

K4D Impact Stories #6

K4D's Tax and Gender Learning Journey boosting social reform in Pakistan

As a means to reduce discrimination and promote the economic empowerment of women, there is a growing understanding that tax policy, tax administration and tax research need to be gender transformative. Recognising this need, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) is reshaping and building its approach to tax and gender programming.

K4D's Tax and Gender Learning Journey brought together tax and gender teams to identify other tax and gender stakeholders and collaboratively craft a future approach to tax and gender for FCDO and partners. Initial exploration of the early impact from activities that have taken place amongst partner organisations in Pakistan suggests K4D's inputs have the potential to bolster intended social reforms across the country's revenue and other government departments.

The opportunity

Evidence indicates that through 'gender awareness', tax policy, tax administration and tax research have the potential to both reduce discrimination and promote women's empowerment as well as provide benefits to wider inclusive economic growth and development processes. Taking into account that gender issues affect every aspect of tax systems, both policies and administrations need to identify and challenge inherent bias against women. Actions need to be taken to tackle gender issues within tax systems and to use those systems as a means to promote gender equality. Women's equal participation in an economy means they both pay and benefit from fair tax policy.

In the case of Pakistan, in-country partners were consulted for their perspectives on challenges around implementing a tax policy equipped with a gender lens. In contrast to evidence which refutes a gender-neutral tax approach, respondents consistently noted the challenge of bringing gender (and other social issues) to the fore within a context where existing practice dictates all taxable entities be treated equally. Each respondent highlighted the critical importance of an informed evidence base to ground their arguments and shine a light on the need for change.

BOX 1

Background

Pakistan's involvement in the K4D Learning Journey sprung from its role as a pilot country within the Global Tax Program, through which the PFTD funds the World Bank to centrally pilot dedicated gender work. A key component of Pakistan's engagement here is the Revenue Mobilisation, Investment and Trade (ReMIT) programme. ReMIT is a 4-year long project (June 2020–June 2024) which aims to promote and enhance international trade competitiveness of Pakistan. ReMIT is a flagship FCDO economic development program, and one of FCDO's first bilateral economic development investments in Pakistan. As a program, ReMIT has prioritised taking on a gender sensitive agenda. This has included the enlisting of a dedicated gender lead and identification of key change champions, one of which has been the Federal Board of Revenue's (FBR) Member Reforms and Modernisations unit. Tax has been identified as a promising area for women's empowerment by both FCDO and Pakistan's tax authority.

“There’s a default position for tax people that everything has got to be the same, in a principled way that is correct. But that’s not necessarily the reality as it plays out. There is pushback in terms of people’s questions whether this really was an issue, and this work was able to support recognising all of this engrained prejudice which we’ll need to try to address.”

K4D’s contribution

The Tax and Gender Learning Journey brought together tax and gender teams to identify other relevant stakeholders and collaboratively craft a future approach to tax and gender for FCDO and partners. This was built from K4D’s 2020 Helpdesk Report [‘Gender and Tax Policies in the Global South’](#). Working with the Tax and Public Financial Management (PFM) Community of Practice alongside other key tax and gender stakeholders across FCDO and the UK Government, this Learning Journey set out to accomplish the following goals:

- Introduce and grow awareness of issues of gender and taxation in the context of developing through work with both internal and external participants;
- Create consensus around priorities for tax and gender policy; and
- Build capacity of the Tax and PFM Community of Practice and other staff within FCDO’s central and country offices to understand, apply and communicate FCDO’s reshaped approach to tax and gender programming.

Perspectives gained from both internal FCDO members and external Learning Journey participants point to several key K4D service areas seen as critical to achieving impact goals. Both internal team members and external country partners highlighted the value seen in K4D’s work to engage stakeholders and provide a platform for the open exchange of experience and ideas. In-country partners shared their recognition of the value of engaging in a Learning Journey platform where commonalities within complex issues could be shared. Both respondents expressed a strong desire to continue engagement with the K4D Learning Journey Team. Internal to FCDO, team members reflected positively on this process, noting the contribution engagement with the K4D team had on supporting innovative ways to engage stakeholders and organise learning.

“The Learning Journey has definitely given us ideas on different ways to do things and engage people and [ways to] promote, so that’s been excellent. K4D has taught us the importance of specialising in particular topics and having a theme to run across to provide different sessions on – that’s been really useful.”

“// We wanted to include gender in the conversation but no one really knew what that meant; now we can have an informed discussion. //”

This Learning Journey’s associated products have been widely recognised for the potential added value they offer to extending and strengthening the uptake of evidence and recommendations. One team member outlined how K4D’s convening power alongside their ability to produce engaging products served to set this Learning Journey into motion and correspondingly deliver positive results,

“In fact, [there were a few things] that attracted us to this Learning Journey. The first was the ability to draw people across the organisation in a way we wouldn’t have been able to do on our own and secondly, an opportunity to produce something in a more exciting format than we could do on our own team – and both of those things were good I think.”

