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Two steps forward, one step back – measuring social change in women’s rights through feminist values

*An intersectional feminist critical content
analysis on two NGO reports*

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Course code: MRSK62
Semester: Spring 2022
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Word count: 15 568



Abstract

The need to measure and track both people and processes involved in change is increasing. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), states, and research need to find tools to ensure that the treaties, programmes, and strategies meant to reduce poverty and increase equality are working. This thesis aims to study how Oxfam and ActionAid measure social change in women's rights. Regarding women's rights, gains and losses can occur frequently and can be illustrated by how the development often takes two steps forward and one step back. Therefore, NGOs work to develop tools and methods to measure change within the Monitoring, Evaluating, and Learning (MEL) framework of a programme to ensure sustainable and holistic results. The purpose of this paper is to examine if and how Oxfam and ActionAid incorporate feminist values within their MEL-frameworks. Additionally, this paper examines how a feminist theoretical framework affects the outcomes of a developmental project. To study this topic, gendered critical content analysis is applied to two final reports, one from each NGO. The main conclusion is that the reports apply feminist values such as participation, intersectionality, awareness of the context-specific and power dimensions, as well as acknowledge that change is non-linear, in multiple ways. It can be through the involvement of multiple actors and levels of change as well as engaging the constituency in the change processes. The incorporation of feminist values leads to the use of well-motivated and context-specific methods to measure social change which results in holistic, sustainable, long-term, and anti-colonial outcomes.

Keywords: *social change, human rights, development, feminism, intersectionality, Monitoring, Evaluating, Learning (MEL), feminist values, measure, non-governmental organisation (NGO).*

Abstract

Två steg framåt, ett steg bakåt – mätning av social förändring gällande kvinnors rättigheter genom feministiska värderingar: En intersektionell feministisk kritisk innehållsanalys av två NGO rapporter

Det finns ett ökat behov av att mäta både människor och förändringsprocesser. Icke-statliga organisationer (NGO:er), stater och forskningen behöver hitta metoder och verktyg för att säkerställa att traktat, program och strategier som är ämnade att minska fattigdom och öka jämställdhet fungerar. Denna uppsats syftar till att undersöka hur Oxfam och ActionAid mäter social förändring inom kvinnors rättigheter. Framsteg och motgångar sker mer frekvent inom kvinnors rättigheter, något som kan illustreras av hur utvecklingen hela tiden kan ta två steg framåt och ett steg bakåt. Av den anledningen jobbar NGO:er med att ta fram metoder och verktyg som mäter förändring inom ramverket för ett programs Monitorering, Evaluering och Lärande (MEL) för att säkerställa hållbara och holistiska resultat. Syftet med uppsatsen är att undersöka om och hur Oxfam och ActionAid inkorporerar feministiska värderingar inom deras MEL-ramverk. Utöver det utforskar uppsatsen även hur ett feministiskt teoretiskt ramverk påverkar resultatet av ett utvecklingsprojekt. Detta undersöks via ett genuskritiskt innehållsperspektiv som appliceras på två slutrapporter, en från respektive NGO. Den huvudsakliga slutsatsen som dras är att rapporterna applicerar feministiska värderingar på olika sätt såsom delaktighet, intersektionalitet, medvetenhet om det kontextspecifika och maktdimensioner samt vidkänner att förändring är icke-linjär. Det kan vara genom inkluderingen av flera olika aktörer och nivåer av förändring såväl som att engagera människorna i de olika förändringsprocesserna. Inkorporeringen av feministiska värderingar leder till användningen av välmotiverade och kontextanpassade metoder som mäter social förändring vilket resulterar i hållbara, holistiska, långsiktiga och anti-koloniala resultat.

***Nyckelord:** socialförändring, mänskliga rättigheter, utveckligt, feminism, intersektionalitet, Monitorering, Evaluering, Lärande (MEL), feministiska värderingar, mätning, Icke-statliga organisationer (NGOs).*

List of abbreviations

CSOs	Civil society organisations
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
VAWG	Violence against women and girls
GBV	Gender-based violence
IPV	Intimate partner violence
AVCs	Anti-violence centers
ToC	Theory of Change
CCA	Critical content analysis
WROs	Women's rights organisations
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual

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1 Introduction

Monitoring, evaluating, and learning (MEL) practices are central themes within the development field. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Oxfam and ActionAid integrate MEL into programmes and projects which are meant to be implemented in a specific context. The purpose of MEL is to monitor the programme or project in question, to make sure that it is being carried out and implemented according to the programme plan. The second part of MEL which is evaluating refers to the process of assessing the programme towards the end of its cycle. In the end, this leads to highlighting lessons learned – which is the third component of the MEL concept.¹ This actualizes the need for tools and methods to monitor, evaluate, and learn that build on a theoretical foundation.

However, most of the current MEL frameworks and applied methods are quantitative which can provide various types of challenges. The challenges are posed both on local grassroots organisations as well as donor-organisations, especially regarding women's rights issues such as men's violence against women. This is due to the tools often not being freely chosen but primarily since MEL tools are required to meet donor needs.² Another challenge is the focus on the quantification of unmeasurable and abstract realities such as measuring social change or people's attitudes towards a specific question. Nonetheless, NGOs, states, and other entities including research need to find ways to check whether the treaties, resources, programmes, and strategies meant to reduce poverty, increase equality, and build more peaceful societies, are working or not. As Srilatha Batliwala, a pioneer within the field of development and sustainable MEL

¹ Batliwala, Srilatha and Pittman, Alexandra. Capturing change in women's realities: a critical overview of current monitoring & evaluation frameworks and approaches. *Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)*. 2010.

² Ibid.

frameworks, together with Alexandra Pittman wrote, there is a need “of measuring and tracking both the people and the processes involved in change”.³

Recently, human rights issues have taken a central position within the developmental discourse. As the subject of this thesis, development and social change, especially within equality and men’s violence against women is most definitely a human rights issue.⁴ For that reason, this thesis aims to analyse currently applied methods within the MEL frameworks in the development field from a feminist perspective. The purpose is to understand how the current methods found in my data work to incorporate feminist values to measure social change and how a feminist theoretical framework affects the process of measuring. This will be achieved by applying a critical content analysis from a gendered perspective. The thesis will also study how the outcomes of a developmental project can be affected when incorporating feminist values. The aim is also to propose a critical and intersectional feminist critique of MEL-frameworks.

1.1 Purpose, aim, and research questions

Social change and especially considering women’s rights and men’s violence against women are complex topics that cannot be reduced to only numbers and indicators.⁵ Additionally, women’s rights are a prime example of how change is not linear and can take several steps back and forth due to political, economic, and social factors. This is a global trend that has been reported all over the globe, for example in Poland and the right-winged populist ruling party that keeps passing laws restricting and undermining

³ Ibid., p.3.

⁴ Ellerby, Kara. *No shortcut to change: an unlikely path to a more gender-equitable world*. New York: New York University Press, 2017. And Gready, Paul. (ed.). *Human rights and development in the new millennium: towards a theory of change*. 1st Edition. Milton Park Abingdon Oxon: Routledge, 2013.

⁵ Merry, Sally Engle. *The seductions of quantification: measuring human rights, gender violence, and sex trafficking*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016.

women's rights, especially reproductive rights.⁶ Another example is Brazil and its concerning numbers of femicide⁷ which keep rising despite the gains such as including the crime of femicide in its penal code.⁸ Consequently, it becomes vital for NGOs to try and measure a societal change to find answers and solutions to why society is the way it is and how it can be changed in a long-term, feminist, and holistic way.

As mentioned before, the purpose of this thesis is to introduce and analyse the applied methods found in my data that adopt a feminist framework and are a part of a developmental project. Therefore, the first research question is:

Do the reports apply feminist values within the MEL-framework of a developmental project, and if so, how?

The question is anchored in the primary data of this thesis which consist of two NGO reports. Human rights as a concept become actualised in practice within the development sector as NGOs become the rights provider. Therefore, it is relevant to study development and how the field works with human rights through monitoring, evaluating, and learning. The second research question is:

How does the incorporation of feminist values affect the outcomes of a developmental project as a way to measure social change?

The purpose of this question is to further deepen the discussion and provide an analytical and critical perspective on the MEL methods applied to women's rights issues with a focus on men's violence against women. The aim of this question is also to study how feminist values can affect the process of how an organisation measures social change

⁶ Amnesty International. Poland: A year on, Abortion ruling harms women. 19.10.2021. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/10/poland-a-year-on-abortion-ruling-harms-women/> (Accessed 08.04.2022)

⁷ The killing of women on account of their gender.

⁸ Varejão, Isadora. Even with renewed laws, Brazil struggles to protect women amid rising femicide. *GlobalVoices*. 19.03.2020. <https://globalvoices.org/2020/03/19/even-with-renewed-laws-brazil-struggles-to-protect-women-amid-rising-femicide/> (Accessed 08.04.2022)

within the framework of a project. This question too will build on the primary material which will be introduced later in this chapter, as well as previous research within this field.

These research questions go hand in hand with the aim of the thesis, which is to provide a nuanced, but critical, and feminist analysis of current applied methods and tools to measure social change. The purpose is also to conduct research that is *for* women instead of *about* women, which is one of the goals of feminist research.⁹ I aim to do this by applying a gendered perspective as a way to critically analyse the content of the reports, as well as have in mind the needs of the women who are affected by the implementation of a programme or project and in the long run, the social change. However, I am fully aware that this can be difficult to maintain as I will not be interviewing women in contexts, due to several reasons, one being lacking time and resources. For that reason, my goal is to rather be conscious of my choices and how they *could* potentially affect people.

The purpose and aim of my thesis are also to illustrate how one (or many) method(s) can be built on intersectionality and feminist principles, is holistic, sustainable, and takes into consideration the people who get affected by the change. It is important to show how measuring social change can in itself be multi-dimensional, involve different actors, and take place over a long time.¹⁰

⁹ Gottfried, Heidi. "Introduction: engaging women's communities: dilemmas and contradictions in feminist research. In Gottfried, Heidi (ed.). *Feminism and social change: bridging theory and practice*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996, p.11.

¹⁰ Miller, Carol and Haylock, Laura. Capturing changes in women's lives: the experiences of Oxfam Canada in applying feminist evaluation principles to monitoring and evaluation practice. *Gender & Development*. Vol. 22, nr. 2, p.296. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2014.920980>.

1.2 Definitions, material, and limitations

Within the research field of sociology, social change is defined as:

...the alteration of mechanisms within the social structure, characterized by changes in cultural symbols, rules of behaviour, social organizations, or value systems.¹¹

Oxfam International suggests another definition which emphasises the transformative approach to change:

Transformational change is long-lasting, systematic, sustainable change that challenges structures, cultures and institutions that preserve inequality and injustice in the status quo.¹²

In this thesis, social change is defined according to the above mentioned and in relation to the possible change which is the outcome of a certain programme or project mentioned in my primary material. For that reason, it is of no interest to analyse projects which are meant to have a vast and widespread societal change. This paper will instead focus on local, contextual social change that focuses primarily on addressing and combating men's violence against women through the implementation and realisation of the projects presented in my material.

Furthermore, as noted before, this thesis's main topic is applied method or what I call "MEL-methods" or frameworks which are different ways for NGOs to measure the impact of a programme or project. In other words, I am not looking to analyse and discuss research methods such as discourse analysis or content analysis but rather methods which are applicable in the context of NGOs, implementation, and social change. One definition

¹¹ Wilterdink, Nico and Form, William. "Social change". *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 14.12.2021. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-change>. (Accessed 11.04.2022)

¹² Wakefield, Shawna and Koerppen, Daniela. Applying feminist principles to program monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning. *Oxfam International*. 2017, p.4.

of MEL-methods which is relevant to this thesis as it takes on a feminist approach is from Oxfam International:

In sum, measurement of non-linear and complex change, rooted in feminist principles, means:

- Tracking and capturing of negative impacts, resistance, reaction and unexpected outcomes;
- Using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies and methods that assess contribution, rather than demand attribution.¹³

The thesis will apply a critical gendered perspective which means that the category “women” will be defined according to the social understanding of gender and not the biological understanding of sex. According to R. W. Connell the social category gender, and in this case, “woman” is defined in relation to attitudes and social expectations which create gendered roles, masculinity versus femininity.¹⁴ This also means that I will be applying a critical approach to the category “women” and the misleading understanding of it as a homogenous category. This is something which will be promoted throughout the thesis, especially in this section. Furthermore, a critical standpoint distinguishes the inaccurate fallacy where a gendered perspective equals a women’s perspective.¹⁵ This is important to be highlighted this early in the thesis as I do not wish to contribute to this harmful and false assumption. As a matter of fact, this thesis will not only reject this fallacy but also illustrate how a gender perspective needs to take into consideration different types of masculinities and femininities. In addition, it is important to highlight how multiple power dimensions can be related to gender and takes different forms depending on the situation.

