BRINGING GENDER ANALYSIS TO LIFE
A Four-Part Model for Learning What Works in Gender Equality and Inclusive Development
Despite well over half a century of development programming across the world, understanding and addressing gender realities remain key challenges to effective programming. But when we apply evaluation best practices to these challenges, we uncover opportunities for innovation that enable meaningful integration of a gender focus—with benefits for programs of all sizes and people of all gender identities.

Gender analysis at EnCompass features four key characteristics, drawn from evaluation best practices:

- Participatory
- Appreciative
- Systems-Based
- Utilization-Focused

Even though our gender analyses vary in size, scope, budget, timing, team composition, depth, and other variables, these four elements are essential threads we weave throughout our process.

EnCompass’ Dual Focus as a Gender Integration Partner
1. Ensure gender analyses draw from evaluation best practices
2. Make sure we are “engendering” evaluations by applying a gender lens to our evaluation work

What to expect from this resource
This resource shares EnCompass’ four-part model for gender analysis, brought to life through two real-world examples from activities funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The first example comes from a monitoring and evaluation platform in Lebanon. The second is a gender analysis supporting a health systems strengthening project in Ethiopia. EnCompass was the gender integration partner for both of these initiatives, supporting the transformation of unequal gender norms and dynamics.
A Tale of Two Gender Analyses: Contextualizing the Model

Our first activity as a gender integration partner generally entails carrying out a gender analysis. Gender analysis is vital for understanding the local context of norms, roles, and relationships that shape what it means to be a woman, man, or person of another gender identity. How we apply our gender analysis approach varies based on the cultural and operational realities of each country or locale. We generally use mixed methods and engage key social actors in an inclusive process for data collection and analysis. This enables us to capture a range of primary and secondary data about gender-related contributors to development programming, including a variety of perspectives and ideas from the people and organizations whose work our analysis is supporting.

Country-level gender analysis

In Lebanon, our analysis helped inform the donor’s strategic direction. The goal was to identify sector-specific gaps and opportunities for USAID to use in designing more gender-equitable and socially inclusive programs. In other words, we were seeking data for high-level decision making.

We collected data across several sectors—governance, livelihoods, access to finance, water management and governance, workforce development, and reforestation.

Project-level gender analysis

In Ethiopia, our analysis supported the USAID Transform: Primary Health Care Activity, which works with the country’s Federal Ministry of Health to prevent maternal and child deaths.

Our team brought an intersectional lens to the project, informing the design and integration of gender-transformative activities to reach their health systems strengthening objectives.
A Tale of Two Gender Analyses: Country-Level Methodology

Our sample in Lebanon included 8 governorates and 14 districts—a mix of rural, urban, and semi-urban areas. We gathered perspectives on gender norms, responsibilities, and roles across the country, focusing on areas with USAID presence.

Our mixed methods approach included primary and secondary data collection through a document review, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions.
A Tale of Two Gender Analyses: Project-Level Methodology

In Ethiopia, we conducted key informant interviews with actors at different levels of the health system and innovative participatory group discussions with community members, which we will discuss a little later. Groups were divided by sex, age, and marital status. For married women, we grouped younger women aged 15–24 separately from women older than 25 (considering gender norms around age dynamics that intersected with marital status).

We considered the same group dynamics with married men. We also included separate groups with unmarried youth, separated by sex, between the ages of 15 and 24. We didn’t have groups of unmarried older men and women because they were rare in the areas where we were working, due the prevalence of child marriage and younger marriages in general.

Our mixed methods approach included secondary data collection from a variety of sources, including a document review and primary data collection in 16 woredas (districts) across the four project regions—Amhara, Oromia, Tigray, and the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’ Region (SNNPR).
Applying The Four-Part Model: Ensuring Participation

What does participatory gender analysis really mean? For us, it means thinking carefully and critically about who needs to be part of the process so the information is meaningful and relevant for both those who will use and learn from the data and those who are supposed to ultimately benefit from the program.

