

# *“Beyond Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) – Using Qualitative Methods and Analysis for Gender-Focused Evaluations”*

**Yamini Atmavilas**

M&E Roundtable: Gender, Evaluation and Empowerment  
Series: “Qualitatively Measuring ‘Women’s Empowerment’:  
Lessons from South Asia”

Feb 16, 2015

Mumbai, India

BILL & MELINDA  
GATES *foundation*

## **Explaining the title:**

*FGD are a deeply insightful qualitative method,  
not a shorthand for qualitative design!*

# Getting our thinking aligned – what are gender-focused evaluations

- A central focus on inequities as they are manifest
- Gender as intersecting – caste/religion, class, age, nationality/region, sexual orientation
- Gender as relational – not just about “women”
- Recognise that inequities are structural – and seek to probe underlying factors
- About power
- ***Feminist principles:***
- Proposes to add value to those who are marginalised and to those implementing programmes
- Recognises that evaluation is political
- Positionality of the investigator – power relations
- Ethical considerations of working with marginalised – “voice”

# Gender vs. Feminist Evaluation: Podems

- Feminist evaluation and gender approaches have different historical roots and bring their own strengths (and weaknesses) to an evaluation.
- Gender approaches aim to document and map the lives of women, while feminist evaluation aims to change them.
- Feminist evaluation would be used to guide the evaluation methodology if the evaluation questions seek to understand why differences exist between men and women and to bring about social change.
- Feminist evaluation offers broad guidance that encourages an evaluator how to think about an evaluation, and how to use that reflection to inform the evaluation's design, data collection, and communication of findings. Gender approaches often provide more concrete guidelines and prescriptive methods for data collection and analysis.

→ *However, I believe, at their heart, both are rooted in common feminist and critical theories that are about unpacking power and interrogating inequality and the conditions that shape and structure them*

→ *Evaluation is fundamentally about helping improve a program's effectiveness; ergo – gender- as well as feminist evaluations are complementary and about change*

- - See more at: <http://aea365.org/blog/fie-tig-week-donna-podems-on-the-difference-between-feminist-evaluation-and-gender-approaches/#sthash=BoiQA6G1.dpuf>

*Before we get into methods or design, clarity on our questions*

# ***We need to be clear about our questions***

**Descriptive:** Describe aspects of a process, a condition, a set of views, etc. Typical questions could be:

How many women are enrolled in this CCT from different social groups?

How were women selected?

What are their background attributes?

Who has not enrolled?

**Normative:** They are intended to compare the current situation against a specified target, goal or benchmark. For example:

Did the project meet its stated objective?

Did the project ensure the enrolment and completion of secondary schooling for girls?

Human rights -- legal provisions --cultural norms

**Outcome/Impact:** These questions are intended to determine the changes because of the intervention. For example:

Did the CCT (financial incentives) result in shifting social norms to ensure girls' schooling?

Did the project increase farm income for women and households? Did it affect women's role in decision-making/ empowerment (pathways of impact)

What other impacts (positive or negative) did the project have?

*... on our concepts and constructs*



# Empowerment, Agency, Change Trajectories

- Agency: Appadarai's (2001) concept of the “capacity to aspire”
- Kabeer (2001): access to *resources, agency and outcomes* (achievements) as three essential elements of empowerment
- Alsop and Heinsohn (2005): Degree of empowerment (operationalizing Kabeer for measurement):
  - *Example: ‘Measuring Empowerment in Practice’ is*
    - (i) *do elections exist (opportunity)*
    - (ii) *do women try to vote (agency)*
    - (iii) *do women actually vote (outcome).*

## Bring an institutional approach



**And our approach...**

# Common Approaches and Methods

- Indicator-tracking
- Logical framework
- Theory-based evaluation
- Formal surveys
- **Most Significant Change**
- **Contribution Analysis**
- **Realist Evaluation**
- Rapid appraisal method
- **Participatory methods**
- Public expenditure tracking surveys
- Cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis
- Impact evaluation – Experimental, Quasi, Non-Experimental

# Quantitative Approaches give us a wealth of understanding into gender and inequities – who, where, whether

Surveys - HH, Stakeholder

help assess some easily quantifiable indicators through structured questionnaires