Specifically, to this thesis, it is relevant to include a broad definition and understanding of gender to make room for a better and inclusive change. This approach is needed to

¹³ Ibid., p.8.

¹⁴ Connell, R. W. & Pearse, Rebecca. *Gender: in world perspective*. 3rd edition. Cambridge: Polity Press. 2015.

¹⁵ Ellerby. *No shortcut to change: an unlikely path to a more gender-equitable world*, p.43.

make sure that not only women are involved to achieve long-lasting social change, but rather everyone. When it comes to addressing and combating men's violence against women, it is of the utmost importance to also include men in the topic as plenty of women's rights activists and feminists have claimed throughout the years: "want to end sexual violence against women? Fix the men"¹⁶. However, due to limitations and my interests, this thesis will focus on the term women. In this case, it is understood as highly generalising and inclusive to all types of people who identify themselves as a woman. This generalisation will however be problematised in relation to how applied methods within MEL-frameworks and social change do not apply a critical perspective on the social category of women.

Furthermore, considering the above mentioned, it can be interesting to discuss how one can use a term such as "woman" in science while still adapting the understanding of it as a social construct. One can wonder how researchers can stand behind a definition while the category relies on constructive and subjective assumptions.¹⁷ To this quandary, bell hooks - the critical race theorist and feminist icon, suggests that:

...feminism is possible not because women share the same experiences, but because it is possible to federate around common resistance to all forms of oppression.¹⁸

Regarding the term feminism, the second chapter *Theory and method* will discuss my approach to a feminist perspective and the intersectional lens to it.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.197.

¹⁷ Letherby, Gayle. *Feminist research in theory and practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 57.

1.2.1 Feminist values

As feminist values permeate the thesis and are the baseline of the research questions, it is important to define what these values essentially are in the context of this paper. The following is not meant to give a universal definition to the term, but rather, provide a definition which will be used in this context. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that the following definition of feminist values is inspired by the intersectional feminist theoretical framework which will be introduced later in the thesis, as well as the previous feminist research presented in chapter three.

The reports apply feminist values if they take into consideration:

Intersectionality – meaning that the reports apply an intersectional approach which is aware of the intersections of different social categories and how that can create power structures and imbalances.

Power dynamics – this goes hand in hand with intersectionality. If the reports apply an intersectional approach, which means that they are taking into consideration multiple power dimensions and structures. Additionally, these dynamics and structures are not only between “men” and “women”, but rather, acknowledge how they relate to multiple femininities and masculinities.

Gender and women’s voices/experiences in the centre – this can be achieved by prioritising and actively putting gendered voices and experiences as well as women’s in the front.

Awareness of the context-specific – the report as well as the project/programme needs to be aware of the context and adapt their approaches to making them context-specific to achieve better results. This is also important from an anti-colonial and

anti-imperialistic perspective as the people who are meant to be affected by the change can express their needs.

Change is non-linear – change in women’s rights can take one step forward only for it to shift politically and take two steps back. Therefore, the report needs to address this issue by acknowledging the fact that change is not linear, as well as present alternative solutions.

Participation is key – this is part of the feminist tradition which values the participation of those who are being affected. In this case, the report needs to illustrate how they incorporate various participatory activities.

Knowledge production – the report as well as the NGO in question should be aware of their positionality and the power dynamics within which relates to the knowledge production in correlation to the reports they produce. The type of information and outcomes they choose to highlight should be motivated and relate to the other values.

These values do not necessarily mean that they are essentially feminist, instead, the focus is on how the researcher uses them, in what context, and how they together form a foundation on which feminism has and is still standing on. These are values which have been highlighted and fought for in multiple feminist waves, making them part of a feminist tradition and history. This section will set the base for the analysis in chapter four as I will be studying if the reports relate to the values introduced above and in what ways.

1.2.2 Primary and secondary material

For my thesis, I have chosen two different NGO reports that cover the implementation process and lessons learned, in other words, the social change that has occurred due to a programme or project. The reason why I have chosen these reports is to find answers to the thesis' research questions which will examine if they apply feminist values, and if they do, how exactly do they do that? Additionally, these reports will provide a foundation for how the incorporation of feminist values can affect the outcomes of a project as a way to measure social change.

The reports which I have chosen to be my primary material are the following:

- ◆ “Challenging and Changing Harmful Social Norms Contributing to Violence Against Women and Girls: Enough Campaign Progress and Learnings Report 2016-2019” by Oxfam International, 1-36, 2020.
- ◆ “WE GO! Women’s economic independence, a way out of violence: policies and practices to promote women’s economic empowerment to be able to leave violent relationships” by ActionAid, 1-32, 2017.

The first report is by Oxfam International, one of the largest human rights and development organisations that works with issues such as gender justice, women’s rights, conflict, and disasters. The report for the worldwide *Enough Campaign* “Challenging and changing harmful social norms contributing to violence against women and girls”¹⁹ was published in 2020. As the title reveals, this campaign aimed to end violence against women and girls (VAWG) and gender-based violence (GBV) by “challenging and changing the harmful social norms that contribute to abuse”.²⁰ The purpose of this report was to cover the first three years of the campaign, from 2016 to 2019 by documenting

¹⁹ Oxfam International. Challenging and changing harmful social norms contributing to violence against women and girls: Enough Campaign progress and learnings report 2016-2019. 2020. https://oi-files-d8-prod.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2021-03/OxfamMELReport_FULL_Page_format.pdf

²⁰ Ibid., p.1.

and assessing progress and results which were based on the campaign's MEL-method Theory of Change.²¹

The second report, "WE GO! Women's economic independence, a way out of violence"²² was published by ActionAid in 2017. ActionAid is also one of the biggest development organisations that work with human rights, poverty, and injustice. In this case, the report covers an EU co-funded project which lasted for two years. The purpose of the project was to empower the survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) and local anti-violence centres (AVCs) and shelters.²³

The main reason why I have decided to use these reports as my primary material is to provide a wide range of actors working with women's rights and particularly men's violence against women. Additionally, as will be introduced in the *Method* chapter, according to critical content analysis, the researcher needs to have in mind the context and background of the text, something which can be achieved by the diverse selection of reports.²⁴ Two, the way which I will be analysing these reports is mainly by studying the applied methods and sections where the impacts and lessons learned are presented. I justify this by referring to my research questions as well as what my purpose and aim of this thesis are. However, it is still vital to understand the background and contexts of these reports, in accordance with critical content analysis as a method.

As I have stated earlier, in addition to my primary material, I will be introducing different types of articles and books which will be the foundation of my secondary material and previous research. All these articles and books discuss topics relevant to my thesis which are social change, development, violence against women, monitoring, evaluating, and learning frameworks, feminist approaches, et cetera. To find the referred articles, I had to

²¹ Ibid., p.2f.

²² Scaricabarozzi, Rossana. WE GO! Women's economic independence, a way out of violence: policies and practices to promote women's economic empowerment to be able to leave violence relationships. ActionAid. 2017. <http://www.wegoproject.eu/sites/default/files/media/Final-Narrative-Report-Executive-Summary.pdf>

²³ Ibid., p.4.

²⁴ See chapter *Method* for in-depth introduction about the method critical content analysis.

use specific search words in LUBsearch and other useful websites. These search words were: “women in development”, “gender and development”, “social change and development” and “feminism and social change”.

The articles and books that I finally decided to use have in one way or another, elements of feminism and critical approaches, something which is a conscious choice. This is due to the feminist and critical aim and purpose of my thesis. Therefore, I wanted these values to permeate the whole thesis, including the chosen articles and books.

1.2.3 Ethical considerations in research

Ethical considerations in research are a set of principles meant to guide the researcher in conducting good scientific practice. These considerations cover three main areas:²⁵

- Protecting the rights of research participants
- Enhancing research validity
- Maintaining scientific integrity.

It is worth mentioning that even if a research idea is meant to be valuable to society, it does not justify the violation of human rights or the dignity of the participants.²⁶ There are six ethical issues which a researcher needs to consider to conduct ethically approved research.²⁷

Voluntary participation	The participants are engaging voluntarily and can choose to leave the research at any time.
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²⁵ Bhandari, Pritha. Ethical considerations in research: types & examples. *Scribbr*. 18.10.2021. <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/research-ethics/> (Accessed 08.04.2022)

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

Informed consent	Participants are informed about the purpose, risks, and aims of the research before they agree or do not agree to participate.
Anonymity	The researcher does not collect any personal data which can be used to identify the participants.
Confidentiality	The researcher keeps the participants' information hidden and stored safely. No one can have access to or be able to link data to the participants.
Potential for harm	Any type of harm such as physical, social, or psychological is meant to be an absolute minimum or non-existent.
Results communication	The research needs to be free of plagiarism and that the researcher presents and represents the results accurately while taking into consideration reliability, validity, and transparency.

With the above mentioned in mind, I will now explain how the ethical considerations can be related to my thesis. The ethical considerations refer to the social science research field which imposes accountability and responsibility on me as a researcher despite the chosen materials, methods, and other choices. However, given the type of material that this thesis will be examining, which are reports conducted by major NGOs, it is not highly relevant. Regardless, I will still strive to follow and consider the above mentioned six ethical considerations. In my case, I will be doing that by using the correct reference system, I will not plagiarise others' work and follow good and true research ethical principles and guidelines provided by Lund's university.²⁸ Additionally, I will take into consideration

²⁸ Lund University. *Guidelines and regulations on plagiarism and deceitful plagiarism in first-, second- and third-cycle education at Lund University*. 13.12.2012.

reliability, validity, and transparency. To give an example, these considerations have influenced my choice of material. By doing that, I made sure that the reports in question follow the ethical considerations.

It is also worth mentioning what must already have been noticed, which is the use of ‘I’ but more precisely first-person singular in the thesis. This is not just my preferred writing style, but rather my way to criticise traditional styles of academic writing where “the author” and “one” are meant to represent distance and professionalism. However, it is important to admit to myself as well as the reader how research can be political and by using ‘I’ and making myself as a researcher present in my thesis, I am also taking responsibility for what I write.²⁹ It is a way of understanding the feminist slogan “the personal is political” and as bell hooks writes “research is inherently political, structured in hierarchies of power among researcher...”³⁰. Further on, I will dive deeper into feminist reflexivity in chapter two when introducing the theory of choice.

https://www.lunduniversity.lu.se/sites/www.lunduniversity.lu.se/files/guidelines_regulations_on_plagiarism_deceitful_plagiarism.pdf

²⁹ Letherby, 2003.

³⁰ Gottfried. “Introduction: engaging women’s communities: dilemmas and contradictions in feminist research, p.14.

2 Background

This chapter aims to put forward the various objectives that motivate measuring social change, both in theory and in practice. There seems to be a distinction between what NGOs aim for when working within a MEL-framework to measure change in their programmes, and what actually happens. Additionally, it is of relevance to introduce the current monitoring and evaluating frameworks and approaches that are prevalent within the developmental and human rights field.

Men's violence against women can be measured, defined, and discussed on multiple levels and by different tools, i.e., policies and laws which act to criminalise, implementation of global treaties such as the Declaration on the elimination of violence against women³¹, quantifiable variables or measuring indexes such as *WHO's* statistics of violence against women³².

2.1 Why do we measure social change?

In “Capturing change in women's realities: a critical overview of current monitoring & evaluating frameworks and approaches”, Srilatha Batliwala and Alexandra Pittman create a critical overview of current MEL-methods. In the introduction, Batliwala and Pittman criticise why we are so focused on measuring and in particular measuring social change. They argue that any critique of MEL-frameworks whether it is gendered or not must begin

³¹ United Nations General Assembly. *Declaration on the elimination of violence against women*. New York, 20.12.1993. A/RES/48/104. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-elimination-violence-against-women>. (Accessed 21.04.2022)

³² World Health Organisation. Violence against women. *United Nations*. 09.03.2021. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women> (Accessed 21.04.2022)

with the fundamental question of why we monitor and evaluate at all.³³ The answer to this question can be on two levels: in theory and what is done in practice. Batliwala and Pittman present five basic objectives which motivate MEL. One of them begins **to learn how change happens** which means learning what strategies and tools worked, and which did not. This learning process is necessary to build more effective change strategies in the future.³⁴ The second reason that the authors put forward is **to analyse our role in the change process**. “Our role” in this case refers to everyone involved in the situation; the development and human rights organisations that work with these issues, but also to the locals. This is important to identify cause-effect relationships.³⁵ **To empower our constituencies** is seen as the third reason why social change is measured. The people who are being affected by the change and who the change is aimed at, need to be engaged in the change process to feel empowered and strengthened. This leads them to want to sustain, extend, and expand change.³⁶ Batliwala and Pittman also argue that measuring social change plays a fundamental role in **practising accountability and to build credibility**. Organisations working with development issues need to be accountable to their donors, constituencies, partner organisations, other activists, and the world at large. This is done by establishing and building on legitimacy, credibility, and transparency. Finally, in theory, measuring change can be needed **to advance our advocacy for social justice**. This step is needed to demonstrate how change has advanced social justice goals and aims but also to mobilise support for future work.³⁷

However, Batliwala and Pittman argue that in practice, MEL-frameworks are more likely to be motivated by other reasons. Firstly, donors’ requirements can be a substantial reason that motivates why social change is measured. This is to ensure that donors’ funds have been utilised correctly and to demonstrate that they are supporting effective work. The second driving factor is to sustain or obtain more funding as donors are more likely to invest (further invest or invest in a new organisation), in organisations with a proven track

³³ Batliwala and Pittman, 2010, p.7.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

record of change. Thirdly, in practice, MEL-frameworks are motivated to support public fundraising or advocacy work. This is done by showing how successful some approaches, projects, or programmes have been.³⁸

2.2 Current monitoring and evaluating frameworks and approaches

Whether it is in theory or in practice, there are a few common MEL-frameworks, i.e., theoretical, and methodological frameworks, as well as methods used when measuring change. The following section is a short introduction to current monitoring and evaluating frameworks with a focus on the methods which are presented in the reports.