In Lebanon and Ethiopia, we engaged key actors from the government, USAID, partner organizations, and project technical teams throughout the process. We wanted to get the right people in the room at critical points along the way:

• At the design meeting to determine together the scope, research questions, methodologies, and sample
• In refining data collection tools as we trained data collectors and piloted the tools
• At the final data consultation meetings, where we shared draft findings and then worked with participants to validate and interpret the findings and collaboratively develop conclusions and recommendations, since participants are best placed to make sense of the data and figure out what they mean for their work going forward

We also strove to make the research methods more interactive than those typically used for gender analyses. We know from experience that more interactive methods yield richer data about people’s lived experiences by engaging them in deeper storytelling about their lives and realities. We use a variety of participatory approaches for this process, such as role plays, pile sorting, and drawing.
Ensuring Participation: Country Applications

Prioritizing sectors in the country-level gender analysis

In Lebanon, the focus group participants engaged in a voting exercise to rank the sectors of concern, since the gender analysis covered so many different sectors. We used this process to ensure each focus group discussion would identify participants’ priorities and encourage deeper discussion about the issues that mattered most to them based on their location and needs.

Mapping access in the project-level gender analysis

In Ethiopia, the participatory group discussions included a community mapping exercise. Respondents worked together to draw, on flip charts, the formal and informal healthcare services and resources that existed in their communities and beyond. This ranged from family members and traditional healers to health posts, health centers, and nearby hospitals.

We then engaged them in a “paving stones” activity to explore health-seeking behaviors and access to health services. We drew a person (a man or a woman, with or without children, depending on the group) at the bottom corner of a flip chart and the health center at the top corner, and then discussed and drew the supports or enablers they needed to build a path to the health facility. The size of each stone related to participants’ perception of how important it was in supporting their access and use of the facility.

As a next step, the group marked the stones that already existed and those that were missing in their communities.
Applying The Four-Part Model: Leading with Appreciative Inquiry

Like all our evaluative practices, EnCompass’ gender analysis methodologies draw on Appreciative Inquiry techniques. We often refer to this process as “building on the best of the past.” Appreciative Inquiry is designed to gather information on what is already working well—what successes and opportunities exist for us to build on.

When applied to gender analysis, Appreciative Inquiry seeks to learn about the spaces of equity that may already exist to support a transformation of unequal gender norms and dynamics. This is innovative for gender analysis, which typically focuses on identifying the gaps, barriers, obstacles, and challenges. That’s not to say we don’t also collect that information—just that at EnCompass, we try to start with the positive and actively seek it through our research questions and data collection methodologies.

**APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY** does not ignore problems, but rather starts with a focus on successful experiences, reframing the conversation to focus on opportunities to strengthen programs.

We then engage participants in structured conversations to prioritize challenges and actions that are most important for reaching the desired outcomes.

As participants communicate with each other, they deepen their thinking about the program, motivate each other by articulating their hopes for the future, and use the gender analysis process to help co-create that desired future.

EnCompass finds that this approach is especially useful in sensitive programming environments—for example, with women, youth, and other vulnerable groups—because it encourages people to speak as agents of positive change engaged in systemic transformations.
In both countries, our teams trained the data collectors in Appreciative Inquiry techniques and made sure the data collection tools incorporated appreciative questions. During the data analysis and interpretation sessions, our facilitators used appreciative activities to draw out successes and opportunities for gender transformation.

In Lebanon, the data collectors paid close attention to the translated language, especially for sensitive topics such as power dynamics and gender-based violence. We worked with the team and local gender experts to review, test, and refine the translated tools, ensuring they accurately captured sensitive topics while maintaining an appreciative lens.

In Ethiopia, we had initially designed the paving stones activity to capture barriers to access and utilization—the stumbling blocks along the way. But we ultimately reframed it, realizing an appreciative lens would make it more powerful. This realization—that we wanted to focus on building the path rather than the barriers—was crucial for pivoting discussions toward possibilities for change.

It’s natural to have doubts when you start applying Appreciative Inquiry to gender analysis. How will we find out about the gaps if we focus so much on successes and opportunities? But EnCompass knows from experience that this method works.

Our respondents in an appreciative process still tell us what isn’t working and the obstacles they face. But because we lead with a reframing, asking first what works, we get many more insights from the people whose lived experiences we are seeking to understand and support with transformative programming. In doing so, we also acknowledge their agency in defining what the future could look like—placing them at the center of the process.
Applying The Four-Part Model: Understanding the Systems at Play

Systems thinking in gender analysis means trying to capture the complexity of gender realities in a holistic way.