Can give a broad characterization by social groups, economic status

Can give important insights into quantifiable benefits

Even the reasons underlying exclusion of some groups – lack of awareness among potential beneficiaries, elaborate and time-consuming procedures, social resistance – can be identified through a carefully designed set of questions

## Example

- Sub group analyses in an evaluation reveal difference in conditions at baseline
- Equity gap analyses when you have 2 rounds of data for different sub groups
- Interrogate whether midline-baseline differences were consistent across all sub-groups or there were differences in effects

# Limits of quantitative approaches

- Do not capture “dynamics, processes and relations” (Bardhan, 1989).
- Limited to who we talk to
- Don't understand “how” and “why”
- Often forget to observe
- Self-reporting bias
- Leading questions
- Costly!

# Qualitative approaches

- Brings to light dimensions of the issue that are difficult to capture with statistics or surveys alone
- Captures dimensions of that cannot be described through numbers and statistics
- Questions about context
- Why and how
- Typically considered time consuming



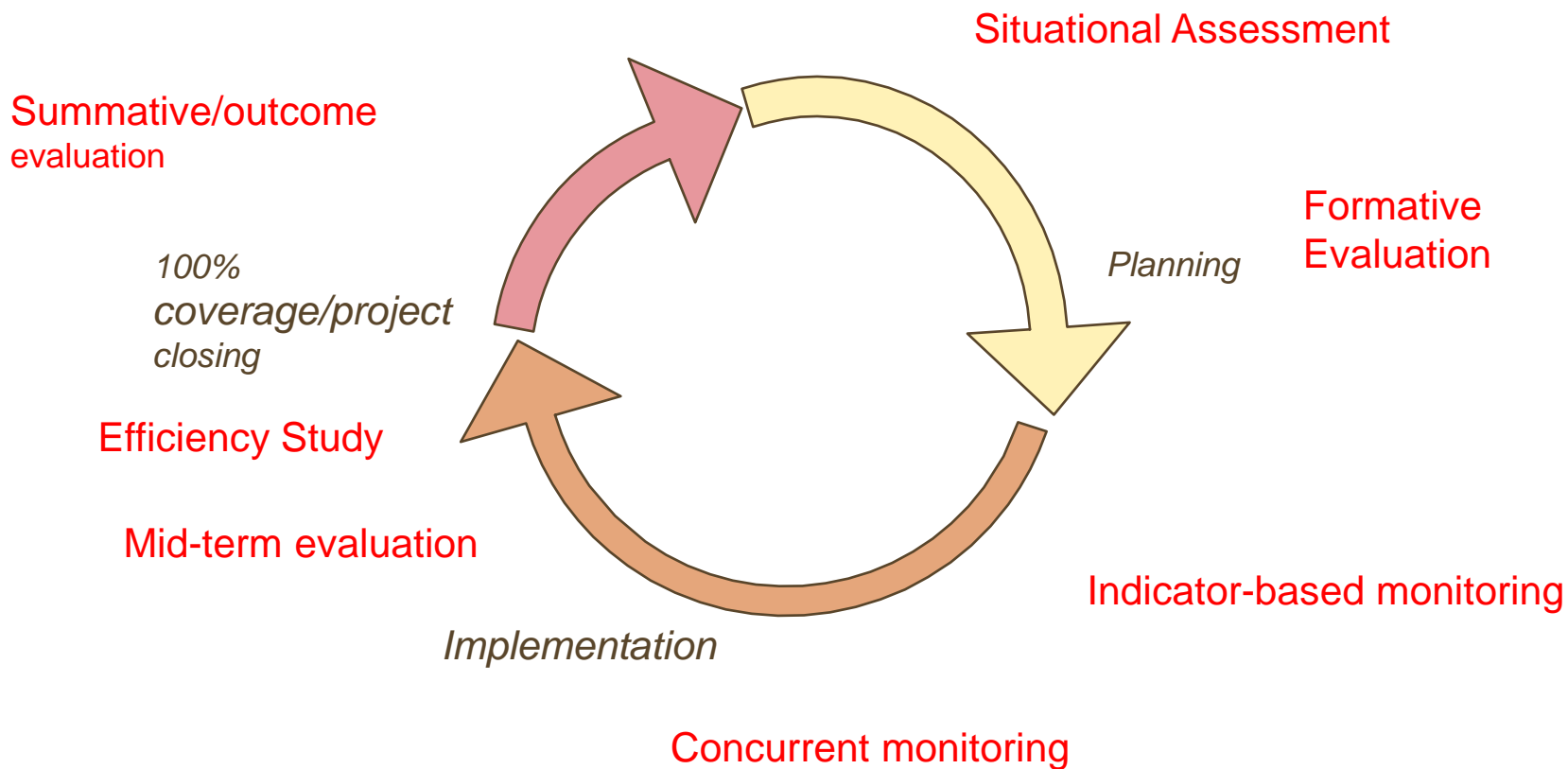
- help us understand underlying normative contexts that are critical to understand gender and empowerment
  
