then, through validation and consultations, women and project staff develop statements of behavioural changes that the community would ‘Like to See’ and ‘Love to See’, based on the desired outcomes articulated by communities. Through periodic focus group discussions and consultations over the course of the project, data is collected on whether the project is contributing to behaviour change towards the ‘Like to See’ and ‘Love to See’ outcomes.

- **What women want.** Gender progress markers give time and space for community members, especially women, to determine what indicators are important to them, rather than those that were developed early in the life of the project. For example, one example of a gender progress marker for change in families was that husbands and male family members talk proudly about their wives’ businesses in front of community members. This change in men’s attitudes was an important indication of change, and GPM allowed the project team to monitor these shifts, despite such an indicator not being included at the project design phase.

- **Adding feminist indicators during implementation.** Beginning with implementation, the team found that the project documents (typical results-based measurement tools like the performance measurement framework (PMF)) were not as gender responsive as needed. At the time, Gender Progress Markers were new for MEDA, but were selected as a method because of their ability to involve women and their families in the creation of
micro-indicators of change that were meaningful for them, allowing the project to add an additional feminist perspective to its measurement.

- **Changing gender roles and relations through dialogue.** The most important part of creating GPMs is the involvement of women and their families (their husbands, fathers, brothers and/or sons) in the creation and validation of the markers. The GPM process itself thus led to facilitating constructive discussions between men and women about their roles and expectations within their household, which led to dialogues that in most instances had never occurred within many households.

**Intersectional Analysis**

The goal of intersectional analysis is to identify intersecting patterns between different structures of power and how people are simultaneously positioned in and around multiple categories, such as gender, age, and ethnicity. The JVL Project used Power BI² filters to easily slice and visualize data by sex, age group, sector, and governorate to uncover and identify characteristics. This led to programming changes and an adaptive management approach, which requires regular reflection sessions on data analysis.

---

² Power BI is a business analytics service by Microsoft allowing for interactive visualizations and business intelligence capabilities, reports and dashboards.
• **Age group analysis.** Intersectional analysis told us that young women and men were not always responding in the same way and were encountering different pathways to success, so we refined project activities specifically for youth. MEDA partner, Baraka, adapted and used a youth entrepreneurship through sports strategy to engage young people on community-based tourism economic opportunities. Throughout the project, we saw that young men had an easier path to entrepreneurship compared to young women, given societal expectations and roles. This insight allowed for further dialogue with the project team and donor.

• **Geographical analysis.** The project found that some women in certain governorates were experiencing mobility challenges—something that may not have been uncovered and thus addressed without MEDA analyzing data by geography. Mobility challenges resulted from conservative Bedouin cultural norms as well as the long distance to a major commercial centre. For instance, women in the Northern Jordan Valley were more easily able to travel to Amman to sell their products. Women in the Southern Jordan Valley however were not able to travel to Amman not only because of the greater distance but also because Bedouin culture can limit women from traveling outside of their immediate community. Additionally, different areas needed different staffing and partner strategies, given their social norms and barriers. JVL women staff were not initially able to meet with clients’ male family members in areas surrounding the Feynan Ecolodge and had to work with their men colleagues to build trust in such communities.

• **Sectoral analysis.** Based on sectoral analysis (food processing, tourism, clean technology, retail, etc.), the project’s Business Plan Competition and matching grants for business start-up and expansion were designed differently by sector. Analysis by sector uncovered different business barriers, capital investments, cost structures, and marketing strategies and opportunities. These were different for women and youth entrepreneurs working in food processing compared to clean technology, for example.

**Women Enumerators**

Annual surveys are a cornerstone to MEDA’s MIM strategy. One practical and important tip for conducting surveys is to hire women, and especially community members and project clients. The JVL project learned early on that hiring and listening to women enumerators was an important way to ensure data quality. Although a potential conflict of interest does arise with the involvement of clients in this role, the MIM team considered this risk to be low and opted to ensure quality data and train enumerators towards being both understanding and objective.

• **Sentinel Indicators** are a type of proxy indicator used not to measure a result, but rather as a bellwether for indicating greater changes within a complex system. In hiring women clients as enumerators, JVL was able to gain insight into early changes (both positive and negative) occurring in the communities and markets, just like sentinel indicators. This was possible not only based on the performance of the enumerator (via quality and quantity of surveys...
completed) but also, the enumerator would be attuned to the respondent’s attitude and responses. The JVL MIM team gained early insight into a particular project partner’s quality of programming based on enumerator performance and emerging data quality.

- **Building confidence and recognition.** Women hired as enumerators were trained on survey processes with role plays and scenarios, but also on empowerment themes. Often young women were hired as enumerators, and they were free to work with both women and men and to travel. Women felt a boost of confidence, being employed by an international organization like MEDA. One enumerator stated, “Now we know how to talk to people. Before, we were not able to deal with people, but now we can talk to people.”

- **Community Ambassadors.** Because MEDA’s enumerators were from the communities where they collected data, they were trusted. They had the potential to ask questions in a contextual way to ensure the respondent understood and was giving valid answers. In some cases, they were able to do public relations and damage control for the project, if there was any miscommunication among clients, partners, and MEDA. Further, some talented enumerators were brought in to facilitate awareness and mobilization sessions when some partners were reticent to do so.
Conclusion

Having a monitoring and impact measurement strategy that promotes feminist principles did not happen by accident: strategy, resources, and pivoting measurement approaches were all needed to transform unequal gender and power relations. In JVL’s case, the MIM team was led by women, gender equality training conducted with staff and partners, SME partners, CBOs, and these topics discussed regularly at team meetings. Leaving time and space for authentic participation of women clients, conducting intersectional analysis, and raising awareness on feminist monitoring and impact measurement were all important for the JVL team.

JVL Learning Series

The JVL Learning Series is an ongoing initiative to share lessons learned as the project is being implemented. Topics include private sector engagement in Jordan, client experiences with savings and loan groups, effective strategies for enterprise development and measuring women’s economic empowerment.

Acknowledgements

Author Jillian Baker
Editing and Review Farah Chandani, Jennifer Denomy, Nour Qawasmi
Graphic Design Wendy Helgerman

JVL is made possible with the generous support of Global Affairs Canada and is implemented by Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA).

Thanks to JVL’s many partners – both “key facilitating” and private sector partners – and MEDA’s generous private supporters.
Offices in Canada, the United States and around the world. Visit our website for a complete list.

1-800-665-7026

www.medai.org | www.medai.org/jvl

meda@medai.org

Creating business solutions to poverty