

How to measure impact of short-term interventions with participatory social research approaches?

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Participatory focus group discussion can be used to jointly analyse systems drivers, trade-off calculation of different human agents in the system and depict feedback loops in the system. The author created these participatory approaches to understand the effect and impact of an ILO training intervention for rural women in Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya on their livelihood.

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In June and July 2015, the ILO project Women Entrepreneurship Development and Economic Empowerment (WED-EE) to advance small agripreneurs and entrepreneurs, most of them young women in rural areas in Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya, was evaluated by the author. At the time of the evaluation, the project has been only running about 18 months, the donor of the project, Irish Aid, however, wanted to get a first understanding, if the project achieves enduring, sustainable impacts and what kinds of impacts these are.

1. The problem

Impact is understood here as having produced visible and lasting change. Since most of the direct interventions with ultimate beneficiaries in form of sensitisation, training, creating market linkages and inspiring networking among small-scale entrepreneurs and agripreneurs happened a year or less ago, the evaluator of the project tried to find out the *likelihood* of achieving impact.

The evaluator's thinking was that systemic changes which occurred during and after the interventions are difficult to reverse. The idea is that entrepreneurs are embedded in a system. When they manage to change how they do things and thus become part of different feedback loops, the changed entrepreneurial behaviour will become part of the system's mechanisms and will be difficult to reverse back.

2. Newly tested Methods and their Results

In focus group discussions and interviews, systems analysis approaches have been tested to study

- Feedback loops
- Trade-offs
- Drivers of change for business success
- Seeing options

Focus groups were only held with the direct recipients of ILO training. Representatives of organisations, which implemented the training (e.g. chambers of commerce, NGOs) or which increase options by providing adequate regulations or infrastructure (e.g. government ministries), have been labelled 'influencers' and were interviewed following a questionnaire.

The focus group methods of systems analysis are described below, the questionnaire for influencers is attached. Interviews held with women and men agripreneurs and entrepreneurs, focussed on discussing their trade-offs, drivers of change for business success and if they perceive an increase in their (business) options.

2.1 Feedback loops

Methods

In order to find out in the focus groups, if new feedback loops have been established and the behaviour conducive for creating a better and more stable livelihood has become habitual, games have been played in different focus groups, in which participants had to solve different problems related to business, agriculture and social roles.

A randomly chosen player sits in the middle of the participant's circle, gets a (business) problem presented after a description of her/his imaginative business, which they have to present in the game. For each problem another player was chosen. After the player presented her/his solution, the other participants could discuss the solution and present alternatives. The problems were for example:

- a. new shop neighbour is a noisy metal working business;

- b. the business (in different focus groups: vegetable vendor, group of vegetable growers, grocery store keeper, tailor) keeps no records or, in another game, the records are spoilt;
- c. a hygienic problem such as insect infestation in a food processing business e.g. potato chip producer, juice producer, food trading e.g. milk seller, and in a growing food processing business (e.g. egg producer and vendor);
- d. no business skills learnt (e.g. seller of second hand clothes, rearing and selling chicken);
- e. input becomes expensive (e.g. water for vegetable production; seeds of good quality)
- f. bad time management (e.g. order delivered late, produce overgrows)

Results

Are new feedback loops established, did new behaviour become habitual?

The randomised control trial evaluation of the ILO GET Ahead tool showed that trainees who received GET Ahead training experienced a 14 to 18 % increase in sales and profits¹. About 80% of the interviewed women entrepreneurs in this final evaluation reported that they have observed that their businesses are more lucrative (sales, profits, networks). About half of them made a decisive change in their business such as widening their market (e.g. opening another outlet), partnering for increasing their production, and developing their product further.

During the evaluation, participants in focus groups were presented with business problems and asked how they would solve them. With this the evaluator wanted to observe how engrained *new behaviour* was already, and if business-conducive behaviour can be adapted flexibly to new situations. Across the three countries, keeping records emerged as a business behaviour, which would not be dropped again and participants found ways, to replace lost or damaged records. In the analysis of the games, participants said that businesses without record keeping could easily collapse, as business capital will be depleted and income will be reduced due to a confusion on stock and costs: “The woman doesn’t even know, what is happening, and she is gone”. Urban micro-entrepreneurs in Kampala mentioned that missing records could lead to overcharging by tax authorities since they base their tax demands then on their own estimations – knowledge which the evaluator found quite unusual for micro-entrepreneurs.