- To thoroughly understand gender relations, researchers must also examine additional aspects:
  - well-being,
  - status,
  - self-esteem,
  - empowerment (or disempowerment),
  - vulnerability,
  - issues of social differentiation,
  - social norms
  - self-perceptions by individuals and communities

# Many creative qualitative approaches and methods – asking, observing, participating

Diagramming/Mapping	Participatory Rural Appraisal Tools (PRA)	Interviews	Ethnographic Tools
Community resource maps	Transect walks	Semi-structured interviews	Participant observation
Participatory impact diagrams	Trend lines	Unstructured interviews	Direct observation
Diffusion maps	Venn diagrams	Key informant interviews	Case Studies
Before/after resource maps	Seasonal calendars	Organisational assessment	Innovation histories
Social network analysis	FGDs		Life histories
	Community meetings		Personal diaries
	Ranking/rating/scoring		

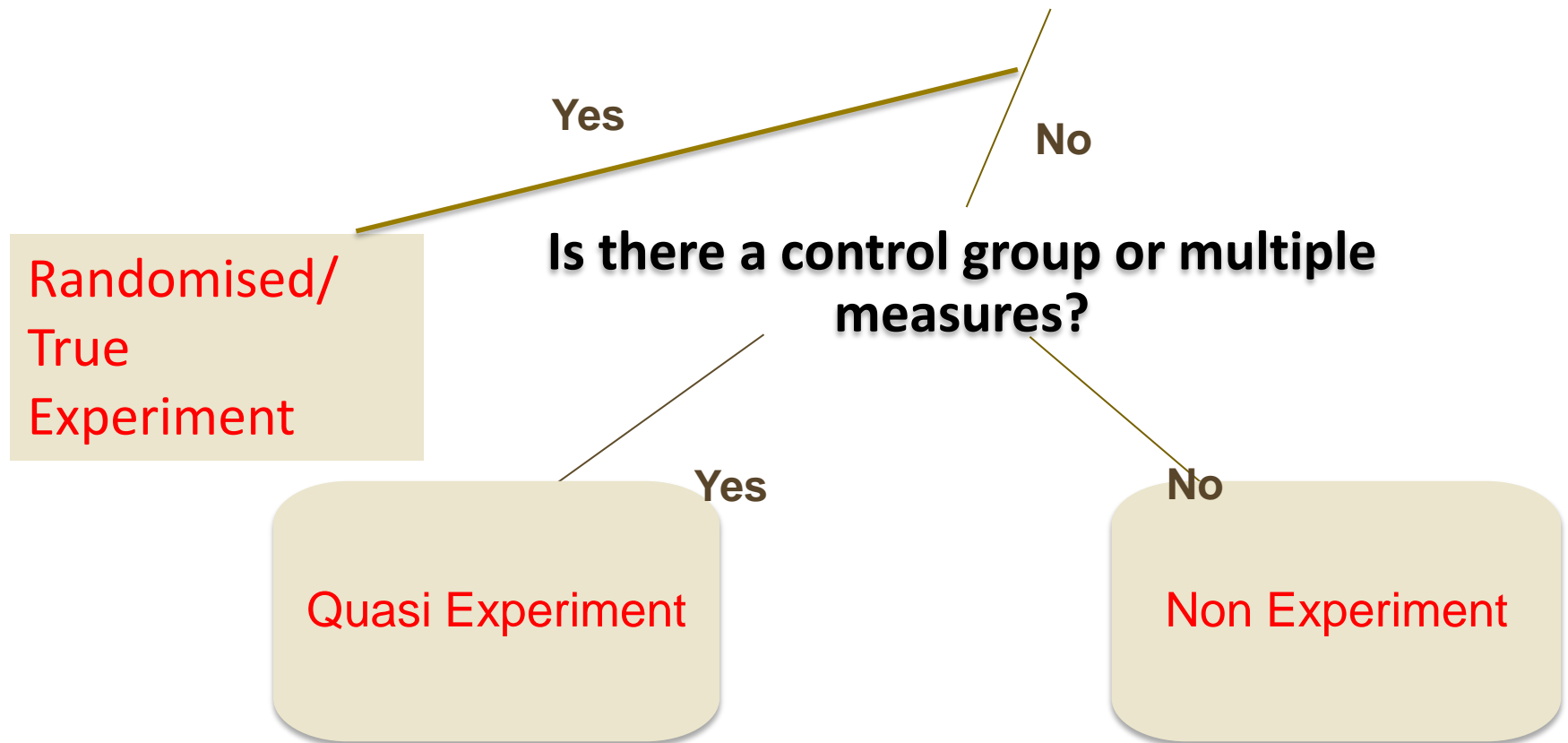
Source: Njiki 2009

# Gender questions and qualitative approaches can be brought to any type of evaluation

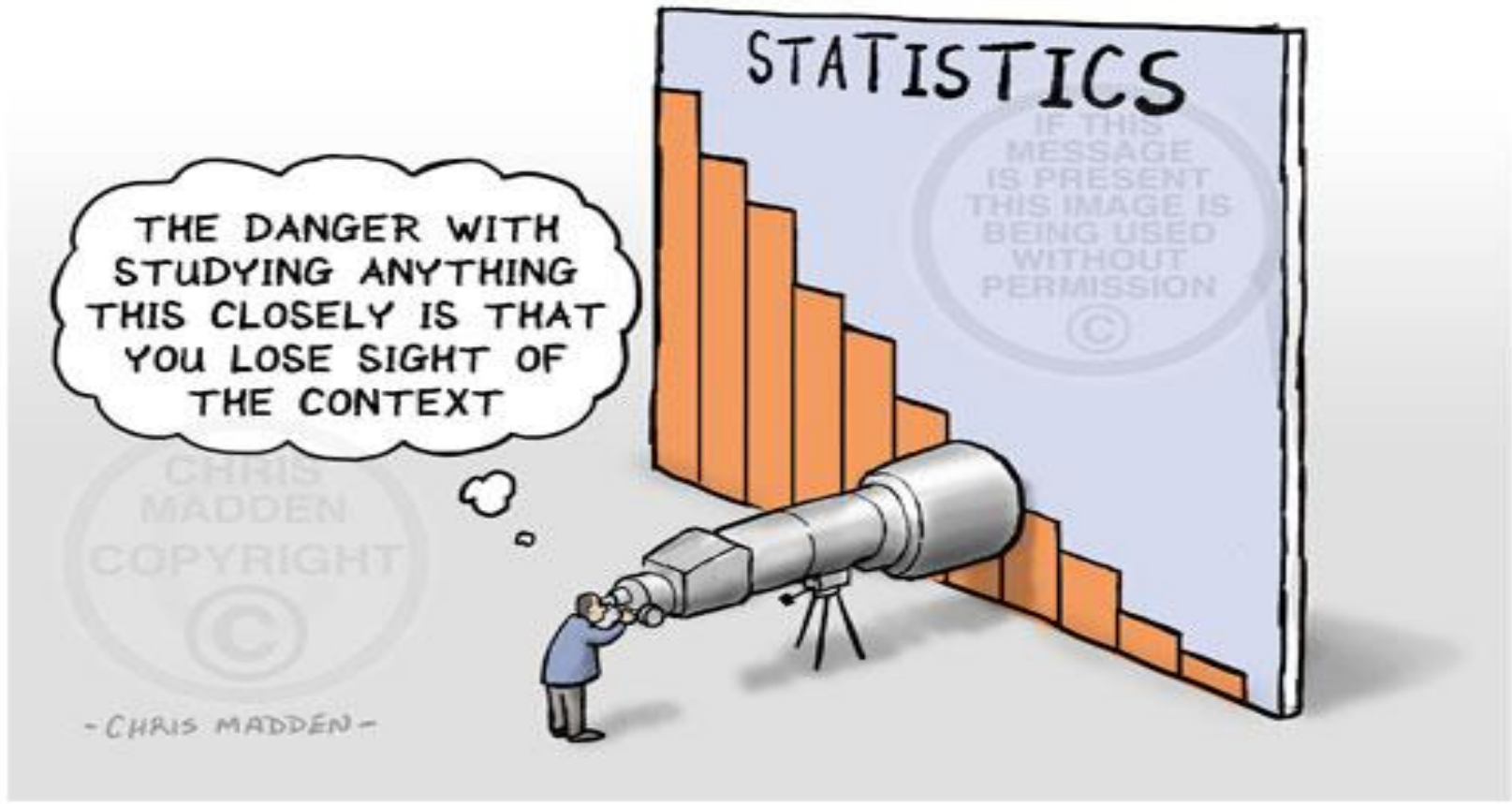


# Gender questions and qualitative *methods* can be used in any kind of design

## Is Random Assignment Used?



**Gender and change are context-specific - *the things we control for in Qn work is often what we're interested in***



# Innovating Participatory appraisals - Gender Audits by Jagori

- STEP ONE Rapid situational analysis of the essential services in the community
- STEP TWO Interviews with key service providers to understand the perspective of the service providers
- STEP THREE Focus group discussions with diverse groups of women, men, girls and boys to understand how the specific gender service gaps affect different people
- STEP FOUR In-depth interviews with community women and girls to gain insights into the different aspects of marginalisation and accessibility issues
- STEP FIVE The safety audit walk to observe the dimensions of safety and the different forms of harassment faced by women and girls while accessing the essential services
- STEP SIX Community members work with the local government to address issues related to essential services so as to make communities safer for women and girls and in doing so, increase safety for all residents of the community

