

Multi-Stakeholder Involvement: Key to Successful Research

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A research project like the Women, Work and Violence project is complex not only in terms of its implementation, but also for it to be of use. As the country lead for Nepal and Myanmar, I share some insights from the experience of involving many stakeholders in the research.

Involvement of the Donor Organisation is key to engaging others

This project was funded by DFID's South Asia Research Hub. One of the key objectives of the research that is undertaken by this centre is used by multiple stakeholders in each country. Naturally, the first stop for advice is the donor. The response from the in-country donor offices was critical in getting a buy-in from other partners. For instance, DFID in Nepal engaged with selection of the project for in-depth research, ensured that heads of different projects within DFID were invited to the research presentation, and participated in inviting a wide range of stakeholders in Nepal to the dissemination workshop. DFID played a very important role in getting the government on board, and also ensured the participation of private sector and the non-government sector organisations in Nepal.

Expect team change along the way

Research projects that involve international teams put together the teams at the bidding stage. By the time the bidding process is over and contracts awarded, some team members find other assignments, and others are not able to keep their commitments for various reasons. Teams get shuffled, with those taking responsibilities appearing as key to the project success. This is a reality of research projects that last for over 12 to 18 months, and getting new people to hit the road running becomes very important for project management.

Engage Multiple Stakeholders in all phases of the research

Organisations can put into practice only what they know. Informing people about the project results is critical to the uptake of the findings. For this, the project set up stakeholders' workshops in Nepal and Myanmar, at the launch of the project, and at the end. The earlier workshop brought stakeholders on board to inform about the research, and seek suggestions about shaping the research questions, deciding locations, etc. The workshops at the end of the project aided dissemination, and as they were held before the final report was prepared, they provided an opportunity for taking feedback from stakeholders to refine the final report. Stakeholders were also involved during the project by constituting a Country Advisory Forum, through which they could provide linkages and advice to the research teams. The stakeholder involvement spanned the entire period and all phases of research.

Involve Doctoral Students in the team

Doctoral students can be very valuable assets in research projects, as they understand research rigour, can contribute to high quality data collection, have the patience and mind-set to do repeat interviews to overcome initial information gaps, and uptake is ensured, as the data will be used for doctoral research. During this project, the research scholar became an integral part of the project, and as he is also a journalist with linkages, he could enable dissemination of information about the project, and the findings arising from it, in international journals, both printed and on-line.

Get the Government on Board

The single most important stakeholder for using the results of any development research is the government of that country. In Nepal, the government participated in the research by including one of its programmes, the Integrated Women's Development Programme government, as part of the research. The Government of Nepal (GoN) was in the process of reviewing and revising its women's empowerment programme and welcomed the opportunity created by this project, to do an indepth research on the IWDP. At the instance of the government 9 districts were covered, with a quantitative survey being conducted in 7 districts, with over 937 respondents, and more with over 100 women and men were reached with in-depth discussions. The GoN's engagement in the research should result in ownership and use of the findings.

Government engagements also pose some challenges. The first one is delays that arise from the need for approvals, communication with district offices, and aligning with government's work schedules. This can easily extend a project's original time line by several weeks and months. Another feature of official collaboration is that governments usually demand high sample sizes, and coverage of geographical areas, which demands high budgets. This can become particularly difficult to negotiate if a project has a limited budget and a short time frame. The benefits of course are that if the government engages with a research project, and uses the findings and analysis, there is very high potential for impact of research in policy formulation and programme design.

Partner with UN Projects

United Nations agencies are great impact multipliers. Their partnership and support has been extremely useful in this research project. UNDP Myanmar's project for capacity building of a national federation of women's Self Reliant Groups provided an opportunity to ask rural women about Women, Work and Violence, and take their perspectives on board. Later UNDP Myanmar ran a phone survey through their iPhone app, during the "16 Days of Activism" week, which served to raise awareness of those who used the app as also gain insights into their experiences of the respondent women.

The UNDP office in Nepal organised a separate meeting for dissemination of the research findings amongst its officers from different departments and projects. With the project information finding its way to these well informed officers, the project received feedback for fine tuning its analysis and recommendations. and internal use

The ILO office in Myanmar was engaged through a place on the Country Advisory Forum of the research project. She provided insights into how to engage the government in Myanmar, an offer extended also by UNDP Myanmar. The ILO's South Asia office in Delhi engaged through its project on Women and Migration, and helped spread the project findings too.

UNWomen in Nepal has offered to reach the findings of the research through a Gender and Social Inclusion focus group of donors and UN agencies in Nepal.

The lessons: dissemination and policy support being a key objective and forte of UN agencies, what could be better for uptake than informing UN agencies? For both efficiencies and impact, make partnerships with UN agencies.

Disseminate widely

In addition to stakeholder workshops, the project plans to disseminate its findings through any conferences, events, windows of opportunity to influence policy and practice that may be coming up

in the near future in the three countries of research: Nepal, Myanmar and Pakistan. Results will also be spread through knowledge sharing networks on the topics of Women, Work and Violence. Stakeholders provided information and suggestions about spreading the messages through libraries, NGOs, media organisations, social media, networks and their mailing lists, newsletters and phone apps of different organisations. Different knowledge products have been suggested and used, such as newsletters, policy briefs, and dissemination through champions and leaders such as the women leaders of the May Doe Kabar in Myanmar.

The key lesson is that multi stakeholder involvement takes planning, effort, care, and a listening attitude, the benefits are immeasurable, in planning, implementation, dissemination and usage of results.