Another business behaviour, which women entrepreneurs participating in WED-EE will probably not change any more is the good handling of clients. This was not only

Box 1: Impacts in a goats business in a pastoralist community in the North-West of Kenya

“I sold goats, just following what others did in the market, without putting into account what it cost me to raise goats. After the training, I am thinking now. I factor into the selling price for my goats, the inputs into the goats, which I had. Furthermore: By making a business plan (facilitated by WED-EE), I could understand, where I wanted to be. Now, because of the training and business plan, I was able to buy land and build (before in a rented place). I identified the person (with land) and the place; there, I raise goats – and have profit! (smile)

(told by Jennifer from this pastoralist community during an evaluation focus group In July 2015)

¹ “I am determined, no matter how hard it becomes, I will not give up”: A Qualitative Assessment of the ILO’s GET Ahead Business Training Program; Authors: Kathryn Farley¹, Kirsty Sievwright¹, Devaki Singh¹, Katherine Fritz¹ and Anne Stangl¹
¹ International Center for Research on Women, March 27, 2015

mentioned by entrepreneurs who participated in marketing related trainings, but also by others. “Treat people well, who come and buy,” one participant sub-summarised this behaviour. When asked ‘what do you do differently now to ensure business success?’ marketing behaviour came first (mentioned nine times). It included: identify needs in the market; place, price, and product are crucial; be aware of quality and price relationship; know customers, their need and interests; know competitors. One farmer said that the training enabled her to follow now the linkage between price and season better. The second most mentioned business behaviour has been planning (six times mentioned), followed by book keeping (3x), networking (2x), acquiring business skills (2x) and importance of location (2x). Mentioned, too, were saving, ensuring storage, seizing opportunities, ensuring sanitation & hygiene, and that commitment is very critical. In interviews and the focus groups, many women emphasized the importance having more self-confidence after the training encouraging them to approach customers and to travel far for the marketing of their products.

Influencers told the evaluator in interviews that business behaviour changed through WED-EE interventions included:

- How women entrepreneurs conduct themselves – more self-confidence;
- Now women entrepreneurs keep records – before, there was nothing at all. (“They thought, when you write it down, you are looking for a thief,” one intermediary in Uganda said);
- Saving culture is improved;
- Women groups are networking more;

2.2 Trade-offs

Method

Trade-off calculations regarding decision making power over income and *re-investment* into the business or farm were looked at in the focus groups by a role game between husband and wife (business woman), whom he asks for money. By the way, a game thoroughly enjoyed by the participating women and men.

In a discussion on trade-off calculations for *doing business* as a woman and earning money on her own, a table was created on a flipchart, to collect answers of men, women both on the questions ‘What is creating the economic relationship between women and men? What are the characteristics of this relationship?’. So, participants described their expectations of *social and financial costs* of different economic behaviour – thus, they described one side of the equation of trade-off calculations. In a follow-up discussion, participants analysed, what needs to change, in order to change these trade-off calculations in the economic behaviour of women and men in their society.

In one game in a focus group, the trade-offs were analysed between having a fixed shop for making and selling jewellery and hawking the self-produced goods walking in the city. The focus group participants were split in two groups, one doing an analysis of economic benefits and costs – so, both sides of the trade-off calculation - for a shop and one for hawking. This approach resulted in the clear depiction of the balance between the two options, and thus which option was preferable to the participants (which was the shop).

Results

In two of six role games (husband asks woman entrepreneur for money), the ‘wife’ refused to give money to the ‘husband’; in another two games, she found a middle way (“I give you half and come along into the bar”) and in two cases, she gave the demanded money to him fairly quickly, saying, she would be beaten, if she wouldn’t (in all role games women played the husband, in two role games a man played the wife). Concluding from the results of this game, about a third of the women learnt to negotiate their way around traditions (“you must obey, you are my wife”) by offering their husbands relief from their financial responsibilities (“I take over the electricity bills”) or gently denying them the money (“I do not refuse; I borrowed from the bank, so I cannot give you”,) or trying to give them some responsibility for their money (“if you don’t pay it back, I am in trouble, because I must repay my loan”). But still for at least a third of women entrepreneurs, traditions and their enforcement prevent them from freely deciding over their income and therefore often from re-investing into their business – a problem, which evaluations found to be particularly strong for women entrepreneurs in the region.