Impact

Growing awareness

The Tax and Gender Learning Journey, alongside the publishing of associated products, only recently came to a close in June 2022. Whilst it is too early to assess longer-term impacts, FCDO team members expressed a strong level of confidence in the utilisation of Learning Journey products as a tool through which to engage colleagues on the relevance of the topic and raise awareness of potential courses of action. Speaking generally, one team member noted,

“From our perspective, this is a good tool to engage people in conversation on the topic of Tax and Gender as a hook, and to share best practice that’s been recorded to help facilitate future discussion and provide opportunities to provide support.”

Early signs of impact can be seen in the degree to which evidence supplied within Learning Journey products have been able to shape engagement with Pakistan on the issue. Here, an FBR representative highlighted the current priority gender sensitisation has within the organisation. In supporting this agenda, one senior advisor here reports,

“In terms of strategy, we are now putting those gender ideas into the wider policy sphere, it’s now part of the conversation and we can now talk with some sort of gravitas. Before, we wanted to include gender in the conversation but no one really knew what that meant; now we can have an informed discussion.”

Creating consensus around priorities

Interviews with FCDO team members indicate that the 2020 Helpdesk Report 'Gender and Tax Policies in the Global South', was a key tool in supporting the team to think through their level of ambition on the issue and in identifying which areas to prioritise focus. In addition to this initial Helpdesk Report, learning activities were specifically designed to convene both stakeholders and experts as a means to build consensus around key narratives alongside tax and gender policy. Specifically, in the case of Pakistan, informants expressed recognition for the value these types of fora hold in providing an opportunity for experiences to be shared across partner countries, where commonalities can be explored and considered.

The '[Conversations on Gender and Tax – Resource Pack](#)' was recognised as an important tool which could be used to bring gender issues to the fore within a context of highly competitive priorities. Partners point to intentions to lean into these products as an evidenced-based means to inform the design of an "Economy for All" platform that will serve as a symposium of stakeholders with goals centred on the prioritisation of gender mainstreaming.

"Sometimes it gets frustrating. Introducing change is not easy, especially when it comes to a relatively new theme like gender. It's not like we are living in the stone age, but we understand that there are other countries that are far more ahead when it comes to some of these issues. But, engagements like this, and contacts and liaisons with the likes of K4D are very heartening and encouraging. I think we need the support of such organisations and platforms to help us speed up the momentum of this important theme."

Building capacity

It is still too early to assess the degree to which engagement here has successfully supported teams in reshaping tax and gender policy and programming. FCDO team respondents, however, express high levels of confidence that achieved levels of awareness alongside consultation with associated Learning Journey

products, have the potential to support colleagues in the consideration of tax and gender issues when designing programmes. In the case of Pakistan, respondents point to the value of Learning Journey engagement as a means to provide practical ideas for how to identify problems and take action. The senior FCDO advisor here outlined how evidenced-based ideas from the Learning Journey have provided him with opportunities to engage partners and present concrete pathways to change.

"One thing that wasn't widespread but is now being promoted is engagement with women taxpayers. That's significant because although it seems obvious because they are a taxpaying group, it wasn't something done before. So, this is a simple yet impactful way to enact change. Something that we can now put forward with a concrete suggestion that's also relatively easy to implement when we speak to our partners. Now, I'm speaking to other revenue authorities across the region, and we've got concrete things to say here; now we have a basket of ideas with which we can go and talk to people in a tangible way."

In-country partners echo this appreciation for Learning Journey products as a means to provide evidence-based arguments to support the design and implementation of programming. Speaking from the position of a ReMIT representative, one interviewee noted several examples where the Learning Journey Resource Pack would provide evidence-based support to bolster a wider wave of programming aiming to incorporate gender considerations. These include programming dedicated to the recruitment of female tax facilitators, promotion of simplified tax forms and the implementation of a gender lens within border customs assessments. In outlining how the Learning Journey engagement would be utilised here, the interviewee noted:

"This is where I find K4D useful – what we're doing is quite closely aligned to what the research is showing, so we will definitely be using that more and more as evidence in which to strengthen our arguments."

FURTHER READING

Learning Products

> **Conversations on Gender and Tax**

Jacky Hicks, Berni Smith, Anna Downs and Benedetta Musillo
June 2022

> **Gender and Tax: Gender Equality Meets Economic Growth – Policy Brief**

Evert-jan Quak and Berni Smith.

> **Tax and Gender Guide for Tax Programming**

Evert-jan Quak and Berni Smith.

> **A series of video interviews on Tax and Gender** with women business owners in Ghana and professionals in Pakistan and Ghana.

Helpdesk Reports

> **Gender and Tax: Programming and Evidence**

Kelbesa Megersa
15 February 2021

> **Gender and Tax Policies in the Global South**

Anuradha Joshi, Jalia Kangave and Vanessa van den Boogaard
26 May 2020

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