<i>Causal frameworks</i>	demonstrate the causal and logical causalities that lead to programme impact.
<i>Contribution frameworks</i>	track multiple and variable factors involved in producing change and highlight change actors.
<i>Gender analysis frameworks</i>	may draw from causal and contribution frameworks, but with a focus on feminist and gender approaches.
<i>Advocacy and network assessment frameworks</i>	may draw from causal and contribution frameworks, with a focus on exploring

³⁸ Ibid.

how change happens through an advocacy lens.

According to Batliwala and Pittman, within Causal frameworks, the three most popular approaches are the *Logical framework approach*, *Results-based management approaches*, and the *Theory of change approach*. From this category, the *Theory of change approach* will be highlighted as it is prevalent in the Oxfam report. *Theory of Change (ToC)* as an approach “makes explicit assumptions or theories about why and how a program should create social change”.³⁹ When using this method, Batliwala and Pittman mean that one maps out the steps and correlation between programme activities, goals, and short-term and long-term outcomes. This is while taking into consideration the context, key actors, as well as unintended consequences. The *Theory of change* emphasises the role of the constituency and their role in social change.⁴⁰

Secondly, contribution frameworks include *Outcome mapping* and *Participatory approaches*. In this case, a brief introduction of both the above-mentioned methods will be given as ActionAid’s report uses both and Oxfam also applies *participatory approaches*. To begin with, *outcome mapping* can be described by Batliwala and Pittman as a method that “recognises that the promotion of social justice is essential about changing how people relate to each other and their environment”.⁴¹ This MEL–method focuses on tracking outcomes that are a result of changes in behaviours, relationships, or activities with the constituencies. The mapping targets contributions to change, boundary partners which refer to the people targeted or potentially influenced by a programme or project, and progress markers. The article authors mention that there are different variations in *outcome mapping approaches*, but they all have in common the above-referenced three core concepts.⁴²

³⁹ Ibid., p. 26.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.27.

⁴² Ibid., p 27f.

As stated by Batliwala and Pittman, *participatory approaches* in MEL-frameworks aim to integrate the people, from various communities, by involving them in every step of the evaluation process. This includes integrating the constituency in the programme designing phase, as well as which measuring methods to use and in the actual data collection and analysis. The article authors state that these approaches are particularly valuable when: “striving for contextually relevant outcomes that respect local traditions, customs, and productions of knowledge”.⁴³ In recent times, *participatory approaches* have become popular in the development sector. For example, large NGOs such as ActionAid and Oxfam have both adopted them in recent programmes and projects. This popularisation is highly due to the applied methods being flexible and adaptable to local, national, or transnational socio-political change.⁴⁴

⁴³ Ibid., p. 29.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

3 Theory and method

One could argue that there is a connection, a bridge, between theory and method, especially in feminist research and feminist methodology. However, to unravel this topic, it is important to know what we mean when we talk about feminist research. This is a topic which has been discussed by feminist researchers throughout history and one way to put it is that feminist research is "...not about women but research for women to be used in transforming the sexist society".⁴⁵ Therefore, the following will introduce feminist research and the bridge between theory and method.

Another attempt to define what feminist research is by claiming that it is feminist theory in practice.⁴⁶ Feminist research has a long history, dating back to the women's movements during the 1960s and 1970s throughout the world, but more primarily in the West. Considering that the origins of feminist research have its roots in activism, many feminist scholars have found inspiration in the research questions generated by women's movements.⁴⁷

When applied in research, feminism is seen and understood as both theory and practice.⁴⁸ Something that all feminist researchers can agree on is the fact that they take a critical standpoint on issues that are regarded as "women's issues" such as reproductive health rights, gender-based violence, and the balance between work and home life. Consequently, feminist research tends to be political and commits to social change by challenging and broadening the traditional boundaries.⁴⁹ Additionally, a feminist researcher is conscious of the knowledge production that will have an impact on women's

⁴⁵ Letherby, 2003.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ackerly, Brooke & True, Jacqui. Back to the future: feminist theory, activism, and doing feminist research in the age of globalization. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 33, 2010, p.464–472.

⁴⁸ Letherby, 2003, p.4.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

lives. For that reason, feminist research tends to take into consideration not only what type of research to conduct, but also *how*. This can be seen through the researcher's choice of methods, and topics, as well as how to position oneself in relation to one's research.⁵⁰

3.1 Theory – intersectional feminism

As previously mentioned, the theoretical framework of this thesis is a feminist perspective. The feminist approach which will be adopted is of the intersectional type, meaning that it takes into consideration how different types of categories such as race, gender, class, sexuality etc., can intersect and cause a context-specific intersection leading to the creation of oppressive structures and power dimensions. Kimberlé Crenshaw, the one who coined the term defines intersectionality as:

It's basically a lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other. We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality, or immigrant status. What's often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts.⁵¹

An intersectional feminist approach illustrates how patriarchal structures are harmful and oppressive to not only mainly white ciswomen⁵² but rather everyone, in specific groups that are marginalised. The patriarchal society is supported and maintained by racist, classist, discriminatory, homo-, bi-, trans-, and queerphobic structures which together

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Steinmetz, Katy. She Coined the Term 'Intersectionality' Over 30 Years Ago. Here's What It Means to Her Today. *Time*. 20.02.2020. <https://time.com/5786710/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality/> (Accessed 11.04.2022)

⁵² "ciswomen" is short for "cisgender women" which is a term for non-transgender women, women who were assigned female at birth and still identify with the social category "woman".

oppress and subordinate specific groups.⁵³ Therefore, it is vital to challenge the category “gender” and male domination, not just “add gender” to the mix and believe that the problem will be solved.⁵⁴

An additional reason why intersectional feminism permeates the thesis is that it is a tool which can be used to make the invisible visible, in other words, women who are marginalised as well as structures that cooperate. Intersectionality can also be used in a way to include different types of groups instead of excluding them, groups which are often cast in the shadows, for example, BIPOC⁵⁵ transwomen. An intersectional approach also implicates a consciousness of one’s position, relating to the feminist tradition of reflexivity. Finally, intersectionality is also about highlighting *who* is behind the production of knowledge and the importance of including all types of people, especially those affected by the change in the research to produce better and context-specific methods to measure social change.⁵⁶

Feminist reflexivity is an important part of research that claims to be feminist. It is the notion of one’s consciousness and position in relation to the research that is being conducted. Therefore, I aim to continuously reflect on my position and its relation to the research, information, and results. In accordance with the purpose of this thesis, it is vital to reflect and be aware of the purpose of measuring social change. I, we, need to ask ourselves why we want to measure social change, which categories we have chosen to focus on and why, what are we reproducing, how are we measuring, can it be harmful to the people, and what are our prejudices and so on.⁵⁷

⁵³ hooks, bell. *Feminist theory: from margin to center*. New York: Routledge, 2015, 3d edition.

⁵⁴ Ellerby, 2017.

⁵⁵ BIPOC is short for Black, Indigenous, Person Of Colour.

⁵⁶ Gorelick, Sherry. “Contradictions of feminist methodology”. In Gottfried, Heidi (ed.). *Feminism and social change: bridging theory and practice*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996, p.38.

⁵⁷ Letherby, 2003.

3.2 Methods & methodologies – can they be feminist?

Which methods are feminist? Which methods should one use to presume a feminist analysis? Similar questions have been raised by the feminist critique of social science research methods and it remains a hot topic. As mentioned, there is no such thing as a “feminist method” or methods that are better to achieve a feminist analysis.⁵⁸ A method is just “a technique, a tool for doing research, for gathering evidence, for collecting data.”⁵⁹ However, it can be worth mentioning how qualitative methods have been prominent within feminist research. The reason that plenty of feminist researchers consider qualitative methods such as interviews and surveys is because they are more compatible with feminist principles and leave room for reflexivity.⁶⁰

With the above mentioned in mind, it is worth differentiating between method and methodology. Now that we know that there are no methods that are essentially feminist but rather how the researcher is using the method and for what purpose, the same cannot be said about methodology. The methodology can be easily described as thinking about the method or theorising the method, it is the notion of:

...describing and analysing the methods used, evaluating their value, detailing the dilemmas their usage causes, and exploring the relationship between the methods that we use and how we use them, and the production and presentation of our data...⁶¹

⁵⁸ Acker, Joan, Barry, Katy and Esseveld, Joke. “Objectivity and truth: problems in doing feminist research”. In Gottfried, Heidi (ed.). *Feminism and social change: bridging theory and practice*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996, p. 60

⁵⁹ Letherby, 2003, p.6.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.5.

In contrast to methods, there are various feminist approaches to methodologies. It is impossible to claim that there is only one feminist methodology, instead, there are a few components that bind all feminist methodologies together.⁶² These are: "...the belief that researchers and participants are equal, and that the research should be mutually beneficial, characterized by give-and-take".⁶³ Furthermore, feminist methodologies are also distinguished by the value of reflexivity and "...the belief that researchers should continually reflect about issues of power and positionality in their work."⁶⁴ Additionally, the critical methodology is also relevant to highlight and reflect on in relation to the proposed research questions. Critical methodology can be:

...to involve a *de-emphasis* on method per se, the need for methodological innovation and the continual critical examination of the assumptions that undergird methods...⁶⁵

Within critical methodology, theory development and research are essential. More focus is applied to the purpose and the theoretical framework behind a method which is something that will be taken into consideration when analysing the MEL-methods in the reports.⁶⁶ Furthermore, critical methodology enables the possibility to analyse and study methods as theories. In the context of this thesis, the applied methods used in the reports will therefore be studied not only as tools but also as theories to answer the proposed research questions.⁶⁷ In addition, in the field of critical methodology, it is not a surprise if the analyse leads to method development. This process is described due to the:

⁶² Krook, Mona Lena. Finns det feministiska metoder inom samhällsvetenskaplig forskning? *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift*, vol. 2-3, 2006, p.77–89.

⁶³ Huisman, Kimberly. "Does this mean you're not going to come visit me anymore?": An inquiry into ethics of reciprocity and positionality in feminist ethnographic research. *Sociological Inquiry*, vol. 78, no.3, 2008, p.374. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-682X.2008.00244.x>

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Yanchar, Stephen C, Gantt, Edwin E., & Clay, Samuel L. On the nature of a critical methodology. *Theory & psychology*. Vol. 15, no.1, 2005, 27-50. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354305049743>

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Given the contingent nature of research, method innovation and use could only be viewed as an evolving, theoretically informed process occurring synchronously with the critical examination.⁶⁸

Arguably, critical methodology and feminism can be compatible as they share the same critical standpoint towards different parts of research. Feminist research and knowledge production emphasise feminist reflexivity which is what critical methodology essentially is: the reflection on one's positionality and critiquing research, including methods. Both feminist and critical methodology aims to have a critical and reflective standpoint, especially regarding methodologies, in other words, how research is being conducted and for what purpose.⁶⁹

3.3 Method - Critical content analysis

With a common ground on methods and methodologies, especially the feminist critique of them, it is of interest to turn to the research method which will be used to answer the research questions. The method of choice is critical content analysis (CCA) which will be complemented by a gendered perspective.

The reason behind applying a gendered perspective to CCA is primarily due to the complex nature of the topic in question. Social change, especially within women's rights and men's violence against women cannot be approached from only one perspective, it is vital to apply various tools in order to get a holistic, true, and just picture of the situation. Additionally, to achieve and fulfil the aim, purpose, and answer the research questions of the thesis, it is necessary to have multiple approaches in mind, especially tools that take into consideration a gendered perspective. Therefore, the critical part of the content analysis will be achieved through a gendered perspective.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Letherby, 2003. And Yanchar, Gantt and Clay. On the nature of a critical methodology, 2005.