# Bangladesh – Social Movement Participatory

## Monitoring

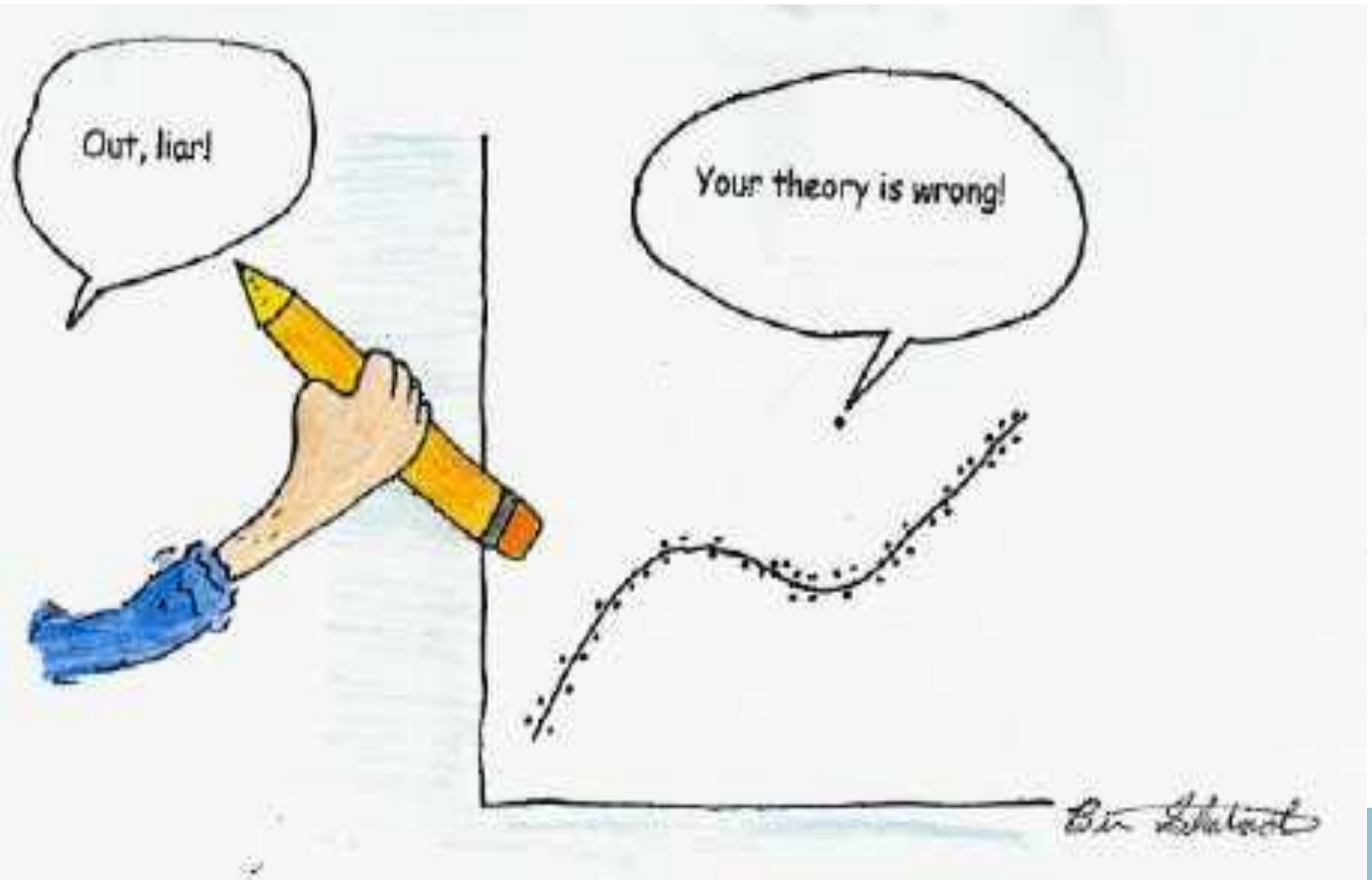
- 132 indicators

	Awareness	Confidence and capability	Effectiveness and self-sustaining
Political Development			
Social Development			
Economic Development			
Capability			

In 2006, the programme gathered data from 6854 groups. The ‘happy’ and ‘unhappy’ faces were translated into scores according to the weighting

Combined mood meter, well-being analysis, scoring, network mapping, timelines, flow diagrams, drawings and drama.

# Change is complex & contradictory – follow the outlier





# Gender and empowerment are multi-dimensional and capturing process is key; but empowerment is fundamentally about Power

GBV may increase with women's access to productive resources and decision making (ISST; Pradan)

Families may get daughter married as they value safety (ICRW; Nirantar)

# Mixing methods – Q-Squared

- **Triangulation**— seeking convergence of results;
- **Complementarities**—examining overlapping and different facets of a phenomenon;
- **Initiation**—discovering paradoxes, contradictions, fresh perspectives;
- **Development**—using the methods sequentially, such that results from the first method inform the use of the second method
- **Expansion**—adding breadth and scope to a project.

*Source: Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989) cited in Adato (2007).*

# Mixing Methods also bring process understandings and test theories of change

- Example – In a program that assumes information provided in an SHG will transfer to other HH in the village,

we are combining:

- A multi-arm quasi-experimental quantitative “impact” assessment of SHG for improving health
- with a qualitative network study looking at how information moves from SHG members to others in their HH/ Villages

In an IFAD program in the context of the Mewat Area Development Project, qualitative studies revealed that overcoming male resistance to self-help groups (SHGs) was important for successful groups to foster the formation of other SHGs in the same or neighbouring villages over time) (Gaiha and Nandhi (2005).

# Principles for quality qualitative work (and mixed methods work) for gender-focused work

- Robust Sampling Strategy
- Confront the attribution-contribution tension and be creative about answering it
- Confront biases – and eliminate them
- Confront the subjectivity question – open up that black box
- Minimize the harms of research – place of interview, persons conducting the interview (gender, position)
- Support changes that will improve women's status
- Generate Meaning numbers and Meanings that count