Lockdown Learning Series:
Part 1 Lessons from organizing a virtual road trip

GENDER AND EVIDENCE FUNCTIONS IN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The purpose of this document is to share the process and lessons on how to organize an online learning series, based on the experience of the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia learning series on Gender and Evidence.

1. ON THE ROAD

'Gender and the Evidence Functions in Social Development' was a multi-session learning series, developed by the UNICEF Regional Office of South Asia in partnership with multiple offices across UNICEF and in collaboration with other organizations. It consisted of 11 live webinars held from April 30th to June 4th, 2020 and a collaborative Padlet platform where information and resources were posted before and after the sessions. +500 registered participants (+700 cumulative attendees to the live sessions) joined the roadtrip, together with the 35 facilitators and moderators.

3 Real Time Assessment and Evaluation of Gender Issues in Humanitarian Crises

2 Using Implementation Science for Gender Impact: Case Studies from UNICEF Bangladesh and from Global Immunization and Vitamin A Programming

1 How Much Do You Know About the Gender and Evidence?

4 How the UNICEF Offices in Pakistan and India Improved their Gender and Evidence Function

5 Gender Learning from Evidence Efforts in Polio Eradication Programming in Afghanistan and Pakistan

7 Applying a Gender Lens to Multi-Country, Multi-Organization Evaluations: Findings of the UN System Evaluations and Evidence Reviews

6 Using Infographics About Gender and Evaluation in Dissemination and Utilization

8 Using Gender Findings from Country Programme Evaluations and Reviews Conducted in South Asia, Europe and Central Asia

9 Using Evidence for Gender Impact: Research Priorities for: a) Addressing the Intersections between Violence against Women and Violence against Children, and b) Gender-Responsive Social Protection

10 Bridging the Evidence-to-Action Gap: Global and Country Perspectives in Gender Programming

11 Defining Impact in Gender Equality Programming and Measuring It

2. THE ORGANIZATION OF THE LEARNING SERIES

The learning series was organized by UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA hereon) evaluation and gender sections, in collaboration with the wider UNICEF community as well as other partners. Special thanks are due to UN Women Independent Evaluation and Audit Service (IEAS) for their support and engagement. Ad hoc operational and technical support for IT was also extended from ROSA.

The presenters and moderators were critical partners in the learning: they generously shared their knowledge and facilitated the sessions. In total, 35 (5 male, 30 female) UNICEF and non-UNICEF moderators and presenters engaged in the series. In fact, one of the objectives was to improve the presentation and facilitation skills of those who participated.

> *What worked very well was the team behind the organization of the event. While a big team, I think it proved its value as the event was highly successful. I would like to personally replicate the model for other events. It would be great to have a short Best Practice Sheet on the format and process to disseminate and have other agencies use for their sessions.*
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> *- From the facilitator survey*
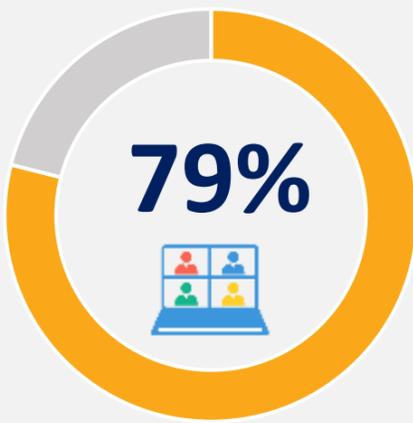
79% of the facilitators agreed or strongly agreed they learned new ways and tools to engage with participants and that their online presentation skills were improved
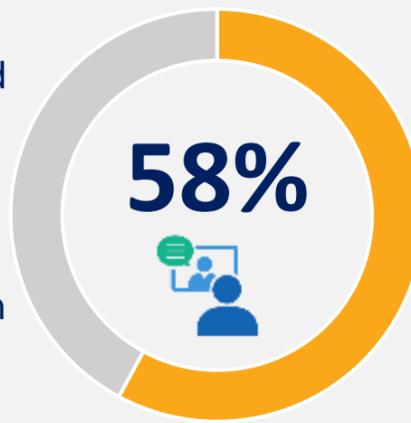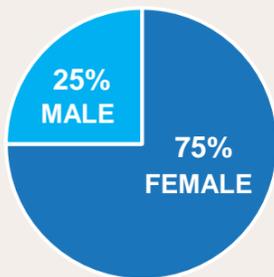
58% of the facilitators found the post-session feedback from ROSA team adequate for improving their future online presentations

3. PARTICIPATION

1 PARTICIPANTS BY GENDER

More than 500 participants (75% female, 25% male) joined, some attending just one session and others several.