While no discernible impact has been achieved (or aimed at) regarding husband – wife relationship factors preventing re-investment into the business, other business behaviour relating to re-investment in the business have changed. Especially, the importance of separating private and business money from each other to avoid reducing ones capital and reducing became clear to the women entrepreneurs interviewed and in the focus groups. An influencer in Kenya is of the opinion that, “there is change in the way women entrepreneurs do business; they learnt to differentiate between private and business money; not to eat into the capital; ensure that profits go into the business; and they learnt the culture of saving.” And one woman entrepreneur recounted in a focus group that she had been in businesses since 10 years and never realised a profit. Through the ILO training she understood: “I must separate – because it was my family and me myself who destroyed the business,” by not re-investing and eating into the capital.

In one focus group in Kampala, Uganda, in which women and men were equally represented, the participants discussed the role game a bit further, describing in this discussion the social issues related to gender roles and relations in their township. The main result was that women and men need to build trust between each other and respect. In order not to have too many children (called “overproducing” by participants), to be able to save and not to eat into capital, participants suggested that women and men (also couples) get business training together, so that they then speak one (economic) language, which is easier for problem solving. Couples should agree on the business type, be open for guidance from others, and follow clear principles of communication, of what to say and do and what not. A participant added, that both must understand, “when the wife earns zero, it is a risk to the family”. Participants agreed that society must change and that they themselves must contribute to the change of trade-off calculations for women regarding doing business. Currently, if a woman has a lot of money on her own, gossiping will start about the marriage and the husband, it will be assumed that she disrespects the man, that she will cheat on him, if he fails to give her enough (which is his responsibility), and that she will have less time for her husband due to the time she needs for the business.

In other focus groups in Uganda and Tanzania, similar socio-cultural trade-off calculations regarding re-investment of profits into the business were described: “Men feel furious – they feel women are too strong, that they lose power;” “the father often does not realise that there are shortages in the families, so women jump in and finance;” or “men cover family costs such as school fees; regular small costs is the mother’s duty, who covers these; but slowly, slowly this becomes a substantial amount, which is missing in the business.”

Other reasons for low re-investment of profits related to gender roles, which were mentioned in all focus groups, were that “women are tempted to buy little things, when they have money in their pocket”. These little things, which women themselves mentioned, are often cosmetics and jewellery. Participants in all focus groups also mentioned that women “want to improve their lifestyle, so do not re-invest so much in business”. Several participants mentioned economic trade-offs linked to the socialisation into specific social roles, as for example that women do not use new technologies as much as men do – e.g. photos (of goods) on mobile phones, and that women’s capital for investment in business and farms is small because they do not have collateral as men own the land.

Box 2: Analysis of trade-offs regarding re-investing into your business or handing over money to your husband, when he demands it:

Trade-offs: Re-investing profits in business
Business must grow (with experience growing)
Act responsibly towards your business and income
Not a good women
Mistrust from husband
He thinks, you do not respect him
Women don’t trust their own judgement (themselves)

(by a focus group in Kampala)

2.3 Drivers of change for business success

Method

To find drivers of change, participants in focus groups were asked to position people, who represented ‘drivers’ according to their importance for business success around a participant in the centre with a specific type of business, which was in all focus groups a chicken keeping and selling business. In a decisive change to other focus group discussions, where people mostly remain seated (e.g. in January 2016, in the

Google selection of imaged showing focus groups, all people sit), in this method people are representing the elements of a system and are moving around in the focus group meeting space (under a tree in the picture below), in order to depict the interrelations in the system.