A critical content analysis will be used to disassemble and analyse the primary material, i.e., the reports. Content analysis in general is a tool to ascertain the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts. This method is of the qualitative type, meaning that it applies to data which is texts and not numbers or statistics which is what quantitative methods are for. There are two main types of content analysis: conceptual analysis and relational analysis. The first mentioned refers to the process of determining the existence and frequency of certain words or concepts in a text. On the other hand, relational analysis is more about examining the relationships among concepts in a text.⁷⁰

There are various advantages and disadvantages when applying content analysis as a method in research. One advantage is that content analysis allows a sort of closeness to written data while the researcher is directly examining communication using text. It also provides useful historical and cultural insights over time as well as complex concepts. However, content analysis can at the same time be reductionistic which means that it often tends to simplify and reduce complex issues to simple categories. Furthermore, there is a fallacy which often leads to the research ignoring the context and background in which the text was produced within.⁷¹ Nonetheless, due to the awareness of the common mistakes, it will be easier to avoid falling into the pitfalls. One way to avoid the mistakes is by introducing the chosen reports with an adequate background.

In the case of this thesis, the purpose of content analysis is to mainly identify how the reports have applied feminist values within MEL and how the incorporation of such values affects the outcomes. However, it will not only be a content analysis but rather a critical one. Critical content analysis (CCA) is described as a flexible method which is not limited to text selection, and it is like “thinking with theory”.⁷² As a method, CCA requires the researcher to be informed and to analyse the framework of *every aspect* of

⁷⁰ Colombia Public Health. Content analysis. *Colombia University*. 2019.

<https://www.publichealth.columbia.edu/research/population-health-methods/content-analysis> (Accessed 13.04.2022)

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Utt, Jamie & Short, Kathy G.. Critical content analysis: a flexible method for thinking with theory. *Understanding and Dismantling Privilege*. Vol. 8, No. 2. 2018. P.1-7. (p.3)

the research process. Additionally, CCA challenges the notion that the research process itself should be power neutral, as “text is never neutral” and neither is the process by which text is analysed.⁷³ This standing point of not seeing research as objective and neutral can be seen in the traditional feminist research which has been stated earlier when quoting bell hooks who suggests that research is inherently political.⁷⁴

The concept in CCA *thinking with theory* is also a way to internalise the theoretical approaches presented in one’s research as well as to understand and motivate every part of the thesis and every choice. Therefore, it can be illustrated by not simply applying a specific theory to a material, but rather considering the contexts of the material to draw thematic analysis with adequate depth and thoughtfulness.⁷⁵ CCA is part of the critical research tradition including critical race theories which can result in a profound analysis of complex issues of power and oppression.⁷⁶

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ See section *Ethical considerations in research* and note 23.

⁷⁵ Utt and Short. *Critical content analysis: a flexible method for thinking with theory*, 2018, p.3f.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.4.

4 Literature overview & previous research

The research area for social change and more precisely how to measure social change within the development and the NGO-sector is extensive. Feminists have proclaimed their critique of existing MEL-methods and the frameworks that have been established. This chapter will present a literature overview of previous research on monitoring, evaluating, and learning (MEL) practices within the NGO-sector and how it relates to measuring social change. Today, most of the research on and about MEL-frameworks and applied methods originates from researchers within the NGO-world which leads to their research often being linked to a specific organisation and/or having a practical anchoring.

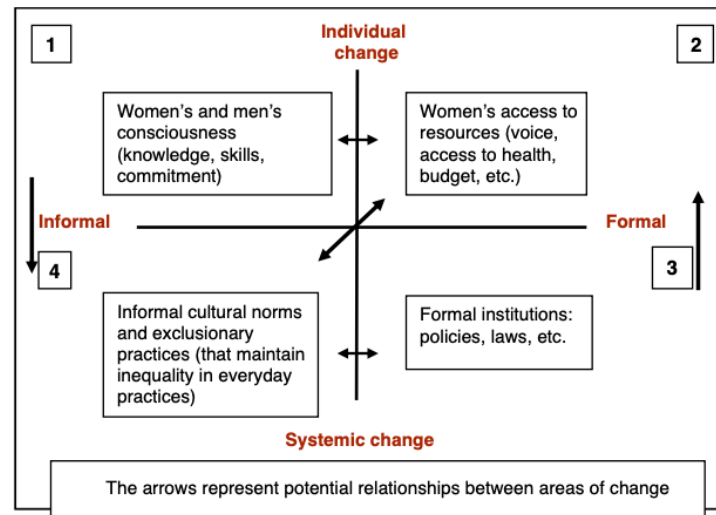
The knowledge production of this thesis builds on previous research on this topic. Furthermore, this chapter aims to build a bridge between the critique of MEL-methods which comes from development discourses, human rights, and feminism. When considering these various discourses, it is a way to fill the gaps and contribute to new directions and critical perspectives *between* and *within* development, human rights, and feminism.

4.1 Measuring the unmeasurable

There have been several attempts for MEL-method critique within the development sector, both from an academic perspective as well as from researchers working with these issues in practice. According to Batliwala and Pittman, the main critique has been towards approaches within MEL-frameworks and tools and how they do not catch the complexity

of measuring social change regarding women’s rights, particularly men’s violence against women. The change in women’s rights can often be illustrated by taking two steps forward, only for it to take one step backwards.⁷⁷

Jeanette Kloosterman, Esther Benning, and Rex Fyles affirm the previously mentioned in their article “‘Measuring the unmeasurable’: gender mainstreaming and cultural change”. In this article, the authors study structural changes related to gender equality and how they can be



visible within a framework of an Oxfam project called *Measuring Milestones Initiative*. The main conclusion the article authors put forward is that transformational change happens because of continuous and consistent work on gender mainstreaming. Kloosterman et al. also highlight how change in gender relations can start in multiple ways, therefore, it is necessary to apply different tools to not only measure but also, generate the change.⁷⁸ The *Measuring Milestones Initiatives* aimed to make visible changes that occur at the “deep structure” level of development organisations and in the communities, they work in. Consequently, Kloosterman et al. mapped out the areas of change and the relation between individual and systematic change, and formal and informal change which is illustrated to the right.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Batliwala and Pittman, 2010.

⁷⁸ Kloosterman, Jeanette, Benning, Esther & Fyles, Rex. ‘Measuring the unmeasurable’: gender mainstreaming and cultural change. *Gender & Development*. Vol. 20, no. 3, 531-545, 2012.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 534f.

The MEL–method used to capture the structural change in Kloosterman et al.’s article is called the most significant change (MSC). The purpose of this method was to collect answers from constituencies to questions such as “What has been the most significant change in your life since xx organisation started to work in xx programme in your country?”⁸⁰ Due to the complexity of the topic, Kloosterman et al. argue that MSC proved to be useful and an advantage as change stories made cultural and structural structures more accessible and visible. Therefore, it became easier to grasp and explain the changes as well as the structures with this method, instead of purely quantitative data collection methods, something which is explained further with the quote given below:⁸¹

We concluded that the change stories showed a continuum of change, in which the transformation of cultural and deep structures take place in small and varying steps, undertaken by individuals, within particular projects and parts of organisations. These changes reveal complexity: circular, unexpected, and even backward movements can occur on the road to gender justice.⁸²

Sally Engle Merry argues in *The seductions of quantification* that the reason why quantitative data is insufficient within these issues is mainly due to quantification being seductive and diminishing complex social phenomena. Merry explains that quantitative data such as indicators inevitably lead to the stripping of the context, history, and meaning.⁸³ The main thesis that Merry puts forward in her book is that quantitative forms of knowledge, particularly indicators, lead to “oversimplification, homogenization, and the neglect of the surrounding social structure”.⁸⁴

In *The seductions of quantification*, Merry mentions that indicators as a method to measure social change is often viewed as non-political. However, Merry highlights how the production and use of indicators are constructed to reflect the social and cultural

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.535.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 537.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Merry, 2016.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.1.

worlds which benefit the creators and actors of power within which they are formed.⁸⁵ In other words, indicators are not only a tool for oversimplification but also a tool for power and knowledge production, Merry says. To exemplify, Merry suggests that when using indicators to measure violence against women, it becomes a way to define and categorise the phenomenon.⁸⁶

Merry presents the two types of data collection on violence against women: one focuses on states' efforts to combat the violence, such as laws passed, shelters built etc. The other type assesses the prevalence of the issue by gathering data on the number of reported incidents.⁸⁷ Both of these types are necessary for measuring the changes within the problem, Merry states, however, Merry also points out the various limitations of gathering such data. One extensive limitation is the substantial dark figure of hidden, unreported violence. Merry implies that especially when it comes to men's violence against women, due to the complexity of the issue, it is widely recognised that not all cases of violence are reported. According to Merry, this has to do with multiple power dynamics, patriarchal structures, discrimination, and lack of justice within the legal system etc.⁸⁸ Consequently, what Merry argues for is that indicators on this issue seek to measure the unmeasurable by not only oversimplification and stripping the context, but also not taking into consideration the largely hidden figure.

Furthermore, Merry mentions that quantification is supposed to refer to universally understood categories, however, this poses an issue when measuring violence against women. Merry illustrates this by giving an example of how rape in marriage is not considered a violation in many places and sexual violence can take different forms depending on the context. Therefore, while constructing categories meant to be universal to measure violence against women, Merry highlights how the quantitative indicator-based methods, are set out to measure the unmeasurable.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, this critique does

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.4f.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.44f.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.50f.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p.51.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.75–91.

not imply that indicators are worthless in measuring violence against women, there are still efforts being made by NGOs and other organisations to adopt a more complex approach that is permeated by human rights and feminist values. In *The seduction of quantification*, Merry also emphasises the need for vernacularisation, the “process by which global ideas, such as human rights . . . , enter into local situations and are refashioned in local contexts”. Global and “universal” indicators are created in a space which differs from the way men’s violence against women is understood in the local context.⁹⁰

4.2 Feminist MEL

Equality Fund together with Genesis Analytics have conducted an overview of current practices within MEL from a feminist perspective in a report called *Feminist approaches to monitoring, evaluating & learning*.⁹¹ The reason why I use reports in this literature overview is that I aim to integrate research conducted within the field of development by actual development actors. In this report, the authors put forwards three ways of recurrent feminist approaches to MEL: feminist approaches to MEL in any organisation, feminist organisations that use a variety of MEL forms, and feminist organisations that explicitly use feminist approaches to MEL.⁹² The report also suggests a three-category framework for enabling and implementing feminist approaches to MEL. According to the report, the first category is strategic enablers which cover organisational approaches and policies that support feminist approaches to MEL. The second category that the report highlights are enabling methods: i.e., methods and tools that emphasise a feminist intent and

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.110f.

⁹¹ Wyatt, Alyna, Podems, Donna, Durieux, Monet and Evans, Kirra. Feminist approaches to monitoring, evaluation & learning: overview of current practices. *Genesis Analytics & Equality Fund*. June 2021. <https://equalityfund.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Feminist-MEL-Research-Overview-Paper-FINAL-1.pdf>

⁹² Ibid., p.4f

therefore implement feminist approaches within MEL. The third category covers the institutional and human processes that support the above-mentioned.⁹³

The approaches and frameworks to feminist MEL proposed in Equality Fund's report are meant to identify in which ways feminist MEL is prevalent in development and human rights organisations. Additionally, the three categories suggest what is needed on multiple levels to enable and implement feminist MEL in the first place.⁹⁴ This can be of interest when analysing how ActionAid and Oxfam relate to applying feminist MEL and in which categories and approaches, they lean on in the reports.

Donna R. Podems defines the essential components of feminist evaluation as something that emphasises “participatory, empowering, and social justice agendas”.⁹⁵ In “Feminist evaluation and gender approaches: there is a difference?”⁹⁶ Podems argues for a distinction between feminist evaluation and gender approaches. Feminist evaluation is described as flexible and as a way of thinking about evaluation, rather than a strict framework or a specific approach.⁹⁷ For that reason, there is no one agreed-upon definition; however, Denise Seigart puts forward six fundamental elements of a feminist evaluation in the *Encyclopedia of Evaluation* which feminist evaluation theorists agree upon.⁹⁸ According to Seigart, gender inequalities that lead to social injustice are at the centre of feminist evaluation. The second element of feminist evaluation is a systematic and structuralist approach to discrimination or inequality based on gender. Seigart also highlights how evaluation is a political act, the context in which evaluation operates is politicised and the personal experiences, perspectives, and characteristics evaluators bring to evaluations lead to a particular political stance.⁹⁹ Feminist evaluation is also

⁹³ Ibid., p.6-11.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Podems, Donna R.. Feminist Evaluation and Gender Approaches: There's a difference? *Journal of Multidisciplinary Evaluation*. Vol. 6, No, 14, 2010, p.3.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.4.