25% MALE
75% FEMALE

Box 1. Invitations to join the road trip

Communications was done with different channels:

Within UNICEF (emailing and LinkedIn of the M&E network, the Office of Research, HQ, and the Gender Network, Yammer, etc.)

In broader public spaces (Gender & Evaluation network & others)

By affiliated organizations (UN Women & others)

Word of mouth including posting in personal LinkedIn pages

2 ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATION

Of those who registered, 31% came from UNICEF, 7% from other UN agencies and 61% were external participants from universities, consulting companies, NGOs and INGOs, governments and independent professionals.

31% UNICEF
61% External
7% UN agency
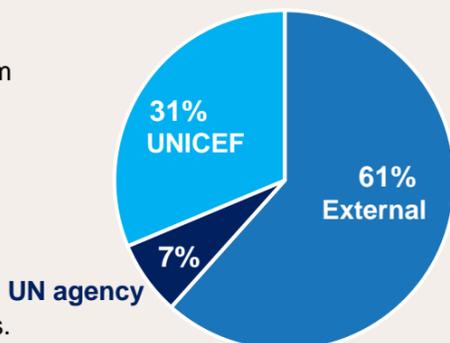
3 GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

As the initiative was managed by the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, it was to be expected that participants from this region would predominate.
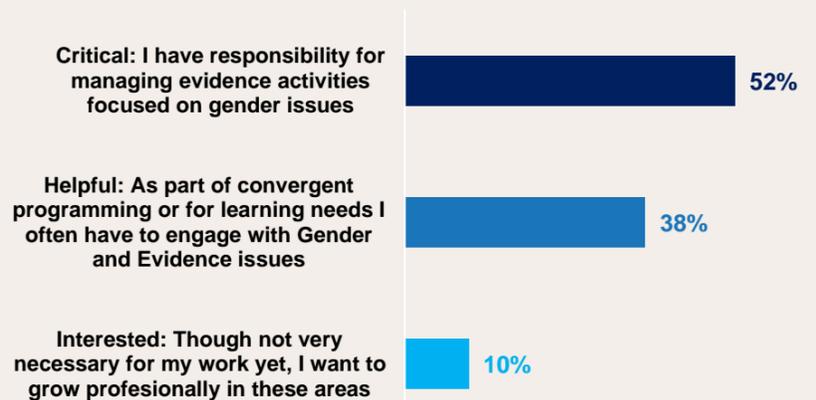
Africa
Oceania 1%
17%
18% America
Europe 13%
52% Asia
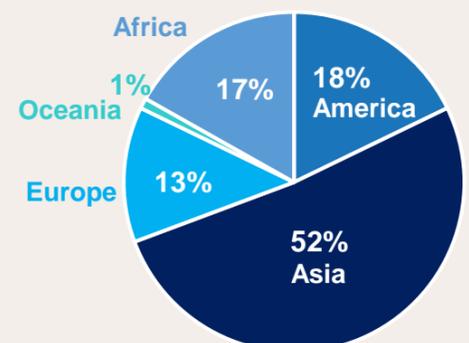
4 CAPACITY SELF-ASSESSMENT

Of those who registered, 48% rated their ability to fully investigate important gender issues in a study, research, or evaluation as above satisfactory or excellent.

2% Poor
11% Below Average
39% Average
38% Above Average
10% Excellent
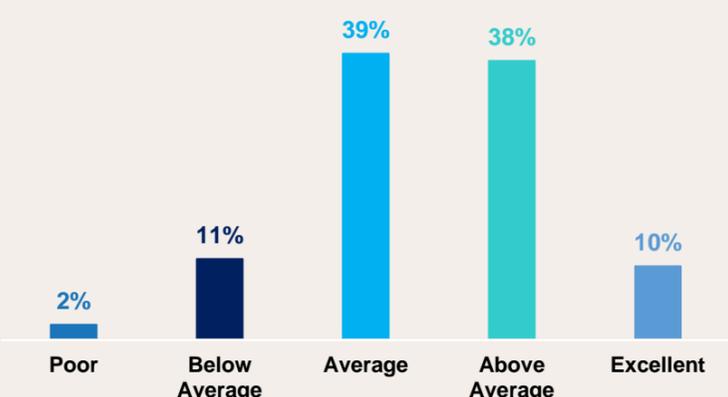
5 IMPORTANCE OF GENDER TO WORK

For most participants, gender and evidence are critical (52%) or helpful (38%) to their work so the topic was closely tied to their professional needs.