The third essential element in our gender analysis model has to do with using systems thinking and frameworks for understanding how structures work together and at different levels to support or hinder gender equality. We look at the whole gender system, not just norms or policies in isolation, and we emphasize intersectionality—how gender systems interact with other economic, political, and social systems.

Many gender analysis frameworks exist and there has been much debate about whether to insist on a particular framework. Most capture the same types of information but might organize or emphasize them in different ways. USAID typically does recommend one, while also acknowledging that this is not the only framework. It includes five gender analysis domains that will be familiar to many gender integration practitioners.

The five domains are extremely useful, and EnCompass teams apply them in our gender analyses. But we also find that there can be a tendency to try to put all the data into these boxes. When we do that, we risk missing opportunities to see the larger systems at play—how things connect and intersect to create the gender realities that exist.

Thinking about gender analysis as “gender systems analysis” instead can help us take a step back and see those multiple relationships—how the domains overlap, influence, and reinforce each other. This is what we tried to do in different ways in Lebanon and Ethiopia.
Understanding the Systems at Play: Country Applications

A socio-ecological model for a country-level analysis

In Lebanon, we used a socio-ecological model to guide data collection and analysis, exploring the different levels at which gender norms, dynamics, and structures played out—from individual relationships with partners, families, and community members to participation in organizations—all in the context of local and national laws and policies. This was important because the gender analysis required us to examine the information across many sectors and understand issues at all levels.

We did this not only to understand the gaps and opportunities in each sector, but also to explore the synergies.

Mapping the gender domains for a project-level analysis

Working with a health systems strengthening project in Ethiopia was a good opportunity to map the gender domains across its result areas and capture information from different levels of the health system—from health extension workers to healthcare providers and facility managers. It also gave us the chance to collect data about how gender issues affected health management and service delivery (supply) as well as health-seeking behaviors and service utilization (demand).

All of that information informed learning agendas for the project, which takes us to the fourth element in our model.
Applying The Four-Part Model: Making It Useful

This fourth essential element in our model—a utilization-focused design—really builds on the others in the sense that when we use participatory and appreciative techniques, combined with systems thinking, the elements work together to ensure the data we collect are useful. That is the most important part of our work in gender analysis.

By engaging the data users throughout the process, and in an appreciative way, we can ensure they feel ownership over the data and really use them to inform their work.

This isn’t just a theory. Our partners and clients see the value of this model in the results it produces. It’s a testament to the power of a user-centered focus for shaping programs, at all stages of implementation, in gender-transformative ways.

“Never in the history of USAID/Ethiopia have we seen a gender analysis done in this way. Usually a small group from Washington comes and meets with us to tell us how they will do the gender analysis, then hand us the final report. Your engagement of project staff, USAID, and the Ministry of Health creates buy-in and support. This is an exemplary approach, and I will share it as a model for others.”

—USAID/Ethiopia Gender Advisor
Making It Useful: Country Applications

Useful and effective across sectors

In Lebanon, USAID found our gender analysis data to be useful and effective for integrating gender in its country programming because the lines of inquiry aligned with and were shaped by the mission’s priorities. This led, for example, to identifying a need for resources and capacity development in different sectors. EnCompass is proud to have been able to provide that support as well, developing guides and workshops for USAID’s implementing partners on gender integration in education, access to finance, and other sectors.

See, for example, the access to finance resource guide: https://encompassworld.com/resource/resource-guide-gender-integration-in-access-finance-programming-lebanon/

An intentionally iterative process for gender integration

From the beginning, the Transform: Primary Health Care Activity envisioned an iterative process for gender integration, so the gender analysis fed into a gender strategy that the team revisited in annual strategy reviews to look at accomplishments and plan for next steps to take the gender analysis findings forward. We timed these reviews to be able to inform project-level theory of change processes and work-planning sessions for each subsequent year.

Tangible results have benefited women’s access to leadership training and advocacy for childcare (among other interventions) to address the lack of female health managers in the system. Our analysis also revealed information gaps that have led to follow-on studies, including a landscape analysis of gender-based violence prevention and response services and an implementation research study on male engagement in reproductive health and maternal and child health.
Read the full reports from Ethiopia and Lebanon

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