⁹⁸ Seigart, Denise. “Feminist evaluation”. In *Encyclopedia of Evaluation*, Sandra Mathison (ed.), p.154-157. California: Thousand Oaks, 2005.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

about acknowledging that knowledge is a powerful resource that serves an explicit or implicit purpose. Therefore, Seigart argues that the fifth element of feminist evaluation is the understanding of knowledge as a resource of and for the people who create, hold, and share it. Consequently, the evaluation or research process can lead to negative or positive effects on the people involved. Finally, Seigart mentions another element that is fundamental in feminist evaluation, namely, that there are multiple ways of knowing, and some ways are privileged over others.¹⁰⁰

Podems argues that feminist evaluation is not only considered to be political, rather; it takes the findings and analysis to a new level. This is however the case with anything that is influenced by feminist theory Podems means, because an evaluation adopting a gender approach only *identifies* the differences between men and women. On the other hand, feminist evaluation explores *why* these differences exist and challenges women's subordinate position in societies.¹⁰¹ Kara Ellerby in *No shortcut to gender*¹⁰² poses a likewise issue with the applied methods that already exist within MEL-frameworks. These methods rarely deal with the questions of *why* these inequalities exist or how they are linked to each other.¹⁰³ The cause of this issue when it comes to men's violence against women is due to it being seen as a "woman's issue" and a private matter, argues Ellerby. She further explains how change within this issue is stuck in dichotomies and the heterosexual binary.¹⁰⁴

Carol Miller and Laura Haylock argue in line with the above mentioned by focusing on the complexity of gender roles, gender hierarchies, and patriarchal structures. In their article "Capturing change in women's lives: the experiences of Oxfam Canada in applying feminist evaluation principles to monitoring and evaluation practice", they describe the efforts made by Oxfam Canada to develop a mixed-methods approach to MEL rooted in feminist principles. This experience was limited to a multi-year, donor co-

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Podems. *Feminist Evaluation and Gender Approaches: There's a difference?* 2010, p.8.

¹⁰² Ellerby, 2017.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p.73.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.163.

funded, women's rights programme called *Engendering change*.¹⁰⁵ This programme aimed to:

...explore[s] what applying feminist principles to evaluation practice offers to organisations seeking to tell the complex story of how development programmes can contribute to lasting changes in gender power relations.¹⁰⁶

The idea for *Engendering change* was rooted in the challenges which are prevalent in the evaluation part of the development sector. Challenges such as how to report on results on multiple levels within a logical framework approach but mainly how to capture the non-linear change, and how does change even look like?¹⁰⁷

With the challenges and feminist principles in consideration, Miller and Haylock put forward a “feminist learning system” (FLS) in relation to *Engendering change* to illustrate how feminist principles can be integrated with an evaluation process. The “feminist learning system” is a methodological merging between feminist and developmental evaluation which aspired to be interconnected, non-linear, respond to contextual needs, and focused on learning while meeting back-donor requirements.¹⁰⁸ FLS consists of five key elements: Theory of change, primarily quantitative performance measurement framework, mid-term evaluating and learning reviews & case studies, final evaluation with reflective and capacity-building exercises, and social accountability surveys.¹⁰⁹ Both Miller and Haylock argue that these elements demonstrate how FLS as a method was developed by taking into consideration multiple actors: donors, the organisation in question, partner organisations, and the constituency. Additionally, there was economic pressure, the need to include feminist values, and social accountability.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Miller and Haylock. Capturing change in women's lives: the experiences of Oxfam Canada in applying feminist evaluation principles to monitoring and evaluation practice. 2014.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. p.292.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. p.294.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p.297.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

The learnings and experiences of this system are developed further in another article by Miller and Haylock, “Merging developmental and feminist evaluation to monitor and evaluate transformative social change”.¹¹¹ In this article, the authors indicate that Feminist Learning System represents a merging of developmental and feminist evaluation principles. These two components were compatible as they highlighted each other’s strengths and filled the gaps which occur when only applying one approach to evaluation. Miller and Haylock mention that developmental evaluation brought in the processes that made it easier to adapt programmes and projects when facing unpredictable situations. Feminist evaluation, on the other hand, brought attention to and challenged gender inequalities that lead to social injustice as well as an understanding of complex social change. Miller and Haylock state that together, feminist and developmental evaluation overlap when both seek to redefine the role of the evaluator.¹¹²

Another team at Oxfam built and evolved on previous research by viewing MEL as a tool for bringing about social justice. Andrea Azevedo, Rosa Wilson Garwood, and Alexia Pretari argue in “Bringing about social justice through feminist research for monitoring, evaluation, and learning? A conversation from Oxfam GB” how feminist values that shape and carry out MEL activities are needed for social change.¹¹³ Azevedo, Garwood, and Pretari reflect on the importance of engaging the constituency at different steps of the project cycle as well as promoting the need to pay attention to multiple gendered impacts that the programmes will have. A feminist approach to MEL also values representation, diversity, and multiple voices. This means that in practice when designing programme surveys or evaluations, they need to take into consideration “indicators which capture and are relevant to gender dynamics in a specific context”.¹¹⁴ This goes hand in hand with Miller and Haylock’s Feminist Learning System while viewing MEL as a tool for social change. As the Pretari puts it in the article:

¹¹¹ Miller, Carol & Haylock, Laura. Merging developmental and feminist evaluation to monitor and evaluate transformative social change. *American journal of evaluation*. Vol. 37, no. 1, 2016, p.63-79.

¹¹² Ibid., p.65f.

¹¹³ Azevedo, Andrea, Garwood Wilson, Rosa, & Pretari, Alexia. Bringing about social justice through feminist research for monitoring, evaluation, and learning? A conversation from Oxfam GB. *Gender & Development*. Vol.27, no.3, 2019, 485-504. DOI: [10.1080/13552074.2019.1664040](https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2019.1664040)

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p.489f.

...as feminists working within Oxfam, in addition to examining gender and power relations, why they exist and how they change, we aim to ensure that this information is used to improve strategies and ultimately transform these power relations. This means that knowledge, evidence, and learning from MEL must be put into use.¹¹⁵

Furthermore, Azevedo, Garwood, and Pretari argue that in the end, feminist values redefine the role of MEL. MEL become a tool which can be used to not only detect power structures but rather, to challenge them and present an understanding of why and how these structures work.¹¹⁶

Oxfam's efforts to apply feminist principles to MEL and what it builds on is summed in Shawna Wakefield's and Daniela Koerppen's discussion paper published by Oxfam International "Applying feminist principles to program monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning".¹¹⁷ Wakefield and Koerppen suggest that to measure non-linear and complex change, which is the case for measuring women's rights, while applying feminist principles, measurements need to be able to track and capture negative impacts, resistance, and reactions to unexpected outcomes. They also stress the need for using mixed methods over time that assess the contribution of the constituency, rather than demand attribution.¹¹⁸

The use of both quantitative and qualitative methods to measure social change has been the topic of plenty of efforts to find alternative MEL-methods. Batliwala argues in "Strengthening monitoring and evaluation for women's rights: thirteen insights for women's organizations"¹¹⁹ how:

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p.495.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.489f.

¹¹⁷ Wakefield and Koerppen. Applying feminist principles to program monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning, 2017.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p.5-8.

¹¹⁹ Batliwala, Srilatha. Strengthening monitoring and evaluation for women's rights: thirteen insights for women's organizations. *Association for women's rights in development*, 2011.

one M&E [monitoring & evaluating] instrument cannot tell us the whole story, strategic combinations can bring us much closer to a more comprehensive understanding of the change process, including its strengths and limitations.¹²⁰

Additionally, Batliwala acknowledges the importance of designing tools that measure negative effects and reactions, and even past gains in women's rights. By measuring negative effects and past gains that "hold the line", i.e., preventing extreme backlash, Batliwala means that it will place the programme's achievements and goals in a more realistic context. In some contexts, holding the line can be a success story, as "things haven't gotten worse".¹²¹

4.3 Under development: gender

As earlier mentioned, development as a field has been criticized from multiple approaches, i.e., human rights, feminism, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism. The critique has resulted in alternative solutions to mainstream development, both in a theoretical framework as well as in practice.¹²² Alternative development, as it is called is "...concerned with identifying and promoting alternative practices and redefining the goals of development".¹²³

In the introduction chapter of *Alternative Development: Unravelling Marginalization, Voicing Change*, Cathrine Brun and Piers Blaikie introduce feminism and postcolonialism as significant critical perspectives within development. Both theoretical

¹²⁰ Ibid., p.5.

¹²¹ Ibid., p.5f.

¹²² Brun, Cathrine & Blaikie, Piers. "Introduction. Alternative development: Unravelling marginalization, voicing change". In *Alternative Development: Unravelling marginalization, Voicing change*, Catherine Brun, Piers Blaikie & Michael Jones (ed.), 1-21. Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2014. , 2014.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 1.

approaches have transformed methodologies and theories of development and therefore proposed alternative responses.¹²⁴ To exemplify, Ellerby in *No shortcut to change* sheds light on how women in development have been diminished to only mean economic issues and rights in the Global South and nothing else.¹²⁵ Furthermore, as earlier mentioned, according to Podems, the foundation of development has been built on different understandings of the category “woman” and gender.¹²⁶ These approaches, both the understanding of gender and women in development have been transformed through feminist critique. Feminism has also contributed to critical viewpoints of development processes and knowledge production which are essential parts of MEL.¹²⁷

Under Development: Gender edited by Christine Vershuur, Isabelle Guérin, and Héléne Guétat-Bernard, a book which inspired the title of this section also examines the development field from a critical point of view, especially from feminist and postcolonial perspectives.¹²⁸ In “Introduction: Gender, a necessary tool of analysis for social change”, the editors shed light on how a gendered perspective on development “enhance women’s visibility and their ability to become subjects, which entails that they are socially recognized”.¹²⁹ Furthermore, a gendered approach highlights multiple socially constructed categories such as femininities and masculinities, as well as how they interact with each other, power dynamics, and intersections with other categories.¹³⁰

Postcolonial and feminist critique of mainstream development reached a significant point in Mohanty’s “Under western eyes: feminist scholarship and colonial discourses”.¹³¹ In Mohanty’s article, she criticises the hegemony of western feminism and introduces the

¹²⁴ Ibid., p.5-7.

¹²⁵ Ellerby, 2017, p.72.

¹²⁶ Podems, 2010, p.6–8.

¹²⁷ Brun & Blaikie. Introduction. *Alternative development: Unravelling marginalization, voicing change*, 2014, p.5–7.

¹²⁸ Verschuur, Christine, Guérin, Isabelle & Guétat-Bernard, Héléne (ed.). *Under development: gender*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p.2.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. Under western eyes: feminist scholarship and colonial discourses. *Feminist Review*, vol.30, no.1, 61-88, 1988. <https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.1988.42>

previously mentioned term “third world women” which becomes the antithesis of western women. Brun and Blaikie write how with Mohanty’s critique, she highlights the ethnocentrism of mainstream development theories and particularly the objectification of third world women.¹³² They further connect Mohanty to a broader anti-colonial critique of development which argues that development can “never releases itself from colonial discourses”.¹³³

In practice, alternative development has sought to represent the marginalised, i.e., groups whose voices are silenced and are not given a space. Essentially, it is people who cannot enjoy their basic rights and needs, states Brun and Blaikie.¹³⁴ In contrast to mainstream development, alternative development is also about shifting the approaches to these issues to challenge the status quo and power dynamics which is creating marginalisation in the first place. Therefore, it is not only a set of alternative theoretical concepts but rather, an attitude and different ways to approach an issue.¹³⁵

Consequently, alternative development promotes participatory forums where the groups that are marginalised can be involved. Therefore, key components are social practice, participation, and empowerment. However, the authors note that marginalisation can be locally constructed and take different shapes throughout time.¹³⁶ This approach to participatory spaces and context-awareness is compatible with feminist MEL principles, a topic which will be further discussed and exemplified when analysing the reports in the following chapter. However, it is noteworthy to highlight how participation is rooted in human rights principles. Hans-Otto Sano demonstrates in “The drivers of human rights change in development” in *Human rights and development in the new millennium* (ed. Paul Gready and Wouter Vandenhoele) how human rights can enter the development field

¹³² Brun & Blaikie, 2014, p.5-7.