Critical: I have responsibility for managing evidence activities focused on gender issues — **52%**

Helpful: As part of convergent programming or for learning needs I often have to engage with Gender and Evidence issues — **38%**

Interested: Though not very necessary for my work yet, I want to grow profesionally in these areas — **10%**

4. TRAVEL TOOLS

A range of different tools and platforms were employed to interact with the audience. The tools were selected to support the following areas: 1) to stay organized /resource sharing (Blue); 2) to share content during the session (Yellow); and 3) to promote interactivity and engagement with participants (Green).

1 **Padlet**: collaborative online platform, where resources were shared before and after each session (posters for sessions, short speaker bios, session objective objectives, transcribed Q&A, session recordings, and additional resources). It was used by 69% of the participants, out of which 71.67% found it partially or very useful (for effective and engaging virtual learning).

2 **Zoom**: webinar platform where the sessions took place. The functions of Q&A, chat and polling were actively used. Especially the Q&A function was well appreciated by the participants. Zoom Polling proved to be one of the most effective tools for engagement according to participants (71.21% found it very useful).

3 **Ahaslides**: an interactive presentation software that allows presenters to turn nonreciprocal sessions and lectures into exciting, impactful, and engaging presentations. This application was used for instance for session #1 to conduct a live and interactive quiz with fun visual effects.

4 **Menti**: similar to the Ahaslides, Menti is an interactive tool for group interaction where participants can be asked to answer questions with different purposes such as icebreakers, assess their knowledge about certain issues, collect their thoughts and reactions, etc. Results were shared in real-time which provides a sense of participation and genuine presence of attendees.

5 **Pre-surveys and crowdsourcing of relevant experiences and resources**: only tested for one session but the positive feedback received by those answering to the invitation signals potential for effectiveness for further engagement.

6 **Videos**: presenters used videos to introduce themselves and the sessions or to share some relevant content in advance in some sessions. These received low response from participants, but it might be due to bandwidth and tech glitches (especially video sound often is incompatible with Zoom).

7 **Storytelling**: some presenters used storytelling to highlight the meaning and relevance of the knowledge they were sharing. This improved both emotional connection as well as the real-life applications of the knowledge being offered.

5. PASSENGER SATISFACTION

The feedback was assessed in real time to improve the delivery as the series evolved. Session-specific and final surveys, debriefings and feedback logs were used.

Overall satisfaction was high. The feedback suggests that the series was well received and appreciated: 89% of the participants were either very satisfied or satisfied.

Box 2. Real Time Feedback Monitoring

Session feedback surveys to assess levels of satisfaction and to gather ideas/interests/needs from participants (104 responses)

▼

Debriefings with moderators and presenters after each session

▼

Feedback logs produced by the external consultant and the UNICEF team member for documenting observations for each session

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Final online surveys covering the overall experience to participants (71 responses) and facilitators (19 responses)

89% Overall satisfied

41% Very satisfied

48% Satisfied

11% Somewhat satisfied
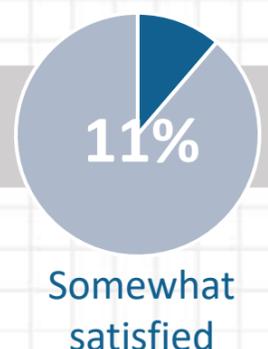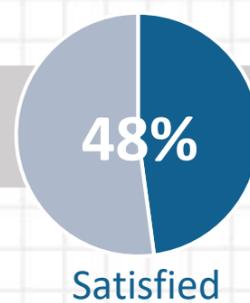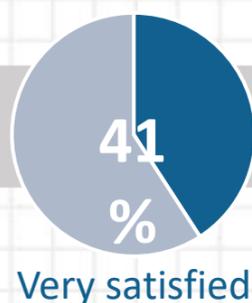
Participants valued most the variety of practical resources and tools shared but asked for more engagement. The practical dimensions of the sessions were highly appreciated. Open comments in the surveys pointed out that the hands-on approach was very effective. Most respondents expressed that the series enabled to think or identify new methods or tools that could be used in their own work, with reference to specific tools such as infographics, Zoom polling, and different evaluation techniques.