photo: Karin Reinprecht

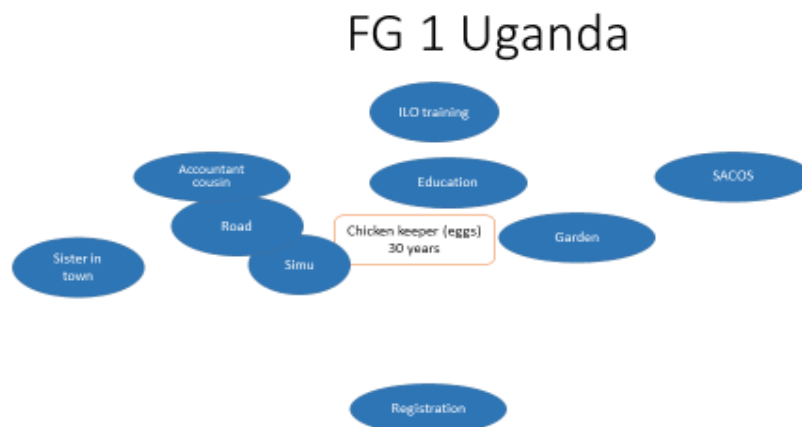
Results

The most important driver of business success was in five of the six focus groups the mobile phone ('simu' in Kiswahili). Also the 'garden' was positioned close to the centre, so deemed as very important for the chicken business, in all focus groups, also in those of entrepreneurs in town. Basic education was mostly placed close to the business – so, it was seen as fairly important for succeeding in business - but further away as the mobile phone and the garden. The 'road' was also seen as fairly important by all focus groups, although in some groups more than in others. The difference might have arisen from the direct situation of the participants, as some worked in the city or close to good roads (Amboseli, Kenya), while others in remote rural areas far from good roads. In all groups, however, participants pointed out that the location of the business was important for the success of the business. All focus groups thought the business training they received from ILO to be fairly important, the women entrepreneurs with growing business emphasizing this point especially. Financing e.g. through SACOS, was seen as very important by the focus groups in Tanzania, less important by the focus groups in Uganda, probably a reflection of the existing offer in micro-finance. In two focus groups, the accountant was placed very closely to the centre, one of them being a group producing vegetables separately, but pooling their products for selling. The focus group of vegetable growers in Kenya added access to affordable 'water' as a main driver of success. None of the focus groups thought that a connection to the city through a relative ('sister in town') would be particularly important for business success.

At the end of this positioning game, the business woman in the middle was asked to only keep the three most important *drivers of her business success*. In the case of the focus group in the example from Uganda (see graph below), she kept the road, the garden, and the ILO training. The road was seen as important in

one more group; in most groups, the mobile phone was kept; the accountant and SACCOS membership was most important to two groups. One more group prioritised the garden, and education (as the basis for the ILO training) and (ILO) business training. Women entrepreneurs could reason very impressively, what drives their business success, what feedback loops are initiated by these drivers and how they can take advantage of them.

Below the result of a focus group in Uganda (**Graph 1**):



2.4 Spill-over effects

Without being prompted, women entrepreneurs in the focus groups and in interviews reported *spill-over effects* of the business training. About half of them were proud to report that they are asked for advice by women entrepreneurs in their vicinity, others recounted that they were now asked by the community to mediate in social conflicts. Some women started close business cooperation with other women entrepreneurs, thus expanding their business and promoting the business of their partners, and three entrepreneurs had founded a savings and credit group. A Tanzanian intermediary observed: “Multiplication happens: women come back and tell the others the new things – it goes into every direction; sons, husbands, neighbours. It is good.” And a policy maker in Kenya made following experience: “For women the training is sustainable, because you find after the training that individuals pick up different items from the training according to their strengths; they continue to learn from each other. After a while they are able to actualize all contributions from the training.”

2.5 Seeing options

Method

Behaviour and behaviour change is embedded in the system. The assumption here is, if the system changes, actors get the opportunity to change their behaviour. Or differently said: if options increase and opportunities arise for actors in the system, they are enabled and more inclined to change their behaviour to make use of these new opportunities.

In the survey interviews (see questionnaires attached) influencers were asked, whether they believed that the options and enabling context for women entrepreneurs in their countries have improved in general.

Results

The responses were positive regarding women entrepreneurs in urban areas. About half of the respondents saw the options to be improving for women entrepreneurs in rural towns Kenya and Tanzania; only a few respondents thought that options and enabling environment for women entrepreneurs in rural areas have been visibly improving. Women entrepreneurs from rural and urban areas in interviews and focus groups observed that they have and see more *options* after the training, demonstrating it by finding realistic solutions, when the evaluator confronted them in games with barriers and difficulties often encountered by women entrepreneurs (e.g. walk path-way of a woman to start a business; business women without business space, capital or without business skills). WED-EE seemingly thus has made a difference to women entrepreneurs seeing options, maybe also to the numbers of options available since their resources (knowledge, skills, networks) increased.