¹³³ Ibid., p.7.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 1.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p.2.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p.2-7.

in multiple ways.¹³⁷ One such way is through the emphasis on participation, inclusion, accountability, and equality, terms which permeate the human rights discourse. This often means that organisations are applying human rights-based approaches also in practice and not only in theory.¹³⁸

What drives human rights integration in development within a theoretical framework can be values and norms. Organisations can be inspired by human rights values which can not only invoke contextualisation and changing social norms, but also a tool to legitimise a certain developmental programme or project. In practice, a project can have overlapping values and similar goals that are rooted in human rights norms.¹³⁹

The third door through which human rights enter the development discourse is through what Sano defines as “human rights legal obligations and adjudication”.¹⁴⁰ He further explains: “The use of law as an instrument for guiding development objectives and regulatory action is becoming more prevalent”.¹⁴¹ What this means in practice is that the aim of a programme or project can be to lobby to abolish harmful legislation or refer to international human rights treaties to improve people’s living standards.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Sano, Hanso-Otto. “The drivers of human rights change in development”. In *Human rights and development in the new millennium: towards a theory of change* edited by Paul Gready and Wouter Vandenhoe. Milton Park Abingdon Oxon, 2013, p.29-49.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p.29f.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p.30-33

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p.30.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 40-43.

5 An intersectional feminist and critical content analysis of NGO reports

In this chapter, the aim is to analyse the primary material of this thesis which consists of two reports from an Oxfam campaign and an ActionAid project. Henceforth, when referring to “the Oxfam report” what is implied is the “Challenging and changing harmful social norms contributing to violence against women and girls: Enough Campaign Progress and Learnings Report 2016-2019” by *Oxfam International*, 2020. As for “the ActionAid report”, it is a reference to “WE GO! Women’s economic independence, a way out of violence” by ActionAid, 2017.

The benchmark of the analysis will be intersectional feminism as a theoretical framework while a gendered critical content analysis will be applied as a method. The proposed research questions will also work as a lens through which the method, theories, and reports will be analysed.

- 1) *Do the reports apply feminist values within the MEL-framework of a developmental project, and if so, how?*
- 2) *How does the incorporation of feminist values affect the outcomes of a developmental project as a way to measure social change?*

As mentioned earlier, the feminist values identified in this thesis are **Intersectionality**, **Power dynamics**, putting **Gender and women’s voices/experiences in the centre**, **Awareness of the context-specific**, acknowledging that **Change is non-linear**, **Participation is key**, and highlighting the power dimensions regarding **Knowledge production**.

The analysis of the reports will be divided thematically according to the themes which have been found as well as the theoretical and methodological framework of this thesis. Analysing and presenting the reports together under specific themes is more meaningful and creates a space for comparison. Furthermore, it is more interesting both for the research and the reader to study the reports thematically as it creates a context for the analysis.

5.1 Behind the scenes: analysing the methods that generated the reports

According to critical content analysis, the researcher needs to analyse every aspect of the research process.¹⁴³ Therefore, the analysis will begin with examining the methods which have been used to generate the reports and how these methods incorporate feminist values. Note, that henceforth, it will be a distinction between the applied methods within a MEL-framework, i.e., the methods used to measure social change, and the research methods used to generate the reports.

In the Oxfam report, page five is dedicated to the methodology of the report. According to the report, the findings are primarily based on qualitative data. The data has been mainly from semi-structured interviews conducted in 13 of the 34 countries involved in the campaign. The focus of the study was to gather information about “process indicators such as partnerships, participation, activities and reach” within the framework of the campaign.¹⁴⁴ In three of the 13 countries, Oxfam conducted in-person case studies to

¹⁴³ Utt and Short, 2018, p.3.

¹⁴⁴ Oxfam International. Challenging and changing harmful social norms contributing to violence against women and girls: Enough Campaign progress and learnings report 2016-2019. 2020, p.5.

capture evidence of change, in other words, impact indicators. The case studies included in-depth interviews with different actors, staff, partner organisations, and constituents.¹⁴⁵

The fact that data was mainly generated through qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and case studies, is compatible with feminist research traditions. This further strengthens the participatory part of applying feminist values in the report when Oxfam conducted interviews in 13 of the 34 countries involved. Additionally, the selection of these 13 countries is meant to “represent a diversity of regions, campaign approaches, and stages of advancement”.¹⁴⁶ One can argue how the diversity of selection is in alignment with intersectionality and the importance of prioritising context-specific gendered voices and experiences to further engage the constituency.

However, quantitative research methods have been used on a minimal scale to generate the report which is important to mention to give a nuanced picture. As Kloosterman et al. argue, it can be necessary to apply different tools to measure and generate the change as a change in gender relations itself can start in various ways.¹⁴⁷ Therefore, the mixed-method approach that Oxfam has applied to generate the report takes into consideration context-specific knowledge production, intersectionality, and participation – components which make up feminist values. Additionally, a mixed-method approach also tackles the issue of quantitative methods which can be seductive and diminishing in complex social situations, by including qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews.¹⁴⁸

In the case of the Oxfam report, the involvement of various actors (staff, partner organisations, and constituents) in the production of the report imply that they are aware of their positionality and knowledge production. Both themes are fundamental in feminist theory and methodology as well as CCA.¹⁴⁹ According to intersectional feminism, it is

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Kloosterman, Benning, & Fyles. 'Measuring the unmeasurable': gender mainstreaming and cultural change, 2012.

¹⁴⁸ Merry, 2016.

¹⁴⁹ Utt and Short, 2018. And Letherby, 2003.

vital to be aware of who is behind the knowledge production and why, therefore, Oxfam's report has integrated feminist values when including multiple actors in the campaign.¹⁵⁰

Regarding ActionAid's report, it does not include a section about the methods of research which have generated the report. Therefore, it is not possible to analyse the research methods and how or if they are compatible with feminist values. The report only discusses the methodology and MEL-methods of the whole project, i.e., the topic of the next section.

5.2 Multiple levels of change

The Oxfam report

Regarding the actual *Enough Campaign* which is what the Oxfam report is about, the MEL-framework which has been used to measure the outcomes is Theory of Change (ToC). As it is a method which can be customised and shaped according to the purpose and aim of a campaign or programme, it can look differently from campaign to campaign. Even though it is called a theory, it is a method that “makes explicit assumptions or theories about why and how a program should create social change”.¹⁵¹ When using this method, Batliwala and Pittman mean that one maps out the steps and correlation between programme activities, goals, and short-term and long-term outcomes.¹⁵² In the following section, the content of the report will be discussed with the help of visual graphics. These graphics are part of my analysis, and therefore not part of the reports; however, the graphics contain information found in the report.

¹⁵⁰ Gorelick, Sherry. *Contradictions of feminist methodology*, 1996, p.38.

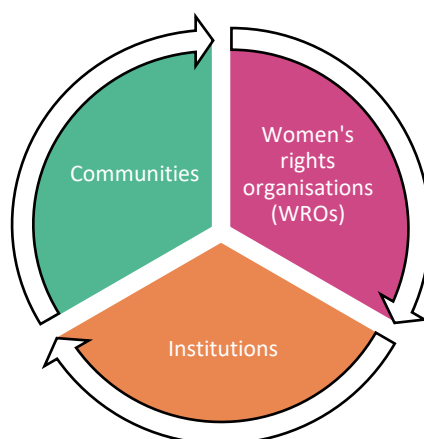
¹⁵¹ Batliwala and Pittman, 2011, p. 26.

¹⁵² Ibid.

The foundation for the ToC, which is stated above, can be found on page six of the report. It permeates the whole campaign, something which is articulated, inter alia, in the domains of change.

The campaign's Theory of Change is based on evidence that social norm change is possible when approached through holistic, long-term, and multi-level gender transformative practice, and that people have the power to drive that change. (Oxfam report, p.6)

The core content of this quote can be summarised visually as follows:



*Graph 1.
Domains of change*

The domains are the areas of work in which the campaign targets, in this case: communities, women's rights organisations (WROs), and institutions. According to the report, these domains are "interdependent and vital to ending VAWG/GBV"¹⁵³, but they require different approaches, hence them being separate parts of the same pie chart but connected by the arrows in graph 1.¹⁵⁴ This means that the framework of this campaign that is the topic of the Oxfam report targets three different actors, and domains of change,

¹⁵³ Violence against women and girls / Gender-based violence.

¹⁵⁴ Oxfam International, 2020, p.6f.

however within the same campaign and with the same overall goal. The general goal of this campaign is as mentioned earlier and found in the title of the report: “to challenge and change harmful social norms that contribute to violence against women and girls”. However, as mentioned, these different domains, require different approaches, therefore, the report covers the various goals for each of the domains on page seven and is as follows:

Communities:	Women’s rights organisations:	Institutions:
strengthened community base of people promoting social norm change. (Oxfam report, p.7)	strengthened support to WROs: they are leading social norm change in their settings. (Oxfam report, p.7)	strengthened institutional policy and practice to end VAWG/GBV. (Oxfam report, p.7)

These quotes illustrate how the report takes into consideration the multiple actors as well as adds a context-specific approach to each actor to achieve the customised goals. Consequently, this can also be read as an awareness of the power dimensions regarding the issue of ending violence against women. The MEL-framework of the Oxfam report Theory of change applies feminist values in multiple ways. This can be illustrated by the following quote from page eight:

Innovative Street Art in Solomon Islands – The Side by Side campaign organised a street art competition, #WomensWall, that aimed to raise the visibility of women figures from the Solomon Islands who have made notable achievements. (Oxfam report, p.8)

What this quote indicates is that in the report, the ToC acknowledges and focuses on context-specific issues when Oxfam designed the campaign to be “strongly anchored in local context” and flexible for “country teams and their partners to design tailor-made campaigns that are relevant for their contexts”.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p.6.

Graph 1: For reference to the content of the graph, see page 7 in the Oxfam International report.

In addition, within the MEL-framework, i.e., ToC, the report also puts gendered and women's voices and experiences in the centre by acknowledging them as "drivers of social change".¹⁵⁶ In the report, this is highlighted on page 17 by giving different examples as evidence of social norm change within different contexts, in the selected instance being represented by India and China:

INDIA More young people, mothers, and community leaders are refusing to allow child/ early marriage in their village; young women are demanding a say in their arranged marriages; and young men role models are participating in domestic chores. (Oxfam report, p.17)

CHINA Women are demanding to be referred to by their own names, rather than in relation to their husband or children. (Oxfam report, p.17)

The ToC in Oxfam's report also addresses the issue of change being non-linear by applying a "holistic" and "long-term" approach. The following from pages 32 and 12 in Oxfam's report illustrates how these approaches have been translated into practice:

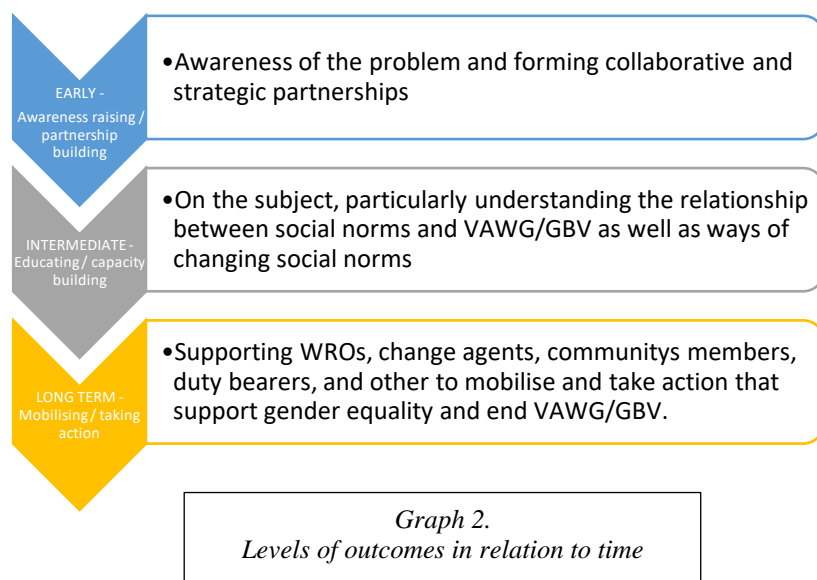
Utilizing different approaches in urban and rural settings: a focus on young people in urban settings, and a multi-sectoral community mobilisation approach in rural settings. (Oxfam report, p.32)

Most country campaigns are in the stage of community-based mobilization for social norm change. All of the countries are utilizing a mix of public, collective, and individual communications and diffusion strategies based on the best-practice evidence which suggests that new ideas are spread and accepted by a combination of: regular exposure in the media, reinforcement by religious, political or community leaders, observing attitude and behaviour change of members... (Oxfam report, p.12)

The outcomes of the *Enough Campaign* found in Oxfam's report were also formulated on multiple levels: early, intermediate, and long-term (see graph 2). This division

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

emphasises the campaign’s aim to approach change through “holistic, long-term, and multi-level gender transformative change”.¹⁵⁷



From an intersectional perspective, it can be worth mentioning how the foundation of ToC which takes into consideration multiple levels of change and actors is compatible with intersectionality. The *Enough campaign* involves communities, women’s rights organisations, and institutions, which correlates with the diverse levels of change – local, national, regional, and institutional structures. For feminism, especially intersectional feminism, it is important to pay attention to various social categories such as race, gender, class, sexuality, etc., and how they intersect. The intersection causes context-specific structures and power dimensions, something which this campaign is aware of due to the involvement of the multiple levels of change and actors.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p.6f.