👍 HIGHLY VALUED

Variety and quality of shared resources	**86%**
Sharing of useful practices and tools	**87%**
Relevance of case studies to the topic of the session	**83%**

💡 AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

Level of interactivity	**55%**
Interaction with participants by speakers	**36%**

➔ Need to allocate more time to Q&A (exchange with speakers), fewer speakers and case studies and sharing reading materials in advance

LESSONS FOR ORGANIZING EFFECTIVE AND ENGAGING ONLINE LEARNING

This learning series was produced between mid-February 2020 and the beginning of June 2020. Each session was preceded by a number of preparatory meetings: one to discuss the overall design (objectives, focus of presentations, etc.), one to refine the content and design and identify how to make the session more engaging and a final one for a session rehearsal. Overall, the planning for each session took 3-4 weeks.

"This was a great opportunity to be exposed to different issues, methods and tools related to gender-responsive Evaluations!"

Monitor, evaluate and learn: A multi-session approach allows and requires a real-time monitoring and learning approach for improving tools, time management, moderation techniques, etc. A standardised survey after each session and the support from an expert (preferably a pair of external eyes) providing detailed feedback for each session enables a process of continuous improvement.

Design the overall experience: Especially with a multi-session series – developing an online learning strategy or document where learning objectives, topics, profile of presenters and participants, communication means, monitoring and evaluation measures are agreed upon on.

Ensure IT compliance and support: IT support was important in identifying the optimal learning platforms for the live sessions as well as in selecting the appropriate tools. For each session IT was on stand-by for any potential issues. A broad range of issues, such as accessibility to externals and security required the support of the IT section.

Designing each session takes time: 74% of presenters spent more than 4 hours in preparing their presentations but only 5% felt the time spent was not in balance with the benefit(s) they received from participating. Presenters with desire to share their knowledge and experience with willingness to take part in an extensive collaborative effort was pivotal to creating a good experience.

Promote interactivity and engagement: Participants appreciated the invitations to share questions, participate in polls and quizzes. However, trying new engaging tools takes time, effort and courage so it is not always easy to achieve the desired level of participation. Nevertheless, every push to promote more interaction paid off. During the session allocate enough time and energy to questions posed by participants: the participants value being heard.

Engaging participants with a topic relevant to the current context: In addition to rights-based commitment to improving gender effectiveness in all programming, linking the series to COVID-19 helped to make it topical: most of the questions raised by participants were focused on the COVID-19 programming context and how to adapt tools and methods to the particular demands of the COVID-19 and gender in emergency situations.
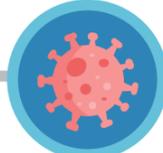
Communicate widely and regularly: This learning series started as an internal UNICEF-focused effort but was quickly expanded to cover external professionals and partners who could benefit from the learning experience. By using existing networks and professional platforms and with repeat efforts to engage new participants the initial 200 registered participants increased to 500.

Pay attention to the practical dimension of the experience: To ensure usefulness of what is being shared, focus on concrete tools, methods, exercises and resources (the "how to") which participants can use in their own work. In the final survey, 87% of participants rated the sharing of useful practices and tools as high or very high.

Bring in the human dimension to the whole experience: Human connections and bringing a personal touch to the learning series proved to be key in sustaining the quality, energy and commitment to deliver the sessions. This applies to the organizing team, to the teamwork with presenters and to linking with participants as human beings (i.e. turn all cameras on to say "Hi!" or "Bye!").

"I had typed in a question about the tensions between feminist values and Randomised Control Trials in Feminist Research. Though raising a slightly controversial topic, I was amazed at the openness with which this was acknowledged by all panel speakers. They agreed that this had to be engaged with and a meeting point had to be arrived at. Instead of being ignored for raising this contentious issue (which happens in many webinars), this approach makes me rank this series as one of the most egalitarian and engaging online series."

"The examples of other countries as well as sources provided on where to find standards/protocols/ methodologies/tools/evidence regarding Gender were the most valuable take-aways for me and my level of engagement!"