¹⁵⁸ Steinmetz, She Coined the Term ‘Intersectionality’ Over 30 Years Ago. Here’s What It Means to Her Today, 2020. And Oxfam International, 2020.

BOLIVIA Young researcher-activists researched and published material discussing GBV against LGBTIQ people and violence in LGBTIQ relationships. (Oxfam report, p.15)

INDIA Ethnicity, caste, religion, and diverse sexual identities were integrated into the campaign. In the rural communities, change agents worked to overcome multiple discriminations, including against Dalit communities. In the urban settings, change agents addressed sexuality, social norms and VAWG / GBV. (Oxfam report, p.15)

These quotes are examples of how the Oxfam report applies these feminist values. The report mentions how Oxfam partnered with different civil society organisations that work with youths, the LGBTQIA+ community, in both urban and rural areas, in this case, it was with communities in Bolivia and India.¹⁵⁹

The following scheme (graph 3) illustrates how there can be different actors and therefore, multiple levels of change as stated in the Oxfam report. It is based on the discussions about multiple levels of change in the Oxfam report as well as the scheme found in Kloosterman et. al.'s article about mapping out the areas of change.¹⁶⁰ However, what is new in this scheme is the framework which is the rectangle around the change areas to highlight how donors, NGOs, partner organisations, and the constituency shape the work. The arrows here also represent potential relations between the areas of change, because as mentioned earlier, change can occur by different drivers and in multiple ways.¹⁶¹

Additionally, what graph 3 also highlights is how feminist values can be integrated and influenced from outside the frame or included by the multiple actors of change. In Oxfam's case, the incorporation of feminist values was addressed by Oxfam itself and their inclusion of feminist principles in their overall work. The report also highlights how

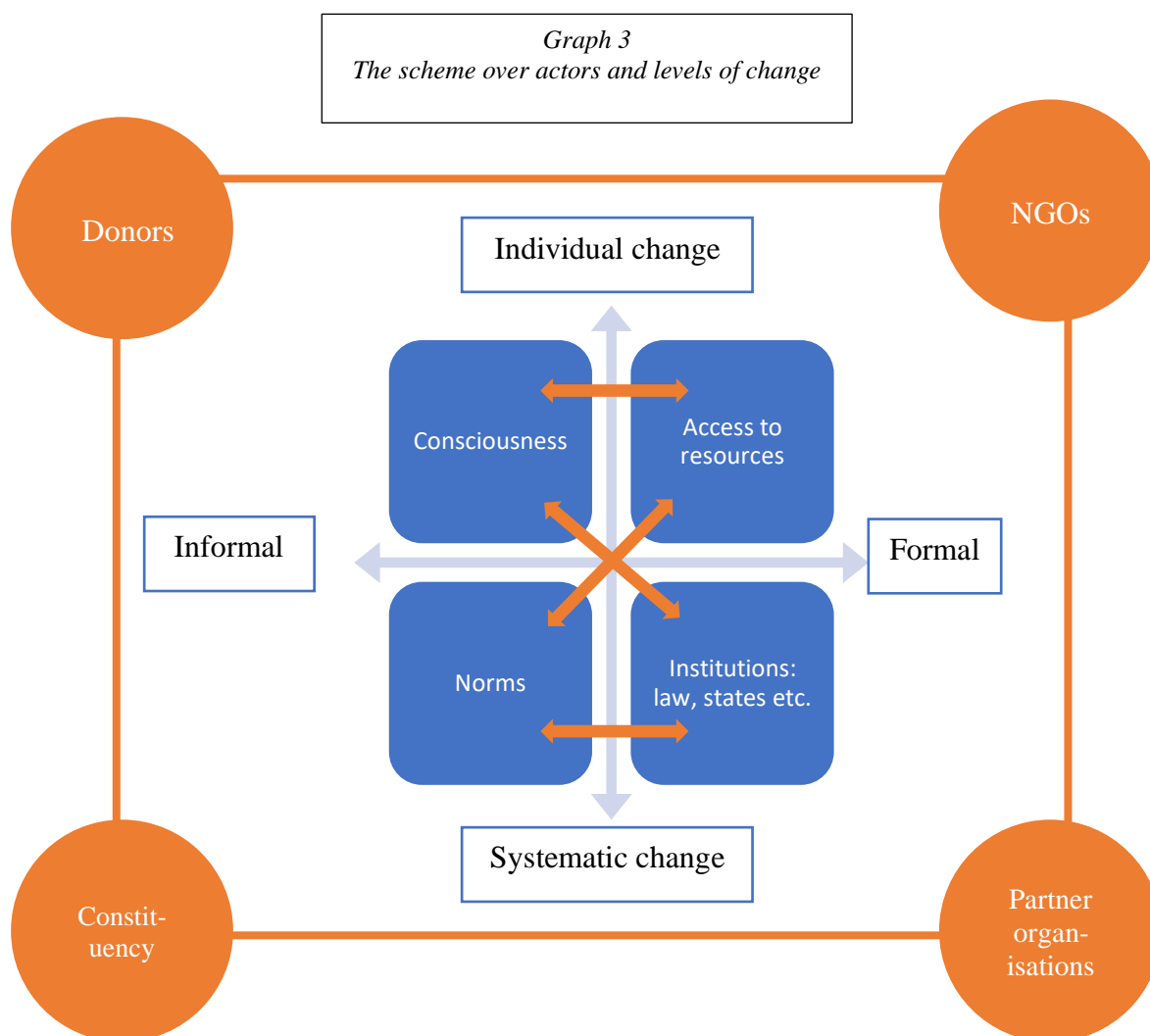
¹⁵⁹ Oxfam International, 2020, p.10.

Graph 2: For reference to the content of the graph, see page 7 in Oxfam International.

¹⁶⁰ Kloosterman, Benning, & Fyles, 2012.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

the constituency also contributed to applying feminist values to the campaign by for example activists in Papa New Guinea that addressed how gender inequalities can be the drivers of VAWG/GBV.¹⁶² Another example from the report is from an intersectional approach where Bolivian researchers and activists “published material discussing GBV against LGBTQ people and violence in LGBTQ relationships”.¹⁶³



¹⁶² Oxfam International, 2020, p.19.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p.15.

The ActionAid report

When it comes to ActionAid's report, it can be worth mentioning that the report does not explicitly mention a MEL-framework which has been used to generate and measure the outcomes and social change. However, during the analysis, the conclusion that has been drawn is that the report reflects on contribution frameworks within MEL. As mentioned in previous research, it includes outcome mapping and participatory approaches, two MEL-methods which can be seen as prevalent in the ActionAid report. The following section will set forth multiple examples to prove the conclusion, as well as to illustrate if the report applies feminist values, and if so, how.

Since the start, the project has been implemented by 15 partner organisations based in seven EU countries (Italy, Spain, Greece, Bulgaria, Cyprus, United Kingdom, and Sweden). On page 19, the ActionAid's report summarises the purpose of the project as:

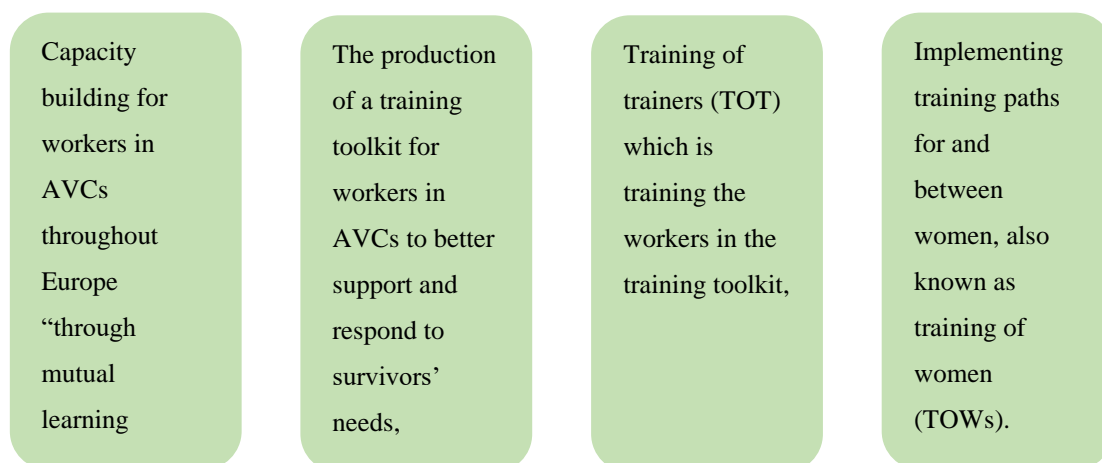
1. Strengthening the capacity of anti-violence centres [AVCs] to respond to survivors' need to be economic independent,
2. Promote the economic empowerment of the women survivors of [intimate partner violence] IPV involved in the project. (ActionAid report, p.19)

What this quote illustrates and according to the report, AVCs are seen as key actors in providing women with the support they need to leave an abusive relationship. This can be through the "emergency protection measures, legal and psychological support, guidance to build a life free from violence" that AVCs can provide.¹⁶⁴ The reason why this report focuses on IPV is due to it being a widespread problem in the EU. The report mentions that "almost one in four women (22%) experience physical and/or sexual violence" in a heterosexual relationship.¹⁶⁵ To relate to the Oxfam report, the domains of change i.e., the actors of change, are in this case the AVCs and women survivors of GBV.

¹⁶⁴ Scaricabarozzi. WE GO! Women's economic independence, a way out of violence: policies and practices to promote women's economic empowerment to be able to leave violence relationships, 2017, p.4.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

These multiple levels of change can be seen to reflect feminist values in multiple ways, one main way being through the emphasis on participation and women’s voices and experiences. In practice, this correlates with the activities of the project which the report summarises as:¹⁶⁶



The multiple levels of change (AVCs and women survivors) found in the ActionAid report are a sign of intersectionality as the change in question is being generated and addressed through different actors and levels. This also supports the conclusion that has been drawn about the MEL-framework of the ActionAid report being based on contribution frameworks. The reason behind this is due to the tracking of multiple factors involved in producing the change while also highlighting change actors.¹⁶⁷ Additionally, what can be worth analysing regarding the activities, is the focus on participation. As mentioned earlier, it is key to a feminist theoretical framework as well as the feminist values put forward in this thesis, therefore, it is worth studying how that takes form in practice. In this case, it is through participatory trainings, both for the survivors of IPV and workers in AVCs which is formulated in the report as:¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p.4f.

¹⁶⁷ Batliwala and Pittman, 2010, p.27.

¹⁶⁸ Scarcabarozzi, 2017, p.4.

training of trainers (TOT) regarding the content and tools of the training toolkit targeting social workers and practitioners of the AVCs involved, as well as external practitioners; (ActionAid report, p.4)

implementation of training paths (training of women - TOW) for women supported by AVCs involved in the project for promoting their personal and economic empowerment and fostering their capacities and possibilities to attain economic independence. (ActionAid report, p.4)

The highlighted quotes from above found in the ActionAid report further point to the direction of contribution frameworks as the applied MEL method due to the prevalence of participatory approaches. As mentioned in previous research, participatory approaches in MEL-frameworks aim to integrate the constituency by involving them in every step. This is something which the ActionAid report shows signs of when including the women survivors in the project in multiple ways.¹⁶⁹ One of them being within the data collection process as “a total of 552 profiles of women assisted by AVCs were included in the project database”.¹⁷⁰ The purpose of the data collection was:

...to contribute to building knowledge on the specific issue of the economic needs of IPV survivors, focusing specifically on their socio-economic characteristics. (ActionAid report, p.15)

The production of a toolkit which was meant to strengthen the workers’ knowledge and provide them with tools to support women is another example of the report applying feminist values. This is due to the training toolkit:

...aiming at strengthening practitioners’ knowledge and methodologies and at providing them with concrete tools to reflect on their existing practising and to support women in developing their personal and economic empowerment. (ActionAid report, p.5)

¹⁶⁹ Batliwala and Pittman, 2010, p.29.

¹⁷⁰ Scabicabarozzi, 2017, p.15.

In this case, this quote relates the training toolkit to knowledge production and how important it is to be aware of the context to create tools that are useful and customised to fit the needs of the women survivors.¹⁷¹ Furthermore, “the result of exchanges between practitioners of partner organisations”, i.e., the process of developing the training toolkit for anti-violence centres is also in alignment with the participatory component of the feminist values presented in this thesis.¹⁷²

5.3 Outcomes and learnings within a MEL-framework

This section is a presentation and analysis of the outcomes and learnings within the MEL-frameworks found in the reports. It will begin with highlighting examples from the Oxfam report and then continue with the ActionAid report. Concrete examples of the outcomes of each report will be highlighted as it is relevant for the research questions to study the outcomes of a campaign or project as that is part of the MEL-framework. Therefore, the outcomes too shall be examined from a critical gendered and feministic perspective and be related to the feminist values.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p.4f.

¹⁷² Ibid., p.5.

The Oxfam report

The outcomes found in the Oxfam report are presented in the following chart. They are divided by the domains of change – community, WROs, and institutions and their timing aspect – early, intermediate, or long-term.

DOMAIN	OUTCOMES		
	Early	Intermediate	Long-term
Community	“Development of partnerships for action.” ¹⁷³	Capacity-building on the country level for individuals, celebrities, and other leading actors within the community base. ¹⁷⁴	“Regular exposure in the media.” ¹⁷⁵
	“Widespread increased awareness of VAWG/GBV and social norms.” ¹⁷⁶		“Reinforcement by religious political or community leaders.” ¹⁷⁷
			Observing attitude and behaviours change of members. ¹⁷⁸
Women’s rights organisations (WROs)			WROs “were co-creating and co-leading the campaigns with the support of Oxfam, through technical assistance, financial resources, linkages, trainings, and facilitating access to

¹⁷³ Oxfam International, 2020, p.10.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p.11

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p.12

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p.11.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p.12

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

			regional and international spaces.” ¹⁷⁹
Institutions	According to the report, regional and worldwide activities have not significantly focused on the institutional level of change. This is due to a lack of capacity and the unexpected added value in the other two domains. ¹⁸⁰		

For the early outcomes, especially regarding widespread awareness-raising in the domain of “communities”, the report highlights how the Liberia team partnered with several civil society organisations (CSOs) that work with youths in both rural and urban settings.

Liberia’s Enough Excuses campaign partnered with several CSOs that had extensive outreach programs with the youth in the urban and rural communities where they wanted to focus. Often these were new alliances and relationships and resulted in the ability to reach large new audiences to raise awareness on VAWG / GBV. (Oxfam report, p.10)

Their extensive outreach to the targeted communities can be related to an intersectional perspective and the importance of including and taking into consideration multiple social categories. The widespread awareness outcome is also relevant from a context-specific perspective as that illustrates how the campaign was adapted to better fit local contexts.¹⁸¹ Additionally, this relates to the campaign’s Theory of Change as it aimed for the campaign to be “strongly anchored in local context” and this is one example that strengthens the ToC.¹⁸²

The early outcomes generated multiple learnings within the “communities” domain. One example is the importance of engaging with youth, especially in rural communities, i.e., taking into consideration the diverse contexts.¹⁸³ This is indicated by the following:

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p.23

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p.30.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p.10.

¹⁸² Ibid., p.6.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p.18.

We felt like the campaign was made for us; it was made by us. We produced and shared the messages, books, tools, etc. that were created by us for young people. (Oxfam report, p.18)

This quote from a young woman in Bolivia which the report has highlighted illustrates the importance of ownership in a campaign. Ownership and knowledge production can be linked to feminist values and when applied to context-specific situations, it also relates to power dimensions and how participation is vital to achieving long-term and holistic outcomes.

Other learnings were the strategic multi-sectoral engagement which goes hand in hand with addressing the multiple and complex drivers of VAWG / GBV. To exemplify, In Papua New Guinea, the campaign was about:

addressing the indirect norm that tolerates the use of violence to solve problems or enforce appropriate behaviour.⁷ That is, the campaign is not always addressing a social norm related to gender power inequalities, but also the norm that violence is normal and acceptable within families and in the community as a way to settle disputes. (Oxfam report, p.19)

For the campaign to succeed, it had to address the multiple drivers of the violence which correlates to diverse power dynamics on multiple levels. Therefore, it became necessary for the campaign to apply an intersectional approach that takes into consideration the power dynamics relating to the contexts and how that can further relate to multiple actors of change.¹⁸⁴

On the intermediate level of the domain “communities”, the framework of the ToC was capacity building on a country level and for multiple actors, or as the report calls “norm-setters”. These are people who “have the ability to influence social norms”, such as

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p.19.

“natural leaders, role models, celebrities, artists and social media influencers”.¹⁸⁵ As an example, the report mentions how in Benin, they managed to increase the awareness of VAWG/GBV from 59% to 80%. In 2016 in India, according to the report, “more than 3.5 million people from 385 villages in 33 districts in 5 states were exposed to campaign messages”.¹⁸⁶ However, when it comes to these types of quantitative data, especially regarding measuring social change and people’s attitudes, it can be deceitful as statistics and numbers do not capture the actual change in people’s minds.¹⁸⁷

Regarding the domain “Women’s rights organisations”, the report highlights one long-term outcome which focuses on how WROs lead the social norm change in societies. It also became one of the main learnings from this campaign, as it became obvious how WROs play a fundamental role.¹⁸⁸ One example of this that the report mentions is about WROs in China:

About 59 leaders from 35 community-based organisations (CSOs or WROs) have completed the one-year community facilitators’ training programme and continue to make changes in their communities and are now undertaking three or four *community initiatives in their settings*. The CSOs and WROs have advanced significantly in terms of *knowledge*, skills, and *depth of gender analysis*. (Oxfam report, p.22, my emphasis)

This example not only illustrates the impact which WROs have but also how important it is with knowledge production in relation to context-specific awareness and power dynamics. These two values are vital in the incorporation of feminist values to achieve depth in gender analysis and therefore, putting gender and women’s voices and experiences in the centre.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p.11.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Merry, 2016.

¹⁸⁸ Oxfam International, 2020, p.23.

The ActionAid's report

The outcomes of the *WE GO!* project, i.e., the topic of the ActionAid report, are divided into two main domains. One domain is related to strengthening the capacity of AVCs, and the second is linked to promoting the economic empowerment of the survivors of IPV. With these two purposes in mind, the report sheds light on the following outcomes in the two domains:

Strengthening the capacity of the anti-violence centres	Promoting the economic empowerment of survivors of IPV
19 sessions of trainings of trainers (trainings for workers/operators in AVCs) (ActionAid report, p.19-21)	“250 women took part in the WE GO! trainings of women” ¹⁸⁹ (ActionAid report, p.21f)
139 operators were trained (ActionAid report, p.19-21)	“Developing women’s self-esteem and confidence” (ActionAid report, p.21f)
1 training toolkit (ActionAid report, p.19-21)	

In both domains, especially in the first that focuses on strengthening AVCs, it can be noted how the outcomes are fixated on quantitative data – 19 sessions, 139 operators, etc. As previously mentioned, these numbers do not cover the social change that has occurred, if it ever has. This quantitative data leads to what Merry argues is “oversimplification, homogenization, and the neglect of the surrounding social structure”.¹⁹⁰

From an intersectional feminist theoretical framework and a gendered critical content analysis, the outcomes in the second domain, involving the survivors of IPV, integrate feminist values in different ways. One such way is by concentrating on women’s

¹⁸⁹ Scaricabarozzi, 2017, p.21f.

¹⁹⁰ Merry, 2016, p.1.

experiences and voices regarding men’s violence against women.¹⁹¹ Actively engaging and making sure the constituency is participating in the change that is targeted towards them, is also a way to influence that knowledge production. However, it is crucial from a *gendered* perspective to pay attention to the focus on the category ‘woman’ in the report, and therefore the lack of an intersectional perspective. Intersectionality can in this case shed light on other intersections of social categories such as race, class, and sexuality in relation to intimate partner violence. Additionally, together with intersectionality, a power perspective would have become relevant if the report has considered that.

Regarding the learnings, the ActionAid report highlights a few learnings which at the same time acted as challenges. One challenge has been the lack of time to “work more on building women’s support network”.¹⁹² This can be related to Oxfam’s report and how WROs were both one of the main domains of change as well as drivers of change.¹⁹³ The involvement and building of connections with the civil society are necessary from a context-awareness perspective as CSOs often have a better presence and legitimacy in the targeted communities.¹⁹⁴

Another challenge raised in the ActionAid report is regarding “the necessity for long-term empowerment programmes”.¹⁹⁵ The following is an example of this from the report:

Meeting women survivors’ short-term economic needs as well as support their long-term financial stability are equally important: immediate solutions should be found to allow them to deal with their immediate needs, but long-term strategies should also be cultivated. Getting a job doesn’t forcibly ensure a way out of financial instability and access to decent work opportunities is essential to increase women’s ability to leave and stay away from an abuser. (ActionAid report, p.13)

¹⁹¹ Scaricabarozzi, 2017, p.21.

¹⁹² Ibid., p.22.

¹⁹³ Oxfam International, 2020, p.20-23.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p.10.

¹⁹⁵ Scaricabarozzi, 2017, p.22.

The proposed challenge in this quote is the epitome of how change is non-linear and for it to be sustainable, it needs to be approached from a long-term perspective. For that reason, ActionAid's report highlights this as a challenge and put forward reasons why there is a need to work both short and long-term regarding men's violence against women. As the quote and the report indicates, women survivors of intimate partner violence do not only need short-term emergency economic solutions to escape from a violent partner. These women also need long-term solutions that tackle the issue of economic independence.

6 Concluding discussion

The conclusion which can be drawn from the Oxfam report and how it was generated, is that feminist values have been applied by using primarily qualitative methods and by involving multiple actors. This is not to say that qualitative methods and the involvement of multiple actors are essentially feminist, but rather, *how* these have been used to generate the report and how it relates to knowledge production. Additionally, Oxfam's report applies feminist values through the intersectional approach to the selection process of where and who to interview. This is not only beneficial to increase participation, but also for the knowledge production of context-specific gendered voices and experiences. The involvement of various actors (staff, partner organisations, and constituents) in the production of the report implies that Oxfam is aware of their positionality and knowledge production. The report's mixed-method approach also tackles the issues of quantitative methods which can be seductive and diminishing in complex social situations, by including qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews.

In the reports, it has become evident that the incorporation of feminist values can take different shapes and forms. However, whether it is through including participatory actions when measuring social change, having an intersectional approach, or involving multiple actors of change, feminist values affect the outcomes of a developmental project in various positive ways. The incorporation of feminist values leads to the use of well-motivated and context-specific methods to measure social change which results in holistic, sustainable, long-term, and anti-colonial outcomes. One such way is by acknowledging that change is not linear and therefore, Oxfam and ActionAid have adapted their project and campaign to better fit this scenario. Both the reports argue that change is non-linear and therefore needs to be approached from multiple angles as well as long-term strategies to eliminate the root causes of inequalities that takes form in men's violence against women. This is important as developmental projects like those mentioned in this thesis illustrate how change within this issue does not only challenge

the phenomena of men's violence against women. Essentially it challenges the white man's privileges and dominance, capitalist economic systems, white supremacy, social norms in general and gender roles.

Consequently, the campaign and project have had positive outcomes as they have not only been maintaining "holding the line" but also advanced further. However, it is not enough to only look at papers and documents, when it comes to men's violence against women, it is necessary to consider the women who are being affected, analyse the situation over time, and have in mind social norms and backlashes. Accordingly, both reports have engaged the constituency and the actors of change to increase their participation as well as include the women who are being affected in the change processes. As illustrated both in the reports and in graph 3, there can be multiple actors and therefore, multiple levels of change. Donors, NGOs, partner organisations, and the constituency shape the work and the directions of change. Additionally, what graph 3 also highlights is how feminist values can be integrated and influenced from outside the frame or be included through the multiple actors of change.

However, it can be worth mentioning that the reports lack an intersectional approach to a certain extent. This is due to the reports being stuck in the cis-heteronormative dichotomies and not incorporating more LGBTQIA+ voices and experiences. The reports do not apply a thorough critical gendered approach and therefore do not take into consideration how gender-based violence can occur in same-sex relationships or how black, poor transwomen are more at risk. For that reason, for the sake of future research as well as those who have been cast in the shadows, this field needs to further apply an intersectional perspective with a focus on LGBTQIA+ communities. It is vital to study how the patriarchal society and the violence it produces affect all types of femininities and masculinities as well as those who are outside of these categories. Men's violence against women does not only affect women, it is rather a global and widespread issue and therefore should be dealt with as such.

In addition, this paper can be an inspiration to further study the development field and its relation to human rights as well as other theoretical frameworks. It can be interesting to apply different principles as an analytical benchmark, or even other feminist values. As this paper has also illustrated the importance of the methods that are used to measure the change, it can be beneficial for the research field to examine those as well. As mentioned earlier, method development can occur parallelly with the critical examination of applied